

REVISITING TAṬAYYŪR: A DIALOGUE BETWEEN TRADITION AND
CONTEXT IN *TAFSIR AL-MISHBAH* THROUGH GADAMER'S
HERMENEUTICS

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of *taṭayyur* in the Qur'an as interpreted by M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, employing Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics as the analytical framework. The Qur'an rejects *taṭayyur* as a fatalistic belief that undermines human agency and emphasizes individual moral responsibility. Through *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, Shihab expands the meaning of *taṭayyur* by highlighting its social, psychological, and cultural dimensions, thereby addressing the real challenges faced by Indonesian Muslims who remain influenced by superstitious practices. By applying Gadamer's concepts of productive prejudice, effective history, and fusion of horizons, this research finds that Shihab's interpretation emerges from a dynamic encounter between classical exegetical tradition and the contextual needs of modern Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that Gadamerian hermeneutics provides a productive methodological approach to Qur'anic exegesis, as it enables an ongoing dialogue between the sacred text and contemporary social realities. This research affirms that a hermeneutic and contextual reading strengthens the Qur'an's message of rejecting

superstition, fostering optimism, and reinforcing moral responsibility in Muslim society.

Keywords: *taṭayyur*, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, *Quraish Shihab*, *Gadamerian hermeneutics*

Abstrak

Studi ini mengkaji konsep *taṭayyur* dalam al-Qur’an sebagaimana ditafsirkan oleh M. Quraish Shihab dalam *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, dengan menggunakan hermeneutika Hans-Georg Gadamer sebagai kerangka analisis. Al-Qur’an menolak *taṭayyur* sebagai keyakinan fatalistik yang melemahkan peran manusia dan menekankan tanggung jawab moral individu. Melalui *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, Quraish Shihab memperluas makna *taṭayyur* dengan menyoroti dimensi sosial, psikologis, dan kultural, sehingga tafsirnya mampu menanggapi tantangan nyata yang dihadapi umat Muslim Indonesia yang masih dipengaruhi praktik-praktik tahayul. Dengan menerapkan konsep prasangka produktif, sejarah efektif, dan fusi horizon dari Gadamer, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa penafsiran Quraish Shihab lahir dari pertemuan dinamis antara tradisi tafsir klasik dan kebutuhan kontekstual masyarakat modern Indonesia. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa hermeneutika Gadamer memberikan pendekatan metodologis yang produktif dalam penafsiran al-Qur’an, karena memungkinkan terjadinya dialog berkelanjutan antara teks suci dan realitas sosial kontemporer. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa pembacaan hermeneutik dan kontekstual memperkuat pesan al-Qur’an dalam menolak tahayul, menumbuhkan optimisme, serta memperkokoh tanggung jawab moral dalam masyarakat Muslim.

Kata Kunci: *Taṭayyur*, *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, *Quraish Shihab*, *Gadamerian hermeneutics*

Introduction

The phenomenon of *taṭayyur*—the belief in ominous signs derived from events, animals, or certain symbols—represents one of the superstitious practices deeply rooted in pre-Islamic Arab society. The Qur’an explicitly rejects this practice as it contradicts the principle of *tawḥīd*. This is evident, for instance, in the accounts of people who rejected their messengers, accusing them of bringing misfortune (Q 36:18–19), and in the narrative of the Children of Israel who attributed their calamities to Moses (Q 7:131).¹ Nevertheless, in contemporary Muslim societies, various forms of modern *taṭayyur* continue to persist, whether in popular beliefs, cultural symbolism, or everyday practices often normalized as common sense.² This continuing phenomenon highlights

¹ Qur’an 36:18–19; Qur’an 7:131.

² Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 150–160.

the urgency of revisiting the Qur’anic perspective on *taṭayyur* within the framework of contemporary contexts.

One of the most influential contemporary exegetical works addressing the relevance of the Qur’an for present-day readers is Tafsir al-Mishbah, authored by M. Quraish Shihab.³ More than a linguistic or historical commentary, this tafsir seeks to connect the Qur’anic message with the socio-cultural realities of modern Indonesian society. In his interpretation of verses concerning *taṭayyur*, Shihab emphasizes that attributing misfortune to external persons or events is essentially a form of scapegoating.⁴ He further argues that misfortune arises from human attitudes and actions rather than from mythical or supernatural causes.⁵ Thus, Shihab reframes the notion of *taṭayyur* from a purely theological prohibition into a social critique of a mentality prone to externalizing responsibility.

To critically examine the hermeneutical dynamics within Tafsir al-Mishbah, this study employs Hans-Georg Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics as its analytical framework. Gadamer argues that textual understanding is always mediated by *prejudice* (*Vorurteil*), shaped by *effective history* (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), and achieved through a *fusion of horizons* (*Horizontverschmelzung*) between the text, tradition, and interpreter.⁶ Applying this framework allows Shihab’s interpretation of *taṭayyur* to be read as a dialogical engagement between the Qur’anic text, the exegetical tradition, and the socio-historical horizon of modern Indonesian society.

Academic studies on *taṭayyur* and its exegetical dimensions may be grouped into several trends. First, philological and semantic studies that trace the lexical root *ṭ-y-r* within the Qur’an and early Arabic sources.⁷ Second, theological-hadith inquiries that address the prohibition of *taṭayyur* in relation to the principle of *tawhīd*, as widely discussed in hadith literature on *ṭiyarah*.⁸ Third, anthropological-sociological studies that examine superstitious practices among Muslim communities, particularly within Malay-Indonesian cultural contexts.⁹ Meanwhile, Gadamer’s hermeneutics has been applied in Qur’anic studies in diverse ways, such as Nashihin and Wahyu Hidayati (2022) on Q 96 (al-‘Alaq),¹⁰ Amru Ghozali and Umi Kalsum (2021) on revitalizing

³ M. Quraish Shihab, Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an, 15 vols. (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2001).

⁴ M. Quraish Shihab, Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an, Vol. 11 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2001), 244–246.

⁵ M. Quraish Shihab, Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an, Vol. 5 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2001), 111–112.

⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 269–306.

⁷ Abu Ja’far al-Ṭabari, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 23 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1968).

⁸ Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, *al-Jāmi’ al-Ṣaghīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1990), 240.

⁹ Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global dan Lokal* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002).

¹⁰ Nashihin and Wahyu Hidayati, “Tafsir QS. al-‘Alaq dengan Hermeneutika Gadamer,” *Al-Hikam: Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 12, no. 2 (2022).

classical exegetical methods,¹¹ and Nikmal ‘Abdu (2019) on contextualizing the concept of leadership in Q 12:55.¹²

However, no study to date has specifically examined the concept of *taṭayyur* in Tafsir al-Mishbah through the lens of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. Existing scholarship has largely focused on methodological discussions of Tafsir al-Mishbah in general or on applying Gadamer’s hermeneutics to other exegetical themes.¹³ This research gap provides the opportunity for a more focused and dialogical exploration.

This study is unique in three respects. First, the object of analysis is the notion of *taṭayyur* in Tafsir al-Mishbah, thus narrowing the focus compared to broader works on contemporary tafsir. Second, the analytical framework is Gadamer’s hermeneutics, which enables a dialogical reading between the Qur’anic text, the exegetical tradition, and modern Indonesian contexts. Third, the academic contribution of this research lies in shifting the study of *taṭayyur* from a normative-prohibitive approach toward a hermeneutical, dialogical, and transformative engagement.

Accordingly, this article seeks to revisit the concept of *taṭayyur* in Tafsir al-Mishbah through the lens of Gadamer’s hermeneutics, producing an interpretation that is contextually relevant while remaining rooted in the Qur’anic tradition.

Taṭayyur in the Qur’an

Etymological Meaning and the Pre-Islamic Arab Cultural Background

The term *ṭiyarah* (الطَيْرَة) derives from the root word *ṭayr* (طير), which literally means “bird.” In pre-Islamic Arab society, birds were not merely ordinary creatures but were also regarded as symbols of supernatural signs related to fortune and misfortune. When a bird was released and flew to the right, it was interpreted as a sign of good fortune; conversely, if it flew to the left, it was perceived as an omen of misfortune.¹⁴ This practice, known as *‘iyā fah* or *taṭayyur*, functioned as a means of “divination” or fortune-telling.

Moreover, the root *ṭayr* in the Qur’an undergoes a semantic development. At times, it denotes “birds” in the literal sense, such as in Q. al-Fīl [105]: 3, while in the context of *taṭayyur* verses, it conveys metaphorical meanings such as “fate,” “deeds,” or “destiny” attached to human beings.¹⁵ Thus, the Qur’an employs the same lexical root to signify two horizons of meaning: first, the pre-Islamic cultural phenomenon of belief in omens derived from birds; and second, a metaphorical sense referring to the moral consequences of human actions.

¹¹ Amru Ghozali and Umi Kalsum, “Hermeneutika Gadamer dan Revitalisasi Metode Tafsir Klasik,” *Dialogia: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Sosial* 19, no. 1 (2021).

¹² Nikmal ‘Abdu, “Penafsiran QS. Yusuf 55 dengan Hermeneutika Gadamer” (Undergraduate Thesis, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, 2019).

¹³ Islah Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsir Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2013), 215–230.

¹⁴ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Juz XIII, h. 122.

¹⁵ al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur’ān*, h. 308.

For pre-Islamic Arabs, belief in *taṭayyur* served as a psychological mechanism for explaining misfortunes. Instead of assuming personal responsibility, they projected the cause onto external mystical signs. In this way, *taṭayyur* was not merely a form of superstition but also contained socio-psychological dimensions: a mechanism of “shifting blame outward” as a means of avoiding responsibility.¹⁶

Qur’anic Verses on *Taṭayyur*

1. Q.S. Yā Sīn [36]: 18–19

قَالُوا إِنَّا تَطَيَّرْنَا بِكُمْ لَئِن لَّمْ تَنْتَهُوا لَنَرْجُمَنَّكُمْ وَلَيَمَسَّنَّكُم مِّنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ . قَالُوا طَائِرُكُمْ مَعَكُمْ إِنَّ دُكْرَكُمْ بِان
أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ

Translation: They said, “Indeed, we consider you a cause of misfortune. If you do not desist, we will surely stone you, and a painful punishment will certainly touch you from us. They said, “The misfortune is upon yourselves. Is it because you were reminded? Rather, you are a transgressing people.”

This passage narrates the dialogue between the messengers and the inhabitants of the city (*aṣḥāb al-qaryah*). After rejecting the prophetic message, the people accused the messengers of bringing misfortune (*innā taṭayyarnā bikum*). The messengers replied firmly: *ṭā ’irukum ma’akum*—“your misfortune lies within yourselves.”¹⁷

The phrase *ṭā ’irukum ma’akum* has been the subject of extensive exegetical debate. According to al-Ṭabarī, it indicates that the people’s adversity or ill fate was the direct result of their own deeds, not of the messengers.¹⁸ Ibn Kathīr reinforces this interpretation by citing the Prophet’s saying: *lā ṭiyarata wa khayruhā al-fa’l* (“There is no [superstitious] omen, and the best is optimism”).¹⁹ In this way, the Qur’an transforms mystical claims into ethical responsibility: misfortune is tied to human actions, not to external omens.

2. Q.S. al-A’rāf [7]: 131

فَإِذَا جَاءَهُمُ الْحَسَنَةُ قَالُوا لَنَا هَذِهِ وَإِنْ تُصِيبُهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَطَّيَّرُوا بِمُوسَىٰ وَمَنْ مَعَهُ أَلَا إِنَّمَا طَائِرُهُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنَّ
أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

Translation: So when good comes to them, they say, “This is ours.” But if evil touches them, they ascribe it to Moses and those with him. Know that their “bad omen” is only with Allah, but most of them do not understand.

¹⁶ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’an* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), h. 226–227.

¹⁷ Al-Qur’an, Q. Yā Sīn [36]: 18–19.

¹⁸ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān fī Ta’wīl al-Qur’ān*, Vol. 20 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1992), 493.

¹⁹ Ismā’īl ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*, Vol. 6 (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1999), 565. See also al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Ṭibb, 5754.

The Israelites are portrayed as having a dual mentality: when blessed with prosperity, they claimed it as the result of their own efforts, yet when struck with calamity, they attributed it to Moses and his followers.

Al-Rāzī interprets this verse as an act of *juhūd* (denial), since they acknowledged blessings as their own doing while blaming others for misfortunes.²⁰ In modern psychological terms, this reflects an *external locus of control*, in which individuals deny personal accountability and ascribe responsibility to outside forces.

3. Q.S. al-Isrā’ [17]: 13

وَكُلَّ إِنْسَانٍ أَلْزَمْنَاهُ طَبْعَهُ فِي عُنُقِهِ وَنُخْرِجُ لَهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كِتَابًا يَلْقَاهُ مَنْشُورًا

Translation: And We have fastened every man's deeds to his neck, and on the Day of Resurrection, We shall bring out for him a book which he will find wide open.

This verse introduces the concept of *ṭā’ir* as the deeds inherent in every individual: *wa kulla insānin alzamnāhu ṭā’irahū fī ‘unuqih* (“We have fastened every person’s destiny to his neck”). Here, *ṭā’ir* is no longer understood literally as “bird,” but as a metaphorical symbol for the moral record that accompanies each individual.²¹

According to al-Marāghī, *ṭā’ir* in this verse signifies the “record of deeds,” so that human happiness or misery stems from one’s own actions rather than external factors.²²

From these three verses, it is evident that the Qur’an redefines the notion of *ṭayr/ṭiyarah*, transforming it from a mythological superstition into a theological-ethical principle. *Taṭayyur* is not merely an individual belief in omens but a collective mentality: blaming external factors when faced with misfortune and evading personal responsibility for one’s own errors.

Table 1: Qur’anic Ethical Reorientation of *Taṭayyur*

Verse	Qur’anic Emphasis	Ethical-Theological Principle
Q.S. Yā Sīn [36]:19	Misfortune does not arise from the presence of prophets or external signs, but from arrogance and denial.	Human adversity is rooted in one’s own rejection and pride, not in omens.
Q.S. al-A’rāf [7]:131	The tendency to blame others reflects denial and ingratitude.	Scapegoating is condemned; recognition of divine justice is required.
Q.S. al-Isrā’ [17]:13	Every individual bears full responsibility for his or her own	Accountability for one’s destiny rests entirely on personal actions.

²⁰ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib al-Ghayb*, Vol. 14 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 92.

²¹ Al-Qur’an, Q. al-Isrā’ [17]: 13.

²² Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī, *Tafsīr al-Marāghī*, Vol. 15 (Cairo: Maṭba’at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1946), 110.

	deeds, which are inseparably bound to the self.	
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Taṭayyur in the Tafsīr Tradition

The discussion of the concept of *taṭayyur* within the tafsīr tradition constitutes a crucial aspect of understanding how the Qur’an has been read and interpreted throughout Islamic history. This concept—rooted in the pre-Islamic *jāhiliyyah* culture of believing in bad omens signified by the flight of birds or other phenomena—received diverse responses from exegetes across different periods. Such responses illustrate how the historical and epistemological horizons of exegetes shaped their understanding of the Qur’anic text. Accordingly, the tafsīr tradition on *taṭayyur* can be divided into three major periods: classical, medieval, and modern. Each period presents exegetical tendencies that not only uncover the meaning of the text but also reflect the intellectual, social, and religious struggles of their times.

1. Classical Tafsīr: Taṭayyur as Shirk and Superstition

In the classical period, exegetes placed *taṭayyur* within a strict theological framework. Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), in his *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, interpreted Q. Yā Sīn [36]:18–19 by emphasizing that the people’s statement “*Innā taṭayyarnā bikum*” (“Indeed, we consider you a bad omen”) was a false accusation directed at the messengers. He explained that the phrase *ṭā’irukum ma‘akum* (“your destiny lies with you”) affirms that human misfortune arises from their own deeds rather than from the presence of the prophets themselves.²³ In this way, classical exegesis treated *taṭayyur* as evidence of *jāhiliyyah* polytheism that must be corrected.

Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), in his *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, reinforced this stance by invoking the prophetic tradition. He cited the Prophet’s saying: “*Lā ṭiyarata wa khayruhā al-fā’l*” (“There is no *ṭiyarah*, but rather good optimism”).²⁴ This hadith was employed as proof that all forms of belief in bad omens are void. Ibn Kathīr stressed that calamity stems from God’s decree and human action, not from external symbols associated with misfortune.

Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), in his *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, adopted a juridical perspective, declaring that *taṭayyur* constitutes a form of hidden shirk (*shirk khafī*).²⁵ For him, belief in omens is not only epistemologically flawed but also theologically reprehensible. The implication of classical tafsīr, therefore, was the formation of an orthodox framework in Islam that categorically rejected superstition and mythical beliefs inherited from *jāhiliyyah*.

²³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1956), vol. 19, 121.

²⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifa, 1997), vol. 6, 565.

²⁵ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1967), vol. 15, 42.

2. Medieval Tafsīr: Ethical and Psychological Dimensions

In the medieval period, tafsīr developed under the influence of philosophy and rational theology. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), in his *Mafāṭīḥ al-Ghayb*, interpreted Q. al-A'rāf [7]:131—which narrates Pharaoh's people accusing Moses of bringing misfortune—by stressing that *taṭayyūr* arises from the human tendency to scapegoat external factors in times of calamity.²⁶ According to al-Rāzī, *taṭayyūr* represents a form of *wahm* (delusion) and *takhayyul* (illusion) that contradicts sound reason.

Furthermore, al-Rāzī connected *taṭayyūr* to human psychology. He noted that humans are inclined to accept praise when enjoying blessings but are reluctant to take responsibility when facing adversity.²⁷ Thus, *taṭayyūr* reflects a moral and psychological weakness rather than merely a theological error. This interpretation marked a significant shift: from focusing primarily on shirk to addressing ethical and psychological problems.

Al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), in his *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, reinforced al-Rāzī's view by stating that attributing misfortune to prophets was merely a pretext to reject their message.²⁸ This interpretation highlighted the sociological dimension of *taṭayyūr*: it functioned as a tool to deny prophetic authority. Hence, medieval tafsīr expanded the discourse by incorporating ethical, psychological, and sociological perspectives.

3. Modern Tafsīr: Rational-Sociological Approach

In the modern period, interpretations of *taṭayyūr* shifted further in line with the reformist agenda of Islamic thought. Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) and his disciple Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), in their *Tafsīr al-Manār*, regarded *taṭayyūr* as a symbol of collective ignorance that hindered the progress of the Muslim community. They interpreted Q. al-Isrā' [17]:13 as reinforcing the principle of individual responsibility, asserting that a person's deeds cling to him as inseparably as a shadow.²⁹ In this framework, *taṭayyūr* was rejected not only because it contradicted monotheism (*tawḥīd*) but also because it fostered a fatalistic mentality.

Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, emphasized the sociological dimension of *taṭayyūr*. For him, *taṭayyūr* represented a collective mentality that weakened societal resilience.³⁰ He insisted that communities must sever ties with mystical symbols and instead turn to concrete action as the determinant of destiny. This interpretation aligned with his vision of Islamic activism.

²⁶ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafāṭīḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1999), vol. 14, 106.

²⁷ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafāṭīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 14, 107.

²⁸ Al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrūr al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998), vol. 3, 215.

²⁹ Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1990), vol. 15, 32.

³⁰ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2004), vol. 5, 3015.

In Indonesia, Hamka (d. 1981), in his *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, strongly criticized belief in bad omens. He argued that the mentality of *taṭayyur* is a remnant of superstition that contradicts the rational and progressive spirit of modern Islam.³¹ Hamka underscored optimism and hard work as the principal antidotes to a culture of superstition.

4. Comparative Analysis

From the three periods, it becomes evident that there is a significant epistemological and contextual development in the understanding of *taṭayyur*.

- A. Classical exegesis emphasized the theological dimension, focusing on the prohibition of shirk and superstition.
- B. Medieval exegesis shifted towards ethical–psychological concerns, highlighting human moral weaknesses.
- C. Modern exegesis stressed rational–sociological aspects, viewing *taṭayyur* as a fatalistic culture that hinders progress.

Nevertheless, each exegetical approach remained bound to its own historical horizon: classical tafsīr was shaped by the need to preserve doctrinal orthodoxy; medieval tafsīr by philosophical and theological debates; and modern tafsīr by reformist agendas and anti-colonial struggles.

This comparison can be summarized in the following table:

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of *Taṭayyur* in Tafsīr Tradition

Period	Main Approach	Key Exegetes	Core Interpretation of <i>Taṭayyur</i>	Historical Context
Classical	Theological	al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī	Considered as shirk and superstition (<i>khurāfāt</i>); calamities stem from human deeds and divine decree, not omens.	Preservation of doctrinal orthodoxy and purification from pre-Islamic practices.
Medieval	Ethical–Psychological	Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Bayḍāwī	Defined as delusion (<i>wahm</i>) and illusion (<i>takhayyul</i>); reflects human tendency to scapegoat external factors; highlights moral weakness.	Engagement with philosophy and rational theology (<i>kalām</i>).
Modern	Rational–Sociological	Muḥammad ‘Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā,	Viewed as collective ignorance and fatalism; rejected for	Reformist Islam, anti-colonialism, and

³¹ Hamka, *Tafsīr al-Azhar* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1982), vol. 6, 413.

		Sayyid Quṭb, Hamka	hindering social progress; emphasis on optimism, responsibility, and activism.	modernist discourse.
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This comparative mapping illustrates the dynamic hermeneutical shifts across time, opening a pathway to employ philosophical hermeneutics—such as Hans-Georg Gadamer’s horizon-fusion approach—to bridge the Qur’anic text with contemporary readers.

Taṭayyur in Tafsīr al-Mishbah

Tafsīr al-Mishbah by M. Quraish Shihab is one of the most influential contemporary Qur’anic exegeses in the Muslim world, particularly in Indonesia. Written in the context of a modern and complex society, this tafsīr seeks to present the Qur’an as relevant to social, cultural, and intellectual life. Within this framework, the concept of *taṭayyur* receives special attention, given that this phenomenon persists in modern forms such as belief in unlucky symbols, mystical practices, and a fatalistic mentality that weakens social resilience. Hence, Quraish Shihab’s interpretation of *taṭayyur* in *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* can be understood as an effort to contextualize the Qur’an’s message within the dynamics of contemporary Indonesian Muslim society.

1. The Concept of Taṭayyur according to Quraish Shihab

In *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*, Shihab discusses the concept of *taṭayyur* through key verses such as Q. Yā Sīn [36]: 18–19, Q. al-A’rāf [7]: 131, and Q. al-Isrā’ [17]: 13. He emphasizes that *taṭayyur* is not merely a belief in bad omens but rather a reflection of human attitudes toward life.³² According to Shihab, the statement of the opponents of the prophets, who accused them of bringing misfortune, reveals a human tendency to shift responsibility for calamities onto external factors.³³

On Q. Yā Sīn [36]: 18–19, Shihab interprets the people’s claim—“We consider you an ill omen”—as a form of rejection of prophetic teachings.³⁴ The prophets’ reply, “Your fate is with yourselves,” signifies that human actions ultimately determine their own lives. For Shihab, this message is profoundly relevant to modern society: personal responsibility is the foundation of progress, and the mentality of blaming external factors must be abandoned.

³² M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 302.

³³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 304.

³⁴ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 306.

2. Moral and Social Dimensions in *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*

Quraish Shihab does not only approach *taṭayyūr* from a theological perspective but also highlights its moral and social dimensions. He explains that *taṭayyūr* reflects moral weakness: an unwillingness to accept responsibility, a tendency to scapegoat others, and an incapacity to confront the realities of life.³⁵ Thus, his tafsīr shifts the understanding of *taṭayyūr* from a matter of creed to an issue of social ethics.

In the context of Q. al-A‘rāf [7]: 131, Shihab notes that Pharaoh’s people associated misfortune with Moses and his followers. He views this as evidence of a fragile collective mentality, one that constantly seeks scapegoats when faced with adversity.³⁶ For him, this phenomenon remains relevant in the modern era, where societies often blame others—individuals, groups, or political structures—for suffering rather than engaging in self-reflection.

Shihab underscores the importance of optimism as the antithesis of *taṭayyūr*. He interprets the Prophet’s saying, “*There is no ṭiyarah, but rather optimism*”, as a call for Muslims to cultivate a positive and productive mentality.³⁷ Thus, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* asserts that combating *taṭayyūr* entails fostering an ethic of optimism, diligence, and responsibility.

3. Contextual Relevance in Indonesia

One of the distinctive features of *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* is its effort to link the Qur’an’s meanings with the Indonesian context. Quraish Shihab acknowledges that local culture remains laden with superstitions, divination, and mystical beliefs often rooted in *taṭayyūr* mentalities.³⁸ He argues that such cultural patterns can hinder national progress, as they perpetuate passivity and fatalism.

In this regard, Shihab presents the Qur’an as a project of deconstructing superstitious traditions. He emphasizes that the success or failure of a nation is not determined by supernatural signs but by hard work, education, and collective morality.³⁹ Thus, his tafsīr functions as a form of social critique against societies still bound by unproductive supernatural beliefs.

Furthermore, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* seeks to internalize modern values such as rationality, optimism, and personal responsibility within the exegetical framework. Consequently, Shihab’s reading of *taṭayyūr* can be viewed as part of the broader project of modernizing Islamic understanding in Indonesia.

³⁵ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 310.

³⁶ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an*, vol. 5 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 112.

³⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 315; see also Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Ṭiyarah, 2224.

³⁸ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an*, vol. 12 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 25.

³⁹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an*, vol. 12 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 27.

4. Comparative Analysis with Previous Tafsīr

Compared with classical and medieval tafsīr, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* presents several distinctive features. First, unlike classical tafsīr which emphasized theological and *shirk*-related dimensions, Shihab highlights the moral and social aspects of *taṭayyūr*. Second, unlike medieval tafsīr which stressed psychological aspects, Shihab underscores personal and collective responsibility as the Qur'an's central message. Third, unlike modern tafsīr which often took a polemical stance against superstition, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* adopts a more communicative and contextual educational approach.

Accordingly, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* can be seen as a bridge between tradition and modernity. While rooted in the classical rejection of *shirk*, it also incorporates modern emphases on rationality and responsibility. This makes *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* unique within the corpus of contemporary tafsīr, especially in the non-Arab Muslim world.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutical Analysis of the Concept of *Taṭayyūr* in Tafsīr al-Mishbah

Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1900–2002) philosophical hermeneutics stands as one of the most significant contributions to twentieth-century philosophy, particularly in the field of textual interpretation. His magnum opus, *Wahrheit und Methode (Truth and Method)*, rejects the notion that understanding can be achieved through a neutral and objective scientific method.⁴⁰ For Gadamer, understanding is inseparable from human historicity, namely the fact that every interpreter carries with them the background of tradition, experience, and pre-understanding. Thus, interpretation is always a dialogical process between text, tradition, and reader.

Three key concepts are especially relevant for this analysis: **Prejudice (*Vorurteil*)** – understanding always begins with preconceptions, not something to be eliminated but to be acknowledged and tested in dialogue with the text.⁴¹ **Effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*)** – every text emerges and is understood within the current of history that shapes its meaning and interpretation.⁴² **Fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*)** – genuine understanding arises when the horizon of the past (text and tradition) encounters the horizon of the present (reader and context).⁴³

This framework enables us to see how Quraish Shihab, in *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*, does not simply repeat classical exegesis of *taṭayyūr* but re-presents it within a new horizon: the modern Indonesian society, still infused with superstition, fatalism, and divinatory practices.

⁴⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 295.

⁴¹ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.

⁴² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 308.

⁴³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 312.

1. Pre-understanding and Prejudice in Reading *Taṭayyur*

According to Gadamer, every interpretation begins with pre-understanding.⁴⁴ Quraish Shihab, as an exegete, brings several forms of prejudice into his reading of *taṭayyur*:

- A. Theological prejudice. As a Sunni scholar rooted in classical exegetical traditions, Shihab views *taṭayyur* as a theological error—a blending of faith with superstition. In this sense, he aligns with the broader classical rejection of believing in birds or omens as determinants of fate.
- B. Modernist prejudice. Shihab is also influenced by Islamic reformist figures such as Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, who emphasized rationality and social progress. From this vantage, Shihab presupposes that the Qur’an must be interpreted in ways relevant to modern challenges, particularly in critiquing fatalistic tendencies within society.⁴⁵
- C. Cultural prejudice. As an Indonesian exegete, Shihab is deeply familiar with social phenomena such as belief in *primbon*, unlucky numbers, and shamanic practices. This cultural horizon leads him to emphasize the social and moral aspects of *taṭayyur*, rather than restricting it solely to a theological prohibition.

2. Effective History (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*

Gadamerian hermeneutics emphasizes that all understanding is shaped by history.⁴⁶ In Shihab’s case, the effective history of classical and modern tafsīr strongly influenced his approach.

- A. Classical exegesis (e.g., al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī) regarded *taṭayyur* as the belief of polytheists linking misfortune to prophets or omens, with a theological emphasis on avoiding *shirk* and affirming exclusive faith in God.⁴⁷
- B. Medieval exegesis (e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī) expanded the psychological dimension, explaining that belief in bad omens arises from human weakness and fear of external signs.⁴⁸
- C. Modern exegesis (e.g., Sayyid Quṭb in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān*) highlighted the social dimension, interpreting *taṭayyur* as the refusal of responsibility and the scapegoating of prophets.⁴⁹

Shihab’s *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* integrates these layers: retaining the theological rejection of *shirk*, incorporating psychological insights, and stressing social critique.

⁴⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 298.

⁴⁵ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 135–140.

⁴⁶ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

⁴⁷ Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān ‘an Ta’wīl Āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1956), vol. 18, 45–46; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1998), vol. 5, 121; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1964), vol. 11, 23.

⁴⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1999), vol. 21, 15.

⁴⁹ Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2003), vol. 5, 3027.

This demonstrates that his interpretation emerges from a long dialogue with the history of tafsīr rather than in isolation.

3. Fusion of Horizons: Text, Tradition, and the Indonesian Context

For Gadamer, true understanding arises from a *fusion of horizons*.⁵⁰ In the case of *taṭayyur*, the horizon of the past consists of exegetical traditions that stress the prohibition of *shirk*, while the horizon of the present is the Indonesian reality, where myths, superstition, and divinatory practices remain embedded even in modern life.

This fusion is evident in Shihab’s commentary on verses such as Q. Yā Sīn [36]:18–19 and Q. al-A’rāf [7]:131. He does not confine interpretation to the Quraysh of the jāhiliyyah era but projects its meaning into contemporary Indonesian society. For Shihab, *taṭayyur* manifests as a weak mentality: scapegoating others for misfortune, avoiding responsibility, and succumbing to irrational beliefs.⁵¹ Thus, his interpretation does not merely reproduce past meanings but generates new, contextualized insights.

4. Dialogue between Text and Reader

In Gadamer’s view, understanding is a dialogical encounter.⁵² The text addresses the reader, and the reader allows themselves to be shaped by the text.

Tafsīr al-Mishbah exemplifies this dialogical dynamic between the Qur’an and modern Indonesian society. For example, when Shihab critiques the belief in “unlucky numbers” or the tendency to attribute disasters to others, he invites readers into a dialogue: the Qur’an rejects *taṭayyur*, and therefore the reader must also reject local superstitions that undermine social resilience.⁵³ In this way, the Qur’an is not treated as a fossil of the past but as a living voice offering ethical guidance for contemporary society.

5. The Productivity of Hermeneutical Meaning

For Gadamer, interpretation is not reproductive (repeating original meaning) but productive, generating new meanings relevant to the present.⁵⁴ *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* demonstrates this productivity by transforming *taṭayyur* into:

- A. **A cultural critique:** rejecting *primbon*, shamanism, and myths of misfortune embedded in Indonesian society.
- B. **A social critique:** opposing attitudes of blaming leaders or others for disasters without self-reflection.
- C. **An ethic of modernity:** emphasizing optimism, personal responsibility, and hard work.

⁵⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 313.

⁵¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur’an*, vol. 10 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), 310–315.

⁵² Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 299.

⁵³ Shihab, *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*, vol. 12, 25–27.

⁵⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 320.

Thus, Shihab’s exegesis transcends the classical horizon while remaining faithful to the Qur’anic spirit.

Table 3. Gadamerian Hermeneutical Analysis of *Taṭayyur* in *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*

No.	Hermeneutical Aspect	Findings in <i>Tafsīr al-Mishbah</i>	Significance
1.	Prejudice (Vorurteil)	Shihab’s theological, modernist, and cultural presuppositions shape his reading of <i>taṭayyur</i> .	Interpretation is historically situated, not neutral.
2.	Effective History (Wirkungsgeschichte)	Influenced by classical (al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr), medieval (al-Rāzī), and modern (Sayyid Quṭb) exegesis.	Indonesian tafsīr is embedded in the global exegetical tradition.
3.	Fusion of Horizons	Integrates Qur’anic prohibition of shirk with Indonesian realities of superstition and fatalism.	Produces a contextual and relevant meaning.
4.	Text–Reader Dialogue	Engages readers by critiquing local practices (e.g., “unlucky numbers,” scapegoating).	The Qur’an becomes a living, dialogical voice.
5.	Productivity of Meaning	<i>Taṭayyur</i> reframed as cultural, social, and ethical critique.	Tafsīr is productive, generating new horizons for Muslim life today.

Conclusion

This study examines the concept of *taṭayyur* in the Qur’an, particularly as interpreted in M. Quraish Shihab’s *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*, using Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics as an analytical framework. Textually, *taṭayyur* refers to the belief in bad omens associated with certain events or individuals, which the Qur’an critiques by emphasizing that human destiny is determined by moral responsibility and personal choice rather than external signs. Shihab extends this understanding by framing *taṭayyur* as a theological, psychological, social, and cultural phenomenon, highlighting its implications for negative mentalities and the tendency to scapegoat external factors.

Gadamerian hermeneutics reveals that Shihab’s exegesis is shaped by productive prejudices, including his grounding in classical tafsīr traditions, engagement with Islamic modernist thought, and sensitivity to contemporary Indonesian socio-cultural realities. Through the lens of effective history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and the fusion of horizons, Shihab reinterprets classical understandings of *taṭayyur* in a manner that is both contextually relevant and ethically instructive. His tafsīr emphasizes optimism,

personal and collective responsibility, and the rejection of superstition, demonstrating a transformative rather than purely normative approach.

Methodologically and practically, this study shows that Gadamer’s hermeneutics provides a productive framework for contemporary Qur’anic interpretation. *Tafsīr al-Mishbah* illustrates how classical, medieval, and modern exegetical insights can be integrated with present-day social realities to produce a contextualized, dialogical, and morally constructive understanding of the Qur’an. Consequently, Shihab’s tafsīr not only bridges tradition and modernity but also offers a model for cultivating ethical, responsible, and progressive attitudes in contemporary Muslim societies.

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