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THE INFLUENCE OF ARABIC EXEGESIS ON ISRA'ILIYYAT NARRATIVES OF PROPHET ADAM IN MALAY TAFSIR AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract:

This study examines the influence of classical Arabic exegetical works on the incorporation of *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives into Malay tafsir literature, focusing on the narrative of Prophet Adam (pbuh) and its implications for Malay Muslims. It investigates how seminal Arabic tafsir texts—namely *Tafsir al-Baghawi*, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, *Tafsir al-Khazin*, and *Tafsir al-Jamal*—served as foundational references for Malay scholars in transmitting and adapting *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives related to the Quranic account of Prophet Adam. For document analysis, two primaries Malay tafsir works were selected: *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by Sheikh Abdul Rauf Singkel and *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* by Sheikh Muhammad Said bin Umar. These were supplemented by secondary sources from related books, articles, and online materials. Employing a qualitative, library-based research approach, this study traces the integration of *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives into Malay Quranic exegesis and evaluates the methodologies scholars use to engage with these narratives. The findings reveal that Malay interpreters adopt diverse strategies when incorporating *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives—from acceptance and reinterpretation to critical appraisal. While some *tafsir* works include these narratives as supplementary explanations, others rigorously examine their authenticity from an Islamic perspective. This study not only highlights the profound impact of Arabic exegetical traditions on Malay scholarship but also enhances our understanding of the intellectual transmission of Quranic interpretations across cultural and regional boundaries. Furthermore, it explores how *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives shape Malay Muslims' perceptions of prophetic stories and the authority of *tafsir*,

emphasizing the need for ongoing critical analysis to ensure the authenticity of Quran interpretation in contemporary Malay *tafsir* studies.

Introduction

The Holy Qur'an, revealed to the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), serves as the primary source of guidance for Muslims, alongside his sayings and teachings as preserved in the Sunnah. This foundational principle is rooted in a hadith of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), who stated:

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«تَرَكْتُ فِيكُمْ أَمْرَيْنِ لَنْ تَضِلُّوا مَا تَمَسَّكْتُمْ بِهِمَا كِتَابَ اللهِ وَسُنَّةَ نَبِيِّهِ»

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"*I have left two matters with you. As long as you hold to them, you will not go astray. They are the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet*". (*Muwatta' al-Imam Malik*, Book of *al-Qadr*, Chapter on *al-Nahy 'an al-Qaul bi al-Qadr*, Hadith 3)

In order to understand the meanings of the Qur'anic verses, Muslims rely on *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), which provides interpretive frameworks and explanations. The process of interpretating the Qur'an began during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), continued by his Companions (*Sahabah*), the Successors (*Tabi'in*), and subsequent generations of scholars (al-Dhahabi, 2000). These exegetical works were originally written in Arabic script and have been continued in other languages, including Malay, up to the present day (Ibrahim, 2013). Scholars in the Malay world were also active in these *tafsir* works, producing Qur'anic exegesis works in the Malay language, written in both *Jawi* or Romanised scripts (Ahmad, 2022). However, a number of these Malay *tafsir* works include *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives originating from Judeo-Christian traditions particularly in the elaboration of prophetic stories (Mohd Zabidi & Wan Abdullah, 2024). This raises an important question: to what extent have Arabic exegetical works influenced the inclusion of *isrā'īlīyyāt* in Malay *tafsir*?

This study explores the extent to which Arabic exegetical works have influenced the incorporation of *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives in Malay *tafsir* literature, with particular focus on the narrative of Prophet Adam (pbuh), the first prophet of Allah. It further discusses the implications of *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives for Malay Muslims. This study analyses the interpretation of verse 190 from *Surah al-Aʿraf* (7:190):

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﴿فَلَمَّآ ءَاتَىٰهُمَا صَٰلِحًا جَعَلَا لَهُۥ شُرَكَآءَ فِيمَآ ءَاتَىٰهُمَا ۚ فَتَعَٰلَى ٱللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ﴾

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"*But when He granted their descendants good offspring, they associated false gods in what He has given them. Exalted is Allah above what they associate (with Him)*!"

The interpretation of this verse has been linked to a story concerning Prophet Adam and his wife, Hawa, after the birth of their child. In *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* (al-Fansuri, 1951) and *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* (Umar, 1972), it is narrated that Iblis suggested naming their son ʿ*Abd al-Harith*, following a series of previous miscarriages. According to the narrative, Harith is

another name for Iblis, and the name of ʿAbd al-Harith gives the meaning "the servant of Iblis" was perceived as an act of *shirk* (associating partners with Allah). Additionally, the story includes descriptions of Adam and Hawa's fear that their unborn child might take the form of an animal, such as monkey, dog, or donkey. They prayed fervently for a complete and healthy child, hoping for a safe and natural delivery, rather than giving birth through unnatural means such as the eyes, mouth, or being extracted from the stomach. Upon being granted a healthy son, they allegedly named him ʿAbd al-Harith, thus succumbing to Iblis's suggestion, which is interpreted as an instance of *shirk* to Allah.

Literature Review

Previous studies have examined the presence of *isrāʾīlīyyāt* narratives in Quranic exegetical works, including their incorporation into Malay tafsir works such as *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* and *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan.*

Isrāʾīlīyyāt Narratives

The study of *isrāʾīlīyyāt* narratives in *tafsir* works has long been a subject of scholarly discussion, particularly in understanding how such narratives found their way into Qur'anic interpretation. These narratives were often used as supplementary sources to help Muslims comprehend the divine messages revealed in the Qur'an. According to Abu Shahbah (1988), *isrāʾīlīyyāt* originated from *Ahlu al-Kitab* (People of the Book), comprising *Yahudi* (Jews) and *Nasrani* (Christians) who converted to Islam during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his Companions.

As al-Dhahabi (2000) notes, the Companions occasionally referred to the words of the People of the Book when interpreting certain stories in the Qur'an, seeking further detail and clarification. However, their engagement with these sources was not uncritical, as they exercised an investigation to ensure authenticity. The transmission of *isrāʾīlīyyāt* narratives continued with the Successors (*Tabi'in*), who also incorporated such narratives from the People of the Book into their *tafsir* writings (al-Dhahabi, 2000). This exegetical activity extended into later Muslim scholarship, including the writing of Malay *tafsir* texts.

Categorization Of Isrāʾīlīyyāt Narratives

Prominent scholars such as Ibn Taimiyyah (1980), Abu Shahbah (1988) and Ibn Kathir (1999) categorized *isrāʾīlīyyāt* narratives into three types: those that are accepted (corresponds Islamic teachings), those that are rejected (contradicting Islamic principles), and those whose authenticity is unknown status or undecided between acceptance and rejection. These three classifications are regarded as a standard framework in the critical evaluation of *isrāʾīlīyyāt* narratives in Islamic scholarship, as shown in Figure 1 below:
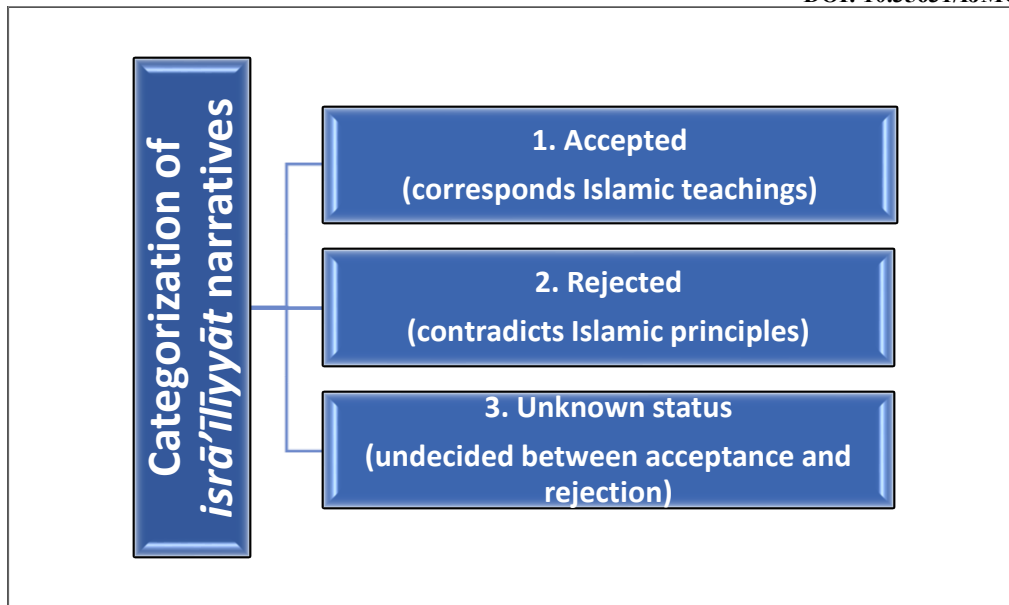
Figure 1: Categorization Of *Isrā'īlīyyāt* Narratives
Source: Ibn Taimiyyah (1980), Abu Shahbah (1988) and Ibn Kathir (1999)

Malay Tafsir Works

In the context of the Malay world, comprehensive Quranic exegetical activity encompassing all 30 juz began in the 17th century with *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* by Abdul Rauf al-Fansuri from Acheh, Indonesia. This was followed in the early 20th century by *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, authored by Muhammad Said bin Umar in Kedah, Malaysia. Both exegetical works were composed in Malay using the Jawi script (Nasir, 2021 & Ahmad, 2022). According to previous studies, these Malay *tafsir* works were significantly influenced by Arabic *tafsir* writings such as *Tafsir al-Baghawi*, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, *Tafsir al-Khazin*, and *Tafsir al-Jamal*. These Arabic exegeses served as primary sources in the transmission of *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives, particularly in the stories of prophets (Ibrahim et al., 2014 & Yusuf et al., 2018).

However, it has been observed that both *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* and *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* do not provide a comprehensive critique of the *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives incorporated within their commentaries (Ibrahim et al., 2014 & Yusuf et al., 2018). To investigate the extent to which the four aforementioned Arabic exegeses influenced these two Malay *tafsir* works, this study focuses on a specific narrative concerning Prophet Adam and Hawa, as interpreted in relation to verse 190 of *Surah al-Aʿraf*. According to Abdullah (2004), this particular story is classified as one of the rejected *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives for several reasons: (1) the *sanad* (chain of transmission) is weak and thus cannot serve as valid evidence (*hujjah*) (2) there is no authentic (*sahih*) hadith that narrates this story, and (3) the narrative contradicts the prophetic infallibility, which asserts that prophets are protected from any sin.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, library-based research approach. It focuses on two primary sources from Malay *tafsir* works, firstly, *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* written by Sheikh Abdul Rauf al-Fansuri and secondly, *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* written by Sheikh Muhammad Said bin Umar. These primary sources have been compared with four Arabic *tafsir* works, which are *Tafsir al-Baghawi*, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, *Tafsir al-Khazin*, and *Tafsir al-Jamal* to trace the influence of *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives related to Prophet Adam (pbuh). With regard to the

secondary sources, this study will be supported by scholarly books, journal articles, and online references. This study uses document analysis to explore how *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives are incorporated into Malay Quranic exegesis and examines the interpretative methods adopted by scholars in engaging with these traditions.

Results and Discussion

This study centres on the *isrā'īlīyyāt* narrative concerning Prophet Adam and Hawa as found in verse 190 of *Surah al-Aʿraf*. The following presents a comparative analysis of how this narrative is interpreted across four Arabic *tafsir* works and two Malay *tafsir* texts.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis between Six Tafsir Works

Tafsir	Narrative Elements	Contextual Interpretation	Use of I*srā'īlīyyāt*	Notable Features/ Commentaries
Tafsir al-Baghawi (1999) Volume: 2 Page: 258	Did not mention the narration from Samurah which was related to Satan's advice to name the child ʿ*Abd al-Harith*, but he cites generally without mention the narrator. In verse 189, he cites narrations from Ibn 'Abbas, al-Kalbi, and Ibn Zaid which were related to the story. Narrates from al-Hasan and Ikrimah that the *shirk* refers to all polytheists from Adam's descendants. Narrates from Ibn Kaisan, as he mentions that disbelievers were who named their children 'Abd al-Uzza, 'Abd al-Lat, and 'Abd al-Manaf.	Prophet Adam and Hawa committed shirk by naming their son ʿ*Abd al-Harith*, as suggested by Iblis. However, it was not *shirked* in worship, and Harith also was not the God. Naming with *al-Harith* as a reason for the child's survival and the safety of his mother. Adam remained *ma'sum* (infallible).	Yes, cites the detailed story of naming the child as suggested by Satan in previous verse 189.	Implies the naming act was influenced by satanic suggestion.

Tafsir al-Khazin (1994) Volume: 2 Page: 281	Cites the narration of Samurah in the interpretation of verse 189 that Iblis instructed Hawa to name the child *ʿAbd al-Harith*, and the child survived. Refers to Ibn ʿAbbas and Qatadah: the *shirk* was in naming, not worship. Cites from scholars generally: naming as *al-Harith* was linked to the child's survival and the mother's safety.	Mentions Adam's infallibility.	Yes, cites the detailed story of naming the child as suggested by Satan in previous verse 189.	Discusses Arabic grammar (*yushrikun*) indicating plural, not referring solely to Adam and Hawa.
Tafsir al-Jalalayn (n.d.) Page: 223	Also cites the narration of Samurah. The narration is graded *sahih*/authentic (*al-Hakim*) and hasan gharib/good-strange (*al-Tirmidhi*).	Naming the child was considered *shirk*, but not in worship, because Adam was *ma'sum* (infallible).	Yes, presents a narration that contain *isrāʾīlīyyāt* briefly.	Concise style, presents the event without detailed elaboration
Tafsir al-Jamal (1971) Volume: 3 Page: 154-155	Cites the narration of Samurah as what has been mentioned in *al-Jalalayn,* and also expands on *al-Jalalayn's* interpretation: Both Adam and Hawa fear that the pregnancy will be an animal, or the baby will die. Iblis deceives Hawa by claiming closeness to God and instructs her to name the child. Two views:	Cites different narration about *shirks*: (1) *Shirk* in attributing ownership (2) *Shirk* in naming the child.	Yes, includes different scholarly citations, from *al-Jalalayn* and *al-Khazin*.	Discusses Arabic grammar (*yushrikun*) such as citation from *al-Karkhi*: the *shirk* does not refer to Adam and Hawa, as the plural form suggests it pertains to others, indicating that these were two

				distinct narratives.
	(1) *Shirk* in attributing ownership of creation to Iblis, the child as a servant of Iblis. (2) *Shirk* in naming only, not worship. Cites from *Khazin*: Ibn ʿAbbas's saying that Iblis suggested to name the child as ʿAbd al-Harith after repeated loss.			
Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid (1951) Volume: 1 Page: 176	Cites narration from Samurah that Iblis came to Hawa to name her child ʿAbd al-Harith, and the child survived, inspired by a satanic suggestion. Quotes Jalaluddin's statement that the act was not *shirk* in worship and Adam was *ma'sum*.	Follows Arabic sources closely, by stating that Prophet Adam and Hawa committed *shirk* by naming the child ʿAbd al-Harith.	Yes, uncritical transmission from Arabic *tafsir* in the narration from Samurah. Lacks of critical analysis.	Uses certain words in narrating: *"(Kisah) Cetera daripada Samurah…"* which means "a story from Samurah".
Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan (1972) Volume: 2 Page: 110	Repeats the narration from Samurah by naming the child with Satan's advice. Quotes al-Hakim's grading the status of the hadith as *sahih*. Prophet Adam and Hawa made a *shirk* to Allah by naming their son ʿAbd al-Harith which means "the servant of Iblis" because	Naming a child ʿAbd al-Harith, which means "the servant of Iblis", is haram (prohibited). It is obligatory to correct such names, as servitude should be attributed only to Allah.	Yes, detailed incorporation of *isrāʾīlīyyāt* from the Arabic *tafsir*. Lacks of critical analysis.	Emphasizes the need to avoid using ʿAbd (servant) in a name referring to others besides Allah.

Harith is a name of Iblis. Asserts it was *shirked* in naming, not worship, and Adam was *ma'sum*.			

Source: *Tafsir al-Baghawi* (1999), *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (n.d.), *Tafsir al-Khazin* (1994), *Tafsir al-Jamal* (1971), *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* (1951), and *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* (1972).

Referring to the table, all *tafsir* works consistently mention the narrative concerning the naming of ʿAbd al-Harith. Their discussions primarily focus on the term *shirk* ascribed to Prophet Adam. However, this attribution is generally refuted by invoking the theological principle that prophets are *ma'sum* (infallible) and therefore protected from committing acts of disbelief. Both Malay *tafsir* works, *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* and *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* are consistent with the four Arabic *tafsir* texts in asserting that the *shirk* described in *Surah al-Aʿraf* (7:190) pertains not to divine worship, but solely to the matter of naming. Moreover, several of these *tafsir* works reiterate the view of Prophet Adam's infallibility to safeguard his prophetic status.

This raises a further question regarding the theological position of Hawa. Was she also implicated in the act of *shirk*? Interestingly, most *tafsir* texts do not address this directly. Nevertheless, some scholars approach the issue from a linguistic discussion, arguing that the word *yushrikun* (they associate partners) in the plural form does not specifically refer to Adam and Hawa. It is thus possible that the verse is referencing a different group of individuals or representing two distinct narratives.

To determine the authenticity of this narrative, its source must first be critically examined. All the authors refer to a single narration attributed to Samurah bin Jundub except *Tafsir al-Baghawi*. This narration was cited in *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*: (3077)

عَنْ سَمُرَةَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، قَالَ: «لَمَّا حَمَلَتْ حَوَّاءُ طَافَ بِهَا إِبْلِيسُ وَكَانَ لَا يَعِيشُ لَهَا وَلَدٌ، فَقَالَ: سَمِّيهِ عَبْدَ الْحَارِثِ، فَسَمَّتْهُ عَبْدَ الْحَارِثِ، فَعَاشَ، وَكَانَ ذَلِكَ مِنْ وَحْيِ الشَّيْطَانِ وَأَمْرِهِ».

هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ غَرِيبٌ، لَا نَعْرِفُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ حَدِيثِ عُمَرَ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَنْ قَتَادَةَ، وَرَوَاهُ بَعْضُهُمْ عَنْ عَبْدِ الصَّمَدِ وَلَمْ يَرْفَعْهُ) [حكم الألباني]: ضعيف

Narrated from Samurah, that the Prophet (pbuh) said: *"When Hawa became pregnant, Iblis came to her, and her children would not live (after birth). So, he said: Name him ʿAbd al-Harith. So, she named him ʿAbd al-Harith and he lived. So that is among the inspirations of Satan and his commands." This is a hadith hasan gharib (good-strange), we do not know it except through the narration of 'Umar ibn Ibrahim from Qatadah, and some narrated it from ʿAbd Samad without raising it (to the Prophet. Al-Albani's judgement: Dhaif (weak)*

This narration has been the subject of extensive discourse among Islamic scholars and Quranic interpreter. While some scholars have accepted the narration, others have strongly rejected it. Among those who rejected the narration is Ibn Kathir (1999). He emphasizes in his *tafsir* that the story originates from the People of the Book. Similarly, Abu Shahbah (1988) concurs with

Ibn Kathir's position, asserting that the narration is likely from the Companion's sayings, or maybe it was narrated from the People of the Book who converts to Islam, such as Ka'ab al-Ahbar, Wahb bin Munabbih, or others. Rashid Ridha (1990) also rejects the narration, categorizing it as strange and weak. He notes that the narration is detailed and lengthy, includes elements of myth and fabrication typically associated with *isrā'īlīyyāt* sources.

In response to the attribution of *shirk* to Prophet Adam and his wife Hawa, one relevant verse is found in *Surah al-Zumar*: 65.

﴿وَلَقَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكَ لَئِنْ أَشْرَكْتَ لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ وَلَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ ٱلْخَٰسِرِينَ﴾

It has already been revealed to you—and to those ˹prophets˺ before you—that if you associate others ˹with Allah˺, your deeds will certainly be void and you will truly be one of the losers.

This Quranic verse as a decisive affirmation of the impossibility of any prophet or messenger of Allah committing *shirk* (Al-Nasafi, 1998). *Shirk* is regarded as one of the major sins in Islamic theology. Although the verse is revealed in reference to prophets, its broader message is directed toward all of humanity in general (Hamoush, 2007). It serves as a profound warning that even if someone were to attain the highest levels of virtue, committing *shirk* would render all their deeds null and void (Al-Thabari, 2000 & Ibn 'Ashur, 1984). This underscores the centrality of *tawhid* (the oneness of Allah) in Islam and highlights the impossibility of prophets and messengers falling into such sin and error.

It appears that both Malay *tafsir* texts were influenced by, and likely referenced, the four aforementioned Arabic exegetical works. They narrate the same account involving the naming of Prophet Adam and Hawa's child as *'Abd al-Harith* and affirm the theological principle of Prophet Adam's infallibility. However, neither of the Malay *tafsir* provides a critical evaluation of the narrative's origin, whether it comes from *isrā'īlīyyāt* sources or not. Therefore, they do not engage in determining whether the narration should be accepted, rejected, or undecided between acceptance or rejection. A notable distinction is found in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, where the author explicitly warns against naming a child *'Abd* (servant) in reference to anyone other than Allah, despite the inclusion of this narrative was classified by some scholars as rejected *isrā'īlīyyāt* commentaries in the Quranic exegesis.

Conclusion and Recommendation

As a conclusion, this study demonstrates that the *isrā'īlīyyāt* narrative concerning Prophet Adam and Hawa in verse 190 of *Surah al-A'raf*, as cited in both *Tafsir Tarjuman al-Mustafid* and *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, originates from a narration attributed to Samurah, which appears consistently across all the *tafsir* works analysed. The influence of Arabic *tafsir* literature on Malay exegesis is evident through the transmission and replication of this narrative across different works.

A key implication of this finding is the need for increased scholarly and public awareness regarding the origins, authenticity, and theological implications of such narratives. This issue necessitates caution and clarification, particularly for the general Muslim community, as not all stories found in Quranic exegetical works should be accepted uncritically. There is a legitimate concern that some of these accounts may be derived from *isrā'īlīyyāt* narratives that

have been rejected by scholars for contradicting the Quran, authentic hadith, or fundamental Islamic belief such as the infallibility of the prophets. Certain *isrāʾīlīyyāt* narratives, particularly those containing fables and superstitions may influence Muslim thought, leading to misinterpretation and distortion of the divine message conveyed in the Quran.

As for recommendation, this study highlights the essential role of contemporary scholars, researchers, and Islamic institutions in conducting critical evaluations to preserve the authenticity of Quran interpretations, especially within the context of modern Malay *tafsir* literature.

Acknowledgement

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