

# The Use of Poetic Narratives in Hamka's Qur'anic Exegesis Books, Tafsir Al Azhar

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## ABSTRACT

Hamka is a multitalented religious scholar, and one of the prominent cultural figures in Indonesia. Hamka holds scholarly authorities as a mufassir (Qur'anic interpreter) and a man of letters. These capabilities are proven by a number of his writings in both fields. Likewise, Hamka has tried to combine these two competencies in his commentary books, Tafsir Al Azhar. Description of interpretation and explanation of Hamka in Tafsir Al Azhar displays handful elements of Malay literature. Yet, little has been done to study the literary dimension of Hamka's interpretation of the Qur'an, while such study is scholarly important, since it would help us understand the extent to which literary work could influence the production of religious authority. This paper tries to fulfill this gap. Thus, it is focused on discussing the use of poetry narration in Hamka's Tafsir Al Azhar, and the extent to which such use is significant to how he has acquired his authority in the field of Qur'anic interpretation. This research belongs to the type of library research using a qualitative approach. The data gathered are analyzed through theory of literary science and linguistics. This research finds out that the poetic narrative in Hamka's Tafsir Al Azhar strictly follows the convention of Malay poetry structures. As such, this research concludes, has many to do with both his effort to strengthen and elucidate his interpretation about the Qur'anic verses, and his mission and interest in spreading Malay cultural identity and moral values.

**Keywords:** *Tafsir Al Azhar, Hamka, poetry, Qur'anic interpretation*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis) is a human effort to understand the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by explaining its meanings and issuing laws and wisdom.[1] Qur'anic exegesis becomes one of the efforts to realize the function of the Qur'an as a source of Islamic teachings and as a guide that provides welfare and happiness for humans, both individually and in groups.[2] Tafsir as one of the Islamic disciplines presupposes a set of interpretation methods in order to achieve a correct understanding of what Allah intended in the verses of the Qur'an.[3] Muslim scholars have developed several methods of interpreting the Qur'an.[4]

Hamka is one of the Indonesian Muslim scholars who have made important contribution in the field of the interpretation of the Qur'an. Hamka, an abbreviation of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, is known as a multi-

talented figure. Aside from being a Muslim scholar, Hamka is also known as a writer, a historian and a politician who wrote around 120 books of various disciplines, such as sufism, literature, philosophy, history, sociology, politics and Qur'anic interpretation.

As a poet or a man of letters, Hamka has proven his authority by producing a number of literary works. He wrote several novels, biographies and collections of short stories. Most of his literary works were romances, many of them have received wide attention and enjoyed popularity, not only in Indonesia but also in other Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore. Slamet Mulyono, an Indonesian literature expert, referred to Hamka as Hamzah Fanshuri of the new age (Hamzah Fanshuri is a Muslim Sufi scholar of the 17th century Islamic Aceh).

In the field of tafsir, Hamka shows his authority by producing books of the interpretation of the Qur'an, most which have received high appreciation from many Muslim scholars in Indonesia. Abdurrahman Wahid, former leader

of the biggest traditionalist Muslim organization in Indonesia, for example, views Tafsir Al Azhar as the most monumental work of Hamka's. The strength of this work lies in the broad knowledge that Hamka uses to support and explain his interpretation. In other word, his deep knowledge reflected his authoritative ability to write a complete interpretation of the Qur'an.

Having in mind Hamka's expertise in literary, the researcher assumes that his literary skill is more or less influential to his exegetic work of the Qur'an. In fact, Hamka had included literary elements in his Tafsir Al Azhar as supplementary commentaries to the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. The literary narration in his exegetic work adopts certain poetic elements characteristic of both Arab-Islamic and local-Indonesian literary works, including poetry, proverbs and Malay maxims. The literary language in his commentary is extracted from his own recitation, Malay treasury and Arabic excerpts.

The case in point is Hamka's commentary on chapter Ali Imran verse 158.[5] Although the number of poems included throughout his exegesis books is not massive, the three kinds of literary language are enough to color Hamka's interpretation style.

Hamka's Tafsir Al Azhar, which consists of 30 volumes (Juz I - XXX), has become an object of many researches. There are a number of research results and scientific works in the form of theses, dissertations and journal articles that examine this interpretation the Qur'an, either to examine their interpretation methods or to investigate various interpretive thoughts.[6]–[10] Yet among them, there is no research that specifically discusses the production of religious authority of Hamka in the field of Qur'anic exegesis, especially through the use of the literary elements in his Tafsir Al Azhar. A research by Lukman, entitled Study of Malay Proverbial Discourse in Hamka's Al Azhar Interpretation, indeed discusses the literary elements in Hamka's Tafsir Al Azhar, but only in general terms and only briefly alludes to Malay proverbs[11].

To fill this lacuna, this paper is intended to examine the use of poetic language in Tafsir Al Azhar for the production of religious authority of Hamka in the field of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia. To avoid broad discussion or to limit this study, not all literary elements are discussed here. But this research is only focused on the use of the Malay poetry. The research questions to be answered here are as follows: What is the quality of the poems used by Hamka in explaining the interpretation of the Qur'an in Tafsir Al Azhar? What are the values contained behind the poetry narratives displayed in Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar?

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

The type of research used in this study is a library research. This is because, the data for this research are collected through searching data sources in the form of literature or books that are related to the research topic. Primary data source in the study is Hamka's Tafsir Al Azhar which consists of 30 volumes. To trace Hamka's

poems, the writer will do a serious investigation of Tafsir Al Azhar.

This study employs a qualitative approach. Data analysis is presented in the form of description and explanation of words. To analyze the selected poems, in order to see the structures, rules and kind of poetry, the researcher will employ to the theories of literacy.[12]–[16]

Then, to examine the meaning of Malay poetic narratives used by Hamka, the researcher refers to the theory of critical discourse analysis (CDA). In this regard, the researcher uses Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse analysis model. CDA, according to van Dijk, deals with social power or social control from the community. A community is considered to have power if they are able to control the actions and thoughts of members of the community. Mastery of the public mind is called social cognition, that is, how a text (both verbal and non-verbal) is produced. This is because the process of meaning making production of a text contains the knowledge behind the text, and under the conditions by which the text controls the public mind. This condition is known as context.[17]

## **3. HAMKA TAFSIR AL AZHAR AND MALAY POETRY**

Hamka lived in the period between 1908 and 1981. He was born in Maninjau West Sumatra and died in Jakarta. He is the son of a great and famous 'ulama named Abdul Karim Amarullah (Hajj Rasul). His formal education only reached elementary school, but he learned by himself a lot (autodidact), especially in the field of Islamic studies.

It seems that scholarship is a predicate that has been inherited by Hamka geologically, which was brought into his subconscious, so that this scholarship was also chosen by Hamka as an obsession to present himself in a variety of activities, namely as a literary man, cultural producer, Islamic scholar, preacher, educator, and politician. His expertise in Islam received international recognition, evidenced by his Honorary Doctorate degree from the Al-Azhar University in 1958 and from the Kebangsaan University of Malaysia in 1974.[18]

The Malay proverb says that tigers die leaving stripes, elephants die leaving ivory, and human dies leaving names. Hamka has left a popular name through his written works. Tafsir Al Azhar is his greatest and monumental work. The presence of the works complements and adds to his authority as an Indonesian Muslim scholar.

These exegetical works originally came from his commentary lectures which were delivered routinely every morning at Al Azhar mosque, Kemayoran, Jakarta. Since 1962, this commentary was published in Panji Masyarakat magazine. Hamka continued writing the Qur'anic interpretation and completed his work when he was kept in prison, by the Old Order Era, before it was finally compiled into books and named Tafsir Al-Azhar. According to Fahmi Salim, there are at least three motivations for Hamka to write this work. They are,

firstly, to encourage the rise of Muslim generations in the Malay region; secondly, to prepare professional da'i (preacher); and thirdly, to contribute to Al-Azhar University in Egypt. [19]

In the field of Qur'anic exegesis, Hamka's works belong to the modern style of Qur'anic interpretation, a type of interpretation that connects the dimensions of aql (reason) and naql (text). Related to the method of interpretation, Tafsir Al-Azhar draws successive sources from the Qur'an, the Hadith, Aqwal (sayings) of the Companions of the Prophet, Aqwal Tabi'in, and books of commentary interpretation. This commentary has a style called Adabi Ijtima'i (social literature). The investigation throughout Tafsir Al Azhar shows that there are about 20 Malay poems that are used by Hamka in the interpretation of the interpretation. The list of the poetry is seen in the list below:

TABLE I.

NO	POETRY TEXT	PLACE
1	<i>Berlayar ke pulau bakal Bawa seraut dua tiga Kalau kail panjang sejengkal Jangan laut hendak diduga</i>	Volume 1 Page 196
2	<i>Jangan ditutuh bunga tanjung Bunga cempaka rampak jua Jangan disepuh emas lancung Kilat tembaga tampak juga</i>	Volume 2 Page 83
3	<i>Bukit bunian panjang tujuh Dilipat lalu panjang lima Bukan tanaman enggan tumbuh Bumi yang segan menerima</i>	Volume 3 Page 48
4	<i>Bila runtuh kota Melaka Papan di Jawa beta tarahkan Jika sungguh bagai dikata Badan dan nyawa beta serahkan</i>	Volume 4 Page 305
5	<i>Dahulu ramai pecan ahad 'Rang jual talang kami beli</i>	Volume 4 Page

	<i>'Rang jual ke bukit tinggi Kiri disurih buah pala Alangkah rimba pada Jambi Dahulu kata mufakat Bukit 'lah sama kita daki Lurah 'lah sama diterjuni Kini diganjur surat saja Alangkah hiba hati kami</i>	307
6	<i>Anak raja memikul kayu Kayu diambil akan titian Nasib malang orang melayu Orang besar-besar berdengki- dengki</i>	Volume 5 Page 40
7	<i>Alangkah elok buah tempayang Sugi-sugi mengarang benih Alangkah elok orang sembahyang Hati suci muka jernih</i>	Volume 6 Page 151
8	<i>Anak orang Silaing Tinggi Di Bubut capa dihempaskan Harap burung terbang tinggi Punai di tangan dilepaskan</i>	Volume 7 Page 210
9	<i>Tegak rumah karena sendi Runtuh sendi rumah binasa Tegak bangsa karena budi Hilang budi, hilanglah bangsa</i>	Volume 8 Page 233
10	<i>Hilang Sinyaru tampak Pagai Hilang dilamun-lamun ombak Hilang nan bungsu, hilang sangsai Hilang di mata orang banyak</i>	Volume 10 Page 9

11	<i>Anak tiung atas rambutan Bernyayi bertongkat paruh Tertegun kapal di lautan Datang angin berlayar jauh</i>	Volume 13  Page 43
12	<i>Rama-rama terbang di hutan Anak Keling bermain kaca Bukan hamba mati diracun Mati ditikam sudut mata</i>	Volume 13  Page 114
13	<i>Berakit-rakit ke hulu Berenang-renang ke tepian Bersakit-sakit dahulu Bersenang-senang kemudian</i>	Volume 13  Page 119
14	<i>Pulau pandan jauh di tengah Gunung Daik bercabang tiga Hancur badan dikandung tanah Budi yang baik dikenang juga</i>	Volume 16  Page 33
15	<i>Pisang emas bawa berlayar Letak sebuah di atas peti Hutang emas boleh dibayar Hutang budi dibawa mati</i>	Volume 16  Page 33
16	<i>Sayang-sayang buah tempayang Sugi-sugi mengarang benih Alangkah elok orang sembah- yang Hati suci mukanya jernih</i>	Volume 16  Page 176
17	<i>Elok umbutnya pandan singkil Dilipat lalu diperkalang Manis mulutnya sehingga bibir Hatinya bulat membelakang</i>	Volume 16  Page 207

18	<i>Satu dua tiga enam Ditambah satu menjadi tujuh Buah delima yang ditanam Tidak berangan yang akan tumbuh</i>	Volume 17  Page 112
19	<i>Hamzah Fanshuri di negeri Melayu Tempanya kaafoor di dalam kayu Asalnya manikam yang tiada layu Dengan ilmu dunia manakan payu</i>	Volume 19  Page 268
20	<i>Hamzah Syahrin-nawi terlalu hapus Seperti kayu sekalian hangus Asalnya laut tiada berarus Menjadi kaafuur di dalam Barus</i>	Volume 19  Page 268

From the above data, it can be seen that the poems inserted by Hamka in his interpretive work are not only popular but also widely inherited among members of Minang community in particular, and Malay community in general. Notwithstanding, the poetry narrative generally uses Malay or Indonesian language. To make an easy identification, the poems quoted are presented in the form of the list, sorted by loading locus in accordance with the series of volume of Tafsir Al Azhar, and the first order is named poetry 1, the second one is called poetry 2, and so on.

Structural analysis of the narrative poetry of Hamka in Tafsir Al Azhar shows that most of poetry is four rows-typed poetry which is commonly known as seloka. In terms of tone, in general the poem's rhyme is a-b-a-b (poetry 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 18). Two poems, 19 and 20, sound the tone a-a-a-a. The other two poems, 12 and 17, deviate from the standard rhyming a-b-c-b.

Based on the theme or content of the poem, the poetic narrative in Tafsir Al Azhar can be divided into the following groups: satire poetry (poetry 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 17 and 18), romance poetry (poetry 4 and 12), mourning poetry (poetry 5), religious poetry (poetry 7 and 16), advice poetry (poetry 9, 13, 14 and 15), fate poetry (poetry 10 and 11) and informative poetry (poetry 19 and 20). In term of

the image to built, it shows that most of poetry reflects visual image that provides stimulation to the sense of sight, so that things that are not visible become 'visible'. Visual imagery is generally found on the part of sampiran (row 1 and 2) of all 20 poems, except poetry 18, which indicates images of feelings or thoughts (sensual). This images can also be found in the part of contents (row 3 and 4), as contained in poetry 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19.

Poetry 5 is the only talibun poetry because it consists of 10 rows. The first five rows are the part of sampiran and the last five ones are the part of content.

#### **4. CRITICAL ANALYSIS HAMKA'S POETIC NARRATIVES IN TAFSIR AL AZHAR**

This section is intended to examine the meaning or purpose of Malay poetic narratives used by Hamka. To meet this aim, the researcher will provide analysis on some part of Hamka's poetry in Tafsir Al Azhar.

Hamka quotes poetry 1 in commenting the meaning of QS. 2: 29. He explains in his commentary that Allah is All-Knowing. Human science is limited and it is impossible to annul the vast verses and knowledge of Allah.[20] In terms of interpretation, this poetry gives a concrete description of the message of this verse, that is, doubting or rejecting Allah's knowledge is the same as measuring the sea's depth with a fishing hook. From the CDA side, this poetry illustrates the wisdom of the Malays, so as not to do something irrational and impossible.

Poetry 2 is used to explain his interpretation of QS. 2: 175-176. In his description, Hamka explained that there are people who like to turn the truth around. Yet, no matter what, the truth will still exist and never disappear, while the humans themselves will die.[21] In terms of interpretation, this poetry also gives a visualization of the message of the verse that the truth cannot be twisted and covered up. One day it will be revealed: like gilded gold, from time to time the original copper will appear. From the CDA side, this poetry also illustrates the wise attitude of the Malay people, so as not to act manipulatively and unfairly.

Poetry 3 is used when he interprets QS. 2: 265. This verse, explained by Hamka, contains the imagery of those who are prosperous, because they only expect the pleasure from Allah, like fertile soil which gives a lot of harvest.[22] In terms of interpretation, this poetry narrative is used as a reinforcement of interpretation, in the form of an anti-thesis on the message of the verse. In terms of discourse analysis, this poetry reflects Malay local message or message about corrective attitude and self-evaluation, as Hamka's statement goes on, if the planted plants do not want to grow, the plants should not be directly blamed. It may be the land where they are planted that is is not guarded, nurtured and maintained.

Poetry 4 is used to explain his interpretation of QS. 4: 21. Hamka explained that marriage is a heavy promise

between a man who wants to get married, and a woman who willingly want to live her life with her choice and give her life to him. In the context of interpretation, this poetry is used to clarify the purpose of that solid promise. In the context of Malay culture, this poetry can be understood as an expression of the mood, attitude and behavior of the Malay woman who is about to get married, that is the attitude of being willing, thankful and obedient.[23]

Poetry 5 which is talibun type is quoted to describe his interpretation of the QS. 4: 21. Hamka emphasizes in his interpretation that it is very ironic and very embarrassing if property is given back to a divorced woman, whose heart was sad, and whose treasure was taken anyway.[24] From the point of view of interpretation, this poetry argues why such an action is called as mubinan (big sin). In the CDA point of view, this poetry represents the feelings of a Malay woman in time of getting divorced: how sad it is to be abandoned by a husband, especially because the former wants to marry another woman.

Poetry 6 is used when he explained his interpretation of the QS 3: 32. Hamka insists that we shall not be jealous and envious of others. The important thing in life is to make an effort and accept of what the results are. Many Malay people resign because of this quality. If one comes forward, others hate and try to knock it down.[25] In terms of interpretation, the use of this poetry is to add information about the impact of envy and envy. This poetry is seen from the CDA glasses in a political context containing an ethical-idealistic moral message in the life of the nation on Malay soil. The strength and unity of the Malays to break away from colonialist hegemony must be built on the ideal of Islamic teachings. Attitudes and actions that trigger weakness must be abandoned. Poetry narratives like this on the one hand reflect the social and political unrest Hamka against colonial power in Malay land and on the other hand concern (criticism) of the condition of Malay society is not united and difficult to advance because it likes to knock down friends or do not like to see other friends progress.

Poetry 7 is used when explaining the interpretation of QS. 5: 6. According to Hamka, the purpose of the ablution, bathing and tayamum (ablution with sand) commands for people who want to pray is that the holy body is clean.[26] From the point of view of interpretation, this poetry narrative is used to add information about the impact of thaharah (purification) to the culprit. From the CDA point of view, seen in the context of the poetry culture this reflects the physical strength and mental quality of the Malays who maintain the routine of prayer and thaharah worship, have a pure heart and a clear face. In line with this, poetry 16 which is almost the same as poetry 17, only slightly different sampiran in line 1, is used when outlining the interpretation of QS. 48: 29. From the CDA analysis in a cultural context, this poetry reflects the quality of the personality of the Malays who always prayed. At least from Hamka's statement, there are two values contained by this poetry: 1) being able to solving problems and 2) the look on his face is always unsightly. "... from the cause of prostration their faces glow, not frowning, not grinning ...

so that there is no tangle that is not finished, there is no unclear turbid ... by always doing prostration, people do not become arrogant ... by the prostration to Allah, he feels humility himself ...."[27]

Poetry 8 is used to explain the interpretation of QS. 6: 52. This verse, according to Hamka's statement, warns the Messenger of Allah not to apply wrongdoing, if the companions were expelled even though they were certain just because they gave a place to those who were uncertain.[28] This condition is illustrated by Hamka in the poem above, and even another version of the last two lines is put forward: "expect thunder in the sky, water to be poured".

In terms of interpretation, the use of this poetry narrative reinforces the verse's message about the objective and non-discriminatory attitude of a leader. This poem seen from the CDA glasses in a political context contains strong criticism of political leaders in carrying out their leadership. Hamka writes, it is not certain that the thunder will become rain, even though the water supply has been thrown away, this is wrongs to those who are driven out and wrongs to themselves. This criticism is increasingly related to Hamka's statement in the introduction of Tafsir al Azhar: "... that my arrest and detention are legalized wrongdoing ... all these accusations are mere defamation. I was arrested in order to cover up my true intention, which was to remove me from the community."[29]

Poetry 9 is used when explaining the interpretation of QS. 7: 34. Here Hamka explains, according to this verse the rise and fall of a people is a certain period of time. The life of a people is governed by the value of the life of the people themselves, namely by the life or collapse of morals.[30] From the point of view of interpretation, the narrative of poetry delivered by Hamka clearly emphasizes the importance of morality for a nation. From the CDA side, Hamka through the Malay literary language reminded the importance of manners in marriage, society, politics, nation and state so that, in the political context, Hamka's exclamation orientation was felt through this narrative poetry aimed at the new Indonesian nation.

Poetry 10 is used when explaining the interpretation of QS. 27: 63. Here Hamka explains the matter of directions, or directions on the journey found in nature, such as stars, mountains, hills, peninsulas, even large wood trees. Hamka also gave an example through these two lines beside the poetry. The words Sinyaru and Pagai contained in this poem are two island names. If the island of Sinyaru is no longer visible, surely Pagai island will be seen. It means that the voyage is near to the destination. Indonesia consists of islands and vast oceans, therefore many of these addresses are on land and in the ocean.[31] In terms of CDA, this poetry narration is conveyed to show the existence of local intelligence possessed by Malays. They are good at reading addresses (signs) found in nature.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, this paper concludes that Hamka has a fairly strong authority in presenting elements

of Malay poetry into his interpretive work. The results of structural analysis indicate that the poetry of Hamka in Tafsir Al Azhar highly meets the quality and classic literary criteria of Malay poetry. A slight inconsistency was found, but this was not significant. In general Hamka succeeded in combining and placing the poetry in his commentary to strengthen and add to his explanation of the verse he was interpreting.

Furthermore, it can be concluded that Hamka's production of meaning of the poetry he inserted in his interpretation, is certainly used to strengthen and elucidate his interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an. Yet, there is also another factor. Behind the narrative of the poem, Hamka has certain intentions and interests. In the cultural context, the use of the Malay poetry narratives in Hamka's Tafsir Al-Azhar has a purpose to show Malay cultural identity and introduce Malay local wisdom. In term of content, the poetry narratives reflect Malay wisdom, scholarship and local values.

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