

## CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE BOOK OF *TAFSIR RAUDHATUL IRFAN FI MA'RIFATIL QUR'AN* BY K.H. AHMAD SANUSI



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### Abstract

The tafsir (Qur'anic commentary) is one of the essential tools for explaining and deepening the understanding of the teachings of the Qur'an within the community. Besides serving as a religious instrument, tafsir often reflects cultural richness by integrating Islamic aspects with local cultural values. This study aims to explore how the cultural identity of the Sundanese people is reflected in the Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan fi Ma'rifatil Qur'an, written by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi from Sukabumi. The research method used is descriptive – analytical with a qualitative approach. The findings of this study indicate that the cultural identity in the Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan is evident in several aspects of local wisdom, particularly in the field of language. The Sundanese language used in this tafsir is the daily language of the mufassir (commentator). Thus, the writing of this tafsir was primarily intended for the students in Islamic boarding schools and the Sundanese community who understand the language rather than for a broader audience. Furthermore, the cultural identity is also reflected in the writing system, where the mufassir utilizes the Pegon script to convey his tafsir. The Pegon script, which is a writing system that uses Arabic characters for the Sundanese, Javanese, and Madurese languages, is employed in this tafsir as a means to preserve and maintain local literary traditions while still conveying Islamic teachings.

### Abstrak

Kitab tafsir merupakan salah satu sarana penting dalam menjelaskan dan mendalami ajaran Al-Qur'an di tengah masyarakat. Selain berfungsi sebagai instrumen keagamaan, kitab tafsir sering kali mencerminkan kekayaan budaya dengan menggabungkan aspek-aspek keislaman dengan nilai-nilai budaya setempat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana identitas kultural masyarakat Sunda tercermin dalam Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan fi Ma'rifatil Qur'an yang ditulis oleh K.H. Ahmad Sanusi dari Sukabumi. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif analitik dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa identitas kultural dalam Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan tercermin dalam beberapa aspek kearifan lokal, terutama dalam bidang bahasa. Bahasa Sunda yang digunakan dalam tafsir ini adalah bahasa sehari-hari mufassir, sehingga penulisan tafsir ini ditujukan terutama untuk para santri di pesantren dan masyarakat Sunda yang memahami bahasa tersebut, bukan untuk khalayak luas. Selain itu, identitas kultural juga terlihat dalam bidang penulisan, di mana mufassir menggunakan aksara Pegon untuk menyampaikan isi tafsirnya. Aksara Pegon, yang merupakan sistem penulisan dengan huruf Arab untuk bahasa Sunda, Jawa, dan Madura, digunakan dalam tafsir ini sebagai sarana untuk menjaga dan melestarikan tradisi literasi lokal sambil tetap menyampaikan ajaran Islam.



## INTRODUCTION

A tafsir book is a significant work within the Islamic scholarly tradition, serving a central function in interpreting and understanding the meanings of the verses in the Qur'an. These works of tafsir not only reflect the author's comprehension of the sacred text but also encompass cultural nuances and the socio-historical context in which they were written (Hajam et al., 2024). Azyumardi Azra explains that with the development of Islam in the archipelago, cultural and religious identity has always played a significant role in the community's life (Azra, 2010). Since the arrival of Islam in these islands, there has been a profound integration process between Islamic teachings and the existing local culture (Saumantri, 2022).

Umar stated that in the Nusantara region, Muslims embrace two aspects of their existence: religious and cultural. In practice, these two aspects often intersect and even undergo acculturation. For example, local wisdom in language blends with religious elements, as seen in the regional language tafsir books of Nusantara (Umar, 2021). The study of Nusantara tafsir results from the acculturation process between the scholars' interpretations and the region's local culture. Although the primary goal is to interpret the Qur'an, it is undeniable that local culture plays a role in this interpretation process. One manifestation of this cultural influence is evident in the language used as the medium in writing the tafsir (Gusmian, 2015b).

Tafsir, written in regional languages, possesses a unique characteristic, as it can only be understood by the local community. Individuals outside the region who wish to comprehend these tafsirs must first learn the language used. In the Nusantara region, scholars have created many tafsirs using local languages to make them more accessible to the local populace. Examples include *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* by Prof. Dr. KH. Quraish Shihab, written in Indonesian; *Tafsir Al-Ibriz Lima'rifati Tafsiril Qur'an bi Lughati al-Jawa* by KH. Bisri Mustofa, written in Javanese; *Tafsir Al-Munir* by KH. Daud Ismail Soppeng, written in Bugis; and *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan fi Ma'rifat Al-Qur'an* by KH. Ahmad Sanusi, written in Sundanese (Abdullah, 2009). Numerous other tafsirs employ regional languages to bridge the understanding of the Qur'an with local culture.

In this study, Tafsir of *Raudhatul Irfan fi Ma'rifat Al-Qur'an* by KH. Ahmad Sanusi will be analyzed to understand how the cultural identity of the Sundanese people is reflected in the interpretation of the Qur'an. This tafsir, written in the Sundanese language, serves not only as a tool for interpreting the sacred text but also as a medium that reflects and preserves local culture. For Qur'anic interpreters, especially Sundanese interpreters, there are at least three distinctive Sundanese elements in their interpretations: the etiquette of language used, traditional Sundanese expressions, and depictions of the Sundanese natural environment. These three elements become benchmarks for the extent to which a tafsir embodies Sundanese nuances; the more dominant these aspects are, the more "Sundanese" the tafsir is. The Sundanese language is preserved and maintained primarily by the people of West Java and Banten (Sofa Urwatul Wusqo & Maelani, 2022).

In the Banten region, the Sundanese language used does not have varying levels of communication. This matter contrasts with West Java, where Sundanese has different levels of communication, known as *undak usuk basa*. This system includes distinctions between coarse, gentle, and neutral speech (Zakiyah et al., 2020). The presence of *undak usuk basa* is influenced by Javanese culture, which has its own language classification system in communication called *unggah-ungguh basa* (Pangestu & Sudjianto, 2021). Aras asserts that *undak usuk basa* is an element of Sundanese cultural

identity. It is accepted and used by the Sundanese community due to their high regard for politeness in language. *Undak usuk basa* reflects attitudes, ethics, and respect towards the conversation partner (Aras, 2022).

The use of “*undak usuk basa*” (language etiquette) in religious contexts, particularly in the writing of tafsir books, represents a form of applying Sundanese cultural language. One such tafsir that employs *undak usuk basa* is *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan fi Ma'rifati Qur'an* by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi. He was a brilliant scholar from Indonesia who produced many other prominent scholars. K.H. Ahmad Sanusi hailed from Sukabumi. Among his works, which include 101 books in Sundanese and 24 books in Indonesian, this study will focus on *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan*. This tafsir consists of two volumes; the first volume covers juz 1 to juz 15 with 498 pages, and the second volume covers juz 16 to juz 30 with 1255 pages. The book contains the matan (Qur'anic text), its translation, and the commentary written in Arabic *Pegon* script. In his interpretation, K.H. Ahmad Sanusi also includes discussions on tauhid (monotheism) and fiqh of the Shafi'i school (Tsamrotus Saadah & Mumtaz Ali, 2022).

To achieve novelty in this research, the researcher identifies previous studies that discuss the tafsir works of K.H. Ahmad Sanusi. First, the study by Yuliani (2020) focuses on the use of *Pegon* script and Latin letters in the writing of Qur'anic tafsir in *Priangan*, West Java, with the objects of study being K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's tafsirs (1880 – 1950): *Raudat al-'Irfan and Malja' al-Talibin* written in *Pegon* script in Sundanese, and *Tamsijjatoel Moeslimien* written in Latin script in Indonesian. Second, the research by Siti Novi Nafisah (2022) examines the *fiqh* characteristics in the interpretation of *Raudhatul Irfan Fi Ma'rifat Al-Qur'an*, which tend to follow the Shafi'i school of thought. This matter can be explained by the influence of Shafi'i scholars, especially during K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's studies in an Islamic boarding school in West Java, where most scholars adhered to the Shafi'i madhhab. Third, the study on the Methodology of *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan Fi Ma'rifat Al-Qur'an* by (Irfanudien et al., 2023) shows that the systematic spelling follows the 'Uthmani script, the method is *ijmali*, the style is Shafi'i fiqh and *lughawi*, and it interprets the attributes of Allah, with the source of tafsir is *bi al-ra'yi al-mahmud*. Based on this literature review, this research does not share similarities with the previous studies. Therefore, this study aims to identify the local wisdom contained in the *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan* as a form of cultural identity in the Nusantara tafsir tradition.

Fourth, the study on K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's tafsir by (Rohmana, 2017) examines K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's (1888 – 1950) responses in the “K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's (1888 – 1950) responses in the “Mal–ja' at–Talibin” tafsir to the Islamic religious polemics in *Priangan* during the 1930s. By applying a critical discourse analysis approach, this study concludes that K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's responses to the five religious polemics reflect the strong influence of the Ahlu Sunnah wal Jama'ah ideology in countering the challenges posed by reformists. His stance remained firmly within the Sunni Islamic tradition, which tends to be more flexible in understanding local Nusantara traditions.

Fifth, Lukman's research on Vernacularism and the Flames of Conservatism discusses the production and politicization of Qur'anic translation using *Al – Qur'an and Its Translation*, a translation produced by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, as a case study. This chapter addresses two interrelated aspects. The first part explores the history of the translation's production, including paratextual elements such as stylistic decisions and layout. The second part outlines how the translation of the Qur'an and its

production history have influenced "popular hermeneutics" in the Indonesian context, particularly how readers interpret these texts. The author argues that the continuous presence of the Qur'an translation, especially when mass production began after 1990, has led to the rise of vernacularism, which has subsequently contributed to conservative shifts in the post–New Order era. The translation metaphorically serves as fuel for the flames of conservatism, periodically fanned by the winds of socio–political conflicts (Lukman, 2024).

The method employed in this research is a descriptive–analytical approach. Data collection techniques are carried out systematically and clearly, focusing on the description and explanation of cultural identity present in the *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan*. This study uses qualitative data, which seeks truth from direct experience. The research technique utilized is the book survey technique, involving analysis of various literature sources, books, and documentation to uncover relevant theories and viewpoints for analyzing the issues under study.

The data analysis process in this research is conducted through several systematic stages. First, data is collected by identifying and gathering various literature sources related to the *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan* and the concept of cultural identity. Once the data is collected, the next step is to organize the information obtained from the various related sources. Then, data description is carried out by outlining information regarding the cultural identity found in the *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan*. During this stage, the cultural elements identified in the text are systematically arranged to provide a clear depiction. Next, the text of the *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan* and related literature are analyzed to understand the cultural context underlying the tafsir. This process involves comparing and synthesizing information from various sources to obtain a comprehensive overview of the analyzed cultural identity. The final stage is data interpretation, where the results of analysis are interpreted to explain the meaning and implications of cultural identity in the *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan*. At this stage, relevant theoretical perspectives are used to support the analysis results, providing a deeper and more comprehensive explanation.

## UNDERSTANDING SUNDANESE TAFSIR IN THE *TAFSIR RAUDHATUL IRFAN*

Ahmad Sanusi was born on the night of Friday, 12 Muharram 1306 H, or September 18, 1888, in Cantayan Village, Cikembar Subdistrict, Cibadak District, Sukabumi Afdeeling. Ahmad Sanusi was the third of eight siblings. His father was named K.H. Abdurrahim bin H. Yasin. Ahmad Sanusi was a prominent Islamic scholar in Indonesia, recognized as a brilliant kiai the nation once had. He became an essential reference in the development of Islamic knowledge in Indonesia, especially in West Java, as he produced many influential kiai in the region (Iskandar, 2013). He was a determined figure who sought knowledge. As the son of an *ajengan* (a respected figure), from a young age, Ahmad Sanusi and all his siblings were educated in a religious environment. Ahmad Sanusi's religious education was directly provided by his parents, who at that time had established an Islamic boarding school in Cantayan (Istikhori, 2019).

The *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan* is a Sundanese–language Quranic tafsir consisting of the matan (Quranic text), its translation, and commentary. It also includes discussions on monotheism, which tend to follow the 'Ash'ari school of thought, and issues of Islamic fiqh following the Shafi'i school. Both schools are widely followed by the majority of Muslims in the West Java region. The writing of *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan* represents a link in Kyai Sanusi's creative activities in expressing his thoughts through

the Sundanese language. His first tafsir book was *Malja'al Thalibin fi Tafsir Kalam Rabb al-'Alamin*, but it was only completed up to juz 9 and consisted of 28 thin volumes (H. Anwar et al., 2018).

The format of *Malja'al-Thalibin* does not follow the conventional structure of classical Islamic texts, as it does not differentiate between sections for the *matan* (text) and the *syarah* (commentary). Some of K.H. Sanusi's interpretations in *Malja'al-Thalibin* were likely conveyed and rewritten in *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan*. In interpreting the Qur'an, K.H. Ahmad Sanusi employed the method of *tafsir bi al-Ra'yi*, which involves interpreting the Qur'anic verses based on the mufassir's own *ijtihad* (Rohmana, 2015). Abu Maskur explains that *tafsir bi al-Ra'yi* grants the mufassir freedom, allowing them greater autonomy in interpreting the Qur'anic verses as long as it remains within the bounds permitted by *syara'* and *mu'tabar* principles of interpretation (Kuswandi & Abu Maskur, 2022).

The tafsir method employed by K.H. Sanusi is the *ijmali* method. It is evident when he presents verses in a brief and general manner but sufficiently clear. Consequently, employing this method for tafsir makes it more practical and understandable. This approach is suitable for beginners and is favored by people from various social strata and layers of society. The interpretive style used by the author in *Raudhatul Irfan fi Ma'rifati al-Qur'an* is general in nature (Rohmana, 2014). This means that the interpretations provided are not dominated by any particular school of thought or ideology. They utilize a neutral understanding of the verses without conveying any specific message, such as Aqidah, fiqh, or Sufism. However, the tafsir explains verses related to fiqh laws when addressing specific fiqh cases, such as prayer, zakat, fasting, and hajj. Similarly, verses on *muamalah* (social dealings), theology, Sufism, and others are also elucidated.

## LOCAL WISDOM IN PEGON ARABIC WRITING

The diverse opinions regarding the arrival of Islam in Nusantara have resulted in the birth of a distinct form of Islam in the region. According to Islah Gusmian, citing Fadhlou Shahedina, several factors contribute to the emergence of Islam in Nusantara. The first factor is adoption, where local cultures in various regions of Nusantara were adopted. The second factor is adaptation, where Islam from the Arab lands was integrated into the local cultures of Nusantara, resulting in a fusion of two cultures. It has led to the emergence of distinct forms of Islam, such as Sundanese Islam, Javanese Islam, and Sasak Islam, among others. (Rohmana, 2017)

These two cultures' acculturation has also resulted in the vernacularization of religious language, translating Arabic religious concepts into local languages to connect religion with local culture. Initially, the spread of Islam in Nusantara was limited to the translation of the Qur'an. However, as the understanding of religious sciences developed, interpretations began to be undertaken (Gusmian, 2015a).

According to the research by Johns (1961), by the late 16th century in Nusantara, there had been a process of vernacularization of Islamic sciences, which were translated into the *Jawi* language and script. It can be observed in three aspects: first, the use of Arabic script with the Malay language, commonly referred to as *Pegon* or *Jawi* script. Second, many Arabic loanwords were incorporated into the local language, as seen in texts like *Carita Parahiyangan* and *Sri Ajnyana*. Third, the abundance of Nusantara literature was inspired by Arabic or Persian literary works. Additionally, although not

mentioned by Johns, there was also the absorption of Arabic grammatical structures and linguistic rules (Gusmian, 2010).

Therefore, based on John's research, it can be concluded that the spread of Islam is invariably accompanied by the integration of local culture within a given community and society. It is evident from the writing of Islamic religious texts in various regions. However, in this context, the process of Arabization often predominates, influenced by the use of the Qur'an, hadiths, and other Islamic religious literature. Additionally, there is a prevalent belief that Arabic is superior to other languages due to its use in the Qur'an. It not only demonstrates the processes of adaptation and adoption in language use and writing but also highlights the relevance and significance of the mufassir's relationship with their community in choosing the target audience and segmentation for their tafsir works. Furthermore, it reflects the socio-cultural hierarchy associated with the tafsir texts within the community (Miswar, 2016).

The development of writing from century to century is closely related to the evolution of culture and civilization. According to Rodinson, tafsir, written using local scripts, symbolizes participation in a civilization centered on a single ideology, typically religious, during the corresponding era. However, using various scripts and languages in writing religious texts is not without polemics and controversy. R. Anwar et al. (2016) stated that this is because, at that time, it was considered forbidden (haram) to translate the Qur'an into languages other than Arabic.

From the script perspective, tafsir in Indonesia from the early period (pre-independence) was written using the *Pegon* script. Yuliani (2020) mentioned that the *Pegon* script was discovered around the 15th century and found in various regions such as Sunda, Cirebon, Java, Madura, and Bugis, each with its unique characteristics. The *Pegon* script was further developed around the 1400s by Sunan Ampel or, according to other sources, by Imam Nawawi Albantani, a student of Sunan Ampel. The *Pegon* script emerged from the Muslim community and was generally taught in Islamic boarding schools during the Dutch colonial era. Additionally, the *Pegon* script is closely linked to the spread of Islamic law in Nusantara, as it facilitated the ulama in disseminating the religion.

The *Pegon* script results from the acculturation between Arabic culture and local cultures. *Pegon* originates from the *Jawi* term "*pego*," meaning "*ora lumrah anggone ngucapake*" or "uncommon in pronunciation." According to Heryani (2019), "*pigeud*" implies something that deviates, as the *Pegon* script diverges from Arabic literature and does not conform to Javanese literature. The *Pegon* Arabic generally emerged from the coastal Islamic communities of Java, as maritime trade interactions led to the coastal areas being the first visited by Islamic missionaries, resulting in the acculturation of Arab and local cultures. At that time, the coastal communities had a strong Islamic boarding school tradition, making them more familiar with Arabic script than Latin or *Cacarkan* scripts. Thus, the purpose of writing in *Pegon* Arabic was specifically for those living in Islamic boarding school areas (santri, or Islamic students, and ustadz – ustadz, or teachers) and is referred to as the script of the santri. The *Pegon* Arabic is an acculturation between *Hijaiyah* letters and the Sundanese, Javanese, and Madurese languages (Elmubarok & Qutni, 2020).

The *Pegon* script is classified as a foreign script that arrived in Nusantara, similar to the Latin script from Europe. Additionally, the *Pegon* script represents the transliteration of Arabic letters into letters that are the same as those to write Javanese and Sundanese languages. In West Java, the *Pegon* script is used to write Arabic in the

Sundanese language. Although *Pegon* characters are derived from Arabic script, they are fundamentally used for the Sundanese or Javanese languages. Consequently, there are slight differences in reading and writing *Pegon* compared to traditional Arabic script. Each instance of Arabic language absorption into *Pegon* indicates the significant influence of Arab culture on Nusantara culture. Although *Pegon* initially originates from Arabic, the foundational language used is Sundanese, resulting in differences in writing and pronunciation compared to standard Arabic (Gusmian, 2016b).

Here are the differences between *Pegon* script and Arabic script in general: (1) *Pegon* script is written from right to left, similar to standard Arabic script. (2) *Pegon* script has a more significant number of letters than the Arabic Hijaiyah letters. *Pegon* Arabic consists of 33 letters, while *Hijaiyah* consists of 30 letters. However, there are additional letters in *Pegon* script such as *ca* written with three dots (ج) ج, *nga* written with 'ain (ع) three dots above (ع), *ga* written with (ج) three dots above (ج), and *nya* written with (ي) three dots below (ي). (3) Vowel letters in *Pegon* are the same as Arabic vowels, where a is pronounced as a, i as i, and u as u. The letter o with a *panolong* is written with fathah followed by (و) و, while eu is indicated with a ~ placed above the respective letter (Jahuri & Fauji, 2022).

Arab *Pegon* reflects local wisdom in preserving and maintaining regional languages and cultures amidst the dominance of Arabic as the language of religion. It is widely used for writing religious texts, tafsir (*Qur'anic commentaries*), as well as various literary works and cultural traditions in local languages. When Kemal Atatürk overthrew the ottoman Sultanate, *Pegon* script shifted toward Latin and Roman letters. This transition was formalized in 1950 in Singapore, leading to the establishment of the Language and Literature Bureau of Malaysia, which spearheaded the adoption of the Roman alphabet. During this time, all publications (magazines, books, newspapers, etc.) that used *Pegon* script were replaced with Roman letters. One such example is the magazine *At-turats*, which staunchly supported *Pegon* script but switched to Roman letters. Therefore, according to this magazine, the disappearance of *Pegon* script was seen as the demise of scholars. (Jahuri & Fauji, 2022).

In 2007, the second Congress of the Nusantara Ulama was held in Malaysia, attended by K.H. Maimoen Zubair from Indonesia. During the congress, he emphasized the critical importance of preserving the Salaf teachings. One aspect that has been increasingly forgotten is *Pegon* script. Consequently, in contemporary society, *Pegon* script is starting to be forgotten. The term "*Pegon*" is known in the Indonesian archipelago, while in Malaysia, it is referred to as "*aksara Jawi*." Additionally, *Pegon* script has spread widely to Brunei, the Philippines, and Thailand, where it is known as "*Arab Melayu*." One unique feature of *Pegon* script is that, from a distance, it resembles Arabic script, but upon closer inspection, it is not Arabic letters. Despite being used to write Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Buginese, and Sumatran languages, *Pegon* script is written from right to left, following the same rules of connection (Salim, 2024).

Despite that, in West Java, religion was spread through the writing of tafsir books. Writing tafsir books naturally involved segmenting the readership, such as writing tafsir using *Pegon* script, because during that time, the presence of *santri* (Islamic students) was more dominant in West Java. One of the tafsirs written using *Pegon* script is *Tafsir Raudhatul 'Irfan* by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi, an Islamic scholar from Sukabumi. In addition to writing tafsirs in *Pegon* script, Ahmad Sanusi also wrote tafsirs in Latin and

Indonesian scripts. It demonstrates that K.H. Ahmad Sanusi utilized various forms of writing, aiming his exegeses at a wider audience. Ahmad Sanusi wrote *Tafsir Raudhatul'Irfan* around 1919, shortly after he founded the Genteng Islamic boarding school (Tuhfah Maoludi, 2022).

The Pegon script used in *Tafsir Raudhatul'Irfan* is written in a slanted and hanging style, also known as the hanging script or "logat gantung." The brief interpretations are placed beside the edges of the verses, while the exegesis is printed lithographically (stone printing). The reason for using Pegon script in writing *Tafsir Raudhatul'Irfan* is because this exegesis was intended for the learning process of santri in pesantren. Santri primarily understood Pegon script. Hence, it was also aimed at study sessions (majlis ta'lim) held regularly (Irfanudien et al., 2023).

The background behind using Pegon script for writing *Tafsir Raudhatul'Irfan* stems from K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's background as a student, having studied in various pesantren in West Java. Additionally, the purpose of writing *Tafsir Raudhatul'Irfan* was specifically for pesantren in East Priangan to facilitate the delivery of materials and aid santri in understanding the contents of the Qur'an. It was tailored for Islamic students who often encountered Pegon script in the yellow books (*kitab kuning*) used in Islamic boarding school, thus presenting it in a manner consistent with the traditional style of the yellow books. Its intended audience was not for widespread dissemination.



Figure 1. The use of Pegon Arabic script in an example from the *Tafsir of Raudhatul'Irfan*.

In the image above, Pegon script is visible. It resembles Arabic script but is used to write Sundanese and Javanese languages. The translation of texts using Pegon script is done letter by letter or sentence by sentence, unlike the Ministry of Education and Culture's translation, which translates the Qur'an as a whole. In *Tafsir Raudhatul'Irfan*'s writing, the Pegon Arabic script is written with diacritical marks (harakat) to prevent confusion and misunderstandings for readers. It should be noted that as time progresses,



the use of *Pegon* Arabic script has become increasingly rare. This is because, nowadays, very few people write using *Pegon* script, mostly found in salafi-oriented Islamic boarding schools. Its presence exists but is not widespread. Traditional scripts have now become relics of the past.

Furthermore, there are several reasons why *Pegon* script has ceased to develop further. Firstly, a limited number of people understand this script, making its usage increasingly rare. In today's era, writing has shifted mainly toward scripts that are more practical and widely understood by everyone. Secondly, new cultural scripts have a strong influence over older ones. It is not only because new scripts are more predominant, but also because they are more practical and easier to comprehend compared to *Pegon* script.

Thus, when considering local wisdom in the context of this research, it can be said that the local wisdom in the use of *Pegon* Arab does not lie in its letter system but rather in how the Nusantara community adapts and utilizes this system for their cultural and religious purposes. Local wisdom here can be defined as the community's ability to modify and use Arabic letters to fit the phonology of their regional languages, allowing local language and culture to remain alive and relevant within the dominant Islamic context. Moreover, the use of *Pegon* Arab can be viewed as a form of cultural resistance against language colonization, where the local community chose to integrate Arabic letters—symbolizing religion into their own language rather than adopting the Latin alphabet introduced by the colonizers. In this sense, local wisdom refers to the community's ability to maintain their cultural identity by using elements from outside, such as Arabic letters, and adapting them to the local context.

#### **LOCAL WISDOM IN TERMS OF LANGUAGE IN *TAFSIR RAUDHATUL IRFAN***

Regional or ethnic languages are cultural heritages from our ancestors that must be preserved. In Indonesia, there are approximately 746 languages. However, as time progresses, many of these languages are at risk of extinction, with around 700 languages threatened and only ten languages still actively used by their speakers (Julianti & Siagian, 2023). Sundanese is one of the regional languages in Indonesia, with the second-largest number of speakers after Javanese. Therefore, the influence of language is powerful, as it becomes a primary tool in various activities, including religious outreach and interaction. Language usage can be divided into two types: verbal language, which includes direct communication, like speech or writing, and non-verbal language, which includes indirect communication, such as codes, signals, and other forms. For instance, when an ambulance siren sounds on the road, other drivers are signaled to give way (Rohmana, 2020).

In the 17th century, people's livelihood primarily involved shifting cultivation, known as "Ngahuma." During the era from the Salakanagara Kingdom to the Islamic Banten Kingdom, everyday communication was conducted in ancient Sundanese, which did not have a hierarchical structure at that time. However, the situation began to alter in the mid-17th century when the Mataram Kingdom, led by Sultan Agung, invaded the Priangan region (central and southern West Java). This invasion transformed the shifting cultivation system into a permanent farming and gardening system, which also influenced the Sundanese language used by the community, leading to the development of stratified Sundanese. This stratification, known as "undak usuk basa," is divided into three levels: polite language (*lemes*), medium language (*sedang*), and coarse language (*kasar*) (Tsamrotus Saadah & Mumtaz Ali, 2022).

This linguistic change was influenced by the transition from shifting cultivation (*ngahuma*) to permanent farming and gardening. Consequently, the use of refined and intermediate language became part of daily life for the noble and aristocratic classes, while coarse language was used daily by laborers and farmers. The Mataram culture also influenced the language change, which had long been familiar with language stratification (*unggah-ungguh basa*) (Tamsyah, 2011).

The existence of language stratification is a distinctive advantage of the Sundanese language. Language stratification or "undak usuk basa" is divided into three categories:

#### 1. *Lemes Language* (Polite Language)

*Lemes* language is used as a sign of respect from the speaker to the person who is speaking or the person being talked to. *Bahasa lemes* is used for people who deserve to be respected and appreciated. In its use, *bahasa lemes* is divided into two. First, *Lemes* for oneself, is the polite language used to refer to oneself, showing self – respect when speaking with peers or younger individuals. Examples include "dongkap" (arrive), "neda" (eat), and "mondok" (sleep). Additionally, for referring to family members, the prefix "pun" is added to make it polite, such as "pun biang" (my mother) and "pun adi" (my younger sibling). Second, *Lemes* for others, is the polite language used to show respect to others, whether they are peers or younger. For family members, the prefix "tuang" is used, such as "tuang putra" (your child), "tuang rama" (your father), and "tuang ibu" (your mother) (Aras, 2022).

In the *Tafsir of Raudhatul'Irfan*, the use of polite language (*bahasa lemes*) is found in the translations and interpretations. For example, the use of *bahasa lemes* in the translation of Surah Yusuf, verse 1:

الرَّ تِلْكَ آيَةُ الْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ

"Gusti Allah anu **uninga** kana maksudna ieu ayat, ieu surat, eta ayatayat Quran anu nerangkeun kana hukum".

"Alif, Lam, Ra. These are the verses of the clear Book."

The word "uninga" in the translation of the verse in *Tafsir of Raudhatul'Irfan* uses polite language (*bahasa lemes*). It is because the sentence is interpreted as Allah speaking.

#### 2. *Medium language/loma*

*Loma* language, or intermediate language, is a variety of language used by peers or close friends in a more relaxed setting. This language is typically used in public events, magazines, articles, and other similar contexts. Examples of *bahasa loma* include "adi" (younger sibling), "nyaho" (know), "sare" (sleep), and so on. In *Tafsir Raudhatul'Irfan*, the use of *Loma language* can be seen in the translation of Surah An – Nahl, verse 1:

آتَىٰ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ فَلَا تَسْتَعْجِلُوهُ ۗ سُبْحٰنَهُ ۗ وَتَعٰلَىٰ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

"Geus deukeut datangna kiamat anu geus dipastikeun ku Alloh, maka ulah buru-buru maranuh kana uta kiamat. Maha suci Allah jeung maha luhur Allah tina sagala berhala anu dipaku musyrik ku sakabeh Kafir". (Sanusi, n.d.).

"The command of Allah is coming, so be not impatient for it. Exalted is He and high above what they associate with Him."

The phrase "*geus deukeut datangna, geus*" is an example of *loma language* used in the translation of the verse. The Sundanese people commonly use this type of language daily to express familiarity and closeness in communication. The use of *loma language* in religious or formal contexts can help bridge the gap between traditional texts and the everyday experiences of the Sundanese community, making the message more relatable and accessible.

### 3. Coarse Language/*Garihal*

Coarse language is typically used when someone is angry, fighting, or referring to animals or something considered despicable. Examples of coarse language include "*cokor*" (foot), "*hulu*" (head), "*lolodok*" (to eat), and others (Yulianti, 2016). The use of *Garihal* language / Coarse can be found in the translation of Surah Yusuf, verse 2:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ

"*Saenya-enyana aing geus nurunkeun aing kana ieu kitab (Qur'an) anu maku basa Arab, supaya manuh kabuh pada ngaharti kana maksudna*" (Sanusi, n.d.).

"*Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an that you might understand.*"

In that verse, the interpreter uses a coarse word, "Aing," referring to Allah SWT as the speaker.

The use of *undak usuk basa* (speech levels) in the Sundanese region is highly important because there is a proverb, "*hade ku omong goreng ku omong*," which means that something is considered good if spoken well and bad if spoken poorly. However, as time progresses, the development of *undak usuk basa* is perceived to be declining, mainly because the youth today prefer and delve into foreign cultures more than their own (Widyastuti & Yusuf, 2021). Nonetheless, it becomes more interesting when discussing verbal language within the context of *Nusantara tafsir* (interpretations). It is known that many tafsir books use various local languages, such as Sundanese, Javanese, Bugis, Malay, and others.

Despite this, as a mother tongue, Sundanese is commonly used in the writing of tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis). The use of Sundanese in pre-independence tafsir tends to avoid emphasizing linguistic levels (*undak usuk basa*), or it can be said to be more liberal. It is evident in several books written by Musthafa, such as his work titled "*al-Qur'an al-adhimi*", as well as in the use of language in various tafsir works by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi (Zulfikar, 2021). In contrast, post-independence tafsir generally emphasizes respect and refinement of language, with *undak usuk basa* being more prominently featured. Additionally, the region of the mufassir (interpreter) can influence dialectal diversity and the refinement of language use. Typically, the language used is Sundanese from the *Priangan* region (Bandung, Garut, Sukabumi, Tasikmalaya, Ciamis) with specific dialects. For instance, Ahmad Sanusi used the *wewengkon* dialect in his tafsir writings (Tuhfah Maoludi, 2022).

The differences in dialect and language levels used in these tafsirs reflect the cultural and linguistic dynamics influenced by the social and political context of the time. After independence, the emphasis on honor and refinement in the Sundanese language within tafsir works highlights an increasing awareness of cultural identity and linguistic ethics among the Sundanese community in flux. Meanwhile, the variety of dialects used in these tafsirs suggests that, despite efforts to standardize the language, local realities and regional distinctiveness still played a significant role in how the

language was applied in religious contexts. It emphasizes that language serves not only as a communication tool but also as a marker of cultural and regional identity, which, in this context, is evident in the tafsir works produced by Sundanese scholars such as K.H. Ahmad Sanusi.

## CONCLUSION

Cultural identity encompasses local wisdom, which includes aspects of language, activities, practices, customs, and traditions that are unique to a particular region. This study reveals that the *Tafsir Raudhatul Irfan* by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi, a prominent scholar from West Java, is a reflection of such cultural identity. The cultural identity in this tafsir is clearly evident through the use of the Sundanese language, which the mufassir chose to communicate the Qur'anic message to students who were already familiar with the language rather than to a broader audience. This choice was not only influenced by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's background as a student of Islamic knowledge but also served to strengthen the local cultural ties within Islamic education. Moreover, the study finds that K.H. Ahmad Sanusi employed the Pegon script, a writing system resembling the Arabic script used for the Sundanese, Javanese, and Madurese languages. The use of Pegon in this tafsir also had a strategic dimension, aimed at maintaining confidentiality in communication between Islamic schools and preventing comprehension by the Dutch colonial authorities, thus reflecting local wisdom in the social and political context of that time.

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