

UŞÛL TAFSÎR AND QAWÂ'ID TAFSÎR NUSANTARA: A REVIEW OF NAWAWI AL BANTANI'S BOOK OF TAFSIR MARAH LABID

Andri Nirwana

Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta
Email: andri.nirwana@ums.ac.id

Erlan Dwi Cahyo

Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta
Email: g1001999073@student.ums.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Tafsir is an effort to understand the Quran to find out the meaning and content of the verses of the Quran. It is a result of human labor (it is different from the Quran) that has developed and changed from classical period to contemporary. It is diverse in terms of methods (*manhaj/tariqah*), patterns (*nau'*), and approaches (*alwan*). The book of Tafsir Marah Labid or Tafsir Al Munir written by Syekh Nawawi Al-Bantani is considered an interpretation that connects between traditional times and modern times. It is different from other tafsir in Archipelago because it uses Arabic, of which was novel in Nusantara's works during the time. Other than that, Tafsir Marah Labid also contains some of the teachings that represent its time when Dutch colonialist colonized Nusantara.

Keyword: Tafsir, Tafsir Rule, Marah Labid Nawawi al Bantani

A. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is the word of Allah Almighty which was handed down through Jibril AS to the Prophet Muhammad SAW to be used as a guide and basis for charity in human life (Mughtar 2001, 71). The Qur'an in text does not undergo changes, but the test of its interpretation from time to time undergoes changes. Therefore, the Quran is always open to analysis and interpretation with various methods of rules and approaches to understand its true purpose (Shihab 2007, 109).

The miracle of the Quran can be proven by the inability of humans and non

humans to match or make counterpoints such as the verses in the Quran. It is different from the hadith whose meaning is from Allah, but the words from the prophet Muhammad SAW. Meanwhile the Quran, both meaning and lafadz come from Allah Almighty (Al-Zuhaili 1996, 86). The Qur'an has a *mutawatir* and *qat'i al wurud*, which is kept authentic by Allah.

In understanding the interpretation of the Qur'an, a rule of interpretation of the Qur'an is needed. The Qur'an is a *kalam* of Allah which contains many elements, ranging from matters related to the *mahdlah (obligation)* or *ghairu mahdlah*

(*non-obligation*). To explore what the Qur'an means and desires, a tool is needed to dissect it, namely the knowledge of interpretation. With the this knowledge, it is hoped that we as reviewers and observers of the Qur'an can understand the sciences contained in it, both those whose nature is typical or general (Masnida 2016). Several books of interpretation have been written from time to time, which from all of them attempt to understand the text, and contestation, and approaches to the Qur'an. Each has its own emphasis, specialties and patterns.

The rules of interpretation of the Qur'an and *ushul tafsir* become media instruments in studying and understanding the Qur'an properly and correctly. The existence of the interpretation of the Qur'an occupies a central position in the study of the Islamic science. A *mufasir* will face ambiguous problem and even give rise to an attitude of ambiguity towards the Quran, when his reading of the Quran is not equipped with *qawaid tafsir* or *ushul tafsir*. Understanding the rules of interpretation will contribute to the scientific treasures to the insight of the Quran. With various sciences supporting interpretation more or less help *mufasir* in coloring the study of the Quran.

Tafsir Marah Labid or also known as Tafsir al-Munir by Nawawi al-Bantani

(Avivy, Dakir, and Ibrahim 2015) also used analytical methods developed by earlier *mufassirun* but at the same time contextualized it following modern situation. Tafsir al Munir or Marah Labid is considered an interpretation that bridges the traditional and modern periods (Ilman 2019).

This paper analyzes Nawawi al-Bantani's work using the primary work which was written by Nawawi al-Bantani. In addition, this study also used secondary data from other sources such as books and journal articles. In this case, this research is categorized as a library research (Setiadi and Iman 2021). This research begins with a question of what does Tafsir Marah Labid look like on the side of its form, methods, and characteristics?.

B. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Biography of Nawawi Al Bantani

The popularity of the interpretation of Marāḥ Labīd has indeed attracted many academics to research and explain various things related to this book either in content, epistemology or the thoughts of its author, namely Sheikh Nawawi Al-Bantani. Shaikh Nawawi al Bantani al Jawi has the real name Nawawi bin Umar bin 'Arabi. He was born in the village of Tanara, Tirtayasa, Serang, Banten (now a separate province from West Java) in 1230 H / 1813 AD.

He died on Thursday 25 Shawal 1314 H / 1897 AD in Shi'ib Ali, Mecca at the age of 84 years (Khaeroni 2021). He was buried in the Ma'la Burial Ground adjacent to the tombs of Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani (a 9th-century hadith expert) and Siti Asma' binti Abu Bakr al-Shiddiq (Bahary 2015).

Nawawi al Bantani was the eldest son of a cleric from Tanara. His mother's name was Jubaidah Nawawi al Bantani is said to be a descendant of Maulana Hasanuddin, who pioneered and opened the Islamic kingdom of Banten at the behest of his father Shaikh Sharif Hidayatullâh or known as Sunan Gunung Djati Cirebon. At the age of 15, Nawawi al Bantani left his homeland for Mecca (Abd. Rahman 1996). It was there that he was in contact with Sayyid Ahmad Nahrawi, Sayyid Ahmad Dimiyathi, Sayyid Ahmad Zaini Dahlan who were all in Mecca (the Masyaikh of the Grand Mosque at that time) (Dahlan 1996, 97). He also worked with Muhammad Khathib al Hanbali, a cleric who lived in Medina and continued his studies in the Levant (now Syria) and Egypt. The knowledge gained from his teachers then became a provision for Nawawi al-Bantani to produce works that were not limited only on tafsir but other sciences.

In between recitations, he was also busy teaching his students who later

became great scholars (Suwarjin 2017) in the Archipelago, such as KH. Khalil Madura, KH. Asnawi Caringin, KH. Hashim Asy'ari (nusas), Tubagus Bakri and KH. Arsyad Towil, both from Banten (Muhammad 2001, 98). In fact, besides Indonesia, there are also those from Malaysia such as K.H. David (Dahlan 1996, 98).

After thirty years in the Arab country, he returned to Tanara, Banten with the blessing of his teachers, precisely in 1833. When he arrived at his hometown, he spread his knowledge to the prosecutors of his parents' Islamic boarding school in the hope that they would gain knowledge. Knowledge of Islam and spreading it. In addition to teaching students, he also provided general guidance to the surrounding community. His class turned out to be able to attract the crowd and stimulate their group to rise up against the invaders who brought oppression to this archipelago. Although the political situation of Banten at that time did not change much from when he left Mecca, Dutch colonists always paid attention to religious activities, including the activities of Nawawi al Bantani. His ability to move the masses made the Dutch even more afraid. In order to stem their influence in society, the Colonists felt the need to realize one way that could hinder their relationship with society (its followers)

This situation caused Nawawi al Bantani to feel that he was not free to spread religious ideas to the community. In fact, the desire to abolish the treason often received strong repression from the colonizers. Nawawi al Bantani did not feel at home staying long in his homeland. After about three years in Banten, precisely in 1855, he went to Mecca to study (Anshari and Nashruddin 1989).

Although he eventually settled deep in the earth of Mecca until his death, Nawawi al Bantani continued to pay full attention to the problems of his nation, through relations with his disciples who came from the archipelago. In other words, he continued to pay attention from a distance to the political development of his nation by contributing his ideas for his progress and continued to support struggles in achieving the independence of his beloved nation. In fact, he also continued to ignite the fire of truth by echoing a long creed about the importance of the power of the soul to combat injustice and oppression.

2. Thoughts of Nawani al Bantani

Abd. Rahman formulated the views of Nawawi al Bantani in four areas namely tafsir, sufism, sharia, and tawhid (Abd. Rahman 1996). Nawawi al Bantani himself wrote several works on Sufism especially those inspired by al Ghazali. In

the field of Islamic legislation, Nawawi al Bantani is a *mufasssir* and *musyarrih* (interpreter/explanator) and a defender of the al Shafi'i school. In this context, he also interpreted and gave explanations about the works of Shafi'iyah, such as al Ramli, Zakaria al Ansari, Ibn Hajar al Asqalani and so on. In the field of tawhid, Nawawi al Bantani is typical of Assy'ariyah school, although he still emphasizes the importance of using reason in understanding the revelation.

In sociocultural and historical context, Nawawi Al-Bantani can be described as:

- a) A non reactionary actor who refused to have direct confrontation with the Dutch colonial government, although he did not either cooperate with them
- b) Someone who always pays attention to education and eager to create the truth.
- c) Someone who fostered and advocated social relations with non-colonizing non believers, because all human beings are brothers and sisters.
- d) Someone who supported all forms of renewal ideas in understanding religion in order to realize the nature of truth, especially during his life in Mecca, he directly felt the 'warmth' of the climate of renewal that was raging at that time.

Regarding the affairs of *khilafiyah* (differences) in society, Nawawi al Bantani regarded it as a mercy in the

context of religious diversity to advance Islam.

3. Tafsir *Marâh Labîd*

Shaikh Nawawi al Bantani was a prolific cleric who wrote religious works in various fields. The *Tafsîr al-Munîr li Ma'âlim at-Tanzîl al-Mufassar 'an Wujûh Mahâsin at-Ta`wîl* which is also famous by the name of *Marâh Labîd li Kasyfî Ma'âni al-Qur`ân al-Majîd* is one of his works in the field of interpretation. It is also possible that this work is his magnum opus among his other works.

Thus, it is well understood that he was a representative of non-Arab scholars who wrote their work well. To more clearly see the profile of the interpretation, it is at least divided into three things: background or rational for writing reviews, methods and styles, as well as examples of interpretations. The following will explain the background of the interpretation, methods and writing styles, as well as examples of interpretations:

a. *Background/Principle Writing*

Shaikh Nawawi al-Bantani wrote his interpretation after seeing and feeling firsthand the situation of his people (Mujahiddin and Asror 2021). However, he began to write the interpretation after several requests from many noble people

(*al`A`izzah*) who were around him at that time to write an interpretation of the Quran. This can be seen in the early explanation before he explained the discussion of surah al Fatihah, stating:

"Truly my noble friends begged me to write down the glorious interpretation of the Qur'an. So I hesitated for a long time..... In the end, I fulfilled their request in order to follow in the footsteps of the salafists who had compiled knowledge to remain sustainable. There is nothing in addition to my deeds, but at every time there is a renewal so that it can be a help for me and for those (people) who are as helpless as me. I took (referencing) from several books, such as *al Futuhat al Ilahiyyah, Mafatih al Ghayb, al Siraj al Munir, Tanwir al Miqbas, Tafsir Abu Su'ud*. I named it according to the time "Marah Labid li Kasyfi Ma'na al Quran al Majid". Only to the Most Venerable and the Most Opening One do I lean; I lean on and I leave it entirely only to Him. At this moment I started it because of the kindness of His help, that is, He is the All-Helping One to anyone who asks for his protection" (al-Bantani t.t., 3 in Bahary 2015).

The word Marah Labid etymologically means "sack or place of happiness" and in terms means "a place of happiness for humans or those who return to the way of Allah Almighty" (Al Fayumi n.d.). This naming is for the work of interpretation doesn't seem to have any tendencies. As stated earlier, Tafsir Marah Labid is written in Arabic, not Malay, like *Tafsir Turjumân al Mustafid* by Abdurrauf Sinkel

(Matheson and Milner 1981) who was also a Nusantara scholar and appeared earlier. Tafsir Marah Labid coupled with the Arab language and script inherent in the interpretation further added to the richness of the Nusantara tafsir treasures that other interpretations rarely have (Arivaie Rahman 2018). In fact, among the existing interpretations of Nusantara's works, perhaps only Tafsir Marah Labid was written in Arabic. Because the majority of Nusantara interpretations were written in Nusantara languages, such as Malay and Javanese.

Marah Labid is written like the Quran, sequentially, systematically, starting from Surah Al Fatihah to Surah Al Nash. Before explaining at length, Nawawi al Bantani gave *Muqaddimah* which was then followed by another conversation. In *Muqaddimah* it also begins with *basmalah*, *hamdalah*, and *shalawat* like other books of interpretation (al-Bantani 1997).

From the references used, it turns out that Tafsir Marah Labid is very diverse both in terms of method and style, in which becomes an important marker for his work of interpretation. As mentioned in the *Muqaddimah*, it mentioned the reference to *Tafsir Mafatih al Ghayb* by Fakhruddin al Razi that can be ascertained using the *ra'yi* school. It means that it is rich with

various shades in it that indicate its characteristics, and other references used by Nawawi al Bantani. Everything is wrapped up in the writing of the tafsir written in two large volumes. The formulation of the Tafsir Marah Labid has been perfected in 5 Rabiul Akhir, 1305 H (al-Bantani 1997) as stated by the author himself in *Muqaddimah*. As a quality review work produced by non-Middle Eastern scholars and non-citizens, Tafsir Marah Labid has passed the test of ability by scholars in Mecca and Egypt to be printed or published. In 1887, it was printed or published for the first time (Abd. Rahman 1996)

b. Methods and Styles of Interpretation

If the method of interpretation is the way a person arranges his thoughts in the field of interpretation of the Qur'an, then the style of interpretation is the point of view that a person takes in understanding the Qur'an. Then what about the method and style of Tafsir Marah Labid written in Arabic by Nawawi al Bantani?

In terms of orientation and history, Nawawi al Bantani is not like Muhammad 'Abduh (d.1905 AD.). Nawawi al Bantani's work is based on a new classical tradition that still refers to the work of medieval scholars. This means that in this regard, Tafsir al Mannar Muhammad 'Abduh and Rasyid

Rida are still heavily influenced by the orientation of Muktaẓilah's thought. While Tafsir Marah Labid also sought to maintain the orientation of medieval scholars such as Ibn Kathir (d. 774 H./173 AD), Jalaluddin al Mahalli (d. 1460 AD), Jalaluddin al Suyuthi (d. 1505 AD) and so on (Abd. Rahman 1996). In fact, the reference used by Nawawi al Bantani is *Tafsir Mafatih al Ghayb* that is very thick in using reason. Therefore, Tafsir Marah Labid is often seen as a *tabyîn* (explanation) an sich and a set of excerpts referring to the aforementioned books (Muqaddimah) (Harun 2000).

Therefore, for Rifa'i Hasan, Tafsir Marah Labid seems to use a richer method than Abdurrauf Singkil when compared to him especially in using reason (Arivaie Rahman 2018). For example, is the interpretation of Shaikh Nawawi al- Bantani in al-Isra:15 which groups the ahl al-Fatrah into three categories, namely the survivors, the unsaved, and the survivors who have the possibility of surviving and not surviving. In these three categories, Shaikh Nawawi emphasized the role of reason, thought effort, and his behavior that affects a person is included in each category (Maftuh 2018). Nawawi al Bantani, gives the main emphasis in explaining verse by verse based on the style of language analysis (*Lughawi*). In

addition, a small part is given or attributed to the hadith as a reinforcement of *hujah, asbâb an-Nuzûl* and the opinions of the companions. However, as stated by Ahmad Rifa'i Hasan, Tafsir Marah Labid also has similarities with the Tafsir Jalalain written by al Suyuthi and al Mahalli which is included in the *ijmali* method (Alma'i n.d.). Only the power of Tafsir Marah Labid is verse-by-verse interpretation. Because in giving interpretations according to language, Nawawi al Bantani always refers to the Quran itself. For example, the word "ar-Rahîm" in al Fatihah is interpreted with sura al Ahzab/33:43.

In contrast to Ahmad Rifa'i Hasan, Muhammad 'Ali Iyazi categorized Tafsir Marah Labid as part of the Sufi-style interpretation (Al Fayumi n.d.). In consideration, in his interpretation in each verse of the Quran, Nawai Al-Bantani always refers to the kitab *al Futuhat al Divineyah* by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi but he does not make his interpretation of *isyari* nuanced. Among the characteristics of the conversation, Tafsir Marah Labid mentions the meaning of the surah and its names and continues explaining its content in various aspects. For example, to begin the explanation of surah al Kafirun, Nawawi al Bantani explained another

name for the surah, namely al Mu'abadzah (al-Bantani 2017). Furthermore, according to Iyazi, Nawawi al Bantani also explained the *qira'at* aspects and various histories of the *tabi'in*, and other scholars. He also explained at length these aspects without performing *tarjih* (examination) on which *qiraat* is stronger or superior. Nawawi al Bantani also mentions various histories of *riwayah* without mentioning their *sanad*. Therefore, Tafsir Marah Labid is inseparable from the *kinks* of *israiliyyat*, especially regarding the stories, what the Jews told before the arrival of Islam (Alma'i n.d.).

In addition, Tafsir Marah Labid also honestly refers to *Tafsir Tanwîr al Miqbas fi Tafsîr Ibn 'Abbas* by Fairuzabadi. This can be seen in the interpretation of al Baqarah that Nawawi al Bantani mentions the surah with the address derived and mentions the number of verses, sentences, and the number of letters in the surah (Al Jawi and bin Umar 2017). Thus, from the description of the method and style above, it can be said that if Nawawi al Bantani (in Tafsir Marah Labid) tries to explain the Quran based on the arrangement of verses, verses with a dense, clear and concise explanation. His interpretation of the

Quran is based on a systematic arrangement of verses according to the *mushaf* and seen from various other aspects, such as *qira'at*, *asbab al-Nuzul* and others.

c. *Examples of Interpretation*

For the example of Nawawi al Bantani's interpretation in Tafsir Marah Labid, I will present surah al Fatihah. However, before that, I will state the content of the global interpretation of the surah, because it is quite reflective and still very relevant (in its day), that on the one hand Nawawi al Bantani followed the *salaf* and added nothing (in his work) so that eternal science was established, and on the contrary, he also outlined in the *muqaddimah*, that in every age there was a renewal. Therefore, in this context, Nawawi explained the content of al Fatihah's interpretation which was quite insightful, responsive, and advanced in paying attention to, responding to the situation of Muslims in the Islamic world, although we know that Indonesia, especially at that time, was an era of colonization and imperialism.

The following is an example of his interpretation of al Fatihah which is quite insightful. According to him, Surah al Fatihah globally has four main components.

1) *Tauhîd* or '*ilm al-Uşûl* which contains all the things of the devine. It is

contained in the verse (*alhamdulillah rabb al 'âlamîn*) and the third verse (*ar-rahmân ar-rahîm*). In addition, it contains prophetic problems, which are contained in the 7th verse (*allažîna an'amta 'alaihim*) and about the final days contained in the 4th verse (*mâliki yaum ad-dîn*).

- 2) The greatest '*Ilm al Furû'*' is a matter of worship. These worships involve both property and physicality such as mu'amalah, munakahat, and laws concerning commandments and prohibitions. Aspects of property (in the context of the current economy) and physicality (health) were somewhat dominant, as access to these two matters was very difficult during the state of imperialism at that time.
- 3) '*Ilm Tahşîl al Kamalât*', what is called the science of morality which is as *istiqamah* (consistency) on the straight path, is contained in verse 5 (*iybaka na'budu wa iybaka nasta'in*). Its emphasis is on the Shari'a, all of which are contained in *al shirat al mustaqim*.
- 4) The problem of the stories of the prophet and the lucky ones who entered heaven was in *allažîna 'an'amta 'alaihim*, when those who were not as lucky as the infidels

belonged to the *ghair al-maghđûbi 'alaihim* (al-Bantani n.d.)

Then, for the interpretation of Nawawi al Bantani in detail as follows (al-Bantani n.d.)

- 1) *Lafaz bismillah*, al ba' is interpreted with *bahâ`ullah* which means the greatness of Allah, wa al sin in ism means *šanâ`uhu falâ syai`a a'lâ minhu* which means the high and unmatched rule or law of God, and so on.
 - a) *Lafaz al-ĥamdulillâh* is associated with gratitude, or gratitude only to Allah who show His servants to faith.
 - b) *Lafaz Rabb al-'âlamîn* is interpreted as Allah Almighty is the *creator* of beings and the giver of sustenance and moves them from one place to another.
- 2) *Lafaz ar-Rahmân* is identified as the Most Merciful One, giving sustenance to the good as well as the wicked and nurturing calamities between human beings.
- 3) *Lafaz ar-Rahîm* is interpreted as Allah Almighty has closed human beings' sins in the world and loved them and in the hereafter by incorporating them into heaven.
- 4) *Lafaz mâlik yaum ad-dîn*, first of all, Nawawi al-Bantani describes the aspect of qiraat, i.e. lafaz malik is read

with *bi isbât al-alif* (assigning the letter alif which means a long read) according to the qurra' (reader). Ashim, Kisai' and Ya'qub, so its readings give implications for interpretation.

- 5) *Lafaz iyyâka na'budu* is interpreted as no God but Allah.
- 6) *Lafaz wa iyyâka nasta'in* is interpreted, "we plead with You for Your servants, then there is no power that can avoid the hosts of immorality but with Thy power. And vice versa, there is no power to obey You but with Your help".
- 7) *Lafadz ihdina aș-șirât al-mustaqîm*, may it continue to add hidayah (guidance) to the religion of Islam.
- 8) *Lafaz șirât al-lažîna an'amta 'alaihim* is interpreted, the religion of those whom I (Allah Almighty) bestow upon him, namely the religion of the Prophets, siddiqin, martyrdom, and soleh.
- 9) *Lafaz ghair al-maghđûb* is interpreted as not the Jewish religion that Allah Almighty hates.
- 10) *Lafaz 'alaihim walâ ađ-dâllîn* is interpreted, not even the name

Nashara (now Christian) which they deviate from Islam.

C. SIMPULAN

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that, first, Nawawi al-Bantani is an insightful, productive scholar producing works, and he is also a moderate scholar. Tafsir Marah Labid can be regarded as a bridge of thought methods between traditional interpretation and interpretation using a more modern writing system, which quite adorns the development of interpretation in the Islamic world in the 19th century. The study of the thought of Nawawi al-Bantani from year to year has developed. Second, there are still many works of Nawawi al-Bantani that have not been accessed to become objects of study. Studies of Nawawi's thought still revolve around well-known works such as, *Marah Labid*, *Kasifat as-Saja*, *Maraq al-Ubudiyah*, and *Nashaih al-'Ibad*. Meanwhile, studies of other works are very minimal. Therefore, it needs more studies on Nawawi Al-Bantani's other works.[]

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