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FAKULTAS USHULUDDIN DAN FILSAFAT**

Jl. A. Yani 117 Surabaya 60237 Telp. 031-8410298 Fax.031-8413300 E-Mail:  
fuf@uinsby.ac.id

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Dekan Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Filsafat UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya menerangkan bahwa:

Nama : KHAIRUL ATFAL  
Tempat, Tanggal Lahir : Sumenep, 20 April 2001  
NIM : 07040320127  
Semester / Program Studi : 7 / Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir  
Alamat : Dusun Lanjuk RT/RW 002/002 Desa Lanjuk  
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Prof. Abdul Kadir Riyadi, Ph.D.

NIP. 197008132005011003

THAIFUR ALI Wafa AL-MADURI AND COUNTER-NARRATIVE OF  
MUKTAZILAH IN *FIRDAWS AL-NA'IM BI AL TAWDĪH MA'ĀNĪ*  
*ĀYĀT AL-QUR'ĀN AL-KARĪM*

**Khairul Atfal**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia  
[chairul.atfal@gmail.com](mailto:chairul.atfal@gmail.com)

**Ahmad Zaidanil Kamil**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia  
[ahmad.zaidanil@uinsby.ac.id](mailto:ahmad.zaidanil@uinsby.ac.id)

**Abu Bakar**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia  
[abu.bakar@uinsby.ac.id](mailto:abu.bakar@uinsby.ac.id)

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**Abstract**

This article discusses Thaifur Ali Wafa's response to the polemics of Islamic theology in Madura through his monumental work Tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'im*. As a pesantren cleric and structural NU figure, Thaifur represents Madurese clerical authority. In his career, he provides critical responses to Muktaazilah thoughts, including such issues as the inability to see God in heaven, God's obligation to do good, and God's promises and threats. This library research uses the content analysis method. Using the sociology of knowledge approach, this study finds that Thaifur Ali Wafa's response to Muktaazilah thought reflects the strong influence of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* ideology. This ideology was formed due to Madurese cultural factors and Thaifur Ali Wafa's scientific genealogy. This article is significant in illustrating the network and intellectual relationship between Nusantara Muslims and Middle Eastern scholars, which is crucial in the writing of Islamic scholarly works in the archipelago, including in Madura. It reflects the complexity and diversity of Islamic thought in the region, which is influenced by intercultural interactions and intellectual exchanges that have taken place over centuries.

**Keywords:** *Thaifur Ali Wafa, Firdaws al-Naʿim, Muktaẓilah, Tafsir Madura*

### Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas respon Thaifur Ali Wafa terhadap polemik teologi Islam di Madura melalui karya monumentalnya Tafsir *Firdaws al-Naʿim*. Sebagai seorang ulama pesantren dan tokoh struktural NU, Thaifur merepresentasikan otoritas ulama Madura. Dalam karirnya, ia memberikan tanggapan kritis terhadap pemikiran Muktaẓilah, yang mencakup isu-isu seperti tidak adanya melihat Tuhan di surga, kewajiban Tuhan untuk berbuat baik, janji-janji dan ancaman Tuhan. Metode penelitian yang digunakan dalam penulisan artikel ini adalah penelitian kepustakaan dan analisis isi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi pengetahuan, artikel ini menemukan bahwa respon Thaifur Ali Wafa terhadap pemikiran Muktaẓilah mencerminkan kuatnya pengaruh ideologi *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*. Ideologi ini terbentuk karena faktor budaya Madura dan genealogi keilmuan Thaifur Ali Wafa. Artikel ini sangat penting dalam menggambarkan jaringan dan hubungan intelektual antara Muslim Nusantara dengan ulama Timur Tengah yang sangat penting dalam penulisan karya-karya keilmuan Islam di Nusantara, termasuk di Madura. Hal ini mencerminkan kompleksitas dan keragaman pemikiran Islam di wilayah ini, yang dipengaruhi oleh interaksi antarbudaya dan pertukaran intelektual yang telah berlangsung selama berabad-abad.

**Kata Kunci:** *Thaifur Ali Wafa, Firdaws al-Naʿim, Muktaẓilah, Tafsir Madura*

### Introduction

The *khazanah* interpretation in the Nusantara is born from various social-cultural backgrounds. Several interpretations were fabricated in the context of power and politics, while others were written in an atmosphere influenced by boarding traditions. Others emerged from academies, community organizations, and other contexts.<sup>1</sup> These spaces are crucial in determining who the interpretation was written for and for what purpose. This is evident in the language spoken, the type of characters selected, and the issues for emphasis, such as political, social, and ideological, even down to the scope of the audience when the interpretation was written.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Islah Gusmian, "Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia: Sejarah dan Dinamika," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 1, no. 1 (29 Desember 2015): 4–16, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v1i1.8>.

<sup>2</sup> Islah Gusmian, "Tafsir Al-Qur'an Bahasa Jawa: Peneguhan Identitas, Ideologi, dan Politik Perlawanan," *Suhuf* 9, no. 1 (15 November 2016): 143, <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v9i1.116>; Islah Gusmian, "Bahasa dan Aksara dalam Penulisan Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia Era Awal Abad 20 M," *Mutawatir* 5, no. 2 (28 September 2016): 224, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2015.5.2.223-247>; Farid Esack, *Qur'an Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), xi.

Besides the socio-cultural context, another factor that plays a vital role in determining the character of interpretations is the identity of the mufasir. Several types of identities can influence the interpretation, such as the identity of scholars, scholars-academics, literary-culturalists, bureaucrats, and politicians.<sup>3</sup> This kind of identity, consciously or unconsciously, will create interpretations with distinctive nuances.<sup>4</sup>

One of the interpretations that reflects the ulama's social identity in the Nusantara pesantren environment is Tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'īm* by Thaifur Ali Wafa. He was a pesantren scholar in Madura who contributed to developing Islamic intellectual traditions in Madura. His role is significantly seen not only in various religious polemics that arise in contemporary times but also in the productivity of his work.

There are three critical elements rooted in the culture of santri in Madura society: pesantren, which represents the heritage of traditional Islamic education; Nahdlatul Ulama as a pillar of the Islamic organization; and kiai as a religious symbol. These three components are interrelated and form a complex relationship between Islam and politics in the daily life of Madura society.<sup>5</sup> Thaifur is a figure who has all those components. He is not only a kiai at the As-Sadād pesantren but also has an essential role as a structural NU figure in Sumenep. As such, Thaifur embodies a powerful symbol, reflecting the close relationship between Islamic education, Islamic organizations, and religious figures in the Madura context.

Therefore, studying the interpretation of *Firdaws al-Na'īm* that grew from Madura's pesantren tradition became especially important to describe how this interpretation is used to strengthen the identity of pesantren. This tafsir is not only a religious text but also a concrete form of Madura's pesantren cultural heritage that provides a solid basis for Madura's religious identity and understanding. In the theological framework, especially in the context of thinking that developed among Madura's pesantren, the scholars have long adopted Imam Asy'ari's understanding as a central framework of thought. They firmly reject views that differ from Asy'ari's understanding. This view is reflected in the interpretation of *Firdaws al-Na'īm* written by Thaifur Ali Wafa. In this work, Thaifur Ali Wafa strongly criticizes the opinions of Muktaẓilah, which he considers as a stream that deviates from the traditional understanding that has long been adopted in Madura's pesantren.

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<sup>3</sup> Islah Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsir Al-Qur'an Indonesia Dari Hermeneutika, Wacana hingga Ideologi* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Salwa, 2022), xxvi–xxvii.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Husein Al-Dzahabi, *Penyimpangan-Penyimpangan dalam Penafsiran al-Qur'an. Terjemahan Maznun Husein*, Cetakan ke-4 (Jakarta: PT Grafindo Persada, 1996), 53; Abdul Mustaqim, *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir Al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Ponpes LSQ Ar-Rahmah, 2012), 131–32.

<sup>5</sup> Samsul Ma'arif, *The history of Madura: sejarah panjang Madura dari kerajaan, kolonialisme sampai kemerdekaan* (Bantul: Araska, 2015), 154–55; Yanwar Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 21.

Research on the interpretation of Thaifur Ali Wafa's *Firdaws al-Na'īm* has been the focus of scholars, including Moh. Azwar Hairul,<sup>6</sup> Uswatun Hasanah,<sup>7</sup> Khalilullah,<sup>8</sup> Moh. Rozin,<sup>9</sup> dan Kurdi Fadal.<sup>10</sup> They have given important insights about the context and understanding of tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'īm*. Still, until now, research has yet to examine how Thaifur Ali Wafa responds and deals with Muktazilah's thoughts in his tafsir. This creates an exciting research gap, especially in understanding the extent of the influence of the pesantren tradition on Thaifur Ali Wafa's views in interpreting the Qur'an.

The sociology of knowledge theory becomes a relevant and essential framework to fill this gap. This theory can be used to analyze how the pesantren tradition influenced Thaifur Ali Wafa's understanding of the Qur'an and how the social, cultural, and intellectual influences in Madura society during his time shaped his views.<sup>11</sup> Thus, this research will make a valuable contribution to understanding the development of interpretation in Nusantara and enriching the understanding of the role and influence of the pesantren tradition in the Qur'anic tafsir in Madura.

The research in this article uses the library research method. The primary data of this research is the interpretation of *Firdaws al-Na'īm* and Thaifur's biographical work entitled *Manār al-Wafā*. At the same time, secondary data is in the form of books and several articles that have relevance to this article. The technique of writing this article is based on *content analysis*, which examines Thaifur's thoughts in tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'īm*, which criticizes the Muktazilah ideology.

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<sup>6</sup> Moh. Azwar Hairul in 2017 entitled "Telaah Kitab Tafsir Firdaus Al-Na'im Karya Thaifur Ali Wafa Al-Madury". Moh Azwar Hairul, "Telaah Kitab Tafsir Firdaus Al-Na'im Karya Thaifur Ali Wafa Al-Maduri," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 3, no. 2 (13 Juni 2019): 39–58, <https://doi.org/10.32495/nun.v3i2.44>.

<sup>7</sup> A journal article written by Uswatun Hasanah in 2019 with the title "Hak-hak Perempuan dalam Tafsir Firdaws al-Na'im bi Tawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm Karya KH. Thoifur 'Ali Wafa". Uswatun Hasanah, "Hak-hak Perempuan dalam Tafsir Firdaws al-Na'im bi Tawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm Karya KH. Thoifur 'Ali Wafa," *Islamika Inside: Jurnal Keislaman dan Humaniora* 5 (7 Juni 2019): 72–95, <http://dx.doi.org/10.35719/islamikainside.v5i1.37>.

<sup>8</sup> Thesis written by Khalilullah in 2019 with the title "Tafsir Lokal di Era Kontemporer Indonesia Studi Kasus Karya Thaifur Ali Wafa, Firdaws Al-Na'im". Khalilullah, "Tafsir Lokal di Era Kontemporer Indonesia: Studi Kasus Karya Thaifur Ali Wafa, Firdaws Al-Na'im" (Tesis, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Thesis written by Moh, Rozin in 2022 with the title "Ortodoksi Tafsir Indonesia (Telaah Tekstualitas dan Intertekstualitas Tafsir Firdaws Al-Na'im Karya Kiai Thaifur Ali Wafa)". Moh Rozin, "Ortodoksi Tafsir Indonesia: Telaah Tekstualitas Dan Intertekstualitas Tafsir Firdaws Al-Na'im Karya Kiai Thaifur Ali Wafa" (Tesis, UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Journal article written by Kurdi Fadal in 2023 with the title "Ortodoksi Tafsir Indonesia: Analisis Kitab Firdaus Al-Na'im Karya Thaifur Ali Wafa". Kurdi Fadal, "Ortodoksi Tafsir Indonesia: Analisis Kitab Firdaus Al-Na'im Karya Thaifur Ali Wafa," *Al-Bayan: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 8, no. 1 (1 Oktober 2023), <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-bayan.v8i1.20562>.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia, an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954).

## Thaifur Ali Wafa and Tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'im*

### Portrait of Thaifur Ali Wafa's Life

His full name is Thaifur bin Ali Wafa bin Muharrar Al-Madūrī who was born to Kiai Ali Wafa and Nyai Muṭmainnah binti Dhilhajja. Thaifur was born on Monday 20 Sha'ban 1384 H/17 December 1964 M in Ambunten. Judging from the genealogy of his father, he came from the descendants of Abdul Qudus, known as *bhujū' jinhār*. Nasab Thaifur's genealogy from his mother, who is the daughter of the couple Dhilhajja and Halimah al-Sa'diyah, is a famous couple. Thaifur's grandmother, Halimah al-Sa'diyah, has a lineage to 'Abd al-Bār, renowned as *Agung Tamanuk*.<sup>12</sup> Based on Martin Van Bruinessen's explanation, Kiai Ali Wafa is a figure. He has a brilliant reputation in terms of his personality as a scholar and for the Naqsyabandiyah Order. No one can replace the same importance and popularity as him.<sup>13</sup>

Thaifur learned much religious knowledge from his father as a child. He inherited his father's intellect, so it is not surprising that he has vast spiritual knowledge. Various kinds of knowledge have been given by his father, such as the science of *uṣūl al-aqā'id*, tauḥīd, fiqh, nahwu, Al-Qur'an, and others, using a system like the tradition of salaf pesantren, namely a student reading lessons in front of the teacher or what we commonly know as the *sorogan* system.<sup>14</sup>

His father taught him not only religious sciences but also entrepreneurship. His life was nurtured from the age of six. Before he reached the age of puberty, his father passed away, and his mother entrusted him to Ali Hisham. During that time, the teacher conveyed many fields of knowledge not obtained from his father. Thaifur was presented with various syarḥ books, such as *sharḥ safīnah*, *sharḥ bidayah*, *sharḥ sullām al-taufīq*. When he was 14, he followed his brother to Mecca for the first time. At that time, he only performed the Hajj and made a pilgrimage to the tomb of the Prophet. At this age, Thaifur had also proposed to a daughter of Abdullah Salil al-Kholil named Nūr Bilqīs. When he was 15 years old, he was visited by Kiai Aḥmad Zainy bin Miftāḥul 'Arifīn from Jakarta. At that time, Kiai Ali Hisham asked Thaifur to study with Kiai Ahmad Zainy. This was due to the father's dying wish. In addition, Kiai Ahmad Zainy is someone who is very pious and also very famous for being an expert in the field of morals and Sufism.<sup>15</sup>

When Thaifur turned 18, he began his journey to Mecca for the second time with his family, namely Maḥfūzah and Kiai Sharqāwi. Thaifur's intention had previously been told to Sayyid Fāḍil Muḥammad bin Ṣāliḥ al-Muḥḍār, who later became Thaifur's intermediary in Mecca. Before he studied with the scholars there, he was introduced to two sheikhs from Mecca, namely Sayyid Muḥammad Alawī al-Māliki and sheikh Ismāil 'Uthmān al-Zain. Sayyid Fāḍil asked Thaifur to choose

<sup>12</sup> Thaifur Ali Wafa, *Manār al-Wafā* (Madura: t.p., 2005), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia*, Cet I (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 2012), 439.

<sup>14</sup> Wafa, *Manār al-Wafā*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Wafa, 39.

between the two scholars, and in the end, Thaifur studied with Shaykh Ismā'il. Thaifur's first meeting with Shaykh Ismā'il resulted in a deep sense of *haibah* (love).<sup>16</sup> Thaifur learned from Shaykh Ismā'il for seven years during this time. In the first period, Thaifur focused on gaining knowledge and studying with scholars in Mecca (1402 H/1982 M-1406H/1986 M). Thaifur spent more time serving Sheikh Ismā'il in the second period for three years (1409 H/1989 M - 1412 H/1992 M).<sup>17</sup>

After returning from Makkah in the first period, he married Nūr Bilqīs bint 'Abdullah Salil al-Kholil (Kiai Abdullah Schall) on Wednesday, 18 Dzhulhijja 1407 H/13 August 1987 M. In 1409 H/1989 M, he returned to Makkah at the request of Shaykh Ismā'il 'Uthmān al-Zain. Finally, Thaifur returned to Ambunten, settled in 1413 H/1993 M, and occupied himself with serving the community. Also, Thaifur was busy teaching at the hut he founded, named As-Sadād and known as *Ponduk Tanjung* because of its location in Tanjung Village.<sup>18</sup>

### A Glimpse of Tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'im*

Tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'im* is written in full 30 juz using Arabic and consists of 6 volumes. The language used differs from some interpretations and translations that use Madurese and contain vernacularization and stratification of language use.<sup>19</sup> Thaifur chose Arabic because the intended reader is not only the local Madura community. Furthermore, Arabic is also considered an easy language to learn so that a broader community can study it. This interpretation was written within three years and completed on 21 Rabi'ul Awwal 1434 H/12 February 2013 M.<sup>20</sup>

In the introduction to the interpretation of *Firdaws al-Na'im*, Thaifur states that the background of writing the performance is due to Thaifur's concern for Qur'anic scholars who want to understand the Qur'an. Thaifur's willingness was motivated by one of the traditions conveyed by the Prophet.<sup>21</sup> Thaifur took the initiative from the hadith to compose the interpretation of *Firdaws al-Na'im*. According to him, people who are *ahl al-qur'an* (experts of the Qur'an) have a very noble position. It is proven by several explanations from the reciters of the Qur'an that people who read the Qur'an one letter are worth ten rewards based on the Prophet's hadith:

لا أقول الم حرف، ولكن ألف حرف، ولام حرف، وميم حرف

From the work of interpretation, Thaifur hopes to get God's reward and blessing by leaning on the *ahl al-qur'an* who have very extraordinary privileges.

<sup>16</sup> Wafa, 48.

<sup>17</sup> Wafa, 104.

<sup>18</sup> Wafa, 123.

<sup>19</sup> Ulya Fikriyati, Ah Fawaid, dan Subkhani Kusuma Dewi, "Vernacular Tafsir in Madura: Negotiating Idea of Human Equality in the Social Hierarchical Tradition," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 4 (7 Desember 2021): 52, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v6i4.403>.

<sup>20</sup> Hairul, "Telaah Kitab Tafsir Firdaus Al-Na'im Karya Thaifur Ali Wafa Al-Maduri," 44.

<sup>21</sup> Thaifur Ali Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'im Bitawfih Ma'anī Ayāt al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, vol. 1 (t.k.: t.p., t.t), 3.

According to Thaifur, everything that relies on noble things must also be noble.<sup>22</sup> Thaifur quoted one of the sayings in nahwu:

عليك بأرباب الصدور فمن غدا \* مضافا لأرباب الصدور تصدرا

Initially, tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'im* was only intended to provide understanding to its readers.<sup>23</sup> However, after Thaifur started writing the interpretation, he unconsciously explained the discussion at great length, even containing the recitations of *qir'at sab'ah* and outside *qir'at sab'ah*, fiqh issues, *israiliyat* stories that are not too *daif* and things that are not in other books of tafsir. So, it is known that the preparation of this tafsir was motivated by Thaifur's concern about the local community's understanding of the Qur'an, and he felt the need to write a comprehensive interpretation of the Qur'an.

The sources used by Thaifur in his interpretation are not explicitly written. Therefore, the author provides an analysis of the sources used by Thaifur with several aspects: (1) the Qur'an with the Qur'an; (2) the Qur'an with hadith; (3) the Qur'an with the opinion of scholars; and (4) the Qur'an with personal opinion.<sup>24</sup> The reference of this interpretation elaborates a lot of classical interpretations, namely *lubāb al-ta'wīl fī ma'āni al-tanzīl* by al-Khāzin, *hāshiyah al-sōwy* kaya al-Šōwi, *tafsir al-jailani* by Sheikh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jailani, *mafātih al-ghaib* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzy, *rūh al-ma'āni* by al-Alūsi, *al-jāmi' li ahkām al-qur'ān* by al-Qurṭubī.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Thaifur also refers to *al-durr al-manthūr* by al-Šuyūṭy, *tafsir al-qur'ān al-adhīm* by Ibn Kathīr which he quotes in his tafsir.

Tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'im* is classified as tafsir *bi al-ra'yi* because it is more dominant in interpreting the Qur'an with various media to match the desired meal.<sup>26</sup> The preparation of tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'im* uses the *tahlily* method because the form of presentation of tafsir that describes multiple aspects, such as vocabulary, the background of the revelation of verses and explains the meanings by the mufasir's expertise<sup>27</sup> and extensive discussion.<sup>28</sup> While the style used by Thaifur is more dominant in linguistic style. This is evident from some of the interpretations made by Thaifur, which are pretty detailed when describing the explanation of surah Al-'Arāf [7]: 22:

<sup>22</sup> This statement was conveyed by Thaifur when he gave a public lecture on the book of Tafṣīr Firdaws an-Na'im on January 19, 2023 at al-Karimiyah Islamic Boarding School. *Kuliah Umum Bedah Kitab Firdaus An Naim Karya Kh. Thaifur Ali Wafa 19 Januari 2023*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7z2kHfS6jJs..>

<sup>23</sup> Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'im Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Ayāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, t.t, 1:4.

<sup>24</sup> Thaifur Ali Wafa, *Firdaws Al-Na'im Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Ayāt Al-Qur'ān Al-Karīm* (t.k.: t.p., t.t), 2: 54, 1: 21, 1: 183, 1: 127.

<sup>25</sup> *Kuliah Umum Bedah Kitab Firdaus An Naim Karya Kh. Thaifur Ali Wafa 19 Januari 2023*.

<sup>26</sup> Nashruddin Baidan, *Metode penafsiran al-Qur'an: kajian kritis terhadap ayat-ayat yang beredaksi mirip*, Cetakan ke-1 (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2002), 46.

<sup>27</sup> Baidan, 68.

<sup>28</sup> Nashruddin Baidan, *Wawasan baru ilmu tafsir*, Cetakan ke-4 (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2021), 381.



﴿عَنْ تِلْكَمَا الشَّجَرَةَ﴾ قلتُ والنكتة في المغايرة بكون اسم الإشارة هنا للبعيد وفيما مر من قوله ولا تقربا هذه الشجرة للقريب أن آدم وحواء قبل عصيانهما كانا قريين من الله ولما أكلا الشجرة وعصيا أمر الله تباعدا عنه فخاطبهما مخاطبة البعيد فكذلك كل مطيع قريب من الله قربا معنويا وكل عاص بعيده عنه بُعدا معنويا والله أعلم.<sup>29</sup>

The explanation above shows the linguistic analysis of the tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'īm*. Because to conclude the meaning of the word *tilkumā*, Thaifur uses nahwu analysis by departing from the benefits of using *isim isyarah*. Thaifur's research concludes that people who obey will be close to God in meaning, and everyone who disobeys will be far from God in essence.

### Counter-Narrative of Muktaẓilah in Tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'īm*

Muktaẓilah's thinking, heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, makes this group seem rational. For Muktaẓilah, sense is God's most precious gift and has great potential in understanding all things. By the sense God gave us, Muktaẓilah recognized the existence of good and evil that is rational.<sup>30</sup> The Muktaẓilah in Baghdad grew out of the radical skepticism of the Muktaẓilah.<sup>31</sup> This indicates that the Muktaẓilah school of theology is heavily contaminated and brainwashed by the Greek Philosophy school.

Muktaẓilah is known as *ahl al-tauḥīd wa al-'adl*. The meaning of *tauḥīd* is that God does not have properties because the existence of properties in God's Essence will undoubtedly lead to things that are equal to Him.<sup>32</sup> Thus, they negate all of God's attributes, except for the quality of *qidam*, because it is essentially God's Essence. This means that God is omniscient with His Essence, omnipotent with His Essence, and alive with His Essence, not with the attributes of knowledge, power, and life.<sup>33</sup>

The Muktaẓilah principle is often criticized by the Sunnis, who contradict their ideology. In the interpretation of *Firdaws al-Na'īm*, the use of the word Muktaẓilah, which Thaifur condemns in the understanding, highlights several themes, such as the absence of seeing God in heaven, God's obligation to do good and God's promises and threats.

<sup>29</sup> Thaifur Ali Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'īm Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Ayāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2 (t.k.: t.p., t.t), 301.

<sup>30</sup> Muhamad Ridwan Effendi, *Teologi Islam Potret Sejarah dan Perkembangan Pemikiran Mazhab Kalam* (Malang: Literasi Nusantara, 2021), 108.

<sup>31</sup> A. Kevin Reinhart, *Before Revelation: The Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought* (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), 33.

<sup>32</sup> M.M Sharif, *Aliran-Aliran Filsafat Islam: mu'tazilah, asy'ariyyah, mâturîdiyyah, thahawîyyah, zhahiriyyah, Ihwân al-shafa* (Bandung: Nuansa Cendekia, 2023), 11.

<sup>33</sup> 'Abd Al-Karīm Al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa An-Niḥal*, vol. 1 (t.k.: Muassasah Al-Halabi, t.t), 44.

### *Al-Tauḥīd*

The ideological principle of divinity is the most central point in theology. Because with the focus on god, one can be considered valid as a sect in their respective schools. The principle of *al-tauḥīd* occupies the first position in the structure of the basic tenets of Muktazilah. The notion of *al-tauḥīd* implies that God is truly One, and there is nothing like him. This understanding led the Muktazilah to the elimination of anthropomorphism. In the view of the Muktazilah, God is the One Essence, and there is nothing similar to him. Therefore, the Muktazilah also rejected the existence of attributes in God that have their form outside God's Essence.<sup>34</sup>

According to the Muktazilah, an attribute can be attached to another. So the attributes of *baṣār*, *samā'*, *qudrah*, and others are not attributes. Even the Muktazilah argued that the Qur'an is a creature because the Qur'an is a manifestation of God's words. At the same time, the Qur'an is formed and composed of various letters and words.<sup>35</sup> God's eternal nature is the only attribute specific to God, even though they originally negated that attribute. If there is any attribute of God other than the *qadīm*, God already has a partner.<sup>36</sup> The principle contains four main themes, namely *nafy al-ṣifāt*, *ta'wīl al-ṣifāt al-khabariyah* and *nafy al-ru'yahi*.<sup>37</sup> However, the criticism written by Thaifur only highlights one theme, namely *nafy al-ru'ya*.

The argument used by the Muktazilah departs from al-An'ām [6]: 103. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār, the word *idrāk*, when compared with the phrase *baṣār* will mean seeing God. Meanwhile, the verse indicates that God is invisible. In addition, the poem also contains praise for God's Essence, and removing the award is a form of subtraction for God. Subtraction is an attribute that cannot exist in God's Essence.<sup>38</sup> According to him, by adhering to the textual meaning of the Qur'an, he clearly states that God is invisible because the verse *lā tudrikuhu al-abṣār* already explains that God is indeed invisible.<sup>39</sup>

The commonsense of al-Zamakhshari, he says that God is invisible because sight always has a relationship with form and condition. When this is attached to God, it will create something new in God.<sup>40</sup> This is reinforced by al-'Arāf [7]: 143.<sup>41</sup> Thaifur

<sup>34</sup> Muhammad Hasbi, *Ilmu Kalam: Memotret Berbagai Aliran Teologi dalam Islam* (Yogyakarta: Trustmedia Publishing, 2015), 72.

<sup>35</sup> Nunu Burhanuddin, *Ilmu Kalam Dari Tauhid Menuju Keadilan* (Surabaya: Prenada Media, 2017), 106. Muktazilah's reasoning in this case is because the Qur'an was revealed in turn. This makes the Qur'an not *qadīm*. Because *qadīm* is something that is not preceded by nothing. See Al-Qāḍī 'Abd Al-Jabbār, *Sharh al-uṣūl al-khamsah* (Mesir: Maktabah Wahbah, 1996), 531.

<sup>36</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa An-Niḥal*, 1:45.

<sup>37</sup> 'Abd Al-Laṭīf, *Ta'thīr al-Mu'tazilah fi al-Khawārij wa al-Shī'ah* (Jeddah: Dār al-Andalus, 2000), 32.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Jabbār, *Sharh al-uṣūl al-khamsah*, 233.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Qāḍī 'Abd Al-Jabbār, *Tanzīh al-Qurān 'an al-Maṭā'in* (t.k.: Maktabah al-Nāfidhah, 2006), 159.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Zamakhshary, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Araby, 1987), 54.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Laṭīf, *Ta'thīr al-Mu'tazilah fi al-Khawārij wa al-Shī'ah*, 369.

criticizes the discourse of the absence of seeing God in heaven said by Muktaẓilah by stating his comments when interpreting al-An'ām [6]: 103:

هذا وقد تمسك بظاهر الآية قوم من اهل البدع وهم الخوارج والمعتزلة وبعض من المرجئة, فقالوا ان الله تبارك وتعالى لا يراه احد من خلقه وان رؤيته مستحيلة لهذه الآية ولان الرؤية تستلزم المقابلة واتصال أشعة بصر الرائي بالمرئي فيلزم ان يكون المرئي جسما وتعالى الله عن الجسمية ورد كلامهم بما تقدم وبأن هذا التلازم عادي لا عقلي ويجوز تخلف العادة.<sup>42</sup>

Thaifur begins his verse analysis by presenting the Sunni view that believers can see God in heaven. God can be seen using normative and ratio arguments. *First*, there is normative evidence indicating that God can be seen. The normative statement is built by analyzing the words *idrāk* and *abṣār*. Thaifur quotes the opinion of Ibn 'Abbās with the idea that God cannot be seen in the world and can be seen in the hereafter.<sup>43</sup> Apart from that, Thaifur also uses al-Qiyāmah [75]: 22 and 23, al-Muṭaffifin [83]: 15 as well as several opinions, including that of Imam al-Shaafi'i and traditions taken from Sahih Bukhari and Muslim.

*Secondly*, rationally, everything that exists can be seen. Therefore, if God exists, then God can also be seen. However, in addition to the simple analogy presented by Thaifur, he also uses the analogy of supposition that if only God could not be seen, then Prophet Moses would not have asked God.<sup>44</sup> Thaifur analogized as follows:

ان الله تبارك وتعالى علق رؤيته على استقرار الجبل وهو جائز والمعلق على الجائر جائز ومنها أنه لو كانت الرؤية ممتعة لما سأها موسى عليه السلام اذ لا يجوز على نبي سؤال المحال اذ هو جهل ويستحيل على النبي جهل ومنها ان يقال الله موجود فكل موجود يصح ان يرى فالله يصح ان يرى.<sup>45</sup>

Thaifur criticism is equal to that of other Sunni interpreters. For example, al-Bazdawi states that God can be seen without face-to-face circumstances.<sup>46</sup> In this case, al-Alūsi also commented on the opinion of the Muktaẓilah statement. He concludes that the verse *lā tudrikuhu al-abṣār* can mean absolute in general or at a specific time. al-Alūsi's analysis departs from linguistic analysis and some normative arguments from

<sup>42</sup> Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'īm Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, t.t, 1:237.

<sup>43</sup> Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'īm Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, t.t, 2:235.

<sup>44</sup> This case occurs in al-A'rāf [7]: 143. When Moses asked God to reveal His Essence, God told Moses to look at the mountain. The mountain referred to in this verse is Mount Tursina. In al-Khāzin's interpretation, the name of the mountain is Zabīr. See Shihāb Al-Dīn Al-Alūsi, *Rūḥ al-Ma'āni*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1994), 44. Alasman cannot see God because man's sight is incapable of seeing God. See Muḥammad Mutawallī Al-Sha'rāwī, *Tafsīr al-Sha'rāwī*, vol. 6 (t.k.: Maṭābi' Akhbār al-Yaum, 1997), 3514.

<sup>45</sup> Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'īm Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, t.t, 2:237.

<sup>46</sup> Muḥammad Al-Bazdawi, *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Mesir: Al-Maktabah al-Azhariyah, 2003), 83.

the hadith that are used as support for the ideas he builds. The conclusion of al-Alūsi states that God can be seen, with a special note in heaven later.<sup>47</sup>

Different from al-Rāzi, he interpreted the verse not using analysis like al-Alūsi. In the opening statement, al-Rāzi states that the poem *lā tudrikuhu al-abṣār* becomes the basis for God to be seen. Because the sentence contains praise to God, the award indicates the possibility of humans seeing God in the afterlife.<sup>48</sup>

### *Al-'adl*

The most crucial thing about Muktazilah's ideology is the form of God's justice to His creatures (*al-'adl*). The concept of God's justice comes in second after *al-tauḥīd* in the ideological structure used by the Muktazilah. This principle emphasized eliminating equating God with His creatures in all aspects. God, according to the Muktazilah, is a Deity that is not equal to all forms of human beings, including wrongdoing and vengeance. Muktazilah places responsibility for what humans do on themselves. This means that if humans do evil, then God will reward them with punishment, and if humans do good, then God will reward them with pleasure. With this concept of justice, the Muktazilah intended to purify God from the unworthy attributes of Him. God is just, and God cannot be unjust to His creatures.<sup>49</sup>

According to Muktazilah, God is said to be the creator of human work and gives the burden to carry out His commands and stay away from His prohibitions. Hence, God must provide rewards that are the rights of humans who obey Him. Likewise, God is obliged to punish humans who disobey because punishment is the right of those who violate it.<sup>50</sup> God's justice means that God does not will evil and does not create human actions. Humans can do and leave all forms of God's commands and prohibitions because God gives them the power.<sup>51</sup>

One of the concepts included in God's justice, according to the Muktazilah, is *al-ṣalāḥ wa al-aṣḥāḥ*, namely God's obligation to do good and best. According to Muktazilah, all the responsibilities that God must carry out are compiled in one obligation: God's obligation to do good to His creatures. God's commitment here includes all aspects of goodness that must occur in humans. The Muktazilah benchmark is viewed from the creation of nature in this world. According to him, God's purpose in creating character is for good, and there is wisdom directed at humans. Therefore, the existence of knowledge in creation means that there is an obligation that God must do, namely, doing good.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Shihāb Al-Dīn Al-Alūsi, *Rūḥ al-Ma'āni*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1994), 232.

<sup>48</sup> Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzi, *Mafātih al-Ghaib aw al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 13 (Beirut: Dār Ihayā' al-Turāth al-'Arabi, 2000), 98.

<sup>49</sup> Hasbi, *Ilmu Kalam: Memotret Berbagai Aliran Teologi dalam Islam*, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Tsuroya Kiswati, *Al-Juwaini Peletak Dasar Teologi Rasional Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Penerbit Erlangga, 2015), 146.

<sup>51</sup> Hasbi, *Ilmu Kalam: Memotret Berbagai Aliran Teologi dalam Islam*, 74.

<sup>52</sup> Kiswati, *Al-Juwaini Peletak Dasar Teologi Rasional Dalam Islam*, 152.

God created everything because there is wisdom and a particular purpose in it. God can't start without purpose because work done without purpose is foolish and futile. Therefore, God does things for two reasons: to benefit Him and others. Since God is the Most Holy, God can't benefit from His creation, but for it to benefit others.<sup>53</sup>

Thaifur's criticism of *al-salāh wa al-aṣlah* is the antithesis of a principle that is entirely incompatible with the Sunni school. Muktazilah states that God does not create evil because if God does, it means that God loves and likes that evil.<sup>54</sup> Thaifur's criticism is written when interpreting al-Mā'idah [5]: 1.

(إن الله يحكم ما يريد) من التحليل وغيره وهذا كالعلة لما قبله أي فالأحكام صادرة من الله على حسب إرادته فلا اعتراض عليه ولا معقب لحكمه وهذا يرد على المعتزلة القائلين بوجوب الصلاح والأصلح.<sup>55</sup>

Thaifur's argument clarifies that the Muktazilah principle of God's obligation to do good to His creatures is incorrect. Thaifur interprets the verse by stating that God is the creator of everything. No one can violate and oppose God's will, including God's creation, in terms of good and bad. So, according to Thaifur, evil and good are God's creations. Thaifur's argument is further strengthened when giving an interpretation to another verse, namely when Thaifur interprets al-An'ām [6]: 108:

(زينا لكل امة عملهم) من الخير والشر والطاعة والمعصية وفي هذه الآية دلالة على فساد مذهب القدرية والمعتزلة حيث قالوا لا يحسن من الله خلق الكفر وتزيينه.<sup>56</sup>

The interpretation becomes a supporting argument for the Sunni bias in the performance of *Firdaws al-Na'im* because the conclusion of Thaifur's analysis leads to all forms that exist in the world are God's creation, including goodness, badness, obedience, and even the sin that humans do. Even in the second statement, Thaifur tries to equate the ideology of Muktazilah with Qadariyah because the two groups have similarities in matters of thought. It is not uncommon for Muktazilah groups to be given other names, such as Qadariyah and Jahmiyah.<sup>57</sup> In addition, Thaifur supports his statement when interpreting al-A'rāf [7]: 178 with the following information:

(ومن يضل فأولئك هم الخاسرون) فالله هو الهادي المضل ولو كان الهدى البيان كما قالته المعتزلة لاستوى الكافر والمؤمن اذ البيان ثابت في حق الفريقين.<sup>58</sup>

In the last statement above, Thaifur clearly emphasizes the creation of good and evil, all from God. Because the essence of everything that exists is God's creation,

<sup>53</sup> 'Abd Al-Karīm Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyah al-Aqdam fī 'Ilm al-Kalām* (Mesir: Maktabah al-Thaqāfiyah, 2009), 390; Aḥmad Amīn, *Duḥā al-Islām* (Mesir: Muassasah Hindawi, 2018), 721.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Jabbār, *Sharh al-uṣūl al-khamsah*, 464.

<sup>55</sup> Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'im Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, t.t, 2:2.

<sup>56</sup> Wafa, 2:240.

<sup>57</sup> Aḥmad Amīn, *Fajr al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Araby, t.t), 287.

<sup>58</sup> Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'im Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Āyāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, t.t, 2:399.

this argument negates the existence of God's creation, which is only specialized in something good. Thus, from this, the guidance in people becomes the difference between believers and unbelievers.

This relates to the meaning of the word *al-zulm* in al-An 'ām [6]: 82. Sunni scholars interpret the word *al-zulm* with the meaning of shirk. Because to believe in God must be clean from *al-zulm*, which means shirk. That way, someone can only believe in God when the sense of shirk in his heart is no longer there.<sup>59</sup> Muktazilah has a different view in this regard. According to him, the meaning of the word *al-zulm* is sin,<sup>60</sup> and even the opinion that says the meaning of the word *al-zulm* is shirk; of course, this opinion is incorrect.<sup>61</sup>

The Muktazilah opinion is one of Thaifur's highlights. He states by presenting the Sunni side with the following statement:

وذهبت المعتزلة إلى أن المراد بالظلم في الآية المعصية لا الشرك بناء على أن خلط أحد الشيعيين بالآخر يقتضي اجتماعها ولا يتصور خلط الإيمان بالشرك لأنهما ضدان لا يجتمعان, وأجاب أهل السنة بأن الإيمان قد يجامع الشرك ويراد بالإيمان مطلق التصديق سواء باللسان أو بغيره وكذا إن أريد به تصديق القلب لجواز أن يصدق المشرك بوجود الصانع دون وحدانيته كما قال تعالى وما يؤمن أكثرهم بالله إلا وهم مشركون.<sup>62</sup>

In this case, Thaifur criticizes the statement of the Muktazilah, who says the meaning of the word *al-zulm* is sin. Muktazilah argued that shirk and faith cannot be gathered in one place.<sup>63</sup> Thaifur's opinion aligns with the scholars' explanation because there is harmony between Thaifur's statement and the Sunni mufasir who interpret the word *al-zulm* with the meaning of shirk.<sup>64</sup> According to him, shirk and faith can come together in one place. Because what is meant by religion is absolute justification, whether done by speech or otherwise. The same applies to polytheists who justify the existence of God even though they do not believe in Him.

Criticism of the principle of *al-ṣalāḥ wa al-aṣḥāḥ* has been done by medieval mufasirs, such as those of al-Alūsi and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzi. Although al-Alūsi and al-Rāzi criticism is not in the same verse as Thaifur. However, they criticize when interpreting the verse that offends the Muktazilah principle. The criticism of al-Alūsi exists when analyzing al-'Arāf [7]: 89 in verse *wasi'a rabbunā kulla shai'*. According to him, the opinion conveyed by al-Zamakhshari about the poem is incorrect because God

<sup>59</sup> Al-Rāzi, *Maḥāṭib al-Ghaib aw al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 2000, 13:49.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Jabbār, *Tanzīh al-Qurā 'an al-Maṭā'in*, 158.

<sup>61</sup> Al-Zamakhshari, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, 1987, 2:43.

<sup>62</sup> Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'im Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Ayāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, t.t, 2:213.

<sup>63</sup> Ismā'il bin Muḥammad bin Muṣṭafā, *Hāshiyah al-Qūnawī 'Ala Tafsīr al-Baiḍāwī*, vol. 8 (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2001), 174.

<sup>64</sup> Wahbah Al-Zuhāilī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Munīr fī al-'Aqīdat wa al-Syarī'at wa al-Manhaj* (Damaskus: Dār al-Fikr, 2009), 273.

is obliged to do good and even the best for His creatures with the impossibility of God wanting disbelief.<sup>65</sup> If so, it means that God has gone beyond the limits of the wisdom of every creation that God does.<sup>66</sup>

Al-Rāzi also made the same interpretation. According to al-Rāzi, God could have willed his creation to disbelief. The reason for al-Rāzi is that when man is returned and saved from doubt, God has kept him from punishment. However, if the faith in humans is created with the creation of servants, then the servant's salvation comes from himself, not from God, and will contradict God's words *ba'da idh najjānā allāh minhā*.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Al-wa'd wa al-wa'fīd***

The third of the five main principles of Muktaẓilah is the promise and threat of God. The meaning of *al-wa'd wa al-wa'fīd* is the information about the reward of good and the tip of bad done while in the world. So, the meaning of *al-wa'd* is God's promise to people who do good, and *wa al-wa'fīd* is God's threat to people who do wrong.<sup>68</sup> This principle is related to the second principle of Muktaẓilah, which is the justice of God. This means that God will be considered unjust if He does not keep His promise to reward those who do good and punish those who disobey Him.<sup>69</sup>

To Muktaẓilah, since God has given the burden and responsibility to humans to do His commands and stay away from His prohibitions, God must provide rewards and paradise for humans who obey His commands. God also must torture people who disobey and violate His orders because each of them is God's decree.<sup>70</sup> According to him, people who enter hell are people who are humiliated by God, although in the end, they are lifted and put into heaven.<sup>71</sup> This statement is written when the Muktaẓilah interpreted surah Āli 'Imrān [3]: 192. Even when interpreting the word *faqad akhzaytah*, al-Zamakhshari explains that the one who goes to hell will have no help and will have no intercession for him.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, those who go to hell must not be believers because believers can still receive appeal. Thaifur states his criticism with the following statement:

(فقد أخزيتَه) أي أهنته وأذلتته فالمراد بمن يدخل النار هنا الكافر وهو المهان المخزي لكونه دخلها خالدا فيها، أما المؤمن فدخوله فيها إنما هو لتطهير ذنوبه، وبهذا اندفع ما قيل إن هذه الآية تدل على أن من

<sup>65</sup> Al-Zamakhshary, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, 1987, 2:130.

<sup>66</sup> Al-Alūsī, *Rūh al-Ma'āni*, 1994, 5:6.

<sup>67</sup> Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzi, *Mafātīh al-Ghaib aw al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 14 (Beirut: Dār Ihayā' al-Turāth al-'Arabi, 2000), 316.

<sup>68</sup> Hasbi, *Ilmu Kalam: Memotret Berbagai Aliran Teologi dalam Islam*, 75.

<sup>69</sup> Harun Nasution, *Teologi Islam: aliran-aliran sejarah analisa dan perbandingan*, Cet. 5 (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia (UI-Press), 2016), 132.

<sup>70</sup> Kiswati, *Al-Juwaini Peletak Dasar Teologi Rasional Dalam Islam*, 146.

<sup>71</sup> Abū Ḥayyān Al-Andalusī, *Al-Baḥru al-Muhīṭ*, vol. 3 (Lebanon: Dār al-Fikr, 2018), 472.

<sup>72</sup> Al-Zamakhshary, *Tafsīr al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Araby, 1987), 455.

دخل النار كان مخزيا والمؤمن لا يخزي لقوله تعالى "يوم لا يخزي الله النبي والذين آمنوا معه" فوجب أن يكون كل من دخل النار لم يكن مؤمنا، وهذا قول المعتزلة وهو مردود بما قررناه.<sup>73</sup>

Thaifur's disagreement regarding people who enter hell must not be believers because even believers will still enter hell. However, believers enter them not to remain in them but to cleanse the sins they have committed while in the world. According to Thaifur, what is meant in the verse is only directed at unbelievers because only unbelievers will be eternal in hell. Thus, God's mercy is seen when He raises people from them to heaven. This statement is reinforced by Thaifur's criticism in another verse, namely when interpreting Ali' Imrān [3]: 16. He makes the following statement:

(فاغفر لنا ذنوبنا) إنجازا لوعدهك وفي ترتيب هذا السؤال على مجرد الإيمان دليل على أنه كاف في استحقاق المغفرة وفيه رد على المعتزلة حيث يقولون إن استحقاق المغفرة لا يكون بمجرد الإيمان.<sup>74</sup>

From the preceding statement, Thaifur seems to counter-narrate the ideology of *al-wa'd wa al-wa'd* Muktaẓilah because it does not follow Thaifur's ideology. Al-Alūsi also stated that surah Āli 'Imrān [3]: 192 is a repetition against the Muktaẓilah group by saying that only disbelievers are humiliated. At the same time, believers who enter hell are only limited to cleaning their sins.<sup>75</sup> Al-Rāzi's criticism is sharper than al-Alūsi and Thaifur; he criticized Muktaẓilah's opinion as weak. Another verse, namely al-Tahrīm [66]: 8, supports that God does not humiliate believers.<sup>76</sup>

From the criticisms of Thaifur, some things must encourage Thaifur to criticize the Muktaẓilah group. The thing that drives Thaifur, of course, will remain within the socio-cultural scope in which Thaifur grew up and wrote the interpretation. Because each interpretation is born from a different base, it also spawns additional analysis and interpretation. Here is a counter-analysis of Thaifur's narrative.

### Thaifur Ali Wafa's Theological Construction as a Confirmation of Sunni Identity

The themes that appear in the works of tafsir in Indonesia show the influence of various articles and discourses happening in Indonesia, one of which is about the address of classical Islamic theology. Historically, this theological contestation cannot be separated from the history of the development of Islamic scientific writing in the archipelago - including tafsir - which grew together with the introduction of Islam by scholars who had studied in the Middle East to the archipelago population. The interaction of Nusantara scholars with scholars in the Middle East gave birth to a

<sup>73</sup> Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'īm Bitawḍīḥ Ma'ānī Ayāt al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, t.t, 1:440–41.

<sup>74</sup> Wafa, 1:314.

<sup>75</sup> Shihāb Al-Dīn Al-Alūsi, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1994), 372.

<sup>76</sup> Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzi, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghaib aw al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, vol. 9 (Beirut: Dār Ihayā' al-Turāth al-'Arabi, 2000), 464.



process of response and scientific transition.<sup>77</sup> This transition also brought with it religious and ideological values. In turn, the theological Islam brought by these scholars was assimilated into the Nusantara's socio-culture. Thus, a typical Islamic teaching of the archipelago emerged that upholds local wisdom on the one hand and maintains Islamic law on the other. An understanding of Islam that dialogues with local culture through adaptation, acculturation, and selection.<sup>78</sup>

Thaifur Ali Wada also highlights this theological discourse in his work. The descriptions of Thaifur's interpretations in the previous discussion show his role in theological contestation in Indonesia. From the perspective of Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, Thaifur constructs his theology by placing the Muktaizilah school as a deviant school. This construction is manifested through Thaifur's criticisms of Muktaizilah's thought, which reflects Thaifur's tendency to maintain Sunni identity. This tendency cannot be separated from the cultural reality of Madura, which is still strongly influenced by Sunni ideology, as well as Thaifur's background factor as a tafsir writer.

*First*, cultural factors. Cultural identity in Madura is divided into three parts, namely pesantren, which is a symbol of traditional Islamic education heritage; NU, which is used as a pillar of Islamic organizations; and kiai, which is used as a religious symbol. Some of these components have a connection and can form a relationship between Islam and politics.<sup>79</sup> The Islamic typology of pesantren will be kept from the involvement of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) ideology as the basis of their creed because NU and Madura are a unity that cannot be separated, which ultimately, the Madurese community is dominated by NU.<sup>80</sup> The close attachment between the two even creates an anecdote that implies that religion for Madurese can be identified as NU.<sup>81</sup> Thaifur has also been involved in the management structure of NU<sup>82</sup> and even produced literary works, such as memorable poems devoted to NU.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, kiai are

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<sup>77</sup> Zainul Milal Bizawie, *Masterpiece Islam Nusantara Sanad dan Jejaring Ulama-Santri (1830-1945)* (Tangerang: Pustaka Compass, 2016), 418; Islah Gusmian, "Bahasa dan Aksara Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia dari Tradisi, Hierarki hingga Kepentingan Pembaca," *TSAQAFAH* 6, no. 1 (31 Mei 2010): 3, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v6i1.136>.

<sup>78</sup> Wahyudi Wahyudi, Eka Prasetiawati, dan Muhyidin Thohir, "Teologi Ash'ariyyah Dalam Tafsir Ulama Nusantara (Studi Ittihad I'tiqady dalam Tafsir Jâmi' al-Bayân min Khulâshah Suwâr al-Qur'ân Karya Muhammad bin Sulaimân)," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 28, no. 1 (29 Juni 2020): 72, <https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v28i1.6571>.

<sup>79</sup> Pribadi, *Islam, State and Society in Indonesia*, 29–50.

<sup>80</sup> Abd Hannan dan Zainuddin Syarif, "Konservatisme vs. Moderatisme: Kontestasi Pemikiran Keagamaan Kontemporer di Kalangan Ormas Islam Lokal di Madura, Indonesia," *Fikrah* 10, no. 2 (24 Desember 2022): 335, <https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v10i2.16475>.

<sup>81</sup> Nor Hasan, "Dinamika Kehidupan Beragama Kaum Nahdhiyin-Salafi di Pamekasan Madura," *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 8, no. 1 (25 Agustus 2014): 85, <https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2013.8.1.84-102>.

<sup>82</sup> Fadal, "Ortodoksi Tafsir Indonesia: Analisis Kitab Firdaus Al-Na'im Karya Thaifur Ali Wafa," 5.

<sup>83</sup> The poem written by Thaifur can be read in Rozzaaq Imam. See Rozzaaq Imam, "Syair NU Gubahan K.H. Thaifur Ali Wafa," *Aswaja Muda* (blog), 24 Januari 2021, <https://aswajamuda.com/syair-nu-gubahan-k-h-thaifur-ali-wafa/>.

placed in society's most essential and central position.<sup>84</sup> So, kiai have a crucial role in several domains of society.<sup>85</sup> Thaifur Ali Wafa has all three elements, as a pesantren figure, NU structural, and kiai. With such a close relationship, Thaifur created thoughts in his tafsir that firmly rejected things contrary to the ideology that became the cultural foundation of Madura. This shows how his ideological thinking is part of the theoretical debate and manifested in his involvement in organizations and works that support his beliefs.

In general, the thoughts brought by Thaifur have a significant leaning towards the ideology known as *ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*. Some views show Thaifur's doctrine, which adheres to the teachings of al-Ash'ary and al-Mātūrīdy.<sup>86</sup> The school of jurisprudence followed by Thaifur is on *madhāhib al-arba'ah*<sup>87</sup> (the four madhhabs), and the last tasawuf adopts more of al-Ghazālī's tasawuf.<sup>88</sup>

*The second* is the scientific genealogy factor. The intellectual genealogy factor is the construction of Thaifur's knowledge formed because of the scientific sanad and references used. Thaifur's scientific sanad, which has been educated with religious knowledge since childhood, has contributed significantly to the formation of his character. Thaifur learned much spiritual understanding, such as fiqh, tajweed, nahwu, and others. Thaifur also learned the basic science of creed from his father. Learning Tajweed and the Qur'an applied by his father is also a unity that cannot be separated. Thaifur also studied many classical books that are often studied in salaf pesantren, such as *matn al-ajrūmiyah*, *al-kafrāwi*, *mutammimah al-ajrūmiyah*, *matn safinah an-najā*, *matn sullamal-taufiq ilā mahabbatillāh ala al-tahqīq*, *qāidah al-'wām*, *risālah mukhtaṣarah fi 'ilm al-tauhīd* dan *bidāyah al-hidāyah*.<sup>89</sup>

While the scientific genealogy of Thaifur's father also has a very thick genealogy with Sunni ideology. Thaifur wrote in *manār al-Wafā* that after Kiai Ali Wafa studied in Madura, he continued to Jombang and looked directly at KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, the founder of Nahdlatul Ulama, ended his scientific journey in Mecca and studied with Sayyid Saḥīm Jamal al-Lail. Even after Kiai Ali Wafa returned to

<sup>84</sup> Ma'arif, *The history of Madura*, 127.

<sup>85</sup> Iik Arifin Mansurnoor, *Islam in an Indonesian World: Ulama of Madura* (Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1990), 335.

<sup>86</sup> Thaifur's theological school that follows Al-Ash'ary and Al-Mātūrīdy can be seen in his work entitled *aqaid saiket*. The book is written in Madurese and taught in the diniyah school at Pondok As-Sadād. In the introduction to the book of *qaid saiket*, Thaifur mentions that the authors of the science of tawhid are Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ary and Imam Abu Maṣṣūr al-Maṭūrīdy. See Thaifur Ali Wafa, *Aqaid Saiket* (t.k.: t.p., t.t), 1.

<sup>87</sup> In matters of fiqh, Thaifur mostly uses the school of al-Shāfi'i as the dominant school. This is evidenced by some of his fiqh works that discuss more of al-Shāfi'i fiqh, one of which is the book of *Bulghah al-Ṭullāb*. See Thaifur Ali Wafa, *Bulghah al-Ṭullāb* (t.k.: t.p., t.t).

<sup>88</sup> This claim is based on routine studies conducted every afternoon except Friday and Sunday after Asar which examines the book *Ihya' al-Ulūm al-Dīn*. According to Khalilullah, the adoption made by Thaifur because of al-Ghazālī's moderate thinking and can be accepted by the Madurese community. Khalilullah, "Tafsir Lokal di Era Kontemporer Indonesia: Studi Kasus Karya Thaifur Ali Wafa, Firdaws Al-Na'im," 59.

<sup>89</sup> Wafa, *Manār al-Wafā*, 24–25.

Ambunten, he founded an Islamic boarding school called *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*.<sup>90</sup>

After Thaifur went to Mecca to study, he also learned with Sunni scholars, such as Sheikh Ismā'il 'Uthmān al-Zain, where Thaifur settled. Sheikh Ismā'il 'Uthmān al-Zain's Sunni ideology is also formed with several basic books of faith that are not different from the majority of NU pesantren culture in Madura, such as the book of *aqīdah al-'awām*. In addition, Thaifur also studied with Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Mālīki, a strong opponent of the Wahabi people during his lifetime. He was known as someone who strongly rejected Wahabi teachings in Mecca then. He was also dismissed from teaching at Umm al-Qura by the Saudi kingdom because he considered the Sunni teachings he brought contrary to their ideology. One of the books written by Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Mālīki is the book of *mafāhim yajib an tuṣahhah*.<sup>91</sup> Which was written to refute the Wahabi doctrines of the time.

The genealogy of Thaifur's tafsir thought is also due to the book used as a reference guide that leads to Sunni theology. There are several sources of reference used by Thaifur when writing tafsir *Firdaws al-Na'īm*, namely *lubāb al-ta'wīl fi ma'āni al-tanzīl* by al-Khāzin (678 H/1279 M-741 H/1340 M), *hāshiyah al-ṣawī* by al-Ṣawī (1175 H/1761 M-1241 H/1825 M), *tafsir al-jailani* by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jailani (470 H/1077 M-561 H/1166 M), *tafsir mafātih al-ghaib* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzy (543 H/1150 M-606 H/1210 M), *tafsir rūh al-ma'āni* by al-Alūsi (1217 H/1802 M-1270 H/1854 M), *al-jāmi' li ahkām al-qur'an* by al-Qurṭūby (468 H/1093 M-567 H/1172 M),<sup>92</sup> *al-durr al-manthūr* karya al-Ṣuyūṭy (849 H/1445M-911 H/1505 M), *tafsīr al-qur'an al-adhīm* by Ibn Kathīr (701 H/1301 M-774 H/1373 M).<sup>93</sup> The influence of reference sources from Sunni interpretations used by Thaifur impacts the construction of Thaifur's thoughts, which tend to be Sunni-oriented.

In that case, all of his records tend to be the same as the books he uses as references, for example, when interpreting the meaning of the word *al-zūlm* in al-An'ām [6]: 82 which in the Sunni perspective will lead to the meaning of shirk. The interpretation of surah al-An'ām [6]: 103, which Muktazilah interprets textually and leads to the elimination of seeing God later in heaven, is also a construction of criticism by Thaifur because, in the Sunni perspective, God will be seen later.<sup>94</sup> The redaction written by Thaifur is almost the same as the reference book.

<sup>90</sup> Wafa, 159–66.

<sup>91</sup> The book of *Mafāhim Yajib an Tuṣahhah* is a work written by Sayyid Muhammad Alawi al-Mālīki that was intended because of the emergence of the wahabi movement in the city of Mecca. The book wants to prove and break down wahabi ideologies that lead to disbelief. For more details see Al-Sayyid Muḥammad, *Mafāhim an Tuṣahhah* (Beirut: Dār Kurub al-'Ilmiyah, 2009), 3–7.

<sup>92</sup> *Kuliah Umum Bedah Kitab Firdaus An Naim Karya Kh. Thaifur Ali Wafa 19 Januari 2023*.

<sup>93</sup> These two commentaries are quoted by Thaifur in his tafsir. See Wafa, *Firdaws al-Na'īm Bitawdīh Ma'āni Āyāt al-Qur'an al-Karīm*, t.t, 1:27, 41.

<sup>94</sup> See Al-Alūsi, *Rūh al-Ma'āni*, 1994, 4:232; Al-Rāzi, *Mafātih al-Ghaib aw al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 2000, 13:98; Al-Ṣawī, *Hāshiyah al-Ṣawī 'Alā Tafsīr al-Jalalain*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2006), 475.

تمسك بظاهر الآية قوم من أهل البدع ووهم الخوارج والمعتزلة وبعض المرجئة وقالوا: إن الله تبارك وتعالى لا يراه أحد من خلقه وإن رؤيته مستحيلة عقلا.<sup>95</sup>

The quote above shows that the interpretation of *Firdaws al-Na'im* is a tafsir taken from previous performances. When the interpretation he uses as a reference criticizes, it does not rule out the possibility that Thaifur's interpretation will also do so. Therefore, the construction of Thaifur's thought as an affirmation of Sunni identity must be distinct from the references he uses in his interpretation so that from these references, it can be an argument that is not in line with Thaifur's ideology.

## Conclusion

All of the above descriptions show that in the process of writing Qur'anic commentaries in Madura, there is a conflict of interest and a critical approach from the article's author to the ongoing religious reality. This can be exemplified by the comments given by Thaifur Ali Wafa in his work, *Tafsir Firdaws al-Na'im*, primarily related to Muktaẓilah thought, which includes sensitive issues such as the absence of seeing God in heaven (*nafy al-ru'ya*), God's obligation to do good (*al-ṣalāh wa al-aṣlah*), God's promises and threats (*al-wa'd wa al-wa'īd*).

Thaifur Ali Wafa's critique of Muktaẓilah thought reflects the profound influence of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* ideology. This ideology is the basis of Thaifur Ali Wafa's thinking and reflects the vital culture surrounding Madura and Thaifur Ali Wafa's intellectual origins. This indicates that a person's religious views are not only influenced by academic factors but also by the cultural factors around him and his scientific experience. All of the above descriptions show that in the process of writing Qur'anic commentaries in Madura, there is a conflict of interest and a critical approach from the article's author to the ongoing religious reality. This can be exemplified by the comments given by Thaifur Ali Wafa in his work, *Tafsir Firdaws al-Na'im*, primarily related to Muktaẓilah thought, which includes sensitive issues such as the absence of seeing God in heaven (*nafy al-ru'ya*), God's obligation to do good (*al-ṣalāh wa al-aṣlah*), God's promises and threats (*al-wa'd wa al-wa'īd*).

Thaifur Ali Wafa's critique of Muktaẓilah thought reflects the profound influence of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* ideology. This ideology is the basis of Thaifur Ali Wafa's thinking and reflects the vital culture surrounding Madura and Thaifur Ali Wafa's intellectual origins. This indicates that a person's religious views are not only influenced by academic factors but also by the cultural factors around him and his scientific experience.

These descriptions also show important significance in forming a picture of the complexity and diversity of Islamic thought in the Madura region. It also underscores the importance of the intellectual relationship between Nusantara Muslims and Middle

<sup>95</sup> Al-Khāzin, *Lubāb al-Ta'wīl fī Ma'ānī al-Tanzīl*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1994), 142.

Eastern scholars, who have played a central role in developing Islamic scholarly works in the archipelago, including Madura. The findings reveal that Islam in this region results from long-term intercultural interactions and intellectual exchanges that have taken place over centuries. What Thaifur Ali Wafa has done has provided a deeper understanding of the dynamics of religious thought in Madura, as well as illustrating the complexity of religious belief and providing an overview of the diverse intellectual history and religious thought in Indonesia, which remains an integral part of the academic and spiritual heritage in Madura.

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