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## SCIENTIFIC METHOD OF THE TAFSIR OF PESANTREN: A STUDY OF KYAI BISRI MUSTAFA'S TAFSIR SURAH YASIN (1915-1977)

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### *Abstrak*

#### **Kata Kunci:**

Tafsir al-Qur'an, Pesantren, Metode sains, dan Budaya lokal

*Kajian tentang sejarah tafsir al-Qur'an di Indonesia, seperti yang dilakukan Riddel, AH John, dan Howard M Federspiel, secara umum tidak mengaitkannya dengan tradisi dan budaya pesantren. Padahal, sebagai lembaga pendidikan Islam tertua di Indonesia, pesantren memiliki sejarah dan tradisi literasi tafsir al-Qur'an yang dinamis dan kompleks. Artikel ini mengkaji salah satu sisi tradisi tafsir al-Qur'an di pesantren melalui Tafsir Surah Yasin karya kyai Bisri Mustafa. Tafsir ini dipilih, di samping merepresentasikan tradisi tafsir di pesantren, juga karena di dalamnya sains digunakan sebagai jalan menjelaskan pesan-pesan al-Qur'an. Dalam Tafsir Surah Yasin, penjelasan sains tidak dipakai sebagai pembenaran atas keilmiahannya al-Qur'an, juga tidak dipakai sebagai jalan islamisasi ilmu pengetahuan, tetapi sebagai penguatan atas aspek spiritual dan pesan-pesan implisit dari teks al-Qur'an. Secara aksiologis, kyai Bisri menggunakan pendekatan sains bukan untuk sains, tetapi untuk menjelaskan bukum sunnatullah (bukum alam) dan ke-ada-an yang Ilahi. Melalui Tafsir Surah Yasin, kyai Bisri menolak sains Barat yang cenderung materialistik-nihilistik, dan pada saat yang sama melakukan penguatan atas transendensi sains dalam Islam.*

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## Abstract

**Keywords:**  
 Qur'anic  
 exegesis,  
 Science  
 Method,  
 Pesantren,  
 Local culture

Studies on the history of Qur'anic interpretation (tafsir) in Indonesia, such as those conducted by Riddel, A.H. John, and Howard M. Federspiel, generally do not relate to the tradition and culture of pesantren. In fact, as the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, pesantren has a dynamic and complex history and tradition of Qur'anic interpretation literacy. This article examines one side of the tradition of Qur'anic interpretation in pesantren through Tafsir Surah Yasin by Kyai Bisri Mustafa. This book of tafsir was selected; in addition to representing the tradition of interpretation in pesantren, science is used to explain the messages of the Qur'an in it. In this book, the explanation of science is not used as a justification for the scientificity of the Qur'an, nor is it used as a way to Islamise science, but as an affirmation of the spiritual aspects and implicit messages of the Qur'anic text. Axiologically, Kyai Bisri uses the scientific approach, not for science but to explain the sunnatullah (natural law) and divine existence. Through Tafsir Surah Yasin, he rejects Western science that tends to be materialistic-nihilistic and, at the same time, affirms the transcendence of science in Islam.

## Introduction

Pesantren is an Islamic educational institution that has a vital role in Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> Before Indonesia's independence, pesantren played a role in the education and transmission of Islamic knowledge. Since the 15th century AD, when Wali Songo spread Islam in Java, its role can be found even in a simple form. After the beginning of the 18th century AD, pesantren and *kyai* became increasingly vital in transmitting Islamic scholarship in Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> Based on these roles, Abdurrahman Wahid refers to pesantren as a sub-culture,<sup>3</sup> an institution that has and, at the same time, forms a new culture unique to the Indonesian culture.

<sup>1</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kiai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> This transmission can be seen from the roles of various key figures, including K.H. Nawawi al-Bantani (1813-1897 AD), an encyclopedic kyai who wrote various fields of knowledge whose works are still read and referred to in pesantren today; K.H. Mahfudz At-Tirmisi (1868-1919 M.), al-Muhaddis and al-Musnid, one of the key figures in the field of hadith in Indonesia; K.H. Khalil Bangkalan (1819-1924 AD), Arabic grammarian and spiritualist; K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari (1871-1947 AD), besides being an expert in hadith, he was an inspiration in fighting for the independence of the Republic of Indonesia; K.H. Munawir Krapyak (d. 1942 M.), a sanad holder in the science of qira'at; and K.H. Bisri Mustafa (1915-1977 M.), orator, politician and encyclopedic *kyai*.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding pesantren as a subculture, see Abdurrahman Wahid, *Menggerakkan Tradisi, Esai-Esai Pesantren* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2001).

In the context of the intellectual history of Islam in Southeast Asia, pesantren is identified with the scientific traditions of *fiqh* and *tasawwuf*. This assumption is based on tradition and the role played by *kyai* and pesantren in these two disciplines. The early sources of Islamic scholarship that came and developed in Southeast Asia in the 13th century AD and the scientific transmission of scholars who studied in Mecca,<sup>4</sup> became the basis for this opinion. A survey conducted by the Dutch in Rembang regarding education among the natives in 1864 AD is also a reference to confirm this opinion where *fiqh* and Sufism are the two dominant fields of knowledge taught in the pesantren.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Qur'anic interpretation, except for less developed, its learning is also limited to *Tafsir al-Jalalain*, the works of Jalaluddin as-Suyuthi and Jalaluddin al-Mahalli.<sup>6</sup>

A century ago, the tradition of the Qur'anic interpretation in pesantren in Southeast Asia developed dynamically. *Kyai* at pesantrens did not only carry out learning and scientific transmission of interpretation but also wrote commentary texts. In Java, for example, interpretations were written in the early 19th Century A.D. *Kyai* Muhammad Salih bin 'Umar al-Samarani (1820-1903) wrote a commentary on *Faid al-Rahman*. This tradition continued in the next era, where K.H. Ahmad Sanoesi (1888-1950 A.D.) from the Pesantren Kedung Quail, West Java, wrote *Raudhat al-'Irfan fi Ma'rifah al-Qur'an* and *Tamsyiyah al-Muslimin fi Tafsir Kalam Rabb*

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<sup>4</sup> Discussions related to this issue can be seen for example in Wahid, *Menggerakkan Tradisi, Esai-Esai Pesantren*, 162-3; Alwi Shihab, *Islam Sufistik, Islam Pertama dan Pengaruhnya ingga Kini* (Bandung: Mizan, 2001); Zulkifli, *Sufi Jawa, Relasi Tasawuf Pesantren* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Sufi, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Karel A Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Modern* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986); Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Pandangan Hidup Kiai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia*; Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1995); Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulama' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2004); Abdurrahman Mas'ud, *Intelektual Pesantren: Perhelatan Agama dan Tradisi* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Van den Berg, "Het Mohammedaansche Godsdienstonderwijs op Java en Madoera en Daarbij Gebruikte Arabische Boeken, *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde* 27, 1-46, cited by Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren dan Tarekat, Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia*, 29 dan 158; Karel A. Steenbrink, *Beberapa Beberapa Aspek tentang Islam di Indonesia Abad ke-19* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1984), 157.

*al-'Alamin*;<sup>7</sup> Mahmud Yunus (1899-1982) in Padang Panjang wrote *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*; K.H. Raden Muhammad Adnan (1889-1969), headman at the Surakarta palace wrote *Basa Jawi Interpretation of the Qur'an*; K.H. Bisri Mustafa (1915-1977), caretaker of the Pesanten Raudlah al-Talibin wrote *Al-Ibriz li Ma'rifah Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Aziz* and *Tafsir Surah Yasin*; then K.H. Misbah Mustafa (1916-1994) from the Pesantren al-Balagh, Tuban, wrote *al-Iklil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* and *Taj al-Muslimin*. They were all kyai of pesantrens, who, besides teaching, also wrote interpretations of the Qur'an.

The history of the development of the interpretation written by the *kyai* of the pesantren has received little serious attention from researchers. Howard M. Federspiel did not mention the role of the *kyai* in pesantren when investigating the study of the Qur'an in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> A.H. John, an Indonesianist who studies the history and dynamics of writing translations and interpretations of the Qur'an in Southeast Asia, has not yet touched on the interpretations written by these *kyai*.<sup>9</sup> The Islamic Encyclopedia published by Van Hoeve, compiled by Indonesian Muslim intellectuals, also misses the role of *kyai* intellectuals in pesantrens in writing and publishing interpretations of the Qur'an.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Apart from these two works, KH. Ahmad Sanoesi also wrote other commentary works, entitled: *Tafrij al-Qulub al-Mu'min fi Tafsir Kalimat Surat al-Yasin*, *Kasyfu as-sa'adah fi Tafsir Surat al-Waqi'ah*, *Tanbih al-Hairan fi Tafsir Surat ad-Dukhan*, *Yasin Waqi'ah Digantoeng Loegat dan Keterangannya*, *Kanz al-Rahmat wa al-Luth fi Tafsir Surat al-Kahfi*, *Hidayah al-Qulub fi Fadli Surat Tabarak al-Mulk min al-Qur'an*, *Kasyful Auham fi wa al-Dzunun fi Bayan Qaul Ta'ala La Yamassuhu illa al-Muthahharun*, *Malja' al-Thalibin fi Tafsir al-Kalam al-Rabb al-'Alamin*.

<sup>8</sup> This conclusion is based on the two main studies conducted by Howard M. Federspiel, "An Introduction to Qur'anic Commentaries in Contemporary Southeast Asia," *The Muslim World* 81, no. 2 (1991): 149–161, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1991.tb03519.x>; Howard M. Federspiel, *Kajian Al-Qur'an di Indonesia; dari Mahmud Yunus hingga Quraisyh Shibah*, ed. Tadjul Arifin (Bandung: Mizan, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> See A.H. John, "The Qur'an in the Malay World: Reflections on 'Abd Al-Ra'Uf of Singkel (1615–1693)," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (1998): 120–145, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i26198055>.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the position and role of the *kyai* in the pesantren which are not adequately discussed in the Encyclopedia of Islam, the role of the Wali who spread Islam in Java also does not receive proper attention. See Agus Sunyoto, *Wali Songo, Rekonstruksi AL-A'RAF*— Vol. XIX, No. 2, December 2022

Studies on pesantren also relate little to the tradition of Qur'anic interpretation that grows in pesantren. In the 1970s, when pesantren and *kyai* in Indonesia began to become objects of study, the issues studied were generally related to socio-religious dynamics in the pesantren world and the role of the *kyai* in the social and political world. For example, Horikoshi's study of *kyai* who plays a dual role: as teachers of Islamic sciences and, at the same time, agents of various changes that occur outside pesantren,<sup>11</sup> and Zamakhsyari Dofier's study of pesantren traditions and culture and methods of learning Islamic sciences at pesantren.<sup>12</sup>

Entering the 2000s, studies on pesantren and *kyai* expanded to the context of the social dynamics of society, for example, the role of pesantren in shaping the future of Muslims in Indonesia,<sup>13</sup> the involvement of *kyai* and pesantren in electoral politics,<sup>14</sup> holders of religious authority,<sup>15</sup> and in the dynamics of social and political change in Indonesia.<sup>16</sup> Abdurrahman Mas'ud's studies on the intellectuals and

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*Sejarah yang Dihilangkan* (Jakarta: Trans Pustaka, 2011). Things like this happen, are often caused by the construction of historical writing which is determined by the interests of the elite—both politically and academically. Finally, the intellectual history of pesantren, including in the field of interpretation of the Qur'an, has no space in the grand narrative of Islamic intellectual history in Indonesia.

<sup>11</sup> H. Horikoshi, *A Traditional Leader in a Time of Change: The 'Kijaji' and 'Ulama' in West Java* (University of Illinois at Urban-Champaign, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofer, *Khinsip and Marriage Among the Javanese Kiai* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> R. W. Hefner, "Islamic Schools, Social Movements, and Democracy in Indonesia," in *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia*, ed. R. W. Hefner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009); Ronald A. Lukens-Bull, "Teaching Morality: Javanese Islamic Education in a Globalizing Era," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000): 26-47; R.A. Lukens-Bull, *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java* (New York: Plagrove Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> A.G. Karim, "Pesantren in Power: Religious Institutions and Political Recruitment in Sumenep, Madura," *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 42(1) (2008): 157-184.

<sup>15</sup> Wahyuddin Halim, "Young Islamic Preachers on Facebook: Pesantren As'adiyah and Its Engagement with Social Media," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 46, no. 134 (2018): 44-60,

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13639811.2018.1416796?tab=permissions&scroll=top>.

<sup>16</sup> M Falikul Isbah, "Pesantren In the Changing Indonesian Context: History and Current Developments," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 1 (2020): 65-106,

designers of pesantren in the past complement, as well as broaden, the studies on these pesantrens.<sup>17</sup>

In the context of the role of *kyai* and pesantren and the dynamics of the Qur'anic interpretation, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* by K.H. Bisri Mustofa is important to study. In addition to perceiving the traditions that live in the pesantren, such as the use of the *pegon* script and the *gandul* model (a word-by-word translation system that is written hanging under each word, accompanied by the identity of the word position in a series of sentences), *kyai* Bisri uses a scientific approach to explain the implicit message of the Qur'anic verses. This method is interesting because in the 1950s, when this interpretation was written, the teaching of interpretation in pesantren was generally developed using traditional methods, referring to the interpretations of the works of Middle Eastern scholars, with the *ma'thur* approach (referring to the explanations of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions recorded in the book of tafsir, hadith and *sirah*).

In the context of the pesantren tradition and the dynamics of writing Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia in the 1950s, it is crucial to study further the method used by *kyai* Bisri, such as the factors and purposes of using the scientific method in interpreting the Qur'an, how to use it, and its implications in the tradition of interpreting the Qur'an in pesantren.

The issues above, in this article, are analysed with a sociology of knowledge approach where the existence of human knowledge cannot be separated from individual subjectivity. Knowledge and one's existence are two interrelated things. The social and psychological background of the subject who knows cannot be separated from the process of knowledge occurring.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the *Tafsir of Surah Yasin* by *kyai* Bisri, in this study, is analysed by tracing the background of the *kyai*, the pesantren tradition in

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<https://journal.iainkudus.ac.id/index.php/QIJIS/article/view/5629/0>

<sup>17</sup> Abdurrahman Mas'ud, "The Pesantren Architects and Their Socio-Religious Teachings (1850-1950)" (University of California Los Angeles, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia, an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 39, 1954).

socio-political dynamics, and the socio-political role of *kyai* Bisri.<sup>19</sup>

It is crucial to explore the social context and traditions of the pesantren as the basis for writing *Tafsir Surah Yasin* further. Because, until the end of the 19th century AD, according to Van den Berg, as quoted by Martin, the interpretation of the Qur'an had yet to be positioned as an important part of the learning curriculum in pesantren. At that time, the interpretation study in pesantrens had indeed been carried out, but less intensively than other fields of science.<sup>20</sup>

As a field of knowledge, interpretation (*tafsir*) has yet to become the main concern of the *kyai* in pesantren to write, moreover, if it is contextualised and explains the message of the Qur'an with a scientific perspective. In the 1950s, when *Tafsir Surah Yasin* was written, the study of interpretation in pesantren was generally limited to transmitting works from the Middle East, for example, *Tafsir al-Jalalain* by Jalaluddin al-Mahalli (d. 1460 AD) and Jalaluddin al-Suyuti (d. 1505 AD), *Tafsir Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* by Nasir al-Din al-Baidawi (w. 1319 AD) and Marah Labid, by Nawawi bin Umar bin 'Arabi al-Bantani (1813-1897 AD).<sup>21</sup>

Thus, the relationship between the presence of the interpreter (*mufassir*), the social, cultural and political space when the interpretation is carried out, the audience of the interpretation, and the problems that occur in society will be better seen. As a cultural practice, the interpretation of the Qur'an is born from various habitus. Habitus plays a role in the formation of the characteristics of this interpretation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Grant S. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downer Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1991), 401.

<sup>20</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia*, 159.

<sup>22</sup> Kasyfullah Abd Kadir and Idris Mansor, "Ideology Manifestation in the Translation of Ambiguous Items from the Qur'an by Abdullah Basmeih Manifestasi Ideologi dalam Terjemahan Item Taksa Al-Quran oleh Abdullah Basmeih," *AlBayan* 20, no. 2 (2022): 238–266, [https://brill.com/view/journals/jqhs/20/2/article-p238\\_4.xml?rskey=ACeY0Z&result=2](https://brill.com/view/journals/jqhs/20/2/article-p238_4.xml?rskey=ACeY0Z&result=2).

### **Kyai Bisri Mustafa (1915-1977 A.D.) and his Scientific Network**

*Kyai* Bisri is a political and religious figure born from the pesantren tradition. He was born in Pesawahan, Rembang, Central Java, in 1915,<sup>23</sup> to the couple K.H. Zainal Mustofa and Siti Khadijah. In childhood, he was named Mashadi. After performing the pilgrimage in 1923, he changed his name to Bisri Mustafa. His father was not a *kyai* in the sense of having pesantren and santri, but he was a trader and philanthropist who really loved *kyai*.<sup>24</sup>

In 1923, when he was eight years old, he made the pilgrimage with his father, mother, and family. Before he and his family returned to his homeland, his father died in the port of Jeddah and was buried in Jeddah. After his father's death, he was raised by his mother and half-brothers, H. Zuhdi and H. Mukhtar, along with his younger siblings.<sup>25</sup>

The history of his education began with the Hollan Indische School (HIS) in Rembang: a specific school for children of civil servants. He could enter HIS because he was claimed to be a relative of Raden Sudjono, HIS teacher. Right after studying at HIS, he was asked to leave by *kyai* Cholil because HIS was a Dutch-owned school. He also returned to the Ongko Loro school. After graduating from the Ongko Loro School in 1926, his older brother, Zuhdi, asked him to study at Pesantren Kasingan Rembang Kyai Cholil. In early 1930, he studied under Suja'i, the brother-in-law of *kyai* Cholil. From Suja'i, he studied various fields of religious knowledge until he was proficient. Since then, he had been respected by other students and had even been used as a reference. After studying with Suja'i, *kyai* Cholil asked to stay in Kasingan.

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<sup>23</sup> A. Aziz Masyhuri, *99 Kiai Pondok Pesantren Nusantara: Riwiyat, Perjuangan, dan Doa*, jilid 2. Cet. I (Yogyakarta: Kutub, 2006), 186. Informasi lain menyebutkan bahwa tahun kelahiran kiai Bisri adalah 1914. Lihat H.M. Bibit Suprpto, *Ensiklopedi Ulama Nusantara*, cet. I (Jakarta: Gelegar Media Indonesia, 2009), h. 270. However, the sources commonly referred to by many authors place his birth in 1915. See Saifullah Ma'sum, *Kharisma Ulama: Kehidupan Ringkas 26 Tokoh NU* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), 319.

<sup>24</sup> See Ahmad Zaenal Huda, *Mutiara Pesantren Perjalanan Khidmah KH. Bisri Mustofa* (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2005), 9.

<sup>25</sup> H.M. Bibit Suprpto, *Ensiklopedi Ulama Nusantara* 270.



At the age of 20, while still studying at Pesantren Kasingan, in June 1935, he married Ma'rufah, the daughter of the *kyai* Cholil.<sup>26</sup> For Bisri, being *kyai's* son-in-law is an honour, but at the same time, it was not an easy task. He had to consistently teach the pesantren his parents-in-law manage, even though he felt that his knowledge was little.

A year after his wedding day, *kyai* Bisri found a way to solve the problem by performing a pilgrimage and studying Islamic sciences in Mecca. In Mecca, he studied various fields of knowledge from the *sheikhs*. Firstly, from *Sheikh* Baqir from Yogyakarta, he studied the books *Lubb al-Usul*, *Umdat al-Abrar* and *Tafsir al-Kasysyaf*. Second, from *Sheikh* Umar Hamdan Al-Maghriby, he studied the hadiths of Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim. Third, with *Sheikh* Ali Malik, he studied the books *al-Ayyub wa al-Nadhoir* and *al-Sunan al-Sittah*. Fourth, from Sayid Amin, he learned the *Kitab Ibn 'Aqil*, *sarah*, *Kitab Alfiyah ibn Malik*. Fifth, from *Sheikh* Hasan Massath, he learned the book *Minhaj Zawin Nadbar*. Sixth, from Sayyid Alwi, he learned *Tafsir al-Jalalain*. Seventh, with K.H. Abdullah Muhaimin, he studied *Kitab Jam' al-Jawami'*.<sup>27</sup>

After two years of studying in Mecca, in 1938, *kyai* Bisri returned to Kasingan. A year after his return, his father-in-law died. Since then, he has replaced the father-in-law's position as head of the Pesantren Kasingan. On December 8, 1941, when the Japanese government declared war against the Allies, the Dutch colonial government announced that Pesantren Kasingan santri were requested to be involved as volunteer militias against the Japanese army. Because of this announcement, the santri returned to their respective villages and learned at the Pesantren Kasingan.

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<sup>26</sup> See Achmad Zainal Huda, *Mutiara Pesantren, Perjalanan Khidmah K.H. Bisri Mustofa*, h. 21-22. In this book, it is also told that without the knowledge of his family, Kyai Bisri married for the second time to Umi Atiyah, a woman from Tegal, Central Java. This marriage was blessed with one son, named Maemun.

<sup>27</sup> A. Aziz Masyhuri, *99 Kiai Pondok Pesantren Nusantara*, 188.

In March 1942, the Japanese landed on Java and quickly controlled Java, including the city of Rembang. Due to the war, *kyai* Bisri and his family left Rembang to find a safe place. During the second Dutch attack, *kyai* Bisri joined PETA (Defenders of the Motherland). When the physical revolution ended, and Indonesia became independent, *kyai* Bisri returned to his homeland, Pesawahan. In this place, he founded a pesantren named "Raudlatut Thalibin".

### **Socio-Political Role of *Kyai* Bisri**

Apart from teaching and writing religious texts, *kyai* Bisri also preached in society and politics. He was a figure who lived in three eras: the Colonial era, the Old Order under President Sukarno, and the New Order under President Suharto. During the Japanese colonial era, on December 8, 1941, he was elected chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama and chairman of the Rembang Branch of Hezbollah. After the Japanese government disbanded the Indonesian A'la Council (MIAI), he was elected chairman of the Masyumi Rembang Branch.

During the Sukarno era, he held several important positions. Among them were member of the Constituent Assembly and member of the MPRS, an emergency Penghulu, who in the 1950s was appointed head of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) and chairman of the Rembang Regency Religious Court. After the 1955 elections and representing the NU party, he was elected as a member of the Constituent Assembly, a member of the MPRS during the Guided Democracy era, and an Assistant to the Liaison Minister for Alim Ulama. After the 1971 elections, he was elected as a member of the 1st level DPRD in Central Java, a delegate from the NU party and a member of the MPR from regional representatives.

*Kyai* Bisri also had actively involved in the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organisation since he was young. His service career began as Chair of the NU Rembang Branch, *Rais Syuriah* NU, NU *Syuriah* of Central Java, and finally, as *Rais Syuriah* Central Java Region, until he died on February 16, 1977, at the age of 63. When the New Order regime simplified political

parties, on January 5, 1973, he became a member of the Advisory Council of the Central Leadership Council of the United Development Party (PPP).<sup>28</sup>

### **Kyai Bisri and Literacy Tradition in Pesantren**

At the pesantren he founded, *kyai* Bisri taught various fields of Islamic sciences using the *sorogan* method,<sup>29</sup> including *nabwu*, *sharaf*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, and *ushul fiqh*. The books used as reference are *Sahih Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Alfiyah Ibn Malik*, *Fath al-Mu'in*, *Jam' al-Jawami'*, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, *Jurumiyah*, *Matn 'Imriti*, *Nadzam Maqsud*, and *'Uqud al-Juman*. The diversity of fields of knowledge he taught, titles, and types of books are closely related to the scientific networks he gained while studying in Mecca

Apart from teaching, he also developed the world of literacy in pesantren. In the early decades of Indonesian independence, he was among the *kyai* who was prolific in writing Islamic books in various fields. There are about 176 titles of books that he has written<sup>30</sup> including translation works, *sharah*, and works that express his ideas and views.

In Tafsir, he wrote *Al-Ibriz Lima'rifah Tafsir Al-Qur'an al-'Aziz*, complete commentary on 30 chapters and *Tafsir Surah Yasin*. In the field of introduction to the science of tafsir, he wrote *al-Iksir*. In the field of hadith and hadith science, he wrote *Sullam al-Afham*, *Al-Azyad al-Mustafawiyah*, and *Al-Mandumat al-Baiquniyah* about the science of *musthalah al-Hadith* he wrote in the form of *nadhm*. In Aqidah, he wrote *Ranibat al-Aqwami* and *Durar al-Bayan*. In fiqh, he wrote *Sullam al-Afham li Ma'rifati al-Adillat al-Ahkam fi Bulug al-Maram*, *Qawa'id al-Bahiyah*, *Tuntunan Salat*, *Manasik Haji*, and *Islam dan Salat*. In morality and sufism he wrote *Wasaya al-Aba' lil Abna*, *Syi'ir Ngudi Susilo*, *Mitra Sejati*, and *Qasidah al-Ta'liqah al-*

<sup>28</sup> H.M. Bibit Suprpto, *Ensiklopedi Ulama Nusantara*, 272.

<sup>29</sup> The *sorogan* method is a tradition of learning in pesantren by delivering learning materials to students one by one in turn. In this method, the *kyai* reads the *kitab*, then translates it word by word and explains its meaning. After that, the students are welcome to read and repeat what the *kyai* did, so that each student masters the text read well.

<sup>30</sup> Ahmad Zaenal Huda, *Mutiara Pesantren Perjalanan Khidmah KH. Bisri Mustofa*, 73.

*Mufidab sharh* of the book *Qasidah al-Munfaridah* by *Syeikh* Yusuf al-Tauziri of Tunisia. In Arabic grammar, he translated various Arabic books into Javanese. Among them are *Jurumiyah*, *Nadhm al-Imriti*, *Nadm Alfiyah Ibn Malik*, *Nadm al-Maqsud*, and *Syaarb Jaubar al-Maknun*. In *Mantiq* (logics), he translated *al-Sullam al-Munawarraq*. In history, he wrote *Al-Nibrasy*, *Tarikh al-Anbiya'* and *Tarikh al-Auliya'*. In addition to the various fields of knowledge above, he wrote other books. For example, a book that contains prayer, entitled *al-Haqibah* (two volumes); a guide for *modin*, entitled *Imamuddin*; a collection of sermons entitled *al-Idhamat al-Jumu'iyah* (six volumes); *kasykul*, a humorous stories; kasidah, entitled *Tiryag al-Aghyar*, translation of *Qashidah Burdah al-Mukhtar*; Islam and Family Planning; and Speech Method.<sup>31</sup>

His works have been published by various publishers, including Salim Nabhan Surabaya publisher, Toha Putera Semarang publisher, Progressif Surabaya publisher, Raja Murah Pekalongan publisher, Al-Ma'arif Bandung publisher, and Menara Kudus publisher. One of his most monumental works is *Al-Ibriḡ Lima'rifab Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Aḡiḡ*, a 30 juz interpretation of the Qur'an published by Menara Kudus. Until now, *Tafsir al-Ibriḡ* has been used as a reference in learning tafsir pesantren and madrasas. In various *Majelis taklim* (religious assemblies/forums), this book of tafsir is also used as a reference and study material. Until now, *Tafsir al-Ibriḡ* has been printed several times, but the *kyai* Bisri family does not receive royalties from the publication because the publishing rights have been sold to the publisher. This method was chosen by him so that he is able to maintain sincerity and peace of mind.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from *Tafsir al-Ibriḡ*, other works by *kyai* Bisri were also printed several times. *Kitab al-Aḡwad al-Mustafiyah* has been printed 16 times, *Ruwaihat al-Aqnam* has been printed 14 times, *Durar al-Bayan* has been printed 13 times, *al-Abawiyah al-Jurumiyyah* has been printed five times,

<sup>31</sup> A. Aziz Masyhuri, *99 Kiai Pondok Pesantren Nusantara*, 203-205.

<sup>32</sup> Pernyataan KH. A. Mustofa Bisri di tahun 2004, ketika saya bersilaturahmi di pesantren Raudlatut Thalibin, Rembang.

and the Guidance of the Hajj Rituals has been printed six times.<sup>33</sup> This number can certainly increase from year to year because it all depends on the requests and needs of readers. The data shows that the works of *kyai* Bisri can be understood and accepted by society.

### ***Tafsir Surah Yasin* in the History of Qur'anic Interpretation in Indonesia**

This *tafsir* was published six years before *al-Ibriḥ Lima'rifab Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Aẓiẓ* was published.<sup>34</sup> Even though it was published earlier, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* is less popular among the public than *Tafsir al-Ibriḥ*. It is because *Tafsir al-Ibriḥ* was written in full in 30 juz (parts), used as a reference in learning Tafsir in pesantren and madrasas in Java, and read in various Tafsir recitation activities and *majlis taklim*.

In the 1950s, when *Tafsir Yasin* was published, the publication of Qur'an interpretations in Indonesia ran dynamically. Two decades earlier, Mahmud Yunus<sup>35</sup> and Ahmad Hassan started writing commentaries.<sup>36</sup> In the 1930s, Abdulkarim Amrullah published a commentary on *Juz 'Amma*, entitled *al-Burhan*. In the same era, Moenawar Chalil wrote a commentary on *Hidjaatur Rahman*. Two decades later, A. Halim Hasan (1901-1969) and Zainal Arifin Abbas and Abdur Rahim Haitami published two volumes of *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*.<sup>37</sup>

Along with the dynamics of publishing the Qur'anic interpretation, the presence of *Tafsir Surah Yasin* was crucial. Because in the era of 1950, the tradition of writing interpretations of the Qur'an was not well developed in pesantren. One of the reasons was that the learning of *tafsir* in pesantren generally referred to Arabic commentary books written by

<sup>33</sup> A. Aziz Masyhuri, *99 Kiai Pondok Pesantren Nusantara*, 205-206.

<sup>34</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Al-Ibriḥ fi Ma'rifab Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Aẓiẓ*, Jilid 3 (Kudus: Menara Kudus, t.th.), 2270.

<sup>35</sup> Mahmud Yunus, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim* (Jakarta: P.T. Hidakarya Agung, 1973), iii.

<sup>36</sup> A. Hassan, *Al-Furqan: Tafsir Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, 1956), xi.

<sup>37</sup> Zainal Arifin Abbas dan Abdur Rahim Haitami, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim* (Medan, 1955).

Middle Eastern scholars who were considered authoritative, for example, *Tafsir Jalalain* by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti and Jalaluddin al-Mahalli, *Maarah Labid* by Kyai Nawawi Banten, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* by Nasiruddin al-Baidhawi, *Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* by Ala al-Din Abu Hasan 'Ali al-Khazin, and *Tafsir Surah Yasin* by Sheikh Hamami Zadah.<sup>38</sup>

The writing of *Tafsir Surah Yasin* began with a request from *kyai* Bisri's colleague. They had a habit of reciting *Surah Yasin* and hoped that *kyai* Bisri was willing to explain the messages in a language easily understood by the public.<sup>39</sup> It is on this basis that this *tafsir* was written; by paying attention to the socio-cultural basis of the reader: with the Javanese language and the Pegon script. However, the sources or references used were works of *muktabar* interpretations, such as *Tafsir Jalalain* by Jalaluddin al-Suyuthi and Jalaluddin al-Mahalli, *Marah Labid* by Kiai Nawawi Banten, *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil* by Nasiruddin al -Baidhawi, *Lubab al-Ta'wil fi Ma'ani al-Tanzil* by Ala al-Din Abu Hassan 'Ali al-Khazin, and *Tafsir Surah Yasin* by *Sheikh* Hamami Zadah.<sup>40</sup> In this way, *kyai* Bisri hoped that his work would make it easier for readers to understand the messages of the Qur'an.

Javanese dialect used in this *tafsir* is *ngoko*. The size of the book is designed like a pocketbook.<sup>41</sup> Technically, the writing of its contents consists of three parts. *First*, it contains perfectly written Qur'anic verses accompanied by waqf signs and verse numbers. *Second*, it contains the meaning written in a *gandul* style, the translation model for each word in the Qur'anic verses. It is located under the text of the verses of the Qur'an. This method is commonly used in the tradition of learning in pesantrens. This model provides two advantages for the reader: knowing the meaning of each word in the Qur'an and its position in the sentence structure. *Third*,

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<sup>38</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 3.

<sup>40</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 2.

<sup>41</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus).

it contains an explanation (*sharh*) of each verse. This section is placed in a separate place by delimiting horizontal lines to separate it from the text of the verse and the meaning of the *gandul*.<sup>42</sup> In the *sharh* section, notes explaining the messages in the interpreted verses of the Qur'an are also included. These notes consist of two categories, namely *tanbih* and *mubimmah*, but do not include an explanation of the differences and functions of the two. In one case, the two categories are used to explain aspects of the science of *qira'at*<sup>43</sup> In another case, verses 37-40 are used to explain hadiths related to the interpreted verses of the Qur'an.

### Scientific Approach and Learning Traditions in Pesantren

As is the case in the history of the Qur'anic interpretation tradition, *kyai* Bisri used a variety of approaches in explaining the verses of the Qur'an. In general, he used language, history (*sirah*), hadith, and history as his methods. *First*, using linguistics, as is the case in the tradition of learning other fields of science at pesantren, namely explaining the meaning of words and their position in sentence structure. For example, when he explained verse 32:

Lafaz in iku nganggo makna nafi. Lafaz kullun dadi muftada'. Lafaz lamma—kanthi tasydide mim, nganggo maknane illa. Lafaz jami' dadi khabare muftada' nganggo maknane lafaz majmu'un. Lafaz ladaina, dzaraf ta'alluq marang lafaz muhdzarun. Lafaz muhdzarun dadi khabare kaping pindo. Lafaz lamma kena diwaca tanpa tasydid, lama. Lafaz in dumununge banjur in mukhaffaf, nganggo maknane qad. Lam-e lafaz lama lam fariqah. Lafaz ma za'idah. Maknane banjur mengkene: wa in kullun utawi sekabihane makhluk la jami'un', yekti iku den kumpulake kabeh, ladaina ingdalem ngarsa ingsun, muhdzarun tur iku den suwanake kabeh.<sup>44</sup>

Lafaz *in* uses the meaning of *nafi*. Lafaz *kullun* has the position of

<sup>42</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 3.

<sup>43</sup> The term *qira'at al-sab'ah* or *qira'at* seven is a variety of different ways of reading the Qur'an. It is called *qira'at* seven because there are seven famous *qira'at* imams, each with its reading. Each *qira'at* imam has two students who act as narrators, and each of these narrators also has differences in how to read the Qur'an, so there are 14 ways of reading the Qur'an that is famous.

<sup>44</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 19.

*mubtada'*. The lafaz *lamma* with the tasydid lettered in the letter mim has the meaning *illa*, while the lafaz *jami'* is khabar from *mubtada'* using the majmu'un pronunciation. Lafaz *ladaina* as a *dẓaraf* related to lafaz *mubdẓarun*. As for the lafaz *mubdẓarun* as the second khabar. Lafaz *lamma* can be read without tasydid, long. Lafz *in* as in *mukhaffaf* with the meaning of lafaz *qad*. Lam in the old pronunciation is called *lam fariqah* and the *ma* pronunciation is *ma ẓa'idah*. Thus, the interpretative meaning is: *wa in kullun*, actually all beings; *lama jami'un*, indeed gathered all; *Ladaina* before me; *mubdẓarun*, in all confronted conditions.

*Second*, the science of *qira'at*. In some places, *kyai* Bisri describes variations of *qira'at* related to certain words, for example, in verses 1, 33, 34 and 35. In verses 34-35, he explains that the pronunciation of وَقَجْرْنَا by *qira'at* experts is read in *tasydid* on the letter *jim*, except for the *qira'at* of Imam Junah ibn Jais. In the pronunciation of ثَمْرَةً he also explains the diversity of *qira'at*, which is read with *fathah* on the letters *Tsa'* and *mim* or read with *dhammah* on the letters *Tsa'* and *mim*.<sup>45</sup> Complex explanations of this kind, which in the eyes of the public are difficult to understand and considered irrelevant to convey, were still given by him. The aim is to show the complexity of understanding the Qur'an.

*Third*, the hadith of the Prophet. *Kyai* Bisri uses the Prophet's hadith to explain verses of the Qur'an, for example, in verse 32. This verse talks about the human situation in the desert of *makhsyar*. At that moment, humans will be asked about every action that was done while in the world. After explaining the message of this verse, *kyai* Bisri quoted Aisyah's history about the condition of a person in *makhsyar*, who, because they were busy with their affairs, had no time or opportunity to think about other people.<sup>46</sup>

*Kyai* Bisri's uses this hadith of the Prophet in various verse contexts,

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<sup>45</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 21-22.

<sup>46</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 20. In this case, the quoting of hadith by *Kyai* Bisri did not include the chain of sanad and sources of hadith books. This method is taken solely for the effectiveness of quoting and the popularity of the hadith referred to. The way this happens in several places in *Tafsir Surah Yasin*.



such as in verses 12, 32, and verses 47-50. This method reflects that he positions the hadith as an important element in explaining the intent and message of the Qur'an. He also uses *israiliyyat*<sup>47</sup> as data to understand the Qur'an. For example, in Q.S. Yasin [36]: 13-14. He chose this method as long as the contents of the *israiliyat* did not conflict with the beliefs established in the hadith and the Qur'an.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from the various methods commonly used in learning interpretation at the pesantren, *kyai* Bisri uses the scientific method in *Tafsir Surah Yasin*. In this context, he uses scientific methods and explanations to explain the narrative structure and messages in the Qur'an. He used this method, for example, when explaining verse 35 of *Surah Yasin*. This verse contains Allah's power in governing the universe. Allah is the creator of springs, and from these springs, He grows and gives life to various fruits. Related to this verse, *kyai* Bisri explains by utilising scientific logic, as the following quote:

Coba para sedulur kang kepengen persa tadbire Pengeran, dak aturi pemandangan kanthi ringkes. Sekabihaning dumadi kang urip iku, dumadine sangking unsur papat: lemah, banyu, panas, lan hawa. Supaya dumadi kang urip mahu bisa nerusake uripe, deweke kudu tansah digulawentah kanti unsur papat mahu uga. Semangsa ora kaya mengkono, dumadi kang urip mahu iya nuli mati. Mulane tanduran iku ora bisa urip tanpa lemah lan banyu. Semono uga, senajan wis ana lemahe lan banyune, ananging yen ora entuk labete panas lan hawa, ora bisa urip. Tanduran kang ditandur ana ing lemah kang eluh kanthi kagulawentah banyu sacukupe, meksa ora bisa urip yen ditutupi rapet nganti ora entuk hawa.<sup>49</sup>

Take a look. I will present a brief illustration for those of you who want to know God's arrangement [over all creatures]. All living things are created from earth, water, fire and air. For all creation to continue its life,

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<sup>47</sup> *Israiliyyat* is a story or fable whose history comes from Jews, Christians, or others. There are scholars who argue that *israiliyyat* is a fairy tale that was deliberately smuggled by the enemies of Islam into interpretations and hadiths. The aim is to undermine the Islamic faith. About this view, see Supiana dan M. Karman, *Ulumul Quran dan Pengenalan Metodologi Tafsir* (Bandung: Pustaka Islamika, 2002), 198.

<sup>48</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 9-18.

<sup>49</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 22-23.

it must always be nourished by these four elements. If not, he will die. Therefore, plants cannot live without soil and water. Likewise, even though there is land and water, if it does not receive heat [sunlight] and air, it will also not live. Plants that are planted in soil with sufficient water also cannot live if they are tightly closed so that they do not get air.

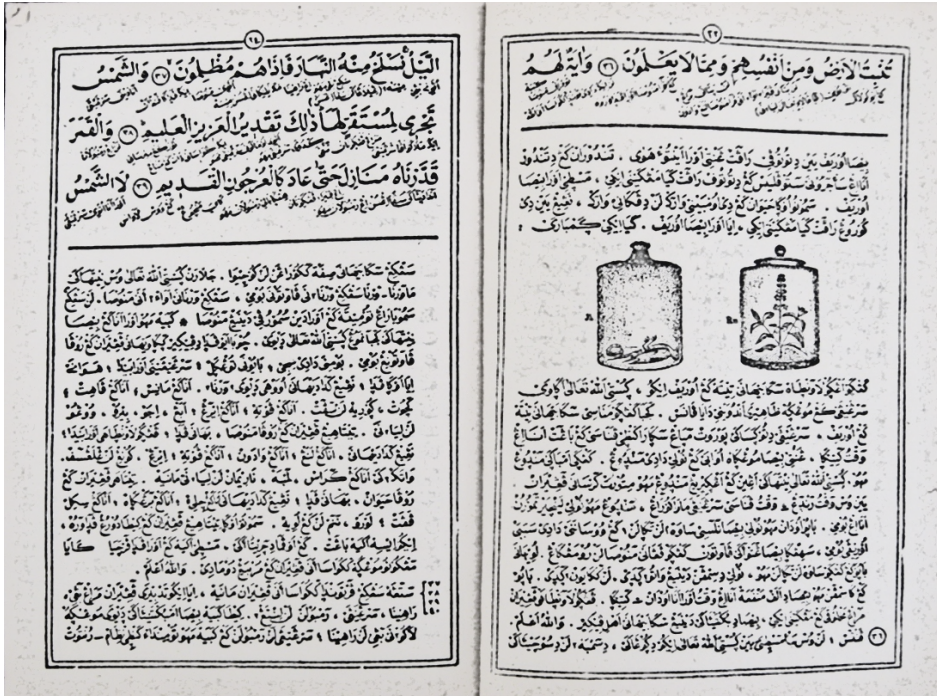
*Kyai Bisri's* statement above is a form of scientific explanation. The four elements in living things above are the building blocks of living things. *Kyai Bisri* believes that every living thing needs these four elements. Living things will die if any of the four elements are not fulfilled. These scientific view and explanation were new ways of interpreting the Qur'an in pesantren in the 1950s.

The same way he did when interpreting verse 33 of *Surah Yasin*. This verse talks about the signs of Allah's power. As explained in the Qur'an, among these signs is the earth that gives life to grains, which become materials beneficial to human life. In the context of this verse, *kyai Bisri* explains various types of plants, such as rice, papaya, and corn, which originally came from a single seed. After the rainwater soaks the earth, the seeds benefit from the water so that one seed from the plant lives, develops, and produces many fruits and seeds. From a single seed, stems, leaves, roots and fruit are formed through natural processes, and seeds later become a source of new life again.<sup>50</sup>

*Kyai Bisri's* explanation of plant life and regeneration which involves many of these elements is accompanied by a visual explanation, as shown in the image below. This way is to facilitate the reader. He displays pictures of plants and birds placed in tightly closed glass jars. It has provided land, water and plants. These plants cannot live even though they get sunlight. This happens because they do not get air, one of the elements that plants and living things need.

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<sup>50</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 20-21.



Visual display of plant and animal life illustrated by *kyai* Bisri

### From Science to Divine Consciousness

The various examples that *kyai* Bisri puts forward concerning science above are not a form of confirming the truth of the Qur'an against scientific findings. Nor does it make the Qur'an a legitimate tool for scientific findings so that it becomes Islamic. However, it is used by him as a medium for humans to think about the Divine and the nature of human existence and life on earth.

This awareness and method of interpretation are taken by *kyai* Bisri in several contexts and in several related verses. Still in the context of verse 33 of Surah Yasin, furthermore, *kyai* Bisri invites readers to reflect on the human body and existence;

As a mighty creature—because of its solid bones and muscles—and has reason so that it can bend iron, destroy copper, and fly in the sky, it first came from disgusting semen. When it was still semen, where were the bones, nails, and whiskers? If God is able to create man from a drop of

semen, how can He not have the power to revive a dead person?<sup>51</sup>

*Kyai Bisri's* question above is one of the ways to make it easier for readers of the book of *tafsir* he wrote to reflect on God's power and the nature of human existence on earth. Communication techniques, rational explanations and scientific logic by *kyai Bisri* are used to grow and strengthen faith for everyone. In the following verses; 36-39, he uses the same technique to explain the uniqueness of the earth; from which is born a variety of plants and fruits as a way to contemplate the majesty and omnipotence of Allah:

On the same earth, with the same water, and the same sunlight, it has produced different fruits in terms of taste and colour. Likewise, humans; from the same material gave birth to different sexes and different skin colours.<sup>52</sup>

Even though he uses a scientific explanation method and a scientific perspective, *kyai Bisri* does not intend to Islamise knowledge, as Ismail Raji al-Faruqi did.<sup>53</sup> *Kyai Bisri* also does not make tafsir an arena in explaining science, as was done by Tantawi Jauhari in *Tafsir al-Jawahir fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*.<sup>54</sup>

The essential thing from the explanation above is two critical attitudes of *kyai Bisri*. *First*, he implicitly rejects scientific materialism, the ontological basis of Western science, which has been developing so far. From the perspective of Western materialism, the reality is believed to only consist of matter, space, and time. The soul is understood as just a collection of matter. Therefore, God is seen as a fragile and helpless human imagination. Beliefs about angels and demons exist only in people who cannot explain various natural phenomena scientifically and logically. This belief is against the pillars of faith, as an important pillar of the Islamic

<sup>51</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 20-21.

<sup>52</sup> Bisri Mustafa, *Tafsir Surah Yasin* (Kudus: Menara Kudus), 21-24.

<sup>53</sup> Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, *Islamization of Knowledge, General Principles and Workplan* (Herndon Virginia: IIT, 1982).

<sup>54</sup> Tanwai Jauhari, *Tafsir Al-Jawahir fi Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-Karim* (Mesir: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi wa Auladiah, 1350).

faith. Therefore, for *kyai* Bisri, this view must be rejected.

*Second*, the axiological aspect of the science building. So far, the science that has developed in the West is materialistic and has put aside the transcendent dimension so that science has no ultimate goal except for science itself. In the end, humans experience nihilism. As a result, the spiritual aspect becomes empty. This is also rejected by *kyai* Bisri. This awareness even existed long before Kuntowijoyo expressed his views on Islamic scholarship.<sup>55</sup>

The various explanations cited above show that *kyai* Bisri believes that reality is not only an object that can be touched and seen but also unseen things. He uses the patterns of scientific science, as explained above, to introduce the existence of God and the unity of the Divine principle in the natural law system (*sunnatullah*).

Regarding the relationship between religion and science, *kyai* Bisri does not confront science and religion as opposing entities, spaced apart within their respective frameworks of thought but as dialogues between the two. He uses scientific logic to explain the implicit messages of the Quranic text. Through *Tafsir Surah Yasin*, in the 1950s, *kyai* Bisri presents himself as a flexible *kyai* and utilised scientific analysis to explain the Qur'anic verses in pesantren.

In understanding the verses of the Qur'an, he does not stop at explaining the meanings of the text but also uses scientific explanations. In the interpretation of *al-Ibriz*, *kyai* Bisri also interprets mutashabihat verses—except referring to the opinions of commentators/*mufasssir*—with rational reasons. In several contexts and cases, *kyai* Bisri also explained the messages in the verses of the Qur'an by utilising social sciences.<sup>56</sup>

These characteristics of logical and rational thinking, in general, became one of the methods used by him in building his religious thought.

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<sup>55</sup> Kuntowijoyo, *Islam sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi, dan Etika* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2004).

<sup>56</sup> Misalnya ketika ia menjelaskan tentang *favattih al-sunwar* di QS. Al-Baqarah. Lihat Bisri Mustafa, *Al-Ibriz fi Ma'rifah Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Aziz*, (Kudus: Menara, t.th.), 4."

Concerning faith, in the context of Islamic theology, for example, according to him, it relates to all aspects of life. In various explanations, *kyai* Bisri linked faith with social, economic, cultural and Islamic legal issues. For him, the reason is used as a means to do good things. However, reason is not the sole determinant in doing good and avoiding evil as a religious principle and obligation.<sup>57</sup>

This way of thinking made *kyai* Bisri's legal views very creative and flexible, especially in responding to the dynamics and challenges of the times. For example, the opinion of *kyai* allows the Family Planning (KB) program, which is based on fundamental humanitarian reasons, it is to maintain the health of mothers and children and improving education and living standards.<sup>58</sup>

Initially, the purpose of writing this *Tafsir Surah Yasin* is to provide an understanding of the contents of *Surah Yasin* and the foundation for people's living practices related to *Surah Yasin*, for example, regarding the reading of *Surah Yasin* when someone is about to die or after it, as well as various priorities for the reader.<sup>59</sup> However, paradigmatically, using science to explain the message of the Qur'an is a new step in interpreting the Qur'an in the pesantren circle. Through *Tafsir Surah Yasin*, *kyai* Bisri presents insights about religious science, rejects nihilistic science, and uses science to explain the existence of God and reminds us of the purpose of human life.

## Conclusion

*Tafsir Surah Yasin* by *kyai* Bisri is an interpretation that was born from the pesantren tradition, written with the model and tradition of the pesantren. Even though he explained that his interpretation was extracted from other interpretations written by previous scholars in paradigmatic

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<sup>57</sup> Ahmad Zaenal Huda, *Mutiara Pesantren Perjalanan Khidmah KH. Bisri Mustofa*, 65-68. A. Azizi Masyhuri, *99 Kiai Pondok Pesantren Nusantara, 197-198*. Lihat misalnya ketika kiai Bisri menafsirkan QS. Al-Ma'idah: 48, al-An'am: 149 dalam *Tafsir Al-Ibriq*.

<sup>58</sup> A. Azizi Masyhuri, *99 Kiai Pondok Pesantren Nusantara, 198-199*.

<sup>59</sup> A. Azizi Masyhuri, *99 Kiai Pondok Pesantren Nusantara*.

terms, he expresses a distinctive approach in interpreting the Qur'an in the pesantren world in the 1950s. The rational and scientific approach in explaining the message of the Qur'an was not only a new way in the tradition of interpretation of the Qur'an in the pesantren at that time but also a form of rejection of Western science, which was materialistic, nihilistic and clear of divine dimensions.

In the context of the publication of religious works, this *tafsir* is one of the important documents regarding the role and dedication of the *kyai* in pesantren in developing Islamic literacy. In the 1950s, when the literacy tradition and publication of Islamic books in Indonesia were less vibrant than in the digital era, *kyai* in pesantren played a crucial role, as was done by *kyai* Bisri. In his hands, writing is not always related to the business but also, even more importantly, a form of dedication to knowledge, preaching, and learning for the community.

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