

Revisiting Maryam through Thematic-Structural Study

Qaziah Fatimah Berhanuddin

Universiti Malaysia Kelantan

Email: qaziah@umk.edu.my

Mohd Sukki Othman, Nik Farhan Mustapha

Universiti Putra Malaysia

Email: msukki@upm.edu.my, farhan@upm.edu.my

Wan Muhammad Wan Sulong

Universiti Putra Malaysia

Email: w_mhd@upm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i12/11156> DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i12/11156

Published Date: 06 December 2021

Abstract

This paper aims to bring a new perspective of understanding Maryam by looking into thematic-structural study. Although there are certain people who are keen to suggest that women should read his Surah Maryam in pregnancy to ease the delivery process, it has never been the main purpose of it – neither for other Surahs to be read for any special occasion. Therefore, this study will provide an initial guide to see Maryam as an example to all human beings, men and women. This study is targeted to attain the objective of obtaining an in-depth understanding of a Quranic Surah or a character in it through the analytical method that is based on interpreting the Quran with Quran. Furthermore, the thematic-structural method which was initiated by Hamiduddin Farahi (1863-1930) will be mainly applied in this study, including the use of the central theme and correlation between words theory that he implemented in most of his books, more specifically his tafsir “Nizam Al-Quran.”

Keywords: Surah Maryam, Coherence of the Quran, Arabic Language, Structural-thematic Analysis.

Introduction

In the time of revelation, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) received the Quranic verses with events underlying the message that was brought in it. In his late storyline that took place in Mecca just before the migration to Medina, many Surahs from the third group of the Quran as categorized by Farahi, were sent down to the prophet. The 19th Surah, namely Surah Maryam, is one of the Quranic chapters that is included in this group. This Surah

was the one that was recited by Jaafar bin Abu Talib during Muslims taking asylum in Habsyah under the kingdom of Negus or Al-Najasyi, when Abdullah bin Abi Rabi'ah and 'Amru bin Al-'Aas came with the gifts and tried to persuade the Christian king of the land to hand over the Muslims back to them.

Surah Maryam has other interesting facts. The Surah has the opening of five letters; *kaf ha ya 'ain sad*, which are known as *huruf muqaththa'at*, that makes it the longest opening letters in a Surah. According to Farahi (2010), the theme that underlies this Surah is prayer (Nadwi, 2019). On the other hand, it shows the mercy of Allah or *rahmah* in an intense description through the story of Zakaria and Maryam. It is a Meccan Surah, the 44th Surah revealed chronologically (Maududi), and has only three places that mentions the name of Maryam; the daughter of 'Imran who has been described by the Quran as "of the devoutly obedient" (Sahih International). Unlike Surah Maryam that has 98 verses with the verses concerning Maryam's story starts at 16 until 40 and where the mention of her names is found in verse 16, 27, and 34, Surah Ali 'Imran, despite having 200 verses whereas the passage concerning Maryam's story covers the verses from 33 to 51, has her name being mentioned seven times: in verse 36, 37, 42, 43, 44, and two times in verse 45. Another Surahs that mentioned her name are Surah Al-Anbiya', Surah Al-Mukminun, Surah Al-Nisa', Surah Al-Maidah, and Surah Al-Tahrim (Gokkir, 2018).

Besides, Surah Maryam is where the word *Al-Rahman* is mentioned the most. Likewise, throughout this Surah we can explore the relationship between us and Allah in more details rhetorically (Alhassen, 2016). Not only the fact that there are 16 times *Al-Rahman* appeared in this Surah, it also has no appearance of any of the other 98 names of Allah.¹ Although this Surah has an argument to decline the trinity, it provides a clear evidence that the deity that Muslims believe in is the One who is worshipped not only by Muhammad, but also by Ibrahim, Isa, and Maryam. Most probably, the silence of the word *Al-Rahman* in the passage from verse 34 to 40 where Allah provides the statement of denial towards what the Christianity believes of Him shows the importance of revisiting this Surah in general and Maryam in specific, in which the Islamic faith that is learned in this Surah is shared by all generations of the prophets starting from Adam, Nuh, to Ibrahim and his offspring. For this reason, Allah mentioned Himself as *Al-Rahman* to represent the absolute mercy and love that He has to all of His believing slaves, as we can see clearly in verse 58 (Sahih International):

"Those were the ones upon whom Allah bestowed favor from among the prophets of the descendants of Adam and of those We carried [in the ship] with Noah, and of the descendants

¹ The beautiful names of Allah or in the Arabic language is called *Al-Asma' Al-Husna* has no limited counts according to some scholars including Dr. Mohammad Akram Nadwi, from whom the researcher acquired some references from in a live course online in October 2020. The hadith in Jami al-Tirmidhi (Hadith no. 3507) that mentions 99 names could be quoted from the companion, or an explanation to the hadith. The accurate source for the endless count of the names can be based on Hadith no. 2452 in Mishkat Al-Masabih, as reported by Ibn Mas'ud, quoted Rasulullah (peace be upon him) said that *if anyone is afflicted by much care he should say, "O God, I am Thy servant, the son of Thy servant, the son of Thy handmaid, and at Thy disposal; my forelock is in Thy hand; Thy judgment is effective regarding me; just concerning me is Thy decree; I ask Thee by every name Thou hast by which Thou hast called Thyself, or sent down in Thy Book, or taught any of Thy creatures, or kept to Thyself in the hidden place of the unseen, to make the Qur'an the Spring of my heart and the means of clearing away my care and grief."* He declared that no one had ever said it without God removing his grief and giving him joy instead of it ("sunnah.com" n.d.)

of Abraham and Israel [i.e., Jacob], and of those whom We guided and chose. When the verses of the Most Merciful were recited to them, they fell in prostration and weeping.”

Meanwhile, this research aims by its inceptive contribution at a few objectives:

- Providing an initial guide to see Maryam as an example to all human beings, men and women.
- Obtaining an in-depth understanding of a Quranic Surah or a character in it through the analytical method that is based on interpreting the Quran with Quran.
- Suggesting new approach of understanding a theme or a Surah by correlate it with the attributes of Allah, or *al-Asma' al-Husna*, that is exist in the Surah.

Methodology

The process to seek an understanding of the Quranic message is basically scientific in its own measurement. Bhutta (2017) showed the implication of analysing the Quranic literature through what he called pre-text, text and post-text exegeses. The pre-text attempt is a study of historical and referral aspects; thus, it relates to the text itself and its background. The text attempt is what he explained as ‘linguistic analysis of words and structures, which may well occur before or alongside the pre-text analysis.’ Finally, the post-text attempt is dependent on the understanding derived from the pre-text and the text exegeses, in other way it is when the concept of *tadabbur* shall takes place which he added as ‘it may also be considered the very purpose of *tafsir* and thus rightly included in works of exegesis.’

In an attempt to see how a thematic-structural approach can be applied to the rhetorical study of either a particular Surah, or a character in the Quran, or any *Al-Asma' Al-Husna*, we need to totally accept the divinity of the Quran where every word in the Surah is chosen and plays its role. Farahi (2013) expressed that “undoubtedly, the composition of the word with the word benefits the meaning.” In doing so, we would not be able to examine every single word at the same time, or at least to a longer verse it may take a longer time. That is why the literary part of analysis must be supported by the rhetorical or scriptural analysis that is based on the Quran in giving the readers a wisdom behind the chosen words. This is no doubt the basis we need when applying a literary framework into a Quranic study. Farahi’s approach as shown in his works was preceded by some Muslim scholars (Mir, 1986) who focused on the *Nazm* or the coherence of the Quran, particularly Al-Khattabi and Al-Baqillani who presented the *Nazm* as the eloquence or what is known in the Arabic as *Al-Balaghah* which to be a proof of the inimitability of the Quran over the words and meanings, followed by Al-Zarkashi and Al-Razi who highlighted the theory of *Al-Munasabah* or linear connection. Meanwhile, Maududi’s works which were also related to *Nazm* are based on the combination of the “subject, purpose and the central thesis of the Quran,” simply includes the human’s life as the field of examining the meanings that one has found from the revelation.

Since this study is following thematic-structural analysis which combines the central theme of each Surah and the core theme of every group – where Farahi divided the Surah into seven major groups (Islahi, 2016; Nadwi, 2019; Hossein, 2021) – to find the *Nazm* for the entire Quran, Maududi’s work is seemingly having a closer view, together with the work by Sayyid Qutb in his interpretation, where he suggested that every Surah of the Quran is built in unity (Mir, 1986). Interestingly, Sayyid Qutb said that there is a *mihwar* in the Surah, which is similar to what Farahi called *‘amud* or the core theme. Nonetheless, these scholarly methods are in fact aimed to ease the understanding of the Quran for laymen, although it requires a lot of

effort to look into the deep concept of whether *mihwar* or *'amud* can be determined in each Surah (Farahi, 2013). Gokkir (2018) mentioned other names such as Muhammad 'Izzat Darwaza and Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai who had followed the same approach where "each Surah is regarded as a unit in itself, interpreted as an independent unit, and consequently reached a core message of the surah."

Fundamentally, the theory of *Nazm* is a part of internal principle of exegesis, stated as "Quranic coherence" by his student Islahi (Mir, 2011). Since the coherence as a thematic-structural unity is not a well-known method although it is the most significant way in explaining the meaning of the Quran, Islahi put an interesting thought by saying that "it is absolutely wrong to say that coherence is some sort of a super intellectual pursuit of subtleties, possessing little or no value for the real purpose of the Quran. This is a fallacious idea, for we believe it is only through understanding its coherence that a person can gain access to the Quranic science and wisdom." This has been said earlier by his teacher in his Tafsir as to conclude that the initiative of this method basically follows a mere natural approach; the interpretation of Quran with Quran (Farahi, 2008).

The formulation of the exegetical principles, as Mir explained, which include the Quranic language, Quranic coherence, and Quranic parallels as the internal and *Sunnah Mutawatirah*, *Hadith*, *Asbab Al-Nuzul*, earlier Quran commentaries, previous scriptures and, ancient Arab history as the external was founded. Meanwhile, Hayrettin differs in its components where he states that Farahi's exegesis principles are divided into two categories, first is named as the indisputable principles which include the Quran's dialect, the *Nazm* principle, exegesis of Quran with Quran, and *Mutawatir* and *Mashur Sunnah*. Second is named as the disputable principles which include *Hadith* books, *Asbab Al-Nuzul*, the guidance from the previous divine books, Arab history, and Arab poetry. Although some experts view Islahi as the one who formulated this principle like the opinion of Mir (2011), it is no doubt that Farahi was the pioneer of the whole unabridged framework. This is as supported by (Hossein, 2021):

"After a close analysis of the Islamic history, he seems to have concluded the reason of the suffering of the Muslims was their indifference towards the Quran and the situation could be redressed only through return to the Quran. This could be possible only when there is unanimity in the interpretation of the Quran. This needed a new methodology for the interpretation of the Quran, which could eliminate the possibility of vague interpretations and similitude (*Tashbih*). This objective he wanted to achieve through the methodology of the interpretation of the Quran that was developed by him and that is now widely consulted in contemporary Quranic exegesis."²

This thought is similar to what Ravi (2014) pointed out in his Ph.D. thesis about Farahi's scrutiny in interpreting the Quran, in which he had a comprehensive knowledge between the Quran and the tools, such as the Arabic language and literature. Hossein subsequently summarized the concept of internal and external exegetical principles based on Farahi's explanation in his tafsir into three components, which are more likely appropriate to be

² The citing is from a proceeding Hayat-o-Afkaar which was presented in a Seminar organised by Alumni of Madrasah Al-Islah in Sarai Mir Azamgarh in October 1991, and a brief reference to the book by *Farahi Rasa'il Fi Ulum Al-Quran*.

measured. In his article (2021), he sums up these major components as an authoritative commentary of the Quran, an Islamic literature, and a reformation of the educational system that are all based on the principles of the Quran.³

Analytical Explanation

To focus more on the necessity for such understanding, the thematic-structural analysis will take place mainly in Surah Maryam, and more specifically in verses 1 to 40 of the Surah. The analysis will combine word to word comparison and thematic parallel which in the end will conclude the accuracy of Quran with Quran's interpretation, in which it will encompass the other correlation of this Surah with other Surah of the Quran. Nevertheless, the other Quranic chapters are not just the ones that mentioned the story of Maryam, but also come from the Surah with the same thematic concept or similar background.

The Correlation between *Al-Rahman*, *Rahmah*, and Maryam

Although this Surah is named after Maryam, the main theme of the Surah is not Maryam herself, it is rather the theme of prayer (Nadwi, 2019). In Farahi's opinion, Surah Maryam and Surah Taha are twin with regard to the matter of prayer and its establishment, and to be patiently steadfast for it. Also, they share similar matters mainly with regard to prayer, reciting the Quran, and the remembrance of Allah (Farahi, 2010). Besides, he called this Surah as "*Rahmaniyyah*" because the name *Al-Rahman* was mentioned the most in the story of Maryam and her son Isa (Farahi, 2010). Rationally, what he meant by this statement is that the Surah has an insight of either denying the claim that says Allah has a son or emphasising His care to every one of His obedient slaves. Asad (2013) has a similar statement about this Surah as being "commonly known is based on the story of Mary and Jesus," where he added that the story "occupies about one-third of the whole Surah and is re-echoed towards its end in verses 88-91." Throughout this Surah, we will find that the word *Al-Rahman* is mentioned the most in the third segment between verse 66 to verse 98 which is ten times, the other two times in the first segment (verses 1-40), and four times in the second segment (verses 41-65).

Ironically, the word *Al-Rahman* does not appear in the segment where the Surah firmly denied Isa being son of Allah that covers between verses 34 to 40. Reasonably, as Khan (2019) added with a subtle absorption into the role of Maryam to be as important as the story of his son Isa, which he suggested that "the audience is Christians who have certain views about Jesus, and the Quran is making it a point to illustrate its alternative view of looking at Jesus." Meanwhile, Al-Alusi stated that when Maryam called Allah *Al-Rahman* as soon as she saw angel Jibril in the form of "a perfectly formed man," she was reminding him with the *rahmah* of Allah and at the same time asking Allah to protect her with His *rahmah*, also, to exaggerate by that for herself the meaning of worship. Indirectly, Al-Alusi affixed the *Rahmaniyyah* to the Surah based on the conversation that happened between Maryam and Jibril to show the huge appreciation of Allah for this virgin lady who is known for her modesty and obedience.

Another scholar that fixed the opening meaning of Surah Maryam with Allah being The Most Merciful or The Most Loving is Al-Biqā'ie in his tafsir *Nazm al-Darar*. Although he expressed

³ Hossein states in the articles as follows: *an authoritative commentary of the Quran based on the principles of the coherency, purification and modernization of Islamic literature based on the Quranic principles, and reformation of the educational system based on the Quran.*

genuinely that the Surah was named after Maryam for the absolute love and mercy of Allah upon all the creations, and in a special occurrence was the miraculous birth of Isa through a virgin lady without any intercourse relationship, his opinion on the fact that a virgin lady is weaker creation who was chosen to conceive a stronger creation, which was a male child, is a contrary. He had put the link fairly between what he interpreted on this matter with what he described in Surah Ali 'Imran about Maryam being a female child conceived by his mother who earlier was hoping that the baby was a boy and later feeling heartbreak when finding out it was a girl. According to Al-Biqā'ie, not only that the gender of the baby was purposely chosen by Allah as female in fulfilling Maryam's mother's wish, but this girl will be capable to hold a complete task which basically is done by man and in her case is to serve the place of worship like any other man in her time.

This perspective is common when explaining a female's nature, or woman in general, yet the more accurate understanding is far simpler. As simplified by Nadwi (2020) and supported by Sya'rawi (1994), a female was chosen absolutely for her to become the mother in the future and to get pregnant with one of His greatest prophets miraculously. The thought that despite being a woman, Maryam could do much better than men in her time in serving her Lord has no other than a justified reason for the verses that are clear to the mind of the reader. In fact, we are told distinctly in the Quran that every human being, male or female, will be rewarded the same when he or she obeys Allah. This is how Allah describes in Surah A-Nisa', verse 124: *"And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer - those will enter Paradise and will not be wronged, [even as much as] the speck on a date seed."*

He also mentions in Surah Al-Nahl, verse 97:

"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer - We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do."

On the other hand, Fauzi and Wan Khairuldin (2017) gave their opinions by saying that human capital development for women can be one of the important aspects from this Surah. By learning Maryam's history, we can figure out how women can be successful in their lives. Both have come with a suggestion that there are five elements of human capital development which can be seen in the light of Surah Maryam. These elements are obeying Allah's commands, the self-isolation, keeping obligations, making effort and being believed, and preserving self-dignity.

Likewise, Allah already stated the same paradigm of the equality that belongs to His slaves regardless of people's genders in Surah Maryam. The word *fardan* which means individually or "alone" (Asad, 2013) is mentioned twice. Firstly, in verse 80 where Allah describes that no one will come to Him on the Day of Judgment except that he will come to Him alone. This verse is actually the sequel to the verse 77 (Sya'rawi, 1994) when Al-'Ash bin Wa'el had reportedly said to Khabab that he will come with his wealth and children on the Hereafter whereas Khabab will have nothing, and that he will be able to pay the debt that he owed Khabab (Al-Tabari). Allah responded to this event with this verse to make everyone, believers and non-believers, aware that all decisions on the Day are within Allah's *rahmah* alone (Asad, 2013) and He is The Most Just to all individuals.

Secondly, Sayyid Qutb, when explaining the other meaning of *fardan*, wrote a cognitively linear description of verse 95 – where Allah assures that everyone will come to Him in the Hereafter individually – with verse 96 which describes the love among His believing slaves. To quote his saying:

“God watched everyone. They will all come to Him on the Day of Resurrection, each on his or her own. None will have the support or encouragement of anyone else. Indeed, all community feeling is gone, for in front of God, everyone speaks for oneself. In contrast with this loneliness and isolation, the believers are given a comforting, friendly surrounding: “God will certainly bestow love on those who believe and do righteous deeds.” The mention of love in this context is bound to comfort and penetrate people’s hearts. It is a type of love that spreads in heaven and spills over to fill the earth and comfort people. The whole universe is given a full share of it.”

When interpreting both verses of Surah Maryam, none of the abovementioned scholars had preceded with the idea that Islam promotes gender equality. In fact, there is no need to immensely relate the understanding from these verses with gender issues. Yet, the essential objective for the fairness in accepting full capability and responsibility given to every man and woman should not be neglected. By extending such thinking, we can slowly see how subtle but concrete the coherence of a particular Surah is from the use of the chosen words. Nadwi (2017) clarified that even though we read the Quran perceiving each verse and the next as if it belongs to the character who was talking, it is absolutely the words of Allah that He chose to put in His Book which used *lisan arabi mubeen* or the “clear Arabic tongue” and made mention of it for a particular purpose that will benefit the believers. Therefore, any little hint like the word *fardan* should not be missed.

Apparently, this *fardan* has led to the understanding of *rahmah* itself. Zamakhshari (), when interpreting verse 95 from Surah Maryam put the correlation between *Al-Rahman* and *al-‘abd* or slave in its truest description as the foundation beneath this correlation is god-man or creator-creation concept; there is no one worth to worship but Allah. All creations will come on the day of Resurrection individually with humble, fearful hearts. By mentioning their Creator as *Al-Rahman*, the word *fardan* is seen to have been given enough time, space and choice to decide who they will be in the next world. Zamakhshari brought another verse to support this description, from Surah Al-Isra’ verse 57 as Allah says:

“Those whom they invoke (such as angels, prophets, deceased scholars) seek means of access to their Lord, [striving as to] which of them would be nearest, and they hope for His mercy and fear His punishment. Indeed, the punishment of your Lord is ever feared.”

Primarily, the word *fardan* in both verse 80 and 95 is an accurate selection of individual appearance in front of Allah, regardless of the kinds and the genders. Thematically, the use of *fardan* somewhere in this Surah may not be a major contributor to the understanding of the theme, but structurally it has a value of hinting the existence of unity in this Surah. Initially, the chosen word is put based on a concrete, comprehensive design which is mixed between internal and external elements as prescribed earlier by Farahi (Hussain, 2021), where for this condition alone we could analyse the role of the ‘amud (prayer is the best worship and the first to be asked on the Day of Judgment), the historical aspect (the *asbab al-nuzul* and the time of revelation of this Surah when Muslim seeking asylum in a Christian land), the coherent division of each passage of the Surah (the beginning, the content and the closing passage

which mostly combines the concept of *'ibadah*) and last but not least the Surah's name (Maryam was a female gender and she was selected to be born instead of male, which commonly people will see woman as lesser than man in many ways). coherent the theme, and the name Maryam for this Surah as she is referred to as the devoted one (salah that leads to *rahmah*).

Two Parallel Stories

In regard to Surah Maryam being the only Surah of the Quran, which is named after a woman, many have missed its real message. First and foremost, Maryam is the best of women in her time, being born into a religious family and was thought to be a boy by her mother. In a hadith narrated by Ali bin Abi Talib, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) had said: "The best of its women is Khadijah bint Khuwailid, and the best of its women is Mariam bint 'Imran."^[3]

In Surah Ali Imran; as the name of this Surah is related to her paternally, Allah recorded that her mother prayed to be granted a child and when she was granted one, she prayed for the child and her offspring. Concurrently, it mentioned the other same character that appeared in Surah Maryam; Prophet Zakaria, with the same attitude in the scene of supplicating to Allah for a child. Besides, the mention of the children of Prophet Ibrahim and Adam prior to Prophet Zakaria's story matches the conclusion of the Israelite at the end of Ibrahim's story in Surah Maryam.

Meanwhile, in the verses 1-40 of the Surah we can look into two relationships of the same lineage; the Zakaria-Yahya and Maryam-Isa stories. Khan (2019) addressed that the relationship between these two stories is seen to support each other in terms of declining that Allah has a son. Coming into sectioning of both stories, the surah was started by Allah praising His slave Zakaria (as) who was very old at the time, but he was not hopeless in asking Allah to grant him a child. His wife was barren, he worried about the religious people that surrounded him as he did not find any suitable candidate to be his successor in spreading the message of Allah. Despite the surah's name is Maryam, Allah chose to start this Quranic chapter with her uncle's closest moment to Allah, as He says in Surah Maryam, verse 2: "[This is] a mention of the mercy of your Lord to His servant Zechariah." This indicates several observations, including how subtle Allah wants to say that every one of His slaves is beloved to Him, and that the claim of Him having a son is never realistic. Nevertheless, every single human being will be judged merely based on their piety regardless of their genders and positions.

According to Khan, the way Quran described Zakaria-Yahya and Maryam-Isa stories can be seen symmetrically in a parallel approach, or what Farrin (2008) regarded as "the structure takes the form AB/A'B'." The relationship through this parallelism strengthens the inimitability of the Quran as the divine speech by combining both parent-child occasions that happened historically at the same time with a lot of similarities. It started with the story of parents who were bestowed with *ghulam* (غلام) or "a boy," which they questioned "how could I have a boy" (أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ) and shortly got the answer (قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّئُ) "your Lord said it is easy for Me." Then came the mention of Yahya's and Isa's similar qualities as a child, in verses that mentioned *barran bi walidaihi/ bi walidati* (وَبَرًّا بِوَالِدَيْهِ/ بِوَالِدَتِي), *lam yakun/ lam yaj'alni jabbaran* (وَلَمْ يَكُنْ/ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْنِي جَبَّارًا) "he is not/ He did not make me arrogant," *wa salam 'alayhi/ wa al-salam 'alayya* (وَسَلَامٌ عَلَيْهِ/ وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ) "peace be upon him/ me."

Prior to that announcement by angel Jibril, both Zakaria and Maryam were secluded in their sanctuaries and focused on their worship by performing prayers. Here, there were no similar words used in the Surah to indicate that, but it is understood from the thematic meaning that tied both events. Interestingly, a clearer picture was drawn in Surah Ali 'Imran when both Zakaria and Maryam were committed to their *mihrab* or sanctuary. The background of the scene is described as followed in verse 37-39. Allah said:

"So, her Lord accepted her with good acceptance and caused her to grow in a good manner and put her in the care of Zechariah. Every time Zechariah entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said, "O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?" She said, "It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account." At that, Zechariah called upon his Lord, saying, "My Lord, grant me from Yourself a good offspring. Indeed, You are the Hearer of supplication." So, the angels called him while he was standing in prayer in the chamber, "Indeed, Allah gives you good tidings of John, confirming a word from Allah and [who will be] honourable, abstaining [from women], and a prophet from among the righteous."

Based on this parallel observation, Surah Maryam can be seen correlating with first Surah Ali Imran as two repeated stories in a thematic way and second with the word *Al-Rahman* within the Surah in a thematic-structural way. As this word describes Allah "the most loving," the Surah has an entire connection to its appearance from the beginning to the end. In addition, the prayer and the vow of Maryam's mother earlier in sanctuary before entering Maryam's story in Surah Ali Imran declines her holy being, mostly like with what Islahi (2015) described "she faithfully fulfilled all her obligations until the very last moment of her life." The similarity can be found in the beginning of Surah Maryam when Allah describes Zakaria – who was also praying alone – as His slave. Both different connections with Surah Ali Imran and the word *Al-Rahman* can be combined to enable us to reread its message, as well as to discover the real value built inside Maryam's self. Indirectly, both differences show how Allah honoured Maryam and her family, whom this 19th Surah was named after her, and makes Zakaria's and Maryam's stories appear again in Surah Ali Imran which took its name from Maryam's father.

Revisiting Maryam

In some cultures, reading a Surah for a specific purpose such as to get blessing is perpetually practiced without authentic evidence from the Quran or the Sunnah. This is against what the Quran teaches. The effort of providing the right understanding or *tadabbur* by the scholars like Farahi should replace this mentality that we often have when reciting the Holy Book. Furthermore, the effort is not only concrete as it is rooted in the depth of its coherence, but also studied through a scientific exegetical process that takes a long way achieving what we need as our life's guidance (Bhutta, 2017; Hossein, 2021).

The study of a Quranic Surah in order to seek its message is the right approach and correct conduct by everyone. In Surah Maryam, the unified explanation can be discovered through thematic-structural analysis which consist of other supportive verses as argument and also evidence. Farahi distinguished the argument in his book *Al-Ra'y Al-Sahih Fi Man Huwa Al-Zabih* by saying that it commonly exposes meanings that are important and dismisses what is easily seen or understood. Besides, we cannot learn a Surah without looking into other Surah, so much so to prove the other bigger unity of Quranic coherency. Previously, we are shown how two repeated stories of Zakaria-Yahya and Maryam-Isa occurred in Surah Ali Imran with

a similar background; Zakaria asking for a child and Maryam was granted a child without even asking Allah. Indirectly, there can be other connections between these two Surah where the other becomes evidence to the one that becomes a proven argument. This can be seen from the utterance of Al-Rahman by Maryam herself which is found in Surah Maryam in verse 18 and 26. From both verses where Allah says *“Indeed, I seek refuge in Al-Rahman from you, [so leave me], if you should be fearing of Allah”* and *“Indeed, I have vowed to the Most Merciful abstention, so I will not speak today to [any] man”* (Sahih International), it is clearly a proof that Maryam knew her Lord. Although she was tested with uneasy conditions that can cause harm to her from the other sides, Allah makes mention in her tongue His name *Al-Rahman* rather than other powerful names such as *Al-Jabbar* or *Al-Aziz*. This matter has supportively been captured in an elaborative passage in Surah Ali Imran in two separate places where Allah mentioned how the pious, righteous upbringing in a faithful family became the start of her excellent characters until she was chosen to become the best of all women in her time.

The mention is, firstly, in verses 36-37 when Allah says:

“But when she delivered her, she said, “My Lord, I have delivered a female.” And Allah was most knowing of what she delivered, and the male is not like the female. “And I have named her Mary, and I seek refuge for her in You and [for] her descendants from Satan, the expelled [from the mercy of Allah]. So, her Lord accepted her with good acceptance and caused her to grow in a good manner and put her in the care of Zechariah. Every time Zechariah entered upon her in the prayer chamber, he found with her provision. He said, “O Mary, from where is this [coming] to you?” She said, “It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides for whom He wills without account.”

Secondly, in verses 42-43, when Allah says:

“And [mention] when the angels said, “O Mary, indeed Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds. O Mary, be devoutly obedient to your Lord and prostrate and bow with those who bow [in prayer].”

Apparently, Allah has made these two passages to support Maryam being someone who really knows Allah because of the obedience and the rightly upbringing by her family, starting approximately with the prayer made by her mother as mentioned in verse 35, *“My Lord, indeed I have pledged to You what is in my womb, consecrated [for Your service], so accept this from me. Indeed, You are the Hearing, the Knowing”* (Sahih International). These both Surahs are not only connected thematically, but also unified in terms of detailed indication which simultaneously shows that the coherence of the whole Quran can structurally be perceived with the help of the words used in the participating Surahs. Moreover, it goes to the next verse in Surah Al-Tahrim at the end of the Quranic order which has declared Maryam to be among the devoted slaves of Allah. This can be clearly understood in verse 12:

“And [the example of] Mary, the daughter of ‘Imrān, who guarded her chastity, so We blew into [her garment] through Our angel [i.e., Gabriel], and she believed in the words of her Lord and His scriptures and was of the devoutly obedient.”

From this point, we can go back to the correlation between Surah Maryam and the name Al-Rahman, where the *rahmah* appears in harmony in two stories of Zakaria-Yahya and Maryam-Isa with a slightly different stylistic. It is clear that the use of nouns for all five words in verse

2 (*zikru rahmati robbika 'abdahu zakaria*) indicates how proud Allah is with the loyalty shown by Zakaria who has never stopped asking and believing in Him. In the story of Maryam, the use of Al-Rahman is intensely indirect for indicating any specific deed done by her mentioned in this Surah. Here, we should return back to the interrelation of other Surah; Surah Ali 'Imran, Surah Al-Tahrim, and Surah Taha in which there are words describing prayer. Although Surah Taha has no direct correlation thematically and structurally, the main theme of the Surah can be considered as a supportive indication to understand the deed taken by Maryam in her obedience to Allah.

On the other hand, the word *rahmah* in verse 21 in Maryam's story after being told to be granted a child magnified the love, protection, and blessings of Allah to His devoted slave. As Allah says:

"He said, "Thus [it will be]; your Lord says, 'It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a rahmah from Us. And it is a matter [already] decreed.'"

Conclusion

The concept of thematic-structural analysis in understanding who is Maryam and Surah Maryam leads to the core point that emphasises the combination of prayer and *rahmah* as two prime elements in obedience, which leads to the concept of God-man relation that is represented by the correlation of Maryam – or Surah Maryam – with Al-Rahman. In addition, being Maryam to Al-Rahman in obedience is an explicit model we can find as a result of understanding the correlation based on interpreting Quran with Quran precisely and rightly, enabling every single believer regardless their gender to be like her.

The coherence concept as explained above can be summarized as follows:

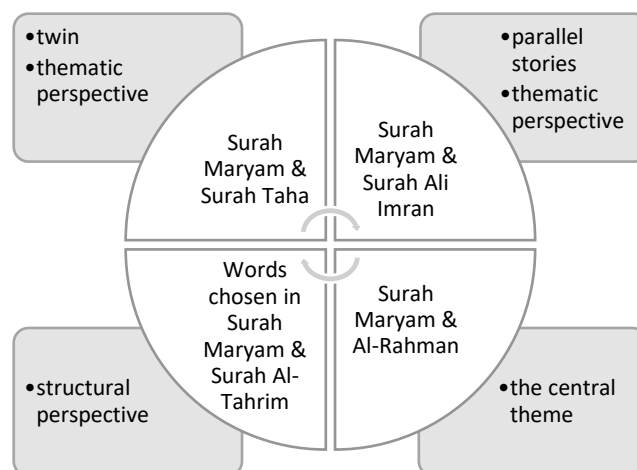


Figure 2: the coherence concept of prayer and *rahmah* derived from interrelation of some Surahs with Surah Maryam

Theoretical and contextual contribution of this research

The understanding of Surah Maryam based on the thematic-structural method based on interpreting Quran with Quran is virtually fresh in the science of the Quranic study. However, taking this step will ensure a more in-depth finding that is barely bended from the main source which is the Quran itself (Farahi, 2008). Such study should be an opening benchmark to other

research in the same field with the different Surah to focus. As a conclusion, there is no evidence to support the idea of reading any Surah only to get the blessing as practiced by the laymen in the Muslim society. Particularly, a thorough word-by-word and central-theme examination is the key concept to bring the true message of the Quran, such as in this Surah which is named after an obedient lady to her Lord. In fact, it is clear from Surah Maryam that the scene of Maryam's pregnancy was not explained in detailed unlike the other important matters. We found the subjects of *rahmah*, prayer, and obedience are more emphasised in this Surah and extremely important to be understood within the organic structure of this Surah itself.

By looking into many aspects of interpreting the Quran, researchers will be able to distinguish every role of the character, words chosen, verses, and the coherence that is tied to a particular theme in a Surah. In this research, taking Surah Maryam as the contextual base allows us to dig deeper into the knowledge it has provided through a solid unity between the elements of this method.

References

- Al-Alusi. (n.d.). *Ruh Al-Ma'ani*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Ihya' Al-Turath Al-'Arabi
- Al-Biq'a'ie, I. U. (n.d.). *Nazm Al-Darar Fi Tanasub Al-Ayat wa Al-Suwar*. Cairo: Dar Al-Kitab Al-Islami
- Al-Qurtubi. (2006). *Al-Jami' Li-Ahkam Al-Qur'an (Tafsir Al-Qurtubi) Vol.5*. Al-Resalah Publisher; Beirut Lebanon.
- Al-Sha'rawi, M. M. (1991). *Tafsir Al-Sha'rawi*. Egypt: Akhbar Al-Yawm
- Alhassen, L. O. (2016). A Structural Analysis of Surat Maryam, Verses 1-58. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 18.1, 92-116. Retrieved from doi:10.3366/jqs.2016.0223
- Asad, M. (2013). *The Message of the Qur'an*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust
- Bhutta, S. S. (2018). *Intraquranic Theories and Methods in Tafsir of the Qur'an through the Qur'an*. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Intraquranic-hermeneutics-%3A-theories-and-methods-in-Bhutta/7387f20b8d52b6bfebdb0b2c9e951f29bda90c14>
- Farahi, H. (2008). *Tafsir Nizam Al-Quran wa Ta'weel Al-Furqan bi Al-Furqan*. Azamgarh Uttar Pradesh, India: Dairah Hameedia, Madrasah Islah, Sarai Meer
- Farahi, H. (2010). *Ta'liqat Fi Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Kareem*. Azamgarh Uttar Pradesh, India: Dairah Hameedia, Madrasah Islah, Sarai Meer
- Farahi, H. (2013). *Rasa'il Fi 'Ulum Al-Quran*. Azamgarh Uttar Pradesh, India: Dairah Hameedia, Madrasah Islah, Sarai Meer
- Farrin, R. (2014). *Structure and Qur'anic Interpretation A Study of Symmetry and Coherence in Islam's Holy Text*. Ashland, Oregon: White Cloud Press
- Farahi, H. (n.d.). *Al-Ra'y Al-Sahih Fi Man Huwa Al-Zabih*. Damascus: Dar Al-Qalam
- Fauzi, N. & Wan Khairuldin, W. M. K. F. (2017). Human Capital Development for Women based on the story of Maryam in the al-Quran. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, Vol.7, No.4, 19-31. Retrieved from <https://hrmars.com/papers/detail/IJARBSS/2776/Human-Capital-Development-for-Women-based-on-the-story-of-Maryam-In-the-al-Quran>
- Gokkir, B. (2018). *Form and Structure of Sura Maryam: A Study from Unity of Sura Perspective*. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323990861>

- Hayrettin, O. (n.d.). Principles of Hamîduddîn Al-Farâhî's Exegesis of the Qur'an and Interpretation of Surah Al-Fil. Retrieved from <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/principles-of-ham-dudd-n-al-far-h-s-exegesis-of-the-qur-an-and-interpretation-of-surah-al-f-l>
- Hossein, S. (2021). Stylistic Cum Hermeneutic Trends in Modern Quranic Exegesis: An Analysis of Allama Hameed Al-Din Farahi's (1862-1930 A.D) Approach and Its Explanation. *International Journal of Quranic Research QURANICA*, Vol.1,3 Issue 1 June 2021, 31-48
- Islahi, A. A. (2015). *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an Pondering Over the Qur'an* (translated). Vol.1. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust
- Islahi, A. A. (2016). *Tadabbur-e-Qur'an Pondering Over the Qur'an* (translated). Vol.2. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust
- Khan, N. A. (2019, August 21). Preliminary Observations About the Structure of Surat Maryam [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=1376336815850380>
- Maududi, A. A. (n.d.). *Tafhim Al-Quran – The Meaning of the Quran*. Retrieved from <https://www.englishtafsir.com>
- Mir, M. (2011). *Coherence in the Qur'an A study of Islahi's Concept of Nazm in Tadabbur-i Quran*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust
- Nadwi, M. A. (2017). *Tafsir Surah Yasin*. Retrieved from <https://ondemand.alsalam.ac.uk>
- Nadwi, M. A. (2018). *Tafsir Surah Al-Isra'*. Retrieved from <https://ondemand.alsalam.ac.uk>
- Nadwi, M. A. (2019). *Quran Intensive*. Retrieved from <https://ondemand.alsalam.ac.uk>
- Qutb, S. (2003). *Fi Zilal Al-Quran*. Cairo: Dar Al-Syuruq
- Qutb, S. (n.d.). *In the Shade of the Quran* (English version). Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/Volume1Surah12/>
- Ravi, M. F. (2015). *Al-Imam Abdul Hamid AL-Farahi wa Juhuduhu Fi Al-Tafsir wa 'Ulum Al-Quran*. Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor: Darul Syakir Enterprise
- Supplications, (7c) Chapter: Supplications to be made at Various Times – Section 3. (n.d.). Sunnah.com. Retrieved from <https://sunnah.com/mishkat:2452>
- Surah Al-Isra'. (n.d.). The Noble Quran. Retrieved from <https://quran.com>
- Surah Al-Nahl. (n.d.). The Noble Quran. Retrieved from <https://quran.com>
- Surah Al-Nisa'. (n.d.). The Noble Quran. Retrieved from <https://quran.com>
- Surah Ali Imran. (n.d.). The Noble Quran. Retrieved from <https://quran.com>
- Surah Maryam. (n.d.). The Noble Quran. Retrieved from <https://quran.com>
- Zamakhshari, M. U. (2009). *Tafsir Al-Kashshaf*. Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Marefah