

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF ‘HALALAN THAYYIBAN’ IN ISLAMIC DIETARY LAW RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

While the concept of halal in food is becoming more important, it no longer indicates the ideal diet for modern Muslims, who are increasingly focusing on the halalan thayyiban concept. Although many studies on halal and thayyib have been conducted, the terms halal and thayyib were not defined clearly, and they have been used to encompass many meanings, causing terminological problems. This study examines the nature and the condition, the inclusive relationship between thayyib and halal, and the elements of thayyib in order to call attention to the use of the terms in future research. This is a qualitative study based mainly on a literature analysis. Findings have clarified the terminological issues expressed in the halalan thayyiban discourse by dividing halal and thayyib into nature and condition and summarised the relationship between halal and thayyib. This study is a good platform for future work on the efforts to come out with more discussion on the relation between halal and thayyib concepts from classical and contemporary views.

**Keywords:** Terminology, Definition, Halal and Thayyib

## 1. Introduction

The significance of halal in food is becoming increasingly important in the context of globalisation. However, as Armanios and Ergene (2020) pointed out, halal is no longer the ideal food standard for modern Muslims. In recent years, thayyib, which is mentioned together with halal in the Quran, has been taken up and increasingly referred to as the halalan thayyiban concept. Although the original forms of these terms in Arabic are halal and thayyib, respectively, they appear in the Quran in the form of halalan thayyiban due to the grammatical requirements of the Arabic language in the context. Halalan Thayyiban was extracted as it appears in the Quran and turned into the slogan.

Despite the growing interest in the concept of halalan thayyiban, there remains a lack of consensus on their precise definition, which has led to some confusion (Ali et al. 2022). This paper shows that the terms halal and thayyib are used with different meanings in the previous literature, and then classifies them and examines their definitions for future research. This is a qualitative study based mainly on a literature analysis.

## 2. Literature Review

Thayyib is an Arabic word with a broad meaning and is explained in the Arabic-English dictionary by translations such as good, pleasant, delicious, fragrant, etc. It is often explained as wholesome in the field of Halalan Thayyiban studies. Aghwan (2021) used as good quality, Kamali (2021) used as pure, clean, etc.

However, it is difficult to understand the key concepts that constitute Islamic dietary rules with only these substitutions of English words. In particular, words such as pleasant, delicious and good are subjective and, therefore, unsuitable for application in rules that are universally applicable to all human beings. Furthermore, Kamali (2021) raised the question of “whether thayyib is embedded in the nature of things, or in individual persons’ taste and

judgment, or indeed in people's custom and culture". If they are embedded in the nature of things, they can be identified by universal criteria. If they are embedded in custom and culture, then it is necessary to develop standards for each community and this may cause problems when visiting other communities. If the criteria are based on personal interests and judgments, information needs to be provided to help individuals make decisions.

Furthermore, Armanios and Ergene (2018) stated that the recent attempt at the definition (and redefinition) of *thayyib* was one way to expand on the meaning of *halal* and the ambiguity of good and wholesome contributed to the alteration of meanings of *halal*. They gave examples of its application to animal rights, environmental ethics, healthy lifestyles, fair trade, etc., mainly by Western Islamic scholars and activists. The term definition may affect the discussion greatly. However, *thayyib* has not been clearly defined, and the diversity of the terminology has not received sufficient attention.

The Arabic word *halal* means 'permissible'. In Islamic food law studies, *halal* is often defined as that which is permitted to be consumed by Allah SWT. Nevertheless, fluctuations in meaning can be observed. For instance, it is said that 'chicken is *halal*', but it is not permissible to eat a chicken walking in the garden by biting down on its neck. For a chicken to become edible, it must be slaughtered and prepared in the correct manner. In this sense, the *halal* of 'Chicken is *halal*' is semantically different from the *halal* of 'this dish is *halal*'.

Riaz and Chaudry (2003) stated that *halalness* depends on its nature, how it is processed, and how it is obtained. Adawiyah et al. (2022) also proposed three criteria for *halal* food; 1) *Halal* based on the substance and its content, 2) *halal* based on how to get it, and 3) *halal* based on the processing, it is widely understood that *halal* is determined by a combination of its nature, history and other factors. Nevertheless, it can be observed that some items which do not meet these requirements are called *halal*.

Furthermore, the relationship between *halal* and *thayyib* in *halalan thayyiban* is also unclear. Some discourses said that if it is not *thayyib*, it is not *halal* (the Muslim must not eat what is not *tayyib*), while others say that it is permissible to eat what is not *thayyib* but recommended to eat what is *thayyib*. Alzeer et al. (2018) made a distinction between *halal* as subject and *tayyib* as process, but as we have already seen, proper process is one requirement of *halal*, and this is not enough explanation.

In light of the aforementioned awareness of the problem, section 3 will present an analysis of the nature and conditions that *halal* and *thayyib* have in common. Section 4 will address the relationship between *halal* and *thayyib*. Section 5 will discuss the meaning of *thayyib*, and section 6 will examine the background to the expansion of the subjective criteria contained therein. Section 7 will present the conclusions of this study.

### 3. Nature and Condition

*Thayyib* and *halal* have terminological confusion in common. In this paper, it is referred to as nature and condition. Alzeer et al. (2018) argued that even *halal* as a subject can cease to be *thayyib* due to inappropriate handling (e.g. *falafel*, a deep-fried ball made from chickpeas, is *halal* as the subject but ceases to be *thayyib* when fried in bad oil), arguing that *halal* is a subject, and *thayyib* is processed. However, as seen above by citing Riaz and Chaudry (2004), *halal* is a concept that also includes process, and Alzeer et al. (2018) mentioned the existence of *khābith*, the antonym of *thayyib*, as a subject (ex. scorpions, snakes, etc.) in the same paper, which also suggests that it is not possible to classify *halal* as subject and *thayyib* as the process.

This issue looks similar to one that has traditionally been discussed on the types of *haram*, *haram lidhātihi* and *haram lighayrihi*. *Haram lidhātihi* means prohibition due to its

substance, and haram lighayrihi means prohibition due to other things or external factors (Fauziah et al., 2022; Ramli et al., 2023). The external factors can contain the context and process. Pork is haram lidhātihi because the pork is prohibited in itself, and on the other hand, the meat of sheep, which was slaughtered purposely with other than Allah's name, is haram lighayrihi because it is prohibited due to its slaughtering process.

If we could assume that halal lidhātihi and halal lighayrihi are set up as the flip side of this, the relationship between them would be as follows.

- i. Halal lidhātihi: something halal in itself. It can be haram lighayrihi due to external factors.
- ii. Halal lighayrihi: something that can be considered halal even based on any external factors.

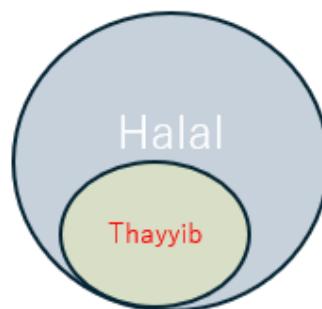
In other words, as Riaz and Chaudry (2004) stated, halal-in-nature raw materials become halal food through the halal process. Since the terms halal lidhātihi and lighayrihi are not authentic Islamic terms, the former is called halal in nature and the latter halal in condition.

Halal-in-nature materials such as beef and chicken can become halal in condition and be consumed if properly processed. Of course, pork, which is haram in nature, is not halal in condition no matter how they are processed. The food prepared by a halal process and with halal-in-nature ingredients can really be halal, or permissible to be consumed. Similarly, thayyib-in-nature materials should be considered to become thayyib food through the thayyib process. Cows and chickens can be said to be thayyib in nature, but they are not thayyib in condition if they are badly processed, even if they are halal, and animals so horrific that no one would want to eat them can hardly be said to be thayyib in nature in the first place. Considering the original meaning of halal is "permitted to be consumed", it is halal in conditions that would be appropriate to be called halal, but the discourses can be found in research papers and daily life, such as 'chicken is halal (while pork is haram)', in which halal refers to halal in nature. This distinction needs to be recognised, especially in the research context.

#### 4. Inclusion Relationship of Halal and Thayyib

The previous section discussed halal and thayyib from the viewpoint of nature and condition. This section discusses the differences between the classical and contemporary views on the causal relationship between halal and thayyib and shows that they stem from differing views on nature and conditions.

There is no significant difference between the classical and contemporary views on the picture that thayyib is a part of halal. The relationship between halal and thayyib can be represented using a Venn diagram as shown in Fig.1. However, the approaches to this figure are quite diverse.



**Fig. 1** Venn Diagram Showing Inclusion Relationship of Halal and Thayyib

Al-Māwaldī and Al-Damīrī provide examples of the classic arguments. Al-Māwaldī (1994) stated that it is halal if it is thayyib and haram if it is khabith. Al-Damīrī (2009) also noted in his zoological lexicon that some animals are halal on the basis of their thayyib nature. Thus, for them, the judgement of thayyib preceded the halal judgement. Something is halal because it is thayyib, and thayyib is positioned as a sufficient condition for halal. In other words, thayyib is a cause, and halal is an effect.

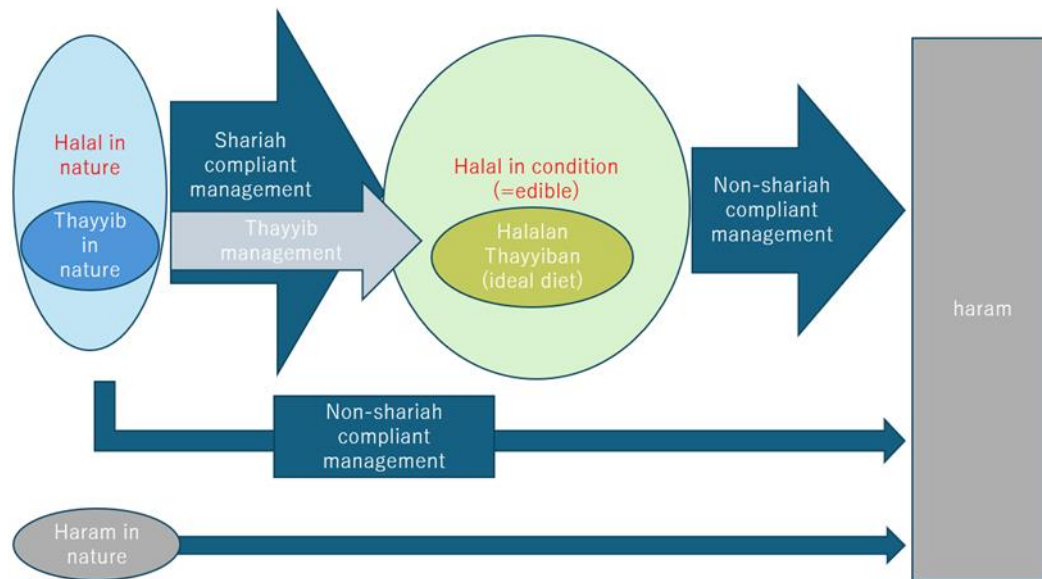
On the other hand, in contemporary Halalan Thayyiban studies, thayyib is not used as a basis for halal determination; Zaina et al. (2015) provided a definition citing one of JAKIM in Malaysia that “halalan toyyiban as halalan toyyiban which merely means allowed and permissible for consumption in relation to Shari’ah law as long as they are safe and not harmful”. Aghwan (2021) also stated that Allah Subhanahu wa Ta’ala has made it mandatory for all Muslims to consume food that is halal (lawful) and thayyib (good quality). The judgement of halal and thayyib is conducted separately. Unlike the classical discussions, where something is classified as halal because it is halal, thayyib is included in the set of halal. These two views are similarly expressed in a Venn diagram, but the process leading to it is different.

What makes this difference is that the classical halal and thayyib referred to halal in nature and thayyib in nature respectively. For example, Al-Damīrī describes some species of birds as halal because of their thayyib nature. This means that they are halal in nature because they are thayyib in nature as a species, and he did not consider the slaughter methods, cooking methods or hygiene conditions. What was important to them was whether the animal species they hunted and the foodstuffs they had access to were halal as a species or not, and thayyib was used as a criterion for determining it.

In modern times, however, the legal determination of most plants and animals that can be used as foodstuffs has been completed, and the establishment of food production systems has eliminated the need for such a determination. Halalness in nature has been already understood, and thayyib in nature is not used as a basis for halal judgement. The decline in the importance of thayyib in nature as a basis for halal judgments has led to an increased focus on thayyib in condition. It cannot also be the basis for halal in condition because it varies depending on the individual in question, as discussed in the following sections. The determination of halal in condition is conducted independently of thayyib. In spite of this difference, the diagram in Fig. 1 is retained by including halal as a necessary condition of thayyib. Whereas in the classical debate, thayyib was defined as a sufficient condition for halal, in the modern era halal is now defined as a necessary condition for thayyib.

Although the approach is different, in both views the thayyib is still a subset of halal and the diagram in Fig.1 is still valid. Thus, the framework in contemporary halalan thayyiban research is shown in Fig.2, confirming that the process is completely different.

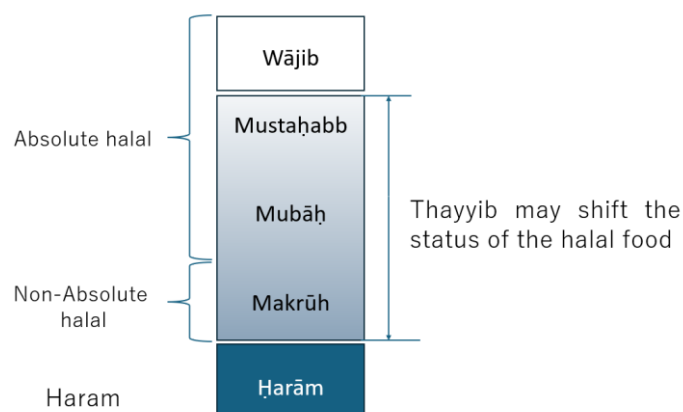
In Islamic law, all human actions are categorised into five categories, namely obligation (wājib), Recommended (mustahabb), Neutral (mubāh), Disliked (makrūh) and Prohibited (ḥarām). Normally, halal is considered to encompass the four categories, with the exception of haram, although Hanafī school excludes makrūh taḥrīmī in addition to this (Butt, 2020). Ali et al. (2022) distinguished two halal categories: absolute and non-absolute. According to them, makrūh and syubhah are included within the latter category. This is because makrūh, which is defined as prohibited by Allah SWT but not severely (al-Qaradāwī, 1997), does not seem suitable to be included in halal, which is defined as permitted by Allah SWT with no restriction (al-Qaradāwī, 1997).



**Fig. 2** Framework of Halalan Thayyiban in Recent Halalan Thayyiban Research.

The category of halal in condition, as illustrated in Fig. 2, encompasses both absolute halal in condition and non-absolute halal in condition. In this paper, the term halal is used to refer to something that is permissible for consumption and does not result in sin when consumed. It should be noted that this usage does not encompass the meaning of something good or recommended. This is analogous to divorce, which Ali et al. (2022) utilised as an illustrative example. Divorce is a halal act recognised by Islamic law, but it is mentioned as the most detestable permissible thing (abghaḍ al-halal) (Mahmud, 2007) and is usually regarded as makrūh.

Even in the case of food, there is a gradation within the concept of halal as illustrated in Fig. 3. In the first instance, daily meals are classified as mubāh, but according to Kamali (2003), there are some actions categorised in mubāh that can be considered makrūh or mustahabb due to external factors such as habituation. In this context, it is possible to ascertain that some certain foods are halal and, therefore, not sinful to consume, but it is better to avoid them or to avoid their habitual consumption, and food selections that are closer to Allah’s intention will lead to His greater satisfaction. However, as will be discussed in the following sections, thayyib includes various elements, and it is impossible to make a straightforward argument by directly linking thayyib to the five categories. Selecting halal and thayyib food is a daily effort to choose food of higher status within the range shown in Fig. 3.



**Fig. 3** Halalan Thayyiban in five scales of Islamic law.

## 5. Elements of Thayyib

According to the analysis of tafsir by Harun (2016), six principles of halalan thayyiban were presented: halal, accepted by fitnah, hygiene, nutritious, safe and Syubhah-free. This paper excludes halal and syubhah-free because syubhah represents the intervening matters that fall between halal and haram (Kamali, 2010), and this study deals with elements of thayyib, not halalan thayyiban. The principle of acceptance by Fitrah represents, as he explains, something the soul desires, tasty or palatable. This paper classifies it as comfort. Safety is explained as what does not harm the body or mind. It represents the prevention of spoilage and contamination with toxic substances that harm the body. This paper combines this element with cleanliness and classifies them as hygiene. The toxicity of the food itself is integrated with nutrition and classified as a nutritional aspect.

In other words, this paper argues for three elements of thayyib: hygiene, nutrition and comfort. The way in which the thayyib is discussed for each of these aspects and the future development of the thayyib will be discussed.

### 5.1. Hygiene

Hygiene as an element of thayyib has already received widespread attention and has been mentioned in many studies. Food hygiene is being researched and practised in the Islamic world and worldwide. In Islam, contamination of food can threaten not only thayyib but also halal, and this control is extremely important. It has become an important topic in recent halalan thayyiban research as the halal supply chain. Appropriate storage of food products and the establishment of checking systems are necessary. Control through the Islamic Manufacturing Process (IMP) has been advocated.

### 5.2. Nutritious

It has long been understood that thayyib are good for the body. Conversely, what is bad for the body is not thayyib and it is recommended to be avoided. This problem includes fast foods containing high amounts of fats and salts.

In previous studies, proportionality was also sometimes pointed to as a factor in thayyib (Fatmawati, 2020), although this paper did not address it as an element of thayyib because it is not a food property.

It should be pointed out that these utilities differ depending on the target individual. Certain foods may be contraindicated for people with certain pre-existing medical conditions, and the amount of fats, oils and salt tolerated may vary from person to person. It is difficult to envisage an absolute standard of thayyib that applies to all human beings.

The findings in medicine, nutrition and other health sciences can contribute to this aspect of thayyib.

### 5.3. Comfort

Harun (2016) explained what is acceptable by fitrah as geckos are unpleasant and no Muslim would think of eating them. The inclusion of the meaning of comfort in thayyib has also been noted for a long time. In particular, there are many references that mention gustatory comfort and deliciousness. However, in the real world, the desire to eat good food has not been given much importance, as it has not been necessary to make it a rule.

In recent years, this element of thayyib adopted ethics and expanded. Many of the redefinitions of thayyib pointed out by Armanios and Ergene (2018) belong to this element. These are not constituted by so-called scientific truths. As we have seen in the section above,

thayyib can have different criteria applied to different target individuals. This is even more so if the subjective criterion of comfort is included.

## 6. Modern Extensions of comfort and their context

This section reviews examples of how comfort in this thayyib has been extended and applied in recent years and analyses the background to this.

Armanios and Ergene (2018) presented the efforts of Islamic activists and practitioners, mainly in the West. Some of these have extended the meaning of thayyib to eat organic or locally grown food or to become vegetarian or vegan. They also introduced Ibrahim Abdul-Matin, a New York-based writer, activist, and political consultant, who utilises thayyib to dissuade overconsumption and to encourage environmental regulations and environmental protection. They also say that some Muslims in the livestock industry in North America go beyond animal welfare and additive-free food, stating that the products harvested by low-wage migrant workers are not thayyib. Such ideas could be joined to so-called animal ethics and fair trade.

It is clear from the Hadith that Islamic considerations regarding animal welfare during the rearing and slaughter of livestock have existed since the time of the Prophet PUBH. Many studies have argued how the Islamic method of slaughter, which is a requirement for halal meat, allows animals to die without suffering. It is also recommended that animal welfare be considered regarding the handling of livestock on mooring, which is not covered by the procedure of the Islamic slaughtering method. For example, Rahman (2017) presented a narration from Sahih Muslim Book 21, Chapter 11, Number 4810 as follows;

*Verily Allah has enjoined goodness to everything; so when you kill, kill in a good way and when you slaughter, slaughter in a good way. So every one of you should sharpen his knife, and let the slaughtered animal die comfortably.*

In the field of animal ethics, ‘animal rights’ are beginning to be advocated beyond animal welfare. The argument is that just as human life is to be respected in its own right and should not be used as a means to an end, so too should animal life and that it is ‘speciesism’ to allow animal life to be used as a means to an end. For those who accept these ethics, thayyib will encourage vegan lifestyles. However, meat-eating is clearly halal, and it is impossible to draw out a logic that mandates a vegan lifestyle.

It is important to consider here the background that has allowed the expansion of the thayyib concept. The word of halal has the original meaning of what is permitted by Allah SWT, and since Allah SWT is set as the subject, the argument always falls within the scope of scriptural interpretation. The question is set out as ‘what is prohibited by Allah SWT’, and the answer and basis for this is provided by the Qur'an and Hadith.

In contrast, the question of what is thayyib is difficult to answer unequivocally, as Harun (2016), in his explanation of ‘what is acceptable by fitrah’, gave as an example that geckos are disgusting and no one would think of eating them, referring to selection as the nature of humanity, not personal preference. However, there are, outside the Islamic world, people who eat geckos regularly. The various peoples of the earth have lived by eating the food available in their lands, sometimes setting it as a taboo, and the inedible food standard by the essence of all humanity is not clear-cut. The ‘what is pleasant’ aspect of thayyib is left to human subjectivity.

Sungit et al. (2020), citing Abdullah (1984), suggested that one interpretation of “thayyibat is something that is considered good by the Arabs, while alkhaba’ith is dirty by the Arabs.” This is a perspective that attaches importance to the Arab understanding of thayyibat, who was attending the revelation of Allah SWT. It was suggested that the divine phrase should be understood as Arabs did because Allah SWT spoke to them. However, nowadays, when non-Arab Muslims are in the overwhelming majority and Muslims in all parts of the world are proactively seeking a connection with Allah SWT, it is understood that Allah's revelation was not addressed to the Arabs alone, but to ‘us’ and ‘humanity in general’. Thus, thayyib was to be judged by the senses of individual Muslims. As thayyib is left to people's senses, its expansion is boundless. Thus, people began to make food choices while justifying their ethical views in Islamic terms.

People have the right to eat thayyib according to their conscience and are encouraged to do so. However, this standard is up to the individual and should not be imposed on others.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper has clarified the terminological issues expressed in the halalan thayyiban discourse by dividing halal and thayyib into nature and condition and summarised the relationship between halal and thayyib.

Muslims are forbidden to eat anything that is haram, and in turn they are obliged to eat anything that is halal. This has led to the expansion of Halal certification, which determines and labels what is Halal. In recent years, as mere ‘halal’ is already not regarded as the ideal diet by some Muslims (Armanios and Ergene, 2018), halal has been linked to thayyib and continues to expand as the halalan thayyiban concept.

However, as this paper suggested, thayyib can vary according to the individuals who consume it, making it difficult to establish the universal thayyib requirements. Awareness-raising activities to encourage each Muslim to eat thayyib may be important, but they do not fit into certification. The question of what is thayyib is linked to the question of what Muslims feel they want to eat and what they do not want to eat, which is a major question linked to the Islamic view of food, the world, and animals. In today's global world, Muslims construct their ethos while being influenced by a diverse range of entities. Herein lies the importance of cultural anthropological halalan thayyiban studies that reveal what ethics people hold and how these ethics are shared. Allah SWT encourages individuals to take the foods they desire and enrich their hearts and minds, of course within the framework of Halal.

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