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Tafsir bil Ra'yi as Intrusion: The Debate between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr

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Abstract

Qur'anic interpretation has undergone diverse methodological developments throughout Islamic intellectual history, one of which is tafsīr bi al-ra'y or interpretation based on reason and ijtihād. However, this approach has long been debated among scholars, particularly concerning its potential status as a form of dakhil fi al-tafsir. In this context, two prominent scholars, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr, represent two contrasting epistemological orientations. Ibn Taymiyyah viewed tafsir bi al-ra'yi critically, considering it a deviation when not grounded in authentic narrations from the Prophet, the Companions, and the Ṭābi'īn. Conversely, Ibn 'Āshūr, as a modernist exegete, legitimized the use of reason in interpreting the Qur'an, provided it remained consistent with shar'ī principles and linguistic conventions. This study aims to analyze the epistemological foundations and interpretive methodologies of both scholars, highlighting how their differing intellectual contexts shaped their approaches to tafsīr bi al-ra'y. The research gap lies in the limited comparative studies that systematically explore this epistemological tension between textual traditionalism and contextual rationalism. Using a qualitative approach and library research, this study examines primary sources of tafsīr and uṣūl al-tafsīr written by both figures. This study contributes to the broader discourse of Qur'anic hermeneutics by offering a nuanced understanding of how classical and modern paradigms interact in defining the boundaries of rational interpretation, thereby enriching contemporary discussions on methodological renewal in Qur'anic studies.

Keywords: Tafsir bi al-ra'yi; Intrusion; Ibn Taymiyyah; Ibn 'Āshūr.

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Introduction

The Qur'an, as the holy scripture of Islam, plays a vital role in all aspects of religious life. To comprehend its content and the messages it conveys, Muslims need the science of tafsir, which is the study dedicated to explaining the meanings of Qur'anic verses according to the will of Allah [1]. Throughout history, the discipline of tafsir has undergone extensive development, giving rise to a variety of methods, approaches, and interpretive styles. One of the most frequently discussed, both in positive and negative terms is *tafsir bi al-ra'yi*, an interpretive method that relies on intellect, reason, and *ijtihad* (independent judgment) [2].

Tafsir bi al-ra'yi has long been one of the most debated methods of Qur'anic interpretation since the early period of Islamic scholarship. This method involves the use of reason and personal effort by the interpreter (*mufasssir*) to understand the divine text, in contrast to *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur*, which relies entirely on transmitted reports from the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, and their successors [3]. Although this method significantly contributes to broadening the understanding of Qur'anic verses, it also raises an important question: to what extent can it be considered valid and accepted within the tradition of Islamic exegesis?

The issue becomes even more complex when *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* is associated with the infiltration of external elements such as foreign philosophies, specific ideologies, or subjective tendencies into the sacred text a phenomenon that scholars refer to as *dakhil fi al-tafsir* (foreign intrusion in interpretation). [4] Ibn Taymiyyah, a prominent figure in classical Islamic thought, strongly criticized any form *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* that is not based on authentic transmitted evidence (*dalil naqli*). He argued that many interpretations circulating among Muslims stem from *fasid* (corrupt) reasoning, which distorts the intended meaning of the Qur'an [5]. Any interpretation that is not grounded in sound textual evidence or the understanding of the early generations (*salaf*) should be regarded with suspicion, as it may represent a form of deviation and could open the door to *dakhil* in exegesis [6].

While numerous studies have examined Ibn Taymiyyah's traditionalist approach and Ibn 'Ashūr's contextual-rational perspective separately, there remains a lack of comparative analysis that systematically explores the epistemological tension between these two interpretive paradigms. Most prior research tends to focus either on theological implications or on historical influence, without critically analyzing how each thinker conceptualizes the boundaries of reason (*'aql*) and revelation (*naql*) within the discourse of *tafsir bi al-ra'yi*. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by offering a comparative

examination of both scholars' methodologies, aiming to clarify how their distinct epistemic orientations contribute to the broader framework of Qur'anic interpretation and its legitimacy in the face of potential *dakhil* intrusions.

In contrast, Ibn 'Āshūr better known as Muḥammad Ṭāhir Ibn 'Āshūr offered a fresh and innovative perspective in addressing the challenges of Qur'anic interpretation in the modern era. Through his comprehensive and reformist thinking, he developed a methodology that aligns with the realities of contemporary life, integrating classical exegetical traditions with rational inquiry and contextual analysis (*tafsir bi al-ra'yi*) [7]. A 20th-century scholar and leading figure of Islamic renewal, Ibn 'Āshūr emphasized the necessity of employing reason (*al-'aql*) in interpretation, arguing that the Qur'an was revealed to guide humankind in every age, thus requiring interpreters to engage with modern intellectual, social, and ethical challenges [8]. For him, as long as interpretation is conducted within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and does not deviate from the core values of Islam, the use of reason in tafsir is not only valid but a necessary form of *ijtihad* [9].

The debate between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr illustrates two major paradigms in Qur'anic exegesis: the textual-scriptural approach and the rational-conceptual approach. The difference between them lies not only in their methods, but also in their fundamental epistemological assumptions regarding the authority of Qur'anic interpretation. This discussion becomes especially important to examine critically in light of the growing use of contemporary interpretive approaches, which often employ *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* to address modern issues such as human rights, gender, the environment, pluralism, and others.

This study aims to analyze the methodological and epistemological differences between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr in interpreting *tafsir bi al-ra'yi*, both *muhtaram* (legitimate) and *madzmum* (blameworthy), and to evaluate objective criteria that can be used as a basis for assessing the validity of rational interpretation. By highlighting the methodological differences between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr, this paper seeks to contribute to clarifying interpretive methodology and to constructing a fair and balanced framework for evaluating *ijtihad*-based exegesis.

Method

This article employs a qualitative research design using a library study approach, which involves collecting and analyzing data from a variety of written sources such as classical and contemporary books, academic journals, and scholarly articles relevant to the research topic. The primary data sources are Ibn Taymiyyah's *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* and Ibn 'Āshūr's *Tafsīr al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, while the secondary data consist of related studies on *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* and

al-dakhil fi al-tafsir found in modern Qur'anic studies literature. Data were collected through document analysis and examined using comparative textual and thematic interpretation, focusing on identifying the epistemological foundations and methodological patterns of both exegetes. The analysis proceeds through several systematic stages: data collection, conceptual identification, comparative analysis, thematic synthesis and conclusion formulation.

Result and Discussion

Basic Concept: *Tafsir bi al-Ra'yi* and *Dakhil fi al-Tafsir*

Tafsir bi al-ra'yi derives from the root word *ra'a-yara-ru'yatan*. Its plural form is *ārā'*, which refers to thought based on conviction (*al-i'tiqād*), analogy (*al-qiyās*), or the result of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) [10]. Generally, this type of interpretation is understood as a method of interpreting the Qur'an based on rational understanding and deep reflection on the meanings of its words after first grasping the intended meaning (*al-madlūl*) and the semantic connections within the structure of the words (*al-dalālah*) [11].

According to Manna al-Qattan, *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* refers a type of Qur'anic interpretation in which the exegete explains the meaning or purpose of a verse based on personal understanding and rational reflection. In this method, the conclusions drawn tend to rely on logical reasoning and rational reflection, without directly referring to transmitted reports or traditional sources.[4] Classical scholars such as al-Dhahabi and al-Zarqani also elaborated on this concept, distinguishing between *tafsir bi al-ra'yi al-mahmud* and *tafsir bi al-ra'yi al-madhmum*. Building upon these theoretical foundations, this study adopts the conceptual framework of epistemological analysis as its primary theoretical basis. Through this framework, the research examines how each scholar between Ibn Taymiyyah with his textual traditional epistemology and Ibn 'Āshūr with his contextual rational epistemology defines the role of reason, revelation, and methodology in interpreting the Qur'an. This theoretical lens allows for a systematic comparison between their approaches, highlighting the underlying epistemic assumptions that shape their respective views on *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* and *al-dakhil fi al-tafsir*.

Muhammad Husain al-Dhahabi defines *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* as a form of interpretation carried out through reflection, *ijtihad*, and rational thinking by a *mufassir* who has mastered the Arabic language, its grammar, and the principle of jurisprudence. This approach also considers essential elements of Qur'anic exegesis, such as the context of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), abrogating and abrogated verses (*nāsikh wa mansūkh*), and other methodological dimensions [10]. Building upon these classical definitions, this study adopts the epistemological framework of *tafsir* methodology as its main theoretical foundation. Within this

framework, tafsir *bi al-ra'yi* is analyzed not merely as a rational approach, but as a methodological spectrum situated between textual traditionalism and rational contextualism. This theoretical model allows for a comparative analysis of Ibn Taymiyyah's traditionalist orientation and Ibn 'Āshūr rational contextual approach, focusing on how each scholar positions reason (*'aql*) and revelation (*naql*) within their interpretive epistemology. Thus, the framework serves as a bridge linking the theoretical concepts of tafsir *bi al-ra'yi* and *al-dakhil* to the comparative analysis of the two exegetes.

Along with the advancement of time, *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* has shown a highly dynamic and adaptive character. However, scholars have long been divided into two main groups regarding the legitimacy of this interpretive method: some support it, while others reject it [12]. The early scholars (*salaf*) who rejected *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* argued that interpretation based solely on personal reasoning and legal inference (*istinbāt*) without reference to the essence of the *sharī'ah* or reliance on established textual sources risks deviating from the true intended meaning of revelation [13]. In contrast, the majority of scholars permit the use of tafsir *bi al-ra'yi*, provided that it is conducted through a rigorous scientific approach that adheres to the principles of *sharī'ah* and sound exegetical methodology. In this study, the analysis proceeds through several systematic stages: first, by identifying the fundamental epistemological concepts underlying the interpretive approaches of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr. Second, by comparing their methodological frameworks to highlight points of convergence and divergence. Third, by synthesizing these findings to construct a balanced perspective on the role of reason in Qur'anic interpretation. And last, by drawing conclusion that elucidate how both scholars contribute to the broader discourse on the legitimacy and boundaries of tafsir *bi al-ra'yi*.

Linguistically, the term *al-dakhil* derives from the root letters *dal-kha-lam*, which means the entry of something, corruption, or something defective. According to Ibn Manzur's explanation, *al-dakhil* describes a condition of deterioration in either the intellect or the body [14]. In the context of Islamic sciences, the term *al-dakhil* refers to foreign or external elements that enter a field of knowledge without originating from the authentic tradition of that discipline. The presence of such elements is considered deviant because it can compromise the purity and originality of the discipline in question. In the science of Qur'anic exegesis, *al-dakhil* refers to matters that lack legitimacy or a valid basis according to the rules of interpretation, whether in terms of transmission (*sanad*), language, or *shar'i* principles. Therefore, these elements are regarded as a form of deviation (*tahrīf*) from the true meaning of the Qur'an [15].

Etymologically, the root word *dal-kha-lam* also contains the meaning of deception or evil. Etymologically, the root word *dal-kha-lam* also contains the

meaning of deception or evil [16]. According to Muhammad Raghīb al-Asfahani, the word *dakhala* can be understood as a metaphor referring to a damaged or contaminated condition [17]. Meanwhile, Ibrahim Musthafa explained that linguistically, *al-dakhil* has several meanings, including: first, someone who associates himself with a group that is not his own [18]. Second, a guest, because he enters someone else's property. Third, a word absorbed from a foreign language or an unknown language. And fourth, a foreigner who comes with the intention of exploiting.

Before the arrival of Islam, foreign elements (*al-dakhil*) had actually already entered the tradition of interpretation, mainly through the influence of the People of the Book, especially the Jews. They began migrating to the Arabian Peninsula around 70 AD, after being expelled from their homeland. Some of them then settled in a fertile area located between mountains and filled with date palms. This area became known as Yathrib, which was later renamed Medina. The presence of this Jewish community brought with it their religious knowledge, which then influenced some of the interpretation traditions through stories and accounts known as *Israiliyyat* [19].

Al-dakhil entered the interpretation of the Qur'an through two main channels. First, through interactions between the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his companions with the Jewish communities in Medina, such as the Banu Qaynuqa', Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayzah, which enabled the exchange of religious information. Second, through the conversion of Jewish figures such as Abdullah ibn Salam and Ka'b al-Ahbar, who became sources of information about stories in the Torah and the Gospel. It was from here that some of the *Israiliyyat* narratives began to enter into interpretation [20].

In the work *Al-Dakhil fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-Karim* by Abd Wahab Fayed, several main factors are mentioned that cause the emergence of foreign elements (*al-dakhil*) in the interpretation of the Qur'an. First, political and power factors, where interpretation is used to support the interests of certain rulers. Second, hatred towards Islam, which encourages some parties to insert false information into interpretations. Third, group or ethnic fanaticism that seeks to justify the views of its group through interpretation. Fourth, differences in *madhhab* (school of thought) sometimes trigger the emergence of interpretations that are laden with sectarian interests. Fifth, ignorance, which occurs when someone who interprets the Qur'an does not have an adequate scientific foundation [21]. The element of *al-dakhil* in interpretation can be classified into two forms, namely *al-dakhil al-naqli* (intrusion from unsound sources such as *Israiliyyat*) and *al-dakhil al-aqli* (intrusion originating from reasoning that is not in accordance with the principles of correct interpretation) [22].

In his work, Al-Najjar reveals that *al-dakhil* in interpretation refers to things that are full of lies associated with the Prophet Muhammad, his companions, the *tabi'in*, or interpretations that use accounts from companions or *tabi'in* that do not meet the criteria for acceptance of such accounts, or originate from reprehensible opinions (misunderstandings) [23]. According to Abdul Wahab Fayed, *al-dakhil* in interpretation is a method of interpretation that is not based on established foundations in Islam, is not in accordance with proper interpretation, and is unreasonable, resulting in an inconsistent understanding of the Qur'an [24].

The prevalence of falsification in the field of interpretation has led to the mixing of valid and invalid interpretations. This has also resulted in the blurring of some truths and raised doubts about these interpretations. The cause of this is the abundance of narrations left behind by the salaf and the authentic narrations from them. As a result, in the fourth century, theological debates arose among Muslims, giving rise to interpretations based on the theological schools of the mufassir. Consequently, the development of interpretation experienced significant progress [25]. Initially, interpretation relied solely on the accounts and fatwas of the companions and *tabi'in* (*bi al-ma'tsur*), then developed into interpretation that relied on reason, known as tafsir *bi al-ra'yi*. As it developed, various approaches to interpretation emerged, such as linguistic, *fiqh*, historical, *Sufi*, theological, and others [26].

In the context of *al-dakhil* in tafsir *bi al-ra'yi*, scholars note several factors that encourage the entry and development of *dakhil bi al-ra'yi*, one of which is the mufassir's subjective interpretation [27]. Subjectivity in understanding an interpreter can arise for several reasons, including: First, they do not meet the criteria as interpreters of the Qur'an. As a result, when an interpreter finds a verse that seems to contradict logic, they tend to jump to conclusions and translate the verse based only on its literal meaning, without considering the context or other possible meanings within it. Second, they interpret the Qur'an with the support of certain groups or factions so that the results of their interpretation of the Qur'an are in accordance with their wishes, contrary to the texts related to the creed and beliefs they adhere to [20].

Ibn Taymiyyah's View on Tafsir *bi al-Ra'yi*

The full name of Ibn Taymiyyah is Ahmad Taqiuddin Abu al-'Abbas Ibn Shaykh 'Abd al-Halim ibn al-Imam Majduddin Abil Barakat 'Abd al-Salam ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah ibn Abi Qasim Muhammad ibn Khudr ibn 'Ali ibn Taymiyyah al-Harrani al-Hanbali [28]. He was born on Monday, the 10th of Rabi'al-Awwal in the year 661 AH, which corresponds to January 22, 1263 CE, in the city of Harran, a region in the southeast of Greater Syria (now part of modern-

day Turkey), specifically on the island of Ibn 'Amr, located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers [29].

Ibn Taymiyyah came from a highly educated and respected family in the field of knowledge. His father, Shaykh Shihabuddin Abu Ahmad, was a renowned scholar who served as a preacher (*khatib*) and judge in their hometown. His grandfather, Shaykh al-Islam Majduddin Abu al-Barakat, was a Hanbali scholar who mastered various disciplines such as *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *hadith*, *usul al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), and *nahw* (Arabic grammar), and was also known as a *hafiz* (memorizer of hadith). In addition, his uncle, Fakhruddin, was an intellectual widely recognized as a prominent scholar and influential writer of his time [30].

Ibn Taymiyyah was an exceptionally intelligent scholar with a strong memory and sharp analytical skills in addressing various issues. These qualities enabled him to master and deeply understand the content of the Book of Allah. Unfortunately, he did not author a dedicated book of tafsir like other exegetes, but his ideas and thoughts on tafsir are scattered throughout his various writings [5]. Ibn Taymiyyah was highly consistent in applying *tafsir bi al-ma'tsur* (transmitted interpretation), and he firmly rejected any form of interpretation that relied on *ra'yi* (personal reasoning). He even stated that interpreting the Qur'an solely with reason is forbidden (*haram*). One of the arguments he used to support this view is based on a hadith of the Prophet, which states:

عن ابن عباس قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: من قال في القرآن
بغير علم فليتبوأ مقعده من النار (رواه الترمذي)

Meaning: From Ibn 'Abbas, that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever speaks about the Qur'an without knowledge has prepared his seat in the Hellfire." (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi). In addition to this hadith, al-Tirmidhi also narrated from Jundub that the Messenger of Allah said:

عن جندب قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: من قال في القرآن برأيه
فأصاب فقد أخطأ (رواه الترمذي)

Meaning: From Jundub, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever speaks about or interprets the Qur'an based on his own opinion (*ra'y*), even if he is correct or hits the mark, has indeed committed an error." (Narrated by al-Tirmidhi).

Ibn Taymiyyah's firm stance was not only driven by the warning of the Prophet (peace be upon him), but also aimed at reducing disagreements and

conflicts among people. This is because differences of opinion using the *ma'tsur* (transmitted) method are fewer compared to those using *ra'y* (personal reasoning), as the differences in *ma'tsur* are usually variations rather than contradictions. For example, in interpreting the Qur'an, some scholars interpret certain terms as referring to Islam, others as referring to acts of worship, and others as obedience to Allah and His Messenger. These are not differences in principle, as the essential principle is to follow the guidance of the Qur'an [5].

Thus, Ibn Taymiyyah did not regard reason or intellect as an absolute source for deriving legal rulings. According to him, the verses of the Qur'an will never contradict sound reason, and reason must submit to the Qur'an. This differs from the *mutakallimīn* (Islamic theologians), who tended to prioritize reason over the Qur'anic text [28]. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyyah did not adhere rigidly to a single opinion; instead, he believed that all views must be evaluated in light of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the *athar* (narrations) of the *salaf* (pious predecessors) who followed the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) [5]. Regarding the four schools of thought (*madhhab*), Ibn Taymiyyah maintained that the views of scholars should be followed if they align with the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the *athar*, and disregarded if they do not. He considered the free use of reason in interpreting the Qur'an without a strong foundation in the Qur'an, hadith, or the sayings of the Companions to be misleading and a form of introducing foreign elements (*dakhil*) into the discipline of tafsir.

Ibn 'Āshūr's View on Tafsir *bi al-Ra'yi*

The full name of Ibn 'Āshūr is Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn 'Āshūr. He was born in 1879 CE/1296 AH in the city of Tunis, the capital of Tunisia [31]. Since childhood, Ibn 'Āshūr was raised in an environment rich in knowledge. In addition, he memorized the Qur'an at a young age and then continued his education at Jāmi'ah Zaytūnah, the oldest center of Islamic learning in North Africa. There, he studied various Islamic disciplines, such as Qur'anic exegesis, jurisprudence, hadith, uṣūl al-fiqh, rhetoric (*balāghah*), and the Arabic language [32].

Ibn 'Āshūr came from an educated family and demonstrated intelligence from an early age. From a young age, he studied the Qur'an and various scholarly works under the guidance of his grandfather and several scholars in Tunisia. He later continued his studies at the University of Ez-Zitouna, where he learned various disciplines. This broad knowledge shaped his comprehensive and multidisciplinary thinking [33]. After completing his studies, Ibn 'Āshūr became a lecturer at the University of Ez-Zitouna and became known as a scholar who introduced reforms. In 1932, he was appointed as the Rector of the University of Ez-Zitouna, an honorable position that allowed him to introduce various

innovations in the curriculum and the Islamic education system. He was known for being highly critical of the stagnation of *ijtihad* and emphasized the importance of using reason and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* in understanding religion [34].

His major works include *Maqashid as-Syari'ah al-Islamiyah (Ushul Fiqh)* and *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*, a Qur'anic exegesis that he worked on for more than twenty years. In this exegesis, Ibn 'Āshūr demonstrates his expertise as a modern exegete by combining linguistic, rational, and maqāṣidī approaches. This exegesis is important evidence of his ability to bridge classical and modern methods of Qur'anic interpretation [19]. The uniqueness of *Tafsir al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir* lies in the introduction written directly by Ibn 'Āshūr. In this section, he explains the reason behind writing the tafsir, which is to interpret the Qur'an as the greatest miracle of the Prophet Muhammad SAW with a linguistic approach and deep meaning. He wanted to compile a tafsir that not only quoted previous scholars, but also included original analysis covering the benefits of this world and the hereafter as a whole [8].

In his introduction to his interpretation, Ibn 'Āshūr emphasizes that the use of reason in interpreting the Qur'an (*tafsir bi al-ra'yi*) must remain based on *naqli* evidence, namely the Qur'an and Hadith. He stresses the importance of maintaining a balance between reason and text so that the interpretation does not deviate from Islamic teachings. According to him, a valid interpretation is one that combines rationality with the authority of the sacred text [8]. In addition, Ibn 'Āshūr had a unique approach to interpreting the Qur'an, seeking to introduce new perspectives that had not been discussed by previous exegetes. He wanted his interpretation to serve as a mediator between other interpretations. According to him, limiting interpretation to *tafsir bi al-Ma'tsur* actually ignores the infinite richness of meaning in the Qur'an [8]. One of the reasons for the decline of tafsir, according to Ibn 'Āshūr, is the excessive reliance on *tafsir bi al-Ma'tsur* and the attitude of scholars who only quote for fear of making mistakes. As a result, this method is considered the only way to interpret, even though weak narrations are used. In fact, interpretation using reason can be more accurate and broaden the meaning of the Qur'an [7].

Ibn 'Ashur developed *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* by integrating rationality and various disciplines such as linguistics, history, and philosophy. He interpreted the Qur'an with a scientific, logical, and contextual approach, emphasizing linguistic analysis, socio-historical context, and the maqāṣid of the Qur'an. This method makes his interpretation relevant and applicable in modern society [33]. In addition, Ibn 'Āshūr firmly stated that in interpreting the Qur'an, an exegete must have a clear purpose and understand the boundaries that must not be crossed. He emphasized the importance for exegetes to remain focused on the

meaning contained in the text of the Qur'an itself, without imposing meanings that are not in accordance with the original context [35].

Points of Convergence and Divergence between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr

Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr, though coming from two major schools within the Islamic exegetical tradition, share a common stance in rejecting any form of interpretation that deviates from the authentic meaning of the Qur'an. Both agree that interpretations which disregard the fundamental principles of *sharī'ah* or impose foreign meanings upon the Qur'an constitute unacceptable distortions [5]. However, the fundamental difference between them lies in the epistemology of interpretation, particularly regarding the authority of reason in understanding revelation. Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized the importance of strictly adhering to the textual sources (*naṣṣ*) and the methodology of the *salaf*, while limiting the role of reason to merely complementing the transmitted evidences (*dalīl naqlī*) [5].

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the use of *bi ra'yi* in interpreting the Qur'an is one of the important ways to understand the words of Allah. Currently, interpretation using the *bi ra'yi* method is gaining more attention, although it still takes into account the aspect of revelation. This shows that there is a close relationship between revelation and reason. Although both have their respective roles, they cannot be separated, even though sometimes one of them is more dominant. Both go hand in hand, complementing each other, and creating harmony in understanding revelation rationally [36].

Meanwhile, Ibn 'Āshūr formulated an interpretation model that provides ample room for intellectual *ijtihad*, as long as it remains within the limits of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and the basic values of Islam [23]. These differences cannot be separated from the historical background and social context of each figure. Ibn Taymiyyah lived in a time of theological deviation caused by extreme philosophy and Sufism in the 7th century AH [5], while Ibn 'Āshūr wrote in the colonial and early modern context of the 20th century, which demanded a contextual and reformist approach to the Qur'an [8].

Ibn 'Āshūr, despite adhering to the Maliki school of thought, was known as an objective scholar. In his work, he even supported schools of thought that differed from his own, demonstrating his objectivity. Ibn 'Ashur's contribution emphasizes that an interpreter can follow a particular school of thought as long as they understand the arguments and conduct further research, and choose the most correct view based on the arguments. This book is not only relevant to researchers of interpretation and the sciences of the Qur'an, but also provides a basis for assumptions and guidelines for interpretation that have the potential to

become a foundation for contemporary scholars in writing their interpretive works. In addition, Ibn 'Āshūr discusses various topics, including language, fiqh, philosophy, and other fields, making his work a rich and important source in the world of Islamic scholarship [7].

This study synthesizes their methodological difference into a comparative model: Ibnu Taymiyyah represent the textual transmissional paradigm, prioritizing revelation and authentic reports (*naql*) as the main source of interpretation, while Ibn 'Āshūr embodies the rational contextual paradigm, emphasizing reason (*'aql*) and *maqashid al-shari'ah* as guiding principles in understanding divine intent. Through this synthesis, the study provides a clearer conceptual framework for readers to understand how these two paradigms reflect the epistemological tension between textual fidelity and contextual adaptability in Qur'anic interpretation. A critical analysis of both shows that the tension between scripturalism and rationalism in interpretation is not an absolute contradiction, but rather a reflection of intellectual responses born out of the demands of different eras. Therefore, understanding the positions of both historically and contextually is an important step in building a more moderate methodological framework for interpretation that is responsive to contemporary challenges.

Table.1 Difference though between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr

No.	Aspect	Ibn Taymiyyah	Ibn 'Āshūr
1.	Approach	Traditionalist / conservative	Rationalist / contextual
2.	Primary Sources of Interpretation	Authentic transmitted reports from the Prophet, the Companions, and the followers (<i>tābi'in</i>)	The Qur'an, Hadith, reason, and <i>ijtihad</i>
3.	View on Tafsir <i>bi al-ra'yi</i>	Risks becoming a form of <i>dakhil</i> if not grounded in sound transmission; should be restricted	Considered a valid tool of contemporary <i>ijtihad</i> as long as it adheres to legal and linguistic principles
4.	Role of intellect and reasoning	Limited; should not override authentic reports	Constructive; essential for uncovering meanings while remaining within shar'I boundaries

5.	Aim of Interpretation	Preserving textual purity and fidelity to tradition	Responding to contemporary challenges while maintaining contextual relevance
6.	Methodological characteristics	Strong reliance on tafsīr bil-ma'thūr; cautious toward innovations	Flexible; integrates reason and transmitted sources for contextual exegesis
7.	Epistemological orientation	Emphasizes textual authority and traditional transmission	Emphasizes integration of text, reason, and historical context

The table 1 highlights the fundamental methodological and epistemological differences between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr in Qur'anic interpretation. Overall, Ibn Taymiyyah represents a conservative, text-centered approach that prioritizes transmitted reports and aims to preserve the purity of the early Islamic tradition. His method limits the use of independent reasoning and maintains a strong reliance on authoritative sources from the Prophet and the early generations. In contrast, Ibn 'Āshūr reflects a more rational, contextual, and reform-oriented approach. He integrates reason, linguistic analysis, and historical context with traditional sources, allowing interpretation to address contemporary issues more effectively. While still grounded in Islamic principles, his methodology is more flexible and open to *ijtihād*. In summary, the table 1 shows that the two scholars stand at opposite ends of the hermeneutical spectrum: Ibn Taymiyyah focuses on safeguarding textual authenticity, whereas Ibn 'Āshūr seeks to harmonize scriptural teachings with modern realities.

Interpretation based on opinion as an addition: A Critical Review

Although *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* is often a subject of debate, al-Dzahabi and al-Rāghib al-Aṣḥānī argue that this interpretation is still permissible as long as it is in accordance with the Qur'an, sunnah, and meets the methodological requirements of interpretation. A similar view is also expressed by Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Zarqānī. An exegete who applies the *bi al-ra'yi* approach must master various sciences that support exegesis, such as linguistics, *usul al-fiqh*, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and so on. In the interpretation process, the first step is to seek the meaning of the verse from the Qur'an itself. If the meaning is not found, then the next reference is the words of the companions, because they understood the social context when the revelation was revealed and were direct witnesses to the process of revelation and the life of the Prophet Muhammad SAW [37].

Al-Zarqānī discusses the permissibility of *tafsir bi al-ra'yi* by outlining several methodological steps that must be followed by a mufasssir. Initially,

interpretation must take meaning from the Qur'an, hadith, or the words of the companions and *tabi'in*. If these sources do not provide clarity, *ijtihad* is permissible, following these steps: 1) Analyzing words (*mufrad*) in terms of *sharf* (word inflection) and *isytiqāq* (word roots). 2) Examining the structure of the sentence to understand the overall meaning, including *i'rab* (grammar) and *balaghah* (rhetorical beauty). 3) Prioritizing the literal meaning before considering figurative interpretations. 4) Consider *asbāb al-nuzūl* or the context in which the verse was revealed. 5) Align the interpretation with the context of the discourse (*siyāq al-kalām*). 6) Consider the verses before and after (*sābiq and lāhiq*). 7) Ensuring that the interpretation is in accordance with the wording being interpreted. 8) Relating the meaning of the verse to other relevant sciences, including the history of the Arab nation at the time of the revelation. 9) Harmonizing it with the history of the life of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. And 10) Being able to explain the meaning of the verse comprehensively and derive legal rulings from it [38].

Throughout the history of exegesis, tafsir *bi al-ra'yi* has always been a subject of debate. On the one hand, this approach is considered a form of intellectual *ijtihad* that allows the teachings of the Qur'an to remain relevant and applicable in various contexts of time and place [39]. On the other hand, tafsir *bi al-ra'yi* has been sharply criticized because it is considered to have the potential to open up opportunities for interpretations that deviate from the meaning intended by the text [4]. This difference in opinion becomes even clearer when viewed from the perspective of two key figures: Ibn Taymiyah, who was cautious and tended to reject interpretations based on reason [5] and Ibn 'Ashur, who instead gave reason an important role in interpretation [8].

Therefore, it is important to classify the various forms of tafsir *bi al-ra'yi* appropriately, so as not to give rise to misunderstandings that all interpretations based on reason are negative or misleading. In this context, the discussion focuses on distinguishing between acceptable (*mahmud*) and reprehensible (*madzmum*) tafsir *bi al-ra'yi*, in an effort to fairly assess the role of reason in interpreting the Qur'an without neglecting the principles and methodological guidelines established by earlier scholars [10].

Interpretation by opinion in the praiseworthy category is interpreting verses of the Qur'an in accordance with the principles of Sharia by individuals who are skilled in Islamic sciences. This interpretation is not based on ignorance or lust, but follows the rules of correct Arabic and pays attention to style (*uslub*). Performing this praiseworthy tafsir *bi al-ra'yi* is permissible and even considered valid, as long as the interpreter fulfills the requirements of *ijtihad*, namely mastery of the supporting sciences. Such interpretation can be classified as tafsir *al-mahmud* or tafsir *al-masyru'* (interpretation that is justified by sharia) [40].

The interpretation based on personal opinion (*tafsir bi al-ra'yi*) that is considered reprehensible (*madzmum*) is interpreting verses of the Qur'an without sufficient knowledge. Usually, this interpretation is influenced by personal desires, individual interests, or deviant beliefs, and is done without understanding the rules of Arabic or the principles of Sharia. Often, this type of interpretation is based on a corrupt school of thought or misguided heretical views. Such interpretation is considered haram in a legal context, because it relies solely on reason or *ijtihad* without a valid and accountable basis, both scientifically and in terms of Sharia [41].

Ibn Taymiyyah made a greater contribution by emphasizing the importance of literal (*zahir*) understanding of the verses of the Qur'an and rejecting excessive, symbolic, or allegorical interpretations that are not supported by strong evidence. His approach was greatly influenced by the thinking of the *salaf*, who prioritized a strict textual approach based on authentic sources. When interpreting *mutasyabihat* verses, Ibn Taymiyyah maintained and used their literal meanings and avoided interpretations that strayed far from the original text [30].

In addition to the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn 'Asyur also made a significant contribution to the field of interpretation with his in-depth and innovative approach. He is known as an exegete who emphasizes the importance of a contextual method, understanding the meaning and content of the Qur'an not only through the verses themselves, but also by considering the social realities and intellectual challenges of both the time of revelation and the era of interpretation. Ibn 'Asyur successfully integrated classical Islamic scholarship with a modern scientific outlook to ensure that the Qur'anic values remain relevant and applicable in addressing contemporary social, political, and intellectual issues. He also emphasized the importance of understanding *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the historical context of the revelation of verses) and the higher objectives of revelation, so that Islamic teachings can be implemented wisely and contextually in modern society [42].

Conclusion

This study is limited to a theoretical comparison. Future research may explore the practical application of both approaches in contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. This article examines the position of *tafsir bi al-ra'y* as an element whose validity has long been debated in Qur'anic interpretation, particularly from the perspectives of two prominent figures: Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr. Their differing views are not merely rooted in distinct exegetical methodologies, but also reflect their respective epistemological frameworks and historical responses to the challenges of their times.

Ibn Taymiyyah, as a representative of the traditionalist approach, emphasized the importance of adhering to authentic transmitted reports from the Prophet, his Companions, and the Followers (*tābi'īn*), while warning against the dangers of using reason without restraint in understanding revelation. In his view, *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* if not grounded in transmitted reports risks sliding into a form of *dakhīl* (foreign intrusion) that could compromise the purity of the Qur'anic meaning. This perspective represents a significant contribution to the broader discourse on Qur'anic interpretation, as it highlights the traditionalist concern for safeguarding textual authenticity in contrast to rationalist tendencies that seek contextual engagement. Thus, Ibn Taymiyyah's thought exemplifies one pole of the interpretive spectrum, offering valuable insight into the epistemological dynamics between rationalism and traditionalism that continue to shape contemporary tafsir studies.

In contrast, Ibn 'Āshūr saw reason and *ijtihād* as having a constructive role in uncovering the meanings of verses, as long as they remain within the bounds of Islamic law (*shar'ī*) and linguistic principles. He argued that stagnation in Qur'anic exegesis often stems from the rejection of sound rational approaches. Therefore, *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* should not be labeled as a foreign element, but rather as a contemporary *ijtihād* instrument that remains relevant. The main contribution of this study lies in demonstrating how epistemological foundations shape interpretive boundaries and mediate the dynamic interplay between textual traditionalism and rational contextualism. This contributes to the broader scholarly discourse on how classical and modern approaches can be integrated within Qur'anic interpretation.

Thus, the debate between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Āshūr illustrates the classical-modern dialectic in Qur'anic exegesis between safeguarding the originality of the text and responding to the challenges of the times. This conclusion shows that the position of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* as *dakhīl* is not an absolute certainty, but depends on the methodological framework and epistemological orientation adopted by the exegete.

Author Contributions

Husna Nadia: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. **Abdul Kadir Riyadi:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation. **Azmie Zahirah Taqiyyah:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation.

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Conflict of Interest

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