



Destiny and Human Freedom: A Comparative Study of the Interpretations of Marah Labid and Bintu Syati

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A B S T R A C T

Explanation about destiny and human freedom is often used to legitimize the understanding and fanaticism of certain sects. This research aims to compare the definitions of destiny and human freedom according to Marah Labid and Bintu Syati, which are often thought to be contradictory. This study employs Abdussatar Fathallah's *maudu'i* interpretation theory with its eight stages: in-depth knowledge of *maudu'i* interpretation, determining the theme, selecting a title from the Qur'anic words, collecting verses related to the theme, arranging the verses according to their Makki and Madani order and the time of their revelation, referring to the opinions of the interpreters, extracting the essence of their meanings, and compiling them into a thematic interpretation. The research concludes that the definitions of destiny presented by Marah Labid and Bintu Syati share a similar narrative, with Bintu Syati using the term "iradah Allah" (God's will). Regarding human freedom, Marah Labid asserts that humans are free to act, provided with the means and choices to determine their own paths, but all of this is still under God's will. Bintu Syati, on the other hand, divides human freedom into four main points: freedom from slavery, freedom of belief, freedom of thought and expression, and freedom of will that is *kasbiyah* (acquired) in nature, as well as freedom in choosing and acting. The compulsion from Allah lies in the cause and effect of human choices, and humans cannot escape the consequences of their own decisions.

1. Introduction

Life is a mystery. It is impossible for someone to know what is to come. One might be happy this afternoon but sad by evening. The bright morning sun can turn dark. All of this is known only by the Creator, Allah Ta'ala (Luthfi, 2009, p. 9). The concept of human destiny has long been a heated debate, both in classical and contemporary times. The discussion about whether humans can have the freedom to act or if their actions are predetermined is a topic that is frequently reviewed (Murdianto & A'yun, 2022). The discourse on destiny was initially discussed during the era of the Companions, but it specifically emerged at the end of the first century into the second during the Umayyad period with the appearance of the Jabariyah and Qadariyah schools of thought. From these two understandings, the discussion about destiny and human freedom has narrowed down to the understanding of a particular school of thought (Al-Gharabiy, 1958, p. 21).

Various approaches have been taken to define destiny and human freedom. However, most of these studies only discuss from the perspective of a single interpreter, while it is very rare to find research using the maudu'i interpretation method as an approach. This fact attracted the author to conduct this research. Studies on destiny and human freedom have been extensively reviewed using various approaches. For example, Anang Haderi (2014) in his research titled "Destiny and Freedom According to Fethullah Gulen" states that Fethullah Gulen introduces several key terms such as imam mubin, kitab mubin, lauh mahfuz, formal destiny, and actual destiny. The findings of this study suggest that Fethullah Gulen has his interpretation, differing from other schools of aqidah thought such as Mu'tazilah, Qadariyah, Jabariyah, Asy'ariyah, and others (Haderi, 2014).

Another study was conducted by Noorthaibah (2015) titled "Jamaluddin Al-Afghani's Reformist Thoughts: A Study of Kalam Thought on Destiny". She explains that Jamaluddin Al-Afghani attempts to reconstruct the concept of destiny from a fatalistic and static perspective to a dynamic one. The findings of this study suggest that faith recognition is a fundamental element in theology and cannot be avoided, but it must be correctly understood to achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter (Noorthaibah, 2015).

Further research was conducted by Izzuddin, Rifki Abror Ananda, and Ahmad Khoiril Fata (2022) titled "Destiny and Causality in the View of Murtadha Muthahhari". In this study, they state that Muthahhari tries to find a synthesis from the dialectic between Jabariyah and Qadariyah, which is related to the law of causality. Muthahhari divides causality into two, material and spiritual. The findings of this study show that although both aspects influence human destiny, it is the spiritual factor that has the greatest impact on human destiny and history (Izzuddin et al., 2022).

In the author's opinion, among the many literatures discussing destiny and human freedom, no research has been found that addresses it from the maudu'i interpretation perspective of Abdussatar Fathallah. Based on this, the author intends to research the Quranic view on destiny and human freedom using Abdussatar Fathallah's maudu'i interpretation methodology. In his book, "Al-Madkhol Ila Tafsir Maudu'i," Abdussatar explains in the sixth chapter titled "Manhaj al-Bahts fi at-Tafsir al-Maudhu'i" that there are at least eight steps in the maudu'i method: first, having a deep knowledge of the meaning of specific maudu'i interpretation intended by the interpreter in operating his method. Second, determining a

specific theme in the Quran with precise determination. Third, selecting a title from the Quranic words that align with the theme. Fourth, collecting Quranic verses directly related to the theme. Fifth, arranging them according to the Makki and Madani and the chronological order of the revelation as much as possible. Sixth, understanding the verses by referring to their interpretation, knowing the circumstances related to the reasons for the revelation, the stages of legislation, abrogation, general and specific, and other knowledge that supports the interpretation of the intended verses. Seventh, dividing the theme into interconnected main discussions, identifying which verses are the main ones and which are the derivatives to extract their essence. Eighth, linking each step with the rules of thematic interpretation perfectly (Sa'id, 1991).

2. Method

In this article, the author uses a qualitative research method with data collection through library research (Mustari & Rahman, 2012). The author collects primary data sourced from the two tafsir books by Bintu Syati and Nawawi Al-Bantani and other books and articles that have a correlation as reference sources. The aim of this research is to compare the two interpreters' opinions on destiny and human freedom, which are often thought to be contradictory.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Terms of Destiny and Human Freedom

The word "destiny" (*takdir*) appears 142 times in the Quran with various derivations, such as in Surah Al-Fajr: 16, Al-Qamar: 12, Al-Muddathir: 18, At-Talaq: 3, Al-An'am: 91, Al-Baqarah: 20, Yasin: 38, Al-Ahzab: 38, Ar-Ra'd: 8, and many others (Baqii, 1945). The term derives from the root قَدَرَ يَقْدِرُ تَقْدِيرًا (qaddara, yuqaddiru, taqdiran), meaning to judge while thinking, measure, respect by knowing the value of something, and decree. It has the trilateral form قَدَرَ يَقْدِرُ وَيَقْدِرُ (qadara, yaqdiru, wa yaqdiru) (Humaid, 2008). "Al-Qadr" has several core meanings:

- An appropriate determination, such as in the phrase قَدَرَ اللَّهُ هَذَا تَقْدِيرًا meaning "Allah has decreed this with an appropriate decree" (Al-Harawi, 2001).
- Degree or value of something (Ar-Razi, 1986).
- Decree or determination (Ismail, 2000).
- A temporary or time-limited decree, such as قَدَرَ اللَّهُ هَذَا تَقْدِيرًا meaning "Allah has decreed this temporarily" (Al-'Autabi, 1999).
- Ability or capacity (Ash-Shaghani, 1970).

Abu Hilal Al-'Askari explains that the original meaning of al-qadr is the intermediary between high and low. It is called Allah's decree because Allah's determination is precisely measured, neither excessive nor deficient (Al-'Askary, 2007). This definition aligns with the verse (إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ). According to Al-Ashfahani, the term al-qadr or qudrah when attributed to humans refers to a form or behavior that enables action. When attributed to Allah, it denotes the absence of weakness. Allah is described as Al-Qadir, meaning the one capable of doing whatever He wills, based on wisdom, without excess or deficiency. The verbal noun التَّقْدِيرُ (at-taqdir) means granting capability. Allah's predestination involves two aspects: giving

His creations the ability to act and setting this ability within specific parameters according to His wisdom (Al-Ashfahani, 1992).

Relevant verses on predestination include:

- Surah Al-A'la, verse 3: "Who has created and proportioned."
- Surah Al-Furqan, verse 2: "and has proportioned it precisely."
- Surah Ar-Ra'd, verse 39: "Allah eliminates what He wills or confirms, and with Him is the Mother of the Book."
- Surah At-Talaq, verse 3: "Indeed, Allah has set a measure for all things."

Bintu Syati notes that terms related to human freedom use the word "iradah" (will). She argues that this term should be understood anew, beyond mere desire or inclination. "Iradah" occurs when intent becomes action, with steadfast determination despite obstacles. The term iradah involves both "ar-raghu" (desire) and "al-'azmu" (firm intention) (Bintu Syati, 1969).

The term "ar-raghu" appears eight times in the Quran in various forms, such as in Surah An-Nisa: 127, Al-Baqarah: 130, At-Taubah: 120, Asy-Syarah: 8, Al-Anbiya: 90, Maryam: 46, At-Taubah: 59, Al-Qalam: 32, Al-Baqarah: 35, 58, An-Nahl: 112 (Baqii, 1945). It derives from the root رَغِبَ يَرْغَبُ رَغْبَةً (raghiba, yarghabu, raghbatan) (Ar-Razi, 1979). According to Ibn Faris, this root has two primary meanings: seeking something and spaciousness (Al-Ashfahani, 1992). The meaning varies depending on the following preposition:

- رَغِبَ فِي (raghiba fi) - to incline towards or desire something.
- رَغِبَ عَنِ (raghiba 'an) - to disdain or turn away from something.
- رَغِبَ إِلَى (raghiba ila) - to plead or supplicate humbly.
- رَغِبَ بِ (raghiba bi) - to boast (Humaid, 2008).

The term "al-'azmu" appears nine times in the Quran in various forms, such as in Surah Muhammad: 21, Ali-'Imran: 159, Al-Baqarah: 227, 235, Ali-'Imran: 186, Luqman: 17, Asy-Syura: 43, Al-Ahqaf: 35, and Ta-Ha: 115 (Baqii, 1945). It derives from عَزَمَ يَعْزِمُ عَزْمًا ('azama, ya'zimu, 'azman) (Al-Fairuzabadi, 2005). According to Ibn Faris, the root meaning is strong intent and decisive action (Ar-Razi, 1979). It signifies a firm resolution to act (Al-Ashfahani, 1992).

The term "iradah" appears 140 times in the Quran in various forms, such as in Surah Al-Baqarah: 26, 233, Al-Maidah: 17, Yusuf: 25, Ar-Ra'd: 11, Al-Isra: 19, 103, Al-Kahfi: 82, Al-Furqan: 62, and many others (Baqii, 1945). It derives from رَوَدَ (rawd), meaning to go and come to one direction (Ar-Razi, 1986). The trilateral form transforms with an added hamzah and the waw of the root replaced by an alif (Al-Farabi, 1987). It signifies will or intention (Ar-Razi, 1999). It implies a desire for something, whether liked or disliked (Az-Zabidi, n.d.). Al-Ashfahani states that iradah denotes the effort to achieve something, based on desires and aspirations, becoming a noun because it implies a compelling rule for action (Al-Ashfahani, 1992).

Relevant verses on human freedom include:

- Surah Al-Balad, verses 8-10: "Have We not made for him two eyes (8), and a tongue and two lips (9), and shown him the two ways (10)?"

- Surah Al-Isra, verses 18-19: "Whoever desires the life of this world, We expedite for him therein what We will to whom We intend. Then We have made for him Hell, in which he will burn, censured and banished (19). But whoever desires the Hereafter and exerts the effort due to it while he is a believer – it is those whose effort is ever appreciated."
- Surah Al-Insan, verse 3: "Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful."

From the explanations above, key points can be drawn to define predestination as Allah's eternal knowledge of everything He wills to occur in creation. Allah's decrees are inscribed in the preserved tablet (Lauh Mahfuz), detailing all aspects such as quantity, quality, time, place, and causes (Al-Jazairi, n.d.). Al-Maturidi states that al-qadr has two aspects: the essence of things (good or bad, beautiful or ugly, wise or foolish) and the specifics of events (time, place, truth, falsehood, reward, or punishment) (Al-Maturidi, 1979). Therefore, Allah possesses the attribute of Al-Qudrah, encompassing His capability to bring things into existence or eliminate them, affecting all possible outcomes, a perpetual and eternal attribute (Ash-Shafaqisi, 2008).

Human freedom means humans can act freely, but within the framework of Allah's will. Humans are free to act based on their effort, choice, and determination, but this freedom aligns with Allah's will (Tabbarah, 2006). At-Thahawi states that everything happens by Allah's decree and will. Human actions occur only if Allah wills them, indicating that nothing happens outside of His will (Farid, 2005).

3.2. Destiny and Human Freedom from Marah Labid's Perspective

An-Nawawi Al-Bantani states that Allah's decree or qudrah is an eternal and everlasting determination by Allah, distinct from our transient and impermanent decisions, requiring nothing specific for its realization and being singular and universal in relation to all possibilities within Allah's power (Al-Bantani, 1996b). Thus, Allah possesses the attribute of Al-Qudrah, the quality affirming Allah's essence as having the authority to create or annihilate anything (Al-Bantani, 1996b).

This understanding is reflected in the interpretation of Surah Al-A'ala, verse 3. An-Nawawi Al-Bantani explains in his exegesis Marah Labid that the majority of scholars read the word *قَدَّرَ* (with tashdid), meaning that Allah has determined everything, such as physical appearance, height, sustenance, and death. Al-Kasa'i reads it without tashdid, implying that Allah acts according to His will upon His creation, guiding them to benefit themselves, just as He inspires a husband in dealing with his wife or a bird in feeding from a crocodile's teeth (Al-Bantani, 1996a).

In alignment with this interpretation, Surah Al-Furqan, verse 2, focuses on the phrase *وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ قَدْرَهُ تَفْدِيرًا*. An-Nawawi explains that Allah creates everything according to His decree and will, preparing what is beneficial for His creation. Allah creates humans in forms similar to one another, assigning abilities and benefits fitting for both worldly and religious matters. This applies to all creatures, living and non-living, based on Allah's wisdom. Allah ordains something and establishes its benefits without delay (Al-Bantani, 1996a).

Similarly, in Surah Ar-Ra'd, verse 39, An-Nawawi explains that the "record" here refers to a specific decree written on the angels' scrolls, which are erased or affirmed in the Preserved

Tablet (Lauh Mahfuz) according to Allah's wisdom. "Allah erases whatever He wills" refers to laws or decrees changed over time as per His wisdom, and "Allah affirms" means He leaves them as they are. The "Mother of the Book" refers to the Preserved Tablet. This wisdom reveals to the angels Allah's complete knowledge of every detail. Allah has two books: one written by the angels for His creation (a place for erasing and affirming decrees) and the eternal Preserved Tablet (Al-Bantani, 1996a).

Regarding human freedom, An-Nawawi states that humans are free to act, provided with the means and choices to follow their path, yet still within Allah's will. Thus, Allah possesses the attribute of *iradah*, which entails considering two possibilities for His servants (Al-Bantani, 1996a).

This understanding is seen in An-Nawawi's interpretation of Surah Al-Balad, verses 8 and 9. He explains that "two eyes" enable humans to see, the "tongue" allows them to speak, and the "two lips" enable them to close their mouths. In verse 10, Allah shows humans two paths: the good and the bad, or the path leading to nourishment through the mother's breasts. Allah guides a child to the mother's breasts until weaning (Al-Bantani, 1996a).

In Surah Al-Isra, verse 18, An-Nawawi states that those seeking worldly rewards will receive them as Allah wills, but they may not get what they desire in both this world and the hereafter. Verse 19 speaks of those seeking the hereafter with good deeds and true faith, whose efforts Allah will accept graciously. This distinction is illustrated by Marstad seeking worldly rewards and Bilal seeking heavenly rewards, with Allah granting provisions to both (Al-Bantani, 1996a).

In Surah Al-Insan, verse 3, An-Nawawi says that Allah shows humans two paths: guidance and misguidance, providing signs and evidence. Humans can choose to be grateful or ungrateful. Abu Sammal reads the verse indicating humans might be grateful due to Allah's guidance or ungrateful due to their poor choices (Al-Bantani, 1996a).

Uniquely, in interpreting Surah Ash-Shaffat, verse 96, An-Nawawi seems to align more with Jabariyyah, which believes human actions are predetermined by divine decree and humans lack true freedom of choice. An-Nawawi explains that "Allah created you and what you do," suggesting human actions are creations of Allah, and thus, consequences are based on those actions (Al-Bantani, 1996a). Al-Mawardi and Az-Zamakhshari offer differing interpretations, suggesting the verse refers to humans and their crafted idols, not their actions (Al-Mawardi, n.d.; Az-Zamakhshari, 1986). Fahkrudin Ar-Razi also refutes the idea that the verse implies Allah creates all human actions, emphasizing the context of idol creation (Ar-Razi, 1999). Asy-Syaukani supports An-Nawawi's interpretation, considering "ma" in the verse to mean "what," indicating Allah's creation of humans and their deeds (Asy-Syaukani, 1994).

An-Nawawi's interpretations are influenced by his adherence to the Ash'ari school of thought, which holds that all human actions occur by Allah's will, but humans have the freedom to choose, aligning with divine will. This perspective combines compulsion and freedom (Syuhud, 2022). His exegesis method, *tahlili*, involves interpreting the Quran sequentially, providing insights on context, causes of revelation, and other related aspects (Saepudin, n.d.).

3.3. Destiny and Human Freedom from Bintu Syati's Perspective

In contrast to An-Nawawi's explanations, Bintu Syati divides human freedom into four main points in her exegesis:

Freedom from Slavery

Bintu Syati asserts that all humans have the right to be free from slavery and that Islam calls for equality, emphasizing that all humans originate from the same source. The Quran states in Surah An-Nisa (4:1), "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from a single soul and made its mate from it." This theme is also echoed in Surah Al-An'am (6:98), Surah Al-A'raf (7:189), and Surah Az-Zumar (39:6). According to Bintu Syati, these verses advocate for the equality of all humans and highlight that no one should enslave another. Islam does not endorse or facilitate human subjugation and promotes worship solely directed towards Allah. It is unacceptable for any group to claim superiority and enslave others, as reflected in Surah Al-Maidah (5:18), where the Quran responds to the Jewish and Christian claim of being God's chosen ones: "But why does He punish you for your sins? No, you are but humans among those He has created." Furthermore, Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13) states, "O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may know one another. The most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous" (Abdurrahman, 1969).

Freedom of Belief

Religious conflicts and sectarian hostilities have a long history, persisting even today. History records that fanaticism has driven followers to create divisions, leading to great animosity and wars. Islam, through its Prophets, has long championed freedom of belief. Surah Yunus (10:99), revealed during the Meccan period, addresses the Prophet: "And if your Lord had willed, those on earth would have believed all of them together. So, will you compel people until they become believers?" This is further emphasized in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:256) from the Medinan period: "There is no compulsion in religion." These verses assert the Quran's stance on freedom of belief, allowing individuals to choose and be responsible for their choices. The Quran repeatedly states that the Prophets' duty is only to convey the message, as in Surah Ali Imran (3:20): "If they accept Islam, they are rightly guided; but if they turn away, your duty is only to convey the message" (Abdurrahman, 1969).

Freedom of Thought and Expression

Following the discussion on freedom of belief, the Quran also provides guidance on seeking knowledge and understanding. Freedom of belief is intrinsically linked to freedom of thought and expression. Humans are encouraged to question to attain peace of mind. The Quran illustrates this in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:260) where Ibrahim asks, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead." Allah does not respond with anger but gently questions Ibrahim's faith, to which Ibrahim replies that his inquiry is to reassure his heart. This story indicates that Islam permits freedom of thought and expression as it is a natural extension of the freedom of belief (Abdurrahman, 1969).

Freedom of Will

Bintu Syati's interpretation of human freedom focuses significantly on this point. She asserts that understanding human freedom in the Quran requires a comprehensive reading of

all relevant verses. Bintu Syati concludes that human freedom differs from divine freedom. Human freedom is acquired through effort and choice, while divine freedom is absolute. The concept of divine compulsion (*jabr*) applies only in the sense that divine justice aligns with human choices. The Quran frequently uses the term “*iradah*” (will) in different grammatical forms but never as a command or noun, indicating that freedom in the Quran pertains to voluntary actions. Bintu Syati finds that about 50 instances of “*iradah*” are associated with Allah, reflecting His omnipotent will, such as in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:253): “Allah does what He wills,” and Surah Yasin (36:82): “When He decrees a matter, He only says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is.” When associated with humans, “*iradah*” indicates human intent and choice, as seen in various verses like Surah Ali Imran (3:145), Surah An-Nisa (4:134), and Surah Hud (11:15). This raises the question of whether will is exclusive to humans or shared with Allah. Bintu Syati concludes that human freedom is acquired through effort, while divine will is inherent and absolute (Abdurrahman, 1969).

In another work, Bintu Syati interprets Surah Al-Balad (90:10), indicating that humans can see and choose between two paths, guided by innate understanding. This suggests that humans are well-equipped to bear the divine trust and make informed choices (Abdurrahman, 1968). In contrast, Az-Zamakhshari interprets Surah Al-Kahfi (18:29) as advocating absolute freedom of choice, in line with Mu'tazilah thought, which posits that humans have complete free will independent of divine intervention (Nasution, 2013).

Bintu Syati prefers the term “*iradah Allah*” (divine will) over “*qadar*” (fate), viewing it as an unalterable divine decree, as seen in Surah Al-Isra (17:16) and Surah Al-Ahzab (33:16). Her focus on linguistic and structural analysis of the Quran underpins her interpretations. As a scholar of Arabic language and education at Egypt’s Ministry of Education, she emphasizes a thematic approach (*maudu’i*) to Quranic exegesis (Iyazi, 1966). Her interpretive methodology is influenced by her husband, Amin Al-Khauili, the pioneer of the *al-bayani* thought method (Abdurrahman, 1968).

4. Conclusion

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that the definition of fate according to An-Nawawi in his exegesis, **Marah Labid**, is the eternal and everlasting decree of Allah, which differs from our transient and non-eternal decrees. Allah’s decree applies to anything He can manifest or eliminate. In contrast, Bintu Syati uses the term **iradah Allah** (the will of Allah) to define fate, describing it as the law of Allah that is certain to occur and a final decree that cannot be annulled by anything.

Regarding human freedom, An-Nawawi in **Marah Labid** defines it as the ability of humans to choose or act according to their own will. Allah has provided all kinds of facilities for humans to make choices, but human will does not exist independently of Allah’s will. Bintu Syati, on the other hand, divides human freedom into four main points: freedom from slavery, freedom of belief, freedom of thought and expression, and freedom of will. According to Bintu Syati, human freedom in the fourth point is defined as acquired through effort and the ability to freely choose and act. The compulsion of Allah (*jabr*) lies in the consequences of human choices, and humans cannot escape these consequences.

From the above definitions, the researcher perceives that An-Nawawi's definition of fate appears more comprehensive compared to Bintu Syati’s explanation. This is evident

because Bintu Syati's definition contains the same meaning as An-Nawawi's, but An-Nawawi adds that Allah's decree applies to what is possible for Allah to manifest or eliminate. Regarding human freedom, the researcher finds Bintu Syati's explanation more complete and detailed. This is understandable because Bintu Syati composed her exegesis using the *maudu'i* method. Therefore, An-Nawawi's definition is encompassed within Bintu Syati's broader explanation.

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