



Original Article

The influence of Shaykh Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi's thoughts in Quranic exegesis in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses on the influence of Shaykh Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi's thoughts (1883-1952) in the Quranic exegesis in Malaysia (before 1963 known as Malaya) through his writing, *Tafsir al-Maraghi*. In the mid-20th century, the Kaum Muda (a modern reformist young fraction) had introduced modern reforms in Quranic exegesis. The modern reformists of Kaum Muda implanted the thoughts of al-Maraghi through modern religious schools known as madrasahs. *Tafsir al-Maraghi* influenced by Muhammad Abduh's and Muhammad Rashid Rida's approach of *Tafsir al-Manar*, was disseminated by the Malay graduates from Egypt which then made it as the main text and reference of the Quranic exegesis at madrasah and Arabic schools in Malaya. Thus, the al-Maraghi reforms expounded by the Kaum Muda scholars had improved the teaching and learning quality of Quranic studies in Malaya.

Keywords: Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi, thoughts, teaching and learning of *Tafsir al-Maraghi*, Kaum Muda, Quranic exegesis, Malaysia

Introduction

The 20th century Islamic reformist movement in Malaya was led by the modern reformists of Kaum Muda (Young Fraction) with two main aims. Firstly, to establish public education through modern religious schools known as madrasahs and secondly, to call for social change through socio-political awareness against colonialism. The reform ideas were disseminated through magazines and local newspapers such as *al-Imam* (1906-1908).¹ Among the early reformists of Kaum Muda were Syed Ahmad al-Hadi (1867-1934) and Tahir Jalaluddin (1869-1956) who followed the development of education reform of Al-Azhar University.² They were directly under the influence of the newspaper, *al-Manar* which

¹ Mohammad Redzuan Othman, *Islam dan Masyarakat Melayu, Peranan dan Pengaruh Timur Tengah* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaysia, 2005), 113-114. John Funston, *Voices of Islam in Southeast Asia: Malaysia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 53.

² Salamon, A.S., "Reform in Islam and al-Azhar" in *Azhar and Politics* (Kuala Lumpur: al-Rahmaniah, 1988), 46-47.

carried the thoughts of 'Abduh and Rasyid Rida. They expounded the reformist ideas from Egypt to Malaya in various fields including the studies of Quranic exegesis (known as tafsir). Syed Ahmad al-Hadi and Tahir Jalaluddin were seniors of Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi (1883-1952) at Al-Azhar University.³

The mid-20th century had shown a significant development of education reforms in Malaya through the expounded thoughts of Muhammad Mustafa al-Maraghi (1881-1945) who was then the 'Shaykh al-Azhar' (Rector of al-Azhar University) between 1935 to 1945. Muhammad Mustafa was the elder brother of Ahmad Mustafa. They implemented many drastic changes to improve the quality of education at the al-Azhar University.⁴ Rapid reformation occurred after Ahmad Mustafa's first book publication, *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in 1945 in Egypt. It was a complete interpretation of the whole Quran with modern approach by Ahmad Mustafa al-Maraghi (1883-1952). The students from Malaya such as Ahmad Maher bin Ismail, Salleh bin Uthman and Hasan bin Idris during the time of al-Maraghi were directly influenced by him. The book of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* was brought to Malaya by these students. The Tafsir was later included in the syllabus of Quranic exegesis studies at thanawi (higher secondary) level at madrasahs. Hence, the influence of al-Maraghi's thoughts in the Quranic exegesis in Malaya was directly through the teaching and learning of *Tafsir al-Maraghi*.

Modern reform in Quranic exegesis by Kaum Muda in early 20th century in Malaya

The reform movement in Malaya at the early stage was dominated by the thoughts of 'Abduh and Rashid Rida through remarkable magazines of *al-Manar* issued in 1896. The Kaum Muda established madrasahs in the Straits Settlement States to introduce a more systematic education system that integrated both studies of religion and science.⁵ The reform in Quranic exegesis initiated by the Kaum Muda was shifting from using traditional to modern teaching and learning of tafsir. Traditionally, learning tafsir was based on mere memorization of text without mastering a clear understanding of the meaning of the Quranic verses.

In addition, there was no two-way interaction in teaching and learning environment, as the students did not have the opportunity to ask questions to clear ambiguity in understanding the tafsir of the Quranic verses. This situation prevented students to be more responsive and fostered them the blind culture of learning. Hence, the early generation of Kaum Muda focussed on introducing the method of understanding the interpretation of the Quranic verses rather than adopting the method of text memorization. The two-way

³ Talib Samat, *Syed Syeikh al-Hadi: Sasterawan Progresif Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992), 12. Sohaimi Abdul Aziz, *Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin Pemikir Islam* (Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2003), 104-105.

⁴ Rainer Brunner, Education, "Politics and Struggle for Intellectual Leadership: Al-Azhar Between 1927 and 1945" in *Guardians of Faith in Modern Times: Ulama' in The Middle East*, ed., Meir Hatina (USA: The Netherlands), 117-119. "t.t", *Tarikh al-Islah fi al-Azhar wa Safahatu min Jihad fi al-Islah Dirasah li Harakah al-Islah wa Qawaninuha wa Rijaluha* (Kaherah: Matba'ah al-'I'timad, 1943), 23.

⁵ William R. Roff, *Studies on Islam and Society in Southeast Asia: Pondok, Madrasahs and Production of Ulama' in Malaysia* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2009), 121. Mohd Sarim Hj. Mustajab, "Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin: Pelopor Gerakan Pembaharuan Agama dan Perubahan Masyarakat" in *Syeikh Tahir Jalaluddin Pemikir Islam* (Pulau Pinang: Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2003), 15.

communication in the classroom had made the students to be more responsive in their learning. Thus, the teaching and learning of Quranic exegesis had been more effective.⁶

However, the use of classic tafsir texts such as *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, *Tafsir al-Nasafi*, *Tafsir al-Baidawi* and *Tafsir Jalalayn* still retained in the studies of Quranic exegesis in Malaya. *Tafsir al-Manar* became the pioneer in introducing the modern tafsir method of *al-Adab wa al-Ijtima'i* which had not been taught before in Quranic exegesis in Malaya. However, the reformist ideas of 'Abduh and Rashid Rida were widely disseminated by local religious teachers inspired by the Kaum Muda scholars through the madrasah institutions.⁷

Mid-20th century Kaum Muda reform in teaching and learning of Quranic exegesis studies through *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in Malaysia

At the beginning of the mid-20th century, Kaum Muda introduced a new method in teaching tafsir by widening the room to exercise *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) in Quranic exegesis. Although the classical tafsir texts still used in madrasahs, the method of teaching tafsir had changed. After the Japanese occupation in Malaya, teaching reform of tafsir took place. In 1945, *Tafsir al-Maraghi* appeared as a model of modern tafsir in Egypt. It was popularized in the Quranic exegesis in some states of Malaya namely Kelantan, Perak and Melaka. *Tafsir al-Maraghi* applied a modern method of tafsir, that is, *al-Adab wa al-Ijtima'i* which links meaning of Quranic verses with current social life issues. Thus, the Kaum Muda introduced two methods in the reform of Quranic exegesis, that is applying *ijtihad* and tafsir method of *al-Adab wa al-Ijtima'i* as the reforms implemented by al-Maraghi at al-Azhar University.⁸ Al-Maraghi continued the mission of his two teachers, 'Abduh and Rashid Rida who led the reformist agenda, particularly in Quranic exegesis.

First: Emphasis of *ijtihad* in Quranic exegesis

The Kaum Muda, through the teaching of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in madrasahs, introduced *ijtihad* based on the opinions of contemporary religious scholars as to ensure no deviation of Islamic teachings and *israiliyyat* diffusion. In *fiqh* issues involving Quranic verses related to syariah, *ijtihad* was emphasized by presenting the concised views of thoughts from various mazhabs⁹ to amass the various views based on authentic *naqli* arguments. Awareness to exercise *ijtihad* in Quranic exegesis was engrossed at educational institutions especially madrasahs.

Initially, most of teachers teaching tafsir were graduated from Mecca through pondok education system which used the description method that explained the contents of the tafsir book from cover to cover without much elaboration. They emphasized on grammar and proper reading without explaining the tafsir analysis which included political, economic

⁶ Mustaffa Abdullah, *Rasyid Rida dan Pengaruhnya di Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaysia, 2009), 178-179.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁸ Sa'ad Mursi Ahmad, Sa'id Ismail 'Ali, "Ahd al-Istiqlal al-Masyrut 1923-1952: Tarikh Ta'lim fi Misr" in *Tarikh al-Tarbiyyah wa al-Ta'lim* (Kaherah: Nasyr 'Alam al-Kutub, 1980), 289.

⁹ *Ibid.*,

and social aspects. Thus, *ijtihad* was not practiced to understand and analyse the content of the tafsir books and they solely relied on what was being written in the tafsir. Most of these tafsir teachers used *Tafsir Jalalayn* in their teachings.¹⁰ While the madrasah teachers who graduated from Egypt and India, were able to describe the interpretations of Quranic verses in greater depth, guided by *ijma ulama mujtahid* (consensus opinions of early Muslim scholars who were qualified to make independent reasoning) or *'uruf* (culture) of the society. They taught tafsir of selected surahs of the Quran based on tafsir books.¹¹

Muhammad Nor bin Ibrahim was among Muslim scholars who was skillful in the field of tafsir and had devoted a lot of his time teaching tafsir. He was very influential public figure, especially in the state of Kelantan. Even though a graduate from Mecca, he was able to interpret the Quranic verses widely by relating them to history, law and sociology. However he did not relate them with contemporary issues of that time.¹² Since 1945, he taught at the Jame' Merbau al-Ismaili using *Tafsir Jalalayn*. Then since 1949, he taught tafsir using *Tafsir al-Nasafi* and *Tafsir Baidawi* at Masjid Muhammadi. In 1956 he changed his teaching tafsir text to *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in both institutions and thus, he was at the same time extended the thoughts of al-Maraghi until mid 1960s.¹³ Consequently, the teaching of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* made the people directly exposed to the *ijtihad* of Muslim modernist scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, 'Abduh and Ibn Qayyim. The contemporary *mujtahid* integrated Quranic exegesis with various issues such as politics, economy and society.

The traditionalists were against these reforms. They wanted to maintain the use of classical tafsir books written by early scholars. According to them explanation of interpretations of Quranic verses should be subjected to the content of the classical tafsir books. The teaching method of the traditionalist scholars did not open space to exercise *ijtihad* in Quranic exegesis studies as they interpreted Quranic verses based on literal meaning, blind imitation and did not welcome questions from students who wanted to clear their confusion in understanding the tafsir.

Thus, the influence of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* was the departure point for positive development of Quranic exegesis in Malaya as it encouraged *ijtihad* to interpret some of the Quranic verses related to various issues based on the views of modernist scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries. The *ijtihad* should use authentic hadiths and not be against the teachings of Quran and Sunnah.

¹⁰ Ismail Awang, *Metode Pengajian Tafsir in Pengajian dan Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Kota Bharu: Pustaka Aman Press, 1987), 190.

¹¹ Mustaffa Abdullah, Mohd Asmadi Yacob, *Pengajian Tafsir di Kelantan: Satu Tinjauan Sejarah*, *Jurnal Usuluddin* 17 (Julai 2003), 110, 115-116.

¹² Ismail Awang, *Metode Pengajian Tafsir in Pengajian dan Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Kota Bharu: Pustaka Aman Press, 1987), 191.

¹³ Ab. Rahman al-Qari Abdullah, *Dato' Mufti Hj. Muhammad Nor bin Ibrahim Satu Pengenalan Tokoh Pengajian al-Qur'an* (Proceeding: Seminar Warisan al-Qur'an dan al-Hadith Nusantara, Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, Ogos 2008), 1:4.

Second: Introducing the modern method of Tafsir *al-Adab wa al-Ijtima'i*

Through the teaching of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in madrasahs, the reformist scholars of Kaum Muda directly introduced the modern method of tafsir *al-Adab wa al-Ijtima'i* pioneered by Madrasah 'Abduh.¹⁴ The modern tafsir method was the new reform in the development of Quranic exegesis in Malaya. In the mid-20th century, *Tafsir al-Maraghi* became a textbook for teaching tafsir mainly at madrasahs which intergrated the interpretations of Quranic verses with current issues supported with scientific facts related to faith, politics, economics, sociology and science. In addition, the explanations of the interpretations of Quranic verses were presented in a simple language which was easily understood by the public.¹⁵ They highlighted directly the teachings of the Quran with supported authentic hadiths without too much focusing on the Arabic Language linguistics such as grammar, *sarf* and *balaghah*, and not submitting any *khilaf* (disagreement) in depth and not obsessed with the opinions of only one school of thought (mazhab).

By using *Tafsir al-Maraghi*, the method of tafsir *al-Adab wa al-tafsir al-Ijtima'i* was directly absorbed in teaching Quranic exegesis which aimed to educate the public with the true teachings of Islam based on the revelation of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) which sources were free from the narration of Isra'iliyyat and bid'ah (innovations).¹⁶ The teachings of Quranic exegesis were then related to issues of various aspects of life such as administrative, economic or social matters to create awareness among the people that the Qur'an is relevant at all times and places, and a guidance to mankind until the Day of Resurrection. As a result, thoughts of al-Maraghi were widely accepted in Malaya by local religious leaders and communities.

The first tafsir book written in the Malay language that used the tafsir method of *al-Adab al-Ijtima'i* was first published in 1949 which resulted in the outburst of al-Maraghi's influence in the Quranic exegesis studies. It is known as *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim* written by Mustafa Abdul Rahman of Il-Ihya 'Assyarif, which was consisted of 27 sections (juz). It contained some interpretations of Quranic verses with issues of the community life at the time.¹⁷ The teaching of *Tafsir al-Quran al-Hakim* was popular at mosques in several states in 1970's until early 1990s. Thus, the teaching of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* extended the influence of al-Maraghi's thoughts in various aspects of life among the Muslim communities in Malaya.

Kaum Muda reforms to improve the quality of Quranic exegesis in Malaysia

The Kaum Muda emulated al-Maraghi's reform at the al-Azhar University which upgraded the structure and curriculum of the its education system where the schools managed by al-Azhar University were structured to be *ibtida'i* (primary), *i'dadi* (lower secondary) and *thanawi* (higher secondary) levels. The change in the education system was

¹⁴ Fahd 'Abd al-Rahman Salman al-Rumi, "Manhaj al-Madrasah al-'Aqliyyah al-Ijtima'iyyah al-Hadithah fi al-Tafsir" in *Ittijahat al-Tafsir fi al-Qarni al-Rabi' 'Asyar* (Mamlakah al-'Arabiyyah al-Sa'udiyah: Muassasah al-Risalah, 1997), 2:170.

¹⁵ Muhammad Husayn al-Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirun*, j.1, (Beirut: Dar Yusuf, 2000), 2:588.

¹⁶ Mahmud Bayuni Faudah, *Al-Tafsir wa Manahijuhu ladayya Madrasah al-Imam Muhammad 'Abduh* (Mesir: Matba'ah al-Amanah, 1988) 24-25.

¹⁷ Mustafa Abdul Rahman, *Muqaddimah Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Hakim* (Pulau Pinang: Persama Press, 1949).

implemented up to the university level with specialization for bachelor, masters and PhD studies. The specialization areas were Usuluddin, Syari'ah dan Arabic language while the duration of studies was determined according to the level of studies.¹⁸ The reform ideas of al-Maraghi in structuring the levels of education were applied at madrasahs to improve the quality of Quranic exegesis in Malaya. In fact, a few pondok institutions were also influenced by the reform. They also applied the structure of modern school curriculum to be practiced in the pondok institutions. Hence, the Kaum Muda in the mid-20th century, influenced by al-Maraghi's thoughts, had improved the quality of education in Malaya encompassing reforms of developing modern curriculum, creating co-curricular activities, restructuring the Quranic exegesis, establishing certification and collaboration with al-Azhar University to facilitate formal entry of students at the bachelor's level in the Middle East universities, particularly al-Azhar University.

First: Improving the curriculum of Quranic exegesis through the teaching of *Tafsir al-Maraghi*

The Kaum Muda initiated reform to review and improve the curriculum which included the tafsir syllabus, aimed to produce students of academic excellence. The *Tafsir al-Maraghi* which was first published 1945 in Egypt was made as the main textbook for teaching tafsir Hasan bin Idris, *thanawi* level Ma'had Muhammadi in 1956. He also included new subjects in the curriculum such as '*ilm al-nafs, hikmah al-tasyri', 'ilm al-ijtima'* and changed some of the old text books to new ones including the textbooks for teaching of tafsir.¹⁹ The Arabic language was made as the new medium of instruction for teaching and learning. Thus, madrasahs became the centre for students to master Arabic language more effectively.²⁰

The coordination of curriculum for Quranic exegesis was done in 1960 for 14 schools managed by the Council of Islamic Religion of Kelantan (MAIK) which consisted of six Arabic schools and eight Sekolah Agama Rakyat. Among these schools were Madrasah al-Falahiyah in Pasir Pekan, Madrasah Indera Putera and Madrasah Yaakubiyah in Bachok, Madrasah Arabiyyah in Pasir Mas, Madrasah Shams al-Maarif in Pulai Chondong, Madrasah al-Saniah li al-Banat and Madrasah al-Tahzib in Pasir Putih.²¹

The teaching of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in these schools was implemented until 1970 when the tafsir syllabus was again reviewed and changed. Ahmad Maher was among those involved indirectly extended the influence of al-Maraghi as he was the president of MAIK from 1955 to 1960.²² He was actively involved in coordinating the tafsir curriculum at the time. Thus, during this duration of almost a decade, al-Maraghi influence dominated the

¹⁸ Sa'ad Mursi Ahmad, Sa'id Ismail 'Ali, "Ahd al-Istiqlal al-Masyrut 1923-1952: Tarikh Ta'lim fi Misr" in *Tarikh al-Tarbiyyah wa al-Ta'lim* (Kaherah: Nasr 'Alam al-Kutub, 1980), 290.

¹⁹ Abdul Razak Mahmud, *Intisari Sejarah Kelantan* (Kota Bharu: Pustaka Aman Press, 2002), 149.

²⁰ Nabir Abdullah, *Maahad Il-Ihya Assyarif Gunung Semanggol 1934-1959* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Sejarah Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1976), 95.

²¹ Ismail Awang, *Pengajian Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Kota Bharu: Dian Darul Naim Sdn Bhd, 1987), 147.

²² Website of Portal Pendidikan Kelantan.

whole of madrasah institutions in the state of Kelantan. *Tafsir al-Maraghi* was also taught at Ma'had Il-Ihya' Assyarif in Gunung Semanggol, Perak.²³ In addition, the non-formal education institutions made *Tafsir al-Maraghi* as a teaching text of tafsir. Among them were Pondok Sungai Durian, managed by MAIK in Kuala Krai, Kelantan,²⁴ Masjid Muhammadi at Kota Bharu, Kelantan²⁵ and Pondok Tuan Guru Haji Ahmad bin Md Kasim at Paya Rumpit, Melaka.²⁶ However, Ma'had Muhammadi used *Tafsir al-Maraghi* until 1962 when a well-known tafsir scholar, Muhammad Nor bin Ibrahim, replaced the textbook of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in the syllabus with his own notes of tafsir.²⁷ The teaching of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* for almost a decade at the schools managed by MAIK directly expanded the influence of al-Maraghi's thoughts in various aspects. In fact, a few modernist pondok in Kelantan such as Sungai Durian in Kuala Krai also followed the madrasah reform using *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in teaching tafsir. Thus, the Kaum Muda succeeded had brought significant influence of al-Maraghi's thoughts in the curriculum of Quranic exegesis studies in Malaya.

Second: Establishment of diversified co-curricular activities

The school extra-curricular activities for gaining additional knowledge, the madrasahs focused on developing leadership skills, personality, and other basic life skills as additional knowledge. Extra-curricular activities at Ma'had Il-Ihya' Assyarif in Gunung Semanggol in 1953 such as public speaking, storytelling, writing articles in school magazine were effectively implemented. Other basic skills learned at Ma'had Il-Ihya' Assyarif were sewing, weaving and carpentry.²⁸ The extra-curricular activities trained students to be sensitive with the information on current issues and concerned with the situation of their surrounding communities. The tafsir studies enabled students to have the opportunity to practice the knowledge they learned in classroom by integrating the tafsir of the Quranic verses with current issues.

The students were guided by their teachers in writing public speaking texts or religious articles which would be presented in the form of speeches and debates. Thus, the learning theories of tafsir in class could be practiced activities outside the classroom. These extra-curricular activities could stimulate the interest of students and train them to be more progressive, creative and independent.

²³ Nabir Abdullah, *Maahad Il-Ihya Assyarif Gunung Semanggol 1934-1959* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Sejarah Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1976).

²⁴ Abdul Hafiz Abdullah, Hasimah Muda, *Peranan Ulama' Pondok dalam Pengajian Tafsir al-Qur'an: Kajian di Tiga Buah Pondok di Negeri Kelantan*, (Proceeding: Seminar Nadwah Ulama' Nusantara III, Ketokohan dan Pemikiran Ulama' Melayu, Fakulti Pengajian Islam Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (April 2006), 27-28.

²⁵ Ab Rahman al-Qari Abdullah, *Dato' Mufti Hj Muhammad Nor bin Ibrahim Satu Pengenalan Tokoh Pengajian al-Qur'an* (Proceeding: Seminar Warisan al-Qur'an dan al-hadith Nusantara, Akademi Pengajian Islam, Universiti Malaya, Ogos 2008), 4.

²⁶ Ismail Mat, "Haji Ahmad Md Kasim" in *Ulama Silam dalam Kenangan* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1993), 77-78.

²⁷ Adel M. Abdul Aziz, "Dato' Haji Muhammad Nor bin Ibrahim" in *Biografi Mufti-Mufti Malaysia* (Nilai: Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 2008), 31-34.

²⁸ Khairul Nizam Zainal Badri, *Ketokohan dan Pemikiran Abu Bakar al-Baqir* (Shah Alam: Karisma Publication Sdn Bhd, 2008), 30.

Third: Restructuring of the system of tafsir studies

The Kaum Muda restructured the education system in madrasah by introducing the class ranking based on a certain age limit within a predetermined learning time to standardize the teaching and learning process of tafsir studies. Thus, it allowed the teaching and learning tafsir to be more effective. The Kaum Muda reviewed the stages of learning tafsir to be more structured such as the reform introduced by Maraghi at al-Azhar University. Most of the madrasahs such as Ma'had Il-Ihya' Assyarif and Ma'had Muhammadi, had preparation class (*tahdiri*), low level class (*ibtida'i*), lower secondary level (*i'dadi*), intermediate class (*thanawi*) and high level class (*'Aliyy*). The syllabus of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* was taught to the thanawi students. Jame' Merbau al-Isma'ili started *al-ula al-Thanawi* (standard 6) class in 1948 and then it was updated in 1952 to have *al-Rabi' al-Thanawi* (standard 7, 8 and 9) classes, consisted of three categories namely '*Ulum al-Diniyyah*, '*Ulum al-'Arabiyyah* and '*Ulum al-Riyadiyyah*.

The tafsir subject using *Tafsir al-Maraghi* was included in the category of '*Ulum al-Diniyyah*. It was taught to *al-Rabi' al-Thanawi* students three times a week.²⁹ Hasan bin Idris was among the individuals who created the class system of 9 years for Arabic schools managed MAIK started with *ibtida'i* level followed by *i'dadi* and *thanawi* levels. Each class level took three years³⁰ with different syllabus of tafsir subject to suit the students's mental ability measured by certain age limit.³¹ *Tafsir al-Maraghi* was written in the Arabic language which discussed issues related to realities of life which was suitable to be studied by thanawi students. Thus, the restructuring of tafsir education system resulted in a more efficient and effective in teaching and learning of tafsir.

Fourth: Establishing certification and collaboration with Al-Azhar University

The Kaum Muda initiated various efforts to improve the quality of tafsir studies. However, there was no coordination as some madrasahs had limited opportunity to implement al-Maraghi reforms through the teaching of *Tafsir al-Maraghi*. The Kaum Muda utilised famous madrasahs in Malaya such as Ma'had Muhammadi in Kota Bharu and Ma'had Il-Ihya' Assyarif in Gunung Semanggol. The Kaum Muda established collaboration with al-Azhar University which aimed to facilitate the admission of potential students from Malaya to pursue their studies in the Middle East at a degree level. In the collaboration program the students had to sit and pass religious subjects including tafsir. Ma'had Il-Ihya' Assyarif headed by Abu Bakar al-Baqir had earlier created a class level after thanawi known as *qism' Aliyya* in 1947 for a period of 2 years. The curriculum for *qism' Aliyy* was equivalent to college level. Thus, these students had the chance to continue to *takhassus* (specialised) class for two years. The *takhassus* class graduates were qualified to enter any Islamic University in the Middle East, including al-Azhar University.³²

²⁹ Faisal@ Ahmad Faisal Abdul Hamid, *Dato' Haji Ismail Yusoff: Sumbangannya Terhadap Perkembangan Islam di Kelantan* (diss., Universiti Malaya, 2002), 116.

³⁰ Abd Razak Mahmud, *Ikhtisar Sejarah Kelantan* (Kota Bharu: Pustaka Aman Press Sdn Bhd, 2002),151.

³¹ Rosnani Hashim, *Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 24.

³² Khairul Nizam Zainal Badri, *Ketokohan dan Pemikiran Abu Bakar al-Baqir* (Shah Alam: Karisma Publication Sdn Bhd, 2008), 33-34.

Ma'had Mahmud in Alor Star, like Ma'had Muhammadi Kota Bharu, also directly fostered bilateral ties with al-Azhar University. Since 1950 Ma'had Mahmud created *qism 'aliyy* class which through its *syahadah nihaiyah* program would qualify its students to continue their studies at third year in al-Azhar University. However this program only lasted for 5 years.³³ Ma'had Muhammadi received recognition from al-Azhar University in 1961. Those who had the *syahadah* certificate were qualified to enter the Usuluddin and Shariah Faculties of al-Azhar University.³⁴ The recognition from al-Azhar University was given as a result of the collaboration with the university. It is an indication that the Islamic education system in Malaya was comparable to the quality of the Islamic studies curriculum in the Middle East, particularly Egypt which used *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in teaching Quranic exegesis. Hence, the implementation of various reforms through school institutions, as an influence of al-Maraghi's thoughts had improved and coordinated the teaching and learning of Quranic exegesis in Malaya.

Network of Kaum Muda Collaboration in the mid-20th century

At the advent of mid-20th century, the Kaum Muda was more proactive in creating a wider network of collaboration with official institutions of state governments such as state religious departments. The Kaum Muda modernists through political parties also highlighted education issues. The collaboration networks were widely deployed to achieve their goal to disseminate reform ideas in a more comprehensive manner particularly in instilling modern ideas in curriculum development of Quranic exegesis.

The Kaum Muda activists held administrative positions at State Islamic Religious Councils. They dominated these posts in Kelantan and Perak.³⁵ The immersion in formal state government of the Kaum Muda modernists aimed to make coordination of the education curriculum in madrasahs managed by the state government. As a result, they succeeded in coordinating the Arabic schools' tafsir syllabus using *Tafsir al-Maraghi* through coordination made by MAIK. Kelantan was among the earliest states to absorb the reformist scholars in the State Islamic Religious Council, whom among them was Ahmad Maher who became the head of education division at MAIK in 1931.³⁶

The collaboration network of Kaum Muda had opened the opportunity for consolidation through socioeconomic movement aimed at developing Islamic education and economy of the Malays. A conference related to these issues was held on 22nd to 24th of March 1947 at Ma'had Il-Ihya' Assyarif in Gunung Semanggol. It was attended by Muslim scholars throughout Malaya and representatives from various organizations such as PEPERMAS (Center for Economic Melayu Se-Malaya), MATA (Supreme Religious Council) and LEPIR (Board of Education of the People).³⁷ The presence of PKMM (Parti Kebangsaan

³³ Abdullah Muhammad Zin, *Pendidikan Islam di Malaysia dari Pondok ke Universiti*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2003), 21.

³⁴ Abd Razak Mahmud, *Ikhtisar Sejarah Kelantan* (Kota Bharu: Pustaka Aman Press Sdn Bhd, 2002), 111-113.

³⁵ Ishak Saat and Mohd Azhar Bahari, *Madrasah Idrisiah Bukit Chandan 1922-2000: Sumbangan dan Kejayaan* (Johor: Penerbit Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, 2010), 60.

³⁶ Website Portal Pendidikan Kelantan.

³⁷ Nabir Abdullah, *Maahad Il Ihya Assyariff Gunung Semanggol 1934-1959* (Bangi: Jabatan Sejarah, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1976), 128, 129, 139, 151.

Melayu Malaya) representatives indicated a sign of firm support of the radical group to the Islamic movement which was an important element in the activities of Malay nationalism.³⁸

The follow up conference was held on 15th November, 1947 at Ma'had Il-Ihya' Assyarif in Gunung Semanggol which discussed the role LEPIR to standardize the syllabus of the Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR) in Malaya including the subjects of Quranic exegesis. The outcome of the conference was the establishment of SAR education centre founded and administered Arif bin Haji Ahmad whom was later succeeded by Abdul Rabb al-Tamimi. Thus, Ma'had Il-Ihya' Assyarif became an example to SAR in Malaya at that time. Abu Bakar al-Baqir was among the active reformist leaders of Kaum Muda who frequently established good relationship with religious schools through Malaya including Singapore.

Some of these modern reformists held administrative positions in state governments. Among the participants of the conference were Fadhullah Shuhaimi from Singapore, Ahmad Maher from Kota Bharu, Kelantan, Ahmad Fuad Hassan and Ismail Hamzah from Kuala Kangsar, Perak, Dr Burhanuddin Helmi of PKMM, Kamil Abdul Hadi from Sabak Bernam, Selangor, Arshad dari Bagan Datoh, Perak and Hassan Yunus from Johor. Collaboration network was established to mobilize efforts to upgrade Islamic education and liberate Malaya from colonial power.³⁹ Ahmad Maher was among those who directly obtained influence of al-Maraghi in Egypt. Participation in the conference indicated that the scholars who attended the conference indirectly accepted al-Maraghi reforms particularly reforms to improve the quality of Quranic exegesis.

The main activists of the Kaum Muda who directly involved in increasing the influence of al-Maraghi in Malaya were Ahmad Maher, the President of MAIK, Hasan bin Idris, the coordinator of Quranic exegesis at Arabic Schools administered by MAIK and its associates,⁴⁰ Muhammad Nor bin Ibrahim⁴¹, the instructor of *Tafsir al-Maraghi*, Abu Bakar al-Baqir,⁴² and Abdul Rahman Mustafa, the students of the Ahmad bin Md Kassim (1901-1943) and Abdul Rahman bin Sulaiman who inserted *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in the tafsir syllabus at madrasah schools and personal owned pondok.

In addition, the good cooperation among modern madrassahs produced proactive reformists of Kaum Muda over the whole of Malaya. These reformists were supported by several madrasahs such as Madrasah Dairatul Maarit and Madrasah Al-Akhlak Arsalan in Kedah. Madrasah al-Masyhur in Penang and Madrasah Muhammadiyah in Kelantan became centres of Kaum Muda reformists.⁴³ In 1954, Madrasah Teachers Association (PEGMA) was

³⁸ Ramlah Adam, *Gerakan Radikalisme di Malaysia 1938-1965* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2009), 75, 86, 199.

³⁹ Nabir Abdullah, *Maahad Il-Ihya Assyarif Gunung Semanggol 1934-1959* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Sejarah Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1976), 125.

⁴⁰ Abd Razak Mahmud, *Ikhtisar Sejarah Kelantan* (Kota Bharu: Pustaka Aman Press Sdn Bhd, 2002), 149.

⁴¹ Ahmad Syukri Yusof, *Sumbangan Dato' Mufti Haji Muhammad Nor bin Haji Ibrahim Terhadap Pengajian al-Qur'an di Kelantan*, (Prosiding Nadwah Ulama' Nusantara III, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, April 2008), 124.

⁴² Nabir Abdullah, *Maahad Il-Ihya Assyarif Gunung Semanggol 1934-1959* (Kuala Lumpur: Jabatan Sejarah Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1976), 83.

⁴³ Ramlah Adam, *Gerakan Radikalisme di Malaysia 1938-1965* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2009), 297, 309, William R. Roff, *Studies on Islam and Society in Southeast Asia: Pondoks, Madrasahs and the Production of Ulama' in Malaysia* (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2009), 125.

founded by Abdul Samad Noh (1917-1984) and Hassan Adli (1929-1987). The Kaum Muda strived to improve the life of the Malay community through the awareness of knowledge on integrated culture and current development of Quranic exegesis of Egypt such as the adoption of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in Quranic exegesis in Malaya. The Kaum Muda reformists stressed the importance of knowledge as a means of development and achievement. Dr Burhanuddin al-Helmi (1911-1969) stressed that knowledge is the basis for changing the standard of living of the Muslims and liberating themselves from colonialism. Abu Bakar Baqir was among those who were concerned about expanding the reformist ideas through the collaboration with Kaum Muda reformists in the whole of Malaya to promote Islamic education which was seen to be more prominent than the political and economic aspects.

Hence, the implication of the established collaboration network of Kaum Muda had created a more effective reform movement in Malaya. They promoted a more effective approach of Quranic exegesis studies based on the Egyptian school model. Then they expanded directly the influence of al-Maraghi's thoughts by including *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in the tafsir syllabus at madrasahs. These madrasahs had reputable relations with the reformist movement in the Middle East. The reformists put great efforts such as producing newspapers and pamphlets to meet the agenda of the Islamic reformation.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Kaum Muda reformation was aimed to improve the quality of Quranic exegesis studies at madrasahs in Malaya. They produced reputable schools in some states such as Ma'had Muhammadi in Kota Bharu, Kelantan and Ma'had Il-ihya' Assyarif in Gunung Semanggol, Perak. The institutions became models to other madrasahs to apply the reform ideas of al-Maraghi including using modern tafsir method of *al-Adab wa al-Ijtima'i* and also encouraged the exercise *ijtihad* in interpretations of Quranic verses. They also developed modern curriculum in Quranic exegesis studies at madrasahs by inserting *Tafsir al-Maraghi* in the syllabus of tafsir subjects.

The series of education reform at al-Azhar University during the time of al-Maraghi reached its peak in 1935-1945. With the emergence of its first publication in 1945, *Tafsir al-Maraghi* had triggered another wave of reform in the Quranic exegesis. The flow of Egyptian reformist ideas of Quranic exegesis to Malaya occurred in stages which resulted in the improvement of the quality of education system in religious institutions particularly the quality of Quranic exegesis at madrasahs. Teaching of *Tafsir al-Maraghi* became a symbol of reform at madrasahs which followed by some pondok institutions. The influence of al-Maraghi reform was a continuation of reform ideas of 'Abduh and Rashid Rida, particularly the Quranic exegesis studies in Malaya in the mid-20th century. The collaboration of Kaum Muda at the state and nasional levels had contributed to speed up the flow of reform ideas which modernised and improved the religious education system particularly the madrasah institutions and also transforming the state Islamic religious councils to function effectively.

Thus, the modern reformist efforts had increased the quality of Quranic exegesis studies at madrasahs, which in turn resulted as a significant contribution the the

⁴⁴ Rosnani Hashim, *Educational Dualism in Malaysia: Implications for Theory and Practice* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996), 24-25, 28. Ishak Saat and Mohd Azhar Bahari, *Madrasah Idrisiah Bukit Chandan 1922-2000: Sumbangan dan Kejayaan*, Johor: Penerbit Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, 2010), 1-2.

development of Quranic exegesis studies in Malaysia. However, the curriculum quality improvement which had modernised the madrasah institutions had indirectly gave negative impact on the long established pondok education system and provided a challenge to the vernacular school education system in Malaya.⁴⁵

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