

# THE CONTINUITY OF QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS IN SUMATRA: A STUDY ON ABDURRAUF SINGKEL, HAKA, AND HAMKA WITHIN THE LOCAL ISLAMIC TRADITION



Fahmi Akhyar Al Farabi<sup>1</sup>, Abdur Rohman<sup>2</sup>, Saiful Amin<sup>3</sup>, Muhammad  
Thoriqlul Islam<sup>4</sup>, Muhamad Shofwan Muttaqin<sup>5</sup>

## \*Correspondence:

Email:  
[fahmiakhyaralfarabi@unida.gontor.ac.id](mailto:fahmiakhyaralfarabi@unida.gontor.ac.id)

## Authors Affiliation:

<sup>1,5</sup>Universitas Darussalam Gontor Ponorogo,  
Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel  
Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Sjech M. Djamil  
Djambek Bukittinggi, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Sayyid Ali  
Rahmatullah Tulungagung, Indonesia

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## Abstract

The development of Qur'anic exegesis in Sumatra illustrates a continuous intellectual trajectory linking classical, transitional, and modern phases of Islamic scholarship. This study examines three major exegetes—Abdurrauf al-Sinkili, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA), and Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA)—by exploring their biographical contexts, socio-historical settings, and distinctive interpretive features. Abdurrauf, through *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* (17th-century Aceh), introduced an *ijmālī* and Sufi-oriented approach to make the Qur'an accessible to Malay audiences. HAKA's *Tafsir al-Burhan* reflects early 20th-century Minangkabau reformism, employing a *tahlīlī* method emphasizing reason and social engagement. Meanwhile, HAMKA's *Tafsir al-Azhar* represents a modern, comprehensive synthesis that integrates transmitted and rational interpretations while addressing contemporary socio-political realities. Read through Talal Asad's concept of Islam as a discursive tradition and John Bowen's Muslims through Discourse, these tafsir works reveal not only textual interpretation but also ongoing negotiations of authority, identity, and social ethics. The continuity of Sumatra's tafsir tradition thus reflects a discursive evolution, demonstrating how local scholars reinterpret the Qur'an in response to shifting historical and political contexts. The novelty of this study lies in positioning Nusantara tafsir as a dynamic dialogical model that contributes to contemporary Muslim societies by bridging classical heritage, local culture, and modern intellectual demands.

## Abstrak

Perkembangan tafsir Al-Qur'an di Sumatra menunjukkan kesinambungan antara periode klasik, transisional, dan modern dalam tradisi keilmuan Islam. Studi ini mengkaji tiga tokoh—Abdurrauf al-Sinkili, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA), dan Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA)—untuk melihat: (1) konteks biografis dan intelektual mereka; (2) latar sosial-historis lahirnya tafsir; dan (3) karakteristik utama karya mereka. Melalui penelitian kepustakaan deskriptif-analitis dengan pendekatan historis, ditemukan bahwa Abdurrauf, melalui *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* (Aceh abad ke-17), menyederhanakan ajaran Al-Qur'an bagi masyarakat Melayu dengan corak sufistik. HAKA, melalui *Tafsir al-Burhan*, merespons kebutuhan pendidikan dan teologis masyarakat Minangkabau. Sementara itu, HAMKA melalui *Tafsir al-Azharnya* menawarkan penafsiran modern dan komprehensif terhadap dinamika sosial-politik zamannya. Secara metodologis, Abdurrauf menggunakan pendekatan *ijmālī*, sementara HAKA dan HAMKA menerapkan metode *tahlīlī* dengan penekanan rasional dan sosial. Kontinuitas ini menunjukkan bahwa tafsir di Sumatra berkembang sebagai tradisi ilmiah sekaligus dakwah yang berinteraksi dengan pemikiran Islam global. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pemahaman bahwa tafsir Nusantara bukan sekadar respons lokal, melainkan model dialogis yang memperlihatkan negosiasi diskursif antara teks, konteks, dan struktur sosial-politik, selaras dengan gagasan Islam sebagai tradisi diskursif menurut Talal Asad dan John Bowen.

## INTRODUCTION

Qur'anic studies in Indonesia continue to be an engaging field of research, as they exhibit distinctive characteristics arising from the interaction between the revealed text and the archipelago's diverse socio-cultural realities. In the context of Indonesia's multicultural islands, Qur'anic interpretation is not merely an intellectual endeavor to understand the meanings of the verses, but also a reflection of how Muslims in the Malay-Indonesian world interpret Islamic teachings in accordance with their social contexts and local traditions. Thus, tafsir serves a dual function: as a means of comprehending the divine message and as a medium for integrating Islamic values with the cultural fabric of society (Azra, 2004b, p. 5).

Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia has developed within a unique cultural context in which local customs, languages, and systems of knowledge have shaped how Muslims interpret divine revelation. Since the early period of Islamization, Nusantara scholars have sought to contextualize the Qur'an's message so that it could be understood and accepted by communities with diverse cultural backgrounds. This effort is evident in the use of local languages—such as Malay, Javanese, and Sundanese—as media of interpretation, which not only facilitated the people's understanding but also strengthened the position of the Qur'an within the life of local Muslim societies (Daudy, 1997, p. 45). This tradition stands as strong evidence that Islam in the Malay-Indonesian world is inclusive, adaptive, and dialogical toward local cultures (Feener, 2016, p. 25).

While many previous studies have examined individual mufassirs or specific periods, this study provides a comparative diachronic analysis and situates each tafsir within Islam as a discursive tradition (Talal Asad) and Muslims through discourse (John Bowen) (Salim et al., 2024, p. 558). This theoretical mapping clarifies the study's novelty in treating Sumatran tafsir not merely as historical texts but as evolving discursive practices.

One of the central figures in the history of Qur'anic interpretation in the Malay-Indonesian world is Abdurrauf al-Sinkili (d. 1693), a distinguished scholar from Aceh renowned for his monumental work *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid*. Written in Malay with a communicative and contextual approach, this tafsir marks the early phase of the development of exegetical tradition in Southeast Asia. Abdurrauf al-Sinkili's work not only demonstrates his profound mastery of Islamic knowledge but also represents the process of Islamizing knowledge within the Malay world. For this reason, he is often referred to as the "Founding Figure of the Malay-Indonesian Exegetical Tradition." (Baidan, n.d., p. 57) *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* stands as a symbol of how the Arabic text of the Qur'an was culturally translated to make it comprehensible to local communities (Bruinessen, 1999, p. 102).

The continuity of the exegetical tradition in Sumatra was later carried forward by prominent scholars such as Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA) with his *Tafsir al-Burhan* and Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA) with his *Tafsir al-Azhar*. These two exegetes not only continued the intellectual legacy established by Abdurrauf al-Sinkili but also developed a more contextual approach to Qur'anic interpretation in response to the social and political realities of their times. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah is known for his rational style and his advocacy of Islamic reform in Minangkabau, while Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah represents the *adabi ijtima'i* (socio-cultural) approach, emphasizing the relevance of Qur'anic values in modern life (HAMKA, 1983, p. 6).

The contributions of these three scholars demonstrate both epistemological and cultural continuity within the exegetical tradition of Sumatra, particularly in Aceh and Minangkabau. Their interpretations emerged from the dynamic interaction between the

Qur'anic text, the global Islamic intellectual tradition, and the local values embedded within society. In this context, Qur'anic exegesis in Sumatra cannot be viewed merely as an academic product but must be understood as a historical expression of the encounter between Islam and Malay culture—an encounter that gave rise to a distinctive form of religiosity in the Indonesian archipelago (Riddel, 2001, p. 14). Tafsir serves as both a vehicle for the transmission of Islamic knowledge and a means of maintaining the Qur'an's relevance within an ever – changing local context.

According to the periodization proposed by Nashruddin Baidan, (Baidan, 1998, p. 33) the history of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia can be divided into four phases: classical, middle, pre – modern, and modern. Each period possesses distinctive characteristics in language, method, and exegetical orientation, shaped by prevailing social, political, and intellectual conditions. Within this framework, Abdurrauf al – Sinkili represents the classical period, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah the pre – modern era, and Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah the modern period. Together, they demonstrate a strong intellectual continuity within the exegetical tradition of Sumatra. Therefore, this study aims to trace the continuity of Qur'anic exegesis in Sumatra by examining the works and socio – historical contexts of these three exegetes, while also revealing how their interpretations reflect a harmonious relationship between Islam and local traditions.

Each mufassir's mode of interpretation emerged from distinct socio – political transformations: the Aceh Sultanate's consolidation of religious authority in the 17th century (al – Sinkili), the early 20th – century reformist movement amid colonial and educational changes (HAKA), and the post – independence ideological contestations of the Old Order and New Order governments (HAMKA). These shifting contexts shaped their interpretive orientations (Al Farabi et al., 2025, p. 558).

This study aims to examines the historical development of Qur'anic exegesis in Sumatra by focusing on three central figures: Abdurrauf al – Sinkili, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA), and Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA). The focus of this research includes the biographical aspects of the exegetes, their roles within political and social contexts, and the distinctive characteristics of their tafsir works. Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the continuity of the exegetical tradition in the Malay – Indonesian world.

The methodology employed in this study is a library – based research approach using descriptive – analytical and historical methods (Sugiyono, 2015, p. 297). The primary sources of this study are *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, *Tafsir al-Burhan*, and *Tafsir al-Azhar*, while the secondary sources consist of books, journals, and other relevant literature. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to strengthening local tafsir studies and to serve as a reference for further research on the development of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia (Roifa et al., 2017, p. 21). In addition, this study seeks to emphasize the importance of integrating textual analysis with socio – cultural contexts so that tafsir studies are not only historical in nature. To strengthen the analytical dimension, this study also incorporates a hermeneutical framework, particularly the relationship between text and context, enabling a deeper understanding of how each mufassir negotiates meaning through linguistic choices, socio – political positioning, and theological commitments (Al Farabi et al., 2025, p. 266).

## BIOGRAPHIES OF ABDURRAUF AL-SINKILI, HAKA, AND HAMKA

Abdurrauf al – Sinkili's full name is 'Abd al – Ra'uf 'Alī al – Fansūrī al – Jāwī (Al – Fansuri, 1951). He was a Malay exegete born in Fansur, Singkel—located on the northwest

coast of Aceh—in 1024 H/1615 CE and passed away in 1693 CE. Before his death, Abdurrauf wrote approximately thirty–six works, among which his monumental contribution in the field of Qur'anic exegesis is *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid*. (Rahman, 2018, p. 6) In addition to being an expert in Qur'anic exegesis, he was also a prominent figure in Sufism in the Malay–Indonesian world. His expertise in tafsir, Islamic law, and other branches of Islamic knowledge was acquired during his approximately nineteen years of study (1640–1650) in the Middle East (Rahman, 2018, p. 5).

He taught and propagated the Shattariyah Sufi order, which originated from India (Anam, 2020, pp. 45–46). Abdurrauf al–Sinkili (1615–1693) wrote *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* in 1675 (Ma'arif, 2017, p. 123). According to Salman Harun and P. G. Riddell, this tafsir is an adaptation of *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* into the Malay language, supplemented with references from *Tafsir al-Khazin* and *Tafsir al-Baydawi* (Ma'arif, 2017, p. 123). This tafsir was written in the Malay language using the Jawi script. This choice reflects a political and cultural identity, indicating both the author's intended audience and the community that would engage with and benefit from the text (Rahman, 2018, p. 7).

Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah, commonly known as HAKA, was born on February 10, 1879, in Maninjau, Agam Regency, West Sumatra. At the age of ten, he studied the Qur'an under Tuanku Hud and Tuanku Fakhri Samnun. When he was thirteen, he began studying *Nahwu* (Arabic grammar) and *Sharaf* (morphology) with his father. Between the ages of fourteen and sixteen, he studied *Minhaj al-Thalibin* and *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* under Sutan Yusuf of Sungai Rotan (Hamka, 1980, p. 53). HAKA spent seven years studying in Mecca, from the age of sixteen to twenty–three. During this period, he studied under several prominent scholars at the Masjid al–Haram, including Shaykh Ahmad Khatib al–Minangkabawi (his most beloved teacher), Shaykh Abdullah Jamidin, Shaykh Usman of Sarawak, Shaykh Umar Bajanid, Shaykh Shaleh Bafadhal, Shaykh Hamid of Jeddah, Shaykh Sa'id of Yemen, and Shaykh Yusuf al–Nabhani, the author of *al-Anwar al-Muhammadiyah* (Nazwar, 1983, p. 69).

HAMKA recorded that Abdul Karim Amrullah authored 27 published works. His most monumental contribution in the field of Qur'anic exegesis is *Tafsir al-Burhan*, a commentary on *Juz 'Ammah*. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah passed away on Saturday at 5:40 a.m., on 21 Jumada al–Akhira 1364 AH, corresponding to June 2, 1945. (Hamka, 1980, p. 53) He wrote *Tafsir al-Burhan*, a commentary on *Juz 'Ammah*, in 1922 in Padang. (Sofyan Saha, 2003, p. 66) It was later published in 1928 by the publisher *Dar Fikri Baru For De Kock* in Bukittinggi. (Putra, 2021, p. 218) In terms of Qur'anic textual material, this work is a tafsir that specifically focuses on selected sections of the Qur'an, namely the 30th *juz*'.

Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, popularly known as Buya Hamka, was born in Kampung Molek, Maninjau, West Sumatra, in 1908 CE and passed away on July 24, 1981, in Jakarta. In his intellectual career, he was recognized as a professor and a prominent scholar. In addition to his academic achievements, Hamka also served in the political sphere as a senior official in the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. He was actively involved in the Muhammadiyah organization and was elected as the head of the Muhammadiyah leadership council in West Sumatra in 1946. In 1953, he was appointed as an advisor to the central leadership of Muhammadiyah, and in 1977, he served as the chairman of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI) (Anam, 2020, pp. 48–49).

As an expert in religion, history, culture, literature, and politics, Buya HAMKA expressed his vast knowledge through approximately 79 written works. His most renowned masterpiece is *Tafsir al-Azhar*, a comprehensive exegesis covering *Juz' 1* to 30 of the Qur'an, (Alfiyah, 2017, pp. 27–28) Hamka began writing *Tafsir al-Azhar* from his Qur'anic lessons published in the *Gema Islam* magazine in 1962. In 1964, he was imprisoned by the New Order regime, during which he continued and completed the writing of his tafsir. The complete version of *Tafsir al-Azhar* was published in 1967 (Ma'arif, 2017, p. 125).

Abdurrauf al–Sinkili, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA), and Buya Hamka represent a continuous tradition of Qur'anic exegesis in Sumatra from the 17th to the 20th century. Al–Sinkili's *Tafsir Tarjuman al–Mustafid* combined Sufi thought with the Malay–Jawi language, establishing a local Islamic identity. HAKA's *Tafsir al–Burhan* emphasized rationality, social relevance, and the Minangkabau language, addressing contemporary community needs. Hamka's *Tafsir al–Azhar* integrated transmitted and reasoned interpretation, considering socio–political and scientific contexts in a comprehensive, modern framework. Together, they illustrate the evolution of tafsir in Sumatra, reflecting linguistic, methodological, and cultural continuity across centuries.

## BACKGROUND OF EACH TAFSIR AND THE POSITION OF EACH MUFASSIR

Hamka began writing *Tafsir al-Azhar* based on his Qur'anic lessons, which were published in the *Gema Islam* magazine in 1962. In 1964, he was imprisoned by the New Order regime, during which he continued and completed his tafsir. The complete version of *Tafsir al-Azhar* was published in 1967 (Lukman Syamsuddin, Achmad Abu Bakar, 2021, p. 259). 'Abd al–Ra'uf returned to Aceh in 1661 CE, during the reign of Sultanah Taj al–'Alam Safiyyat al–Dīn Syah (1641–1675), the 14th ruler of the Aceh Sultanate. Remarkably, female leadership in Aceh continued under three successive queens: the 15th ruler, Sultanah Nur al–'Alam Nakiyyat al–Dīn Syah (1675–1678); the 16th ruler, Sultanah 'Inayat Syah Zakiyyat al–Dīn Syah (1678–1688); and the 17th ruler, Sultanah Kamalat Syah (1688–1699) (Mernissi, 1994, p. 175).

This tafsir was written while 'Abd al–Ra'uf served as the mufti of the Aceh Sultanate. Holding this position gave him the authority and opportunity to compose his works, supported by the facilities and patronage of the Acehnese rulers at the time. Considering the active involvement and support of the political authority in the production of *Tafsir Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, the work can be categorized as a tafsir shaped by political patronage (Gusmian, 2015, p. 1). The primary purpose of writing this tafsir was to make the Qur'an more accessible to the general public, as many people at that time were not proficient in Arabic.

Moreover, there had not yet been a complete Qur'anic exegesis written in the Malay language (Rahman, 2018, p. 9). This tafsir gained wide recognition and a special place in the hearts of Muslims both in the Malay–Indonesian archipelago and abroad. Its popularity is evidenced by the numerous editions published in various regions, including Singapore, Penang, Jakarta, Bombay, and the Middle East. In Istanbul, it was published by *Mathba'ah al-'Uthmāniyyah* in 1884/1302 AH and again in 1906/1324 AH. In Cairo, it was printed by *Sulaimān al-Marāghī Publishers* in 1951, while in Mecca, it was issued by *al-'Amiriyyah Press*. The most recent edition was published in Jakarta in 1981 (Azra, 2004a, pp. 202–203).

In the preface of *Tafsir al-Burhān*, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah stated that the reason for writing his tafsir was the request of his students who regularly attended his Qur'anic study sessions at Surau Jembatan Besi in Padang Panjang. He emphasized the importance of employing reason to understand the verses of Allah, as God commands His servants to use their intellect and reasoning to the fullest extent (Amrullah, 1928, pp. 3–16). The *Tafsir al-Burhān*, which interprets selected Qur'anic passages—specifically from Surah *Adh-Dhuha* to Surah *al-Nās*—emerged within the Minangkabau community at a time of dynamic intellectual tension, polemic, and ideological debate between the *Kaum Tua* (Traditionalists) and the *Kaum Muda* (Reformists). The author of *al-Burhān*, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah, was a leading figure of the *Kaum Muda* movement and played a central role in this ideological and theological discourse (Putra, 2021, p. 301).

HAMKA's tafsir was named *al-Azhar* after the mosque he founded in his hometown of Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta. The name was inspired by Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut, who hoped that the spirit of scholarship and intellectual influence associated with Al-Azhar University would also flourish in Indonesia. HAMKA first introduced his tafsir through early morning Qur'anic lectures (*kuliah subuh*) delivered to the congregation of Al-Azhar Mosque in Kebayoran Baru, Jakarta (HAMKA, 1983, p. 43). HAMKA's exegesis began with Surah *al-Kahf* (Juz XV). The tafsir initially took shape from his oral explanations (*syarah*) delivered at the Al-Azhar Mosque.

On Monday, 12 Rabi' al-Awwal 1383 AH (January 27, 1964 CE), HAMKA was arrested by the Old Order regime on charges of treason against his own country and was imprisoned for two years and seven months (from January 27, 1964, to January 21, 1967). ((dkk.), 2009, p. 191) It was during this imprisonment that HAMKA devoted his time to writing and completing his 30-juz tafsir. In 1967, *Tafsir al-Azhar* was published for the first time. (Gusmian, 2003, p. 60) This tafsir represents HAMKA's most significant achievement and contribution to developing intellectual thought and elevating the scholarly tradition, marking a significant milestone in the history of Qur'anic exegesis in the Nusantara. The primary purpose of writing *Tafsir al-Azhar* was to strengthen and reinforce the arguments of preachers (*muballighīn*) and to support the Islamic da'wah movement (HAMKA, 1983, p. 6).

Buya Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar* belongs to the post-independence period of Indonesia (1951–1980). During this era, Qur'anic studies experienced significant growth due to three main factors: first, Indonesia had proclaimed its independence, creating a new spirit of nation-building and intellectual freedom; second, the establishment of higher education institutions provided structured platforms for religious and academic development; and third, the general intellectual level of Indonesian society had improved considerably, allowing for deeper engagement with Islamic scholarship and the Qur'an (Lukman Syamsuddin, Achmad Abu Bakar, 2021, p. 261). During this period, the teaching of Qur'anic exegesis began to be conducted formally, and the methodologies of presenting and writing tafsir became increasingly diverse and systematic. This era also coincided with the period of Guided Democracy in Indonesia (Rouf, 2020, pp. 47–49).

Hamka is recognized as one of the prominent local figures who significantly contributed to the development of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia. His inclusion among such figures serves as evidence that Islamic scholarship in Indonesia has indeed evolved, particularly in the field of tafsir. This is due to the quality and argumentative strength of his interpretation, which is comparable to Arabic-language tafsir works or those rooted in the Middle Eastern exegetical tradition (Anam, 2020, p. 43).

The tafsir works of ‘Abd al – Ra’uf al – Sinkili, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA), and Buya HAMKA illustrate the evolution of Qur’anic exegesis in Sumatra across centuries. Al – Sinkili’s *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* is Sufi – oriented and written in Malay – Jawi, making the Qur’an accessible under the patronage of the Aceh Sultanate. HAKA’s *Tafsir al-Burhan* emphasizes reason, social engagement, and the Minangkabau language during early 20th – century intellectual debates. HAMKA’s *Tafsir al-Azhar* represents a cosmopolitan, post – independence stage, integrating transmitted and reasoned interpretations with contemporary social and political concerns. Collectively, these works reflect a continuous intellectual, methodological, and cultural engagement with the Qur’an, positioning Sumatra as a significant center of Islamic scholarship.

**Table 1. Background and Intellectual Position of the Three Mufassirs**

No.	Mufassir	Tafsir Work	Writing Context	Tafsir Characteristics	Intellectual Position
1.	‘Abd al – Ra’uf al – Sinkili	Tarjumān al – Mustafid	Written while serving as mufti under four Acehnese queens with strong political patronage.	Sufi – oriented, written in Malay – Jawi, aims to make the Qur’an accessible to non – Arabic speakers.	First complete Malay tafsir; foundational text of Nusantara Qur’anic scholarship.
2.	Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA)	Tafsīr al – Burhān	Written at the request of his students during intense Kaum Tua – Kaum Muda debates.	Rational, reformist, emphasizes human reason; written in Minangkabau.	Represents early 20th – century reformist thought; key text of the Kaum Muda movement
3.	Buya HAMKA	Tafsir al – Azhar	Developed from mosque lectures; completed during imprisonment (1964 – 1967).	Cosmopolitan, integrates tradition and rationality; socially and politically contextual.	Most influential modern Indonesian tafsir; milestone of post – independence Qur’anic scholarship.

## CHARACTERISTICS AND EXAMPLES OF EACH INTERPRETATION

*Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by Abdurrauf al – Sinkili is a Qur’anic exegesis characterized by a Sufi orientation.(Roifa et al., 2017, p. 24) The sources of reference for this exegesis consist of five main tafsir works, namely: *Tafsir al-Baidhawi*, *Manafi’ al-Qur’an*, *Tafsir al-Khazin*, *Tafsir al-Tsa’labi*, and *Tafsir al-Jalalain*.(Rahman, 2018, p. 10) The methodology of this tafsir is *ijmālī* (concise), as it presents interpretations briefly and compactly, spanning only two volumes. It is succinct and straightforward, avoiding lengthy and elaborate explanations.(Rahman, 2018, p. 13) In terms of its systematic structure, Sinkili discusses the Qur’anic verses verse by verse according to their order in the mushaf, subsequently presenting the overall or global meaning conveyed in each verse (Al – Farmawi, 1977, p. 67). The steps of interpretation in Sinkili’s tafsir consist of three

components. First, he mentions the number of verses and the period of their revelation (*nuzūl*).

For example, when 'Abd al-Ra'uf refers to the number of verses and the place of revelation of Surah *al-Fātihah*, he states: "*Surah Fātihah al-kitāb is Makkiyah, and it consists of seven verses. This Surah al-Fātihah, which has seven verses, was revealed in Makkah.*" (Al-Fansuri, 1951, p. 2) Second, he explains the virtues of the Surah. For example, he states: "*It is mentioned in al-Baidhawi that Fātihah is a remedy for every illness, and it is mentioned in Manāfi' al-Qur'an that whoever recites it will receive unmatched rewards from this scripture, and it will bring benefit, goodness, and blessings to the person. And Allah knows best.*" (Al-Fansuri, 1951, p. 2) Third, he employs key terms in his interpretation. In Surah *al-Fātihah* and *al-Baqarah*, 'Abd al-Ra'uf uses seven key terms: *fāidah* (benefit), *qīṣah* (story), *kalimat al-mufassir* (the exegete's words), *tanbīh* (warning/alert), *adāb al-umum* or *adāb al-khusūs* (general or specific manners), *barmula* (beginning), and *ya'nī* (meaning/that is) (Rahman, 2018, p. 14).

The object of *Tafsir al-Burhān*, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah's (*HAKA*) exegesis, is the 30th *juz'* (*Juz Amma*), as this tafsir focuses specifically on selected sections of the Qur'an, namely *Juz 30* (Roifa et al., 2017, p. 22). The sources of *Tafsir al-Burhān* are *bi al-ma'thūr* (transmitted), following a structured pattern that includes the Qur'an, Sunnah, the sayings of the Companions (*Qaul al-Sahabah*), the sayings of the Followers (*Qaul al-Tabi'īn*), and other tafsir works. The method employed is *tahlīlī* (analytical), which involves outlining the sequence and operational steps in presenting the exegesis. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah explained that *Tafsir al-Burhān* interprets 22 surahs of the Qur'an, beginning with Surah *ad-Dhuhā* and continuing through to the end of Surah *al-Nās* (Putra, 2021, p. 244).

Its orientation is *al-adab wa al-Ijtīmā'ī* (socio-cultural), as the characteristic feature of tafsir works produced between 1900 and 1945 strongly reflects the social conditions of the community (Roifa et al., 2017, p. 34). *Tafsir al-Burhān* is one of the tafsir works studied for its incorporation of the Minangkabau local language, employing it both to translate and to explain the meanings of the Qur'anic verses (Putra, 2021, p. 304). One of the Minangkabau terms used by HAKA is *pakak* and *rabun* in explaining the meaning of *tsumma radadnāhu asfalā sāfilīn* in Surah *At-Tīn*, verse 5. In the Minangkabau General Dictionary, *pakak* means "deaf," and *rabun* means "blurred vision." Allah SWT says:

ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ

Its meaning is: "Then We return him to the lowest of the low".

He explains that what is meant by "the lowest of the low" (*asfalā sāfilīn*) refers to worldly humiliation, describing it as: bent after being straight, hair turning white after being black, wrinkled skin after being firm, weakness after strength, loss of teeth, deafness (*pakak*), blurred vision (*rabun*), diminished intellect, and the erosion of dignity and manners" (Amrullah, 1928, p. 70).

Buya HAMKA employed the *tafsīr bi al-Iqtirān* method, as his exegesis not only relied on the Qur'an, Hadith, the opinions of the Companions and Followers, and narrations from classical tafsir works (*al-mu'tabarāt*), but also provided rational and scientific explanations (*ra'y*), particularly concerning verses related to natural phenomena (*āyāt kāunīyah*). HAMKA did not limit himself to *tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* (transmitted sources) alone; he also incorporated *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* (reasoned interpretation), integrating both

approaches with various general methods, including linguistic analysis, historical context, socio-cultural interactions, geographical conditions of regions, and even local community narratives, to support and clarify the meanings in his tafsir (Alfiyah, 2017, p. 31).

Buya HAMKA's *Tafsir al-Azhar* belongs to the *tahlīlī* category, which provides detailed and extensive explanations of each verse, beginning with Surah *al-Fāṭḥah* and continuing through to Surah *al-Nās*. Due to the comprehensive nature of these explanations, the tafsir spans 15 volumes. (Gusmian, 2003, pp. 48–49) The dominant orientation in HAMKA's exegesis is *al-lawḥ al-adabī wa al-ijtimā'ī* (literary and socio-cultural). He provides explanations grounded in the prevailing social conditions, particularly the Old Order government, and the political context of his time. (Alfiyah, 2017, p. 31) One example of HAMKA's interpretation in his tafsir work is Surah *al-Fīl*, verse 4:

تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ

"[He] who pelts them with stones of torment."

In explaining the above verse, Hamka actually provides an introduction, noting that tafsir scholars differ regarding the term "stones of torment." However, he does not elaborate further on these differences. Despite this, Hamka appears to assert his position in supporting Muhammad Abduh's interpretation, understanding it as "smallpox." He cites Ikrimah's account, noting that the disease indeed appeared only after the event of Abrahah al-Ashram al-Habashi's expedition to destroy the Ka'bah.

Furthermore, Hamka contextualizes this for the present time, noting that if we transport birds from different regions or countries, it is advisable to conduct a health inspection first, preferably by consulting a doctor. This precaution is motivated by the various diseases that are currently widespread around the world, including avian influenza (bird flu) (HAMKA, 1983, p. 190).

The tafsir works of Abdurrauf al-Sinkili, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA), and Buya HAMKA illustrate the diversity and evolution of Qur'anic interpretation in Sumatra. Each mufassir demonstrates a distinct methodological approach—concise Sufi-oriented (Sinkili), analytical and socio-culturally engaged (HAKA), and comprehensive, rational, and contextually grounded (HAMKA)—while adapting to local languages and social realities. Collectively, these exegeses reflect how Sumatra's tafsir tradition bridges classical scholarship, local cultural expression, and modern intellectual engagement, ensuring that Qur'anic teachings remain relevant and accessible across generations.

**Table 2. Characteristics and Examples of the Interpretation of Three Sumatran Mufassirs**

No.	Aspect	Abdurrauf al-Sinkili – <i>Tarjuman al-Mustafid</i>	Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA) – <i>Tafsir al-Burhan</i>	Buya HAMKA – <i>Tafsir al-Azhar</i>
1.	Orientation	Sufi (mystical)	Socio-cultural 1 ( <i>adab wa ijtimā'ī</i> )	Literary & socio-cultural ( <i>adabī wa ijtimā'ī</i> )

2.	Method	<i>Ijmālī</i> (concise)	<i>Tahlīlī</i> (analytical)	<i>Tahlīlī</i> with <i>bi al-Iqtirān</i> (combined traditional & rational)
3.	Sources	Al – Baidhawi, Manafi' al – Qur'an, al – Khazin, al – Tsa'labi, Jalalain	Qur'an, Sunnah, Companions, Followers, classical tafsir	Qur'an, Hadith, classical tafsir, reason, science
4.	Language	Malay – Jawi	Minangkabau language	Modern Indonesian
5.	Key Features	Concise; includes verse count, nuzul, virtues, key terms	Uses Minangkabau terms; responds to reform debates	Contextual, uses history, sociology, natural science
6.	Example	Interprets al – Fātiḥah using: verse count, virtues, and seven key terms ( <i>fa'idah</i> , <i>tanbīh</i> , etc.)	Explains <i>asfalā sā'ilīn</i> (QS. At – Tīn:5) using local terms: <i>pakak</i> (deaf), <i>rabun</i> (blurred vision)	Interprets "ḥijārah min sijjīl" (al – Fīl:4) as <i>smallpox</i> (Abduh's view), linked to modern disease control
7.	Scope	30 juz in 2 volumes	Juz 'Amma (22 surahs)	30 juz in 15 volumes
8.	Socio – Political Context	Under Aceh Sultanate patronage	Minangkabau reform debates (Traditionalist vs Modernist)	Post – independence Indonesia, Guided Democracy era
9.	Main Objective	To make Qur'an accessible to Malay readers	To convey Qur'anic meaning through local language and social reflection	To support da'wah and offer modern – contextual interpretation

## THE CONTINUITY OF QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS IN SUMATRA WITHIN THE LOCAL ISLAMIC TRADITION

The intellectual journey of Qur'anic exegesis in Sumatra demonstrates a clear continuity of tradition connecting scholars from the 17th to the 20th century. Abdurrauf al – Sinkili, Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA), and Buya Hamka can be viewed as representatives of three essential phases in the development of Nusantara tafsir, particularly in Sumatra, each reflecting distinct styles, methodologies, and responses to the socio – political contexts of their respective eras (Azra, 2004a, p. 287). Reading this continuity through the lens of Islam as a discursive tradition, as proposed by Talal Asad, or via John R. Bowen's framework in *Muslims through Discourse*, allows us to understand tafsir not merely as textual interpretation but as an ongoing negotiation of authority, ideology, and local social norms.

Using Asad's concept of Islam as a discursive tradition, these exegetical works reveal how authority, practice, and interpretation are continually renegotiated within changing political and cultural environments. Meanwhile, Bowen's framework helps illustrate how

tafsir becomes a site where competing discourses—Sufi, reformist, and modernist—shape communal norms.

First, Abdurrauf al-Sinkili produced *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* as the first complete Malay tafsir of the Qur'an. This work was not merely a transfer of knowledge from the Middle East but also an effort to localize Islam in the Nusantara. By using Malay-Jawi, al-Sinkili reinforced an Islamic identity widely understood by the general populace while simultaneously embedding Sufi-oriented ethics and spirituality into public religious discourse. Within the Aceh Sultanate, his tafsir also functioned as an instrument of political legitimacy, demonstrating how Qur'anic interpretation could both affirm state authority and mediate communal spiritual norms, illustrating the interplay between text, power, and social context (Harun, 2020, pp. 101–118). Al-Sinkili's tafsir must also be situated within the Acehese struggle to maintain political legitimacy amid regional instability and intellectual contestations with earlier mystics such as Hamzah Fansuri and al-Raniri.

Second, HAKA, through *Tafsir al-Burhan*, demonstrates a transformation of tafsir toward rationality and a focus on social issues. This tafsir emerged in the context of the debate between the *Kaum Tua* (Traditionalists) and *Kaum Muda* (Reformists) in Minangkabau, reflecting a shift in discourse from a Sufi-traditional orientation toward a rational-modern perspective (Nasution, 2000, p. 45). HAKA's strategic use of the Minangkabau language continues the localization initiated by al-Sinkili. However, it emphasizes reason (*'aql*) and socio-political relevance, making tafsir a medium for ideological negotiation and intellectual contestation. Applying Bowen's discursive perspective, one can see how *al-Burhan* participates in shaping the boundaries of religious knowledge and communal authority, highlighting the dynamic interaction between textual exegesis and social positioning (Noer, 1996, p. 112). HAKA's rational approach reflects broader socio-political transformations in Minangkabau under Dutch colonial education reforms and increasing access to Middle Eastern reformist ideas, which encouraged reinterpretation of religious authority.

Third, Hamka, through *Tafsir al-Azhar*, represents the stage of maturity in Nusantara tafsir, characterized by a cosmopolitan, academic, and modern orientation. Hamka integrates both *bi al-ma'thūr* (transmitted sources) and *bi al-ra'y* (reasoned interpretation), while carefully considering the socio-political realities of post-independence Indonesia. (Gusman, 2003, p. 245) For example, his interpretation of Surah *al-Fil*, linked to smallpox and avian influenza, illustrates how tafsir can engage contemporary knowledge and public concerns, reflecting an adaptive discursive practice that bridges classical scholarship with modern experience. By reading Hamka's exegesis through Asad's lens, one can discern how authority, interpretation, and social ethics intersect, with tafsir functioning as both intellectual inquiry and a tool for moral and civic guidance (HAMKA, 1983, p. 52). HAMKA's interpretive approach was shaped by the ideological struggles of post-independence Indonesia, including tensions between nationalist politics, Islamic identity, and the state's control of religious discourse, particularly during the Guided Democracy era (Al Farabi & Djamaluddin, 2025, p. 19).

The continuity of tafsir in Sumatra can be understood through three aspects. First, the element of language and localization: al-Sinkili used Malay-Jawi, HAKA used Minangkabau, and Hamka used modern Indonesian. These differences indicate the dynamic role of language as both a medium for da'wah and a symbol of local identity (Fathurrahman, 2007, p. 321). Second, the methodological aspect: it evolved from a concise (*ijmālī*) Sufi-oriented approach (al-Sinkili), to an analytical (*tahlīlī*) method with socio-

cultural nuances (*adab ijtima'ī*) in HAKA's tafsir, and finally to a comprehensive, cosmopolitan form in Hamka's exegesis (Shihab, 2001, p. 375). Third, the socio – political function aspect: al – Sinkili's tafsir supported the authority of the sultanate, HAKA's tafsir served as an instrument of the *Kaum Muda* intellectual struggle, while Hamka's tafsir functioned to strengthen the da'wah movement and provide moral legitimacy for Muslims in the modern era (Federspiel, 1996, p. 189).

Thus, Qur'anic exegesis in Sumatra demonstrates epistemological, methodological, and cultural continuity. Each mufassir presents a distinctive style in response to their temporal and social challenges while maintaining a connection with local Islamic tradition. Viewed through discursive frameworks, these tafsir works are not merely interpretive texts but active participants in shaping religious knowledge, communal norms, and socio – political discourse. The study of Qur'anic exegesis in Sumatra thus reveals a sustained intellectual and cultural legacy, where al – Sinkili, HAKA, and Hamka collectively illustrate the dynamic negotiation between tradition, rationality, and modernity, positioning Sumatra as a vital center for Islamic scholarly production with relevance to both Nusantara and global Islamic contexts (Alatas, 2015, p. 435).

The study of Qur'anic exegesis in Sumatra reveals a sustained intellectual and cultural legacy, where each mufassir—al – Sinkili, HAKA, and Hamka—contributes uniquely to the localization, methodology, and socio – political engagement of tafsir. Their works collectively demonstrate that Sumatra has been a dynamic center for developing Islamic scholarship, successfully bridging traditional, rational, and modern approaches while reinforcing the region's distinct Islamic identity within the broader Nusantara and global contexts. These findings support the central thesis of this study: that tafsir in Sumatra constitutes a continuous discursive trajectory in which scholars reinterpret the Qur'an to assert religious authority, negotiate social norms, and respond to political change across centuries.

## CONCLUSION

This study explores three main aspects: the biographies of the exegetes, the contexts of their tafsir writings, and the characteristics of their interpretations. Abdurrauf al – Sinkili (1615 – 1693), through *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, represents early Qur'anic exegesis in the Malay – Indonesian Archipelago, marked by a Sufi orientation within the 17th – century Aceh Sultanate. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAKA, 1879 – 1945) with *Tafsir al-Burhan* and Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA, 1908 – 1981) with *Tafsir al-Azhar* illustrate the modern phase in 20th – century Minangkabau, emphasizing rational, social, and contextual approaches.

The tafsir writings reflect the social and religious needs of their communities. Abdurrauf aimed to make the Qur'an accessible to Malay audiences; HAKA responded to students' inquiries and intellectual debates between *Kaum Tua* and *Kaum Muda*; while HAMKA produced his tafsir as a da'wah tool amid post – independence social and political dynamics.

Methodologically, Abdurrauf employed the concise (*ijmā'ī*) style with a Sufi tone; HAKA used the analytical (*tahlīlī*) method with a literary – social (*adabī-ijtima'ī*) style; and HAMKA integrated transmitted (*bi al-ma'tsūr*) and reasoned (*bi al-ra'y*) approaches, creating a cosmopolitan exegesis engaging contemporary realities. Collectively, these findings highlight the continuity of Qur'anic interpretation in Sumatra, demonstrating its adaptive, contextual, and intellectually vibrant nature, bridging local traditions and global Islamic scholarship.

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