



INIMITABILITY OF AL-RAHMAN IN SURAH MARYAM

By

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**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra
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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in
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Understanding the Quran through the names of Allah requires a deeper look into the thematic-structural study of the Quran itself. This study aims at the outcome of a refined understanding of one of Allah's names; al-Rahman, and its correlation with Surah Maryam. Often, people see the connection to Allah through His names or attributes as a means to increase their spiritual remembrance of Him. However, it does not magnify the reality of Allah's attribute especially when reading a certain Surah. Thus, through the name of al-Rahman, this research focuses on its visibility in Chapter 19 of the Quran with three objectives; investigating the definition of the word al-Rahman in general and in the Quran, analysing the correlation between the word al-Rahman and Surah Maryam, and discovering a refined understanding of the inimitability of al-Rahman in Surah Maryam. The selection of al-Rahman as the subject of scrutiny is based on its 16 times appearance in the surah which is the most mentioned name of Allah in a particular Quranic chapter. Following Farahi's theory of al-Nazm, this research will use its major elements; words chosen, the 'amūd, and the grouping of the surah as the analytical tools where the refined understanding of al-Rahman is unveiled within the existing theme of Surah Maryam. Finally, this research comes to conclude that Ibrahim's foundation of faith – analysed from his conversation with his father where the word al-Rahman is mentioned – is accurate to become the central point of Surah Maryam based on this thematic-structural interpretation. Subsequently, this finding also leads to the discovery of al-Rahman in Surah Maryam as the possible indicator of the existence of an organic order in the whole Quran. Furthermore, the research contributes scientifically to a new perspective on the Quran with Quran's interpretation by exposing the correlation between a name of Allah and a single Surah.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

KEMUKJIZATAN AL-RAHMAN DALAM SURAH MARYAM

Oleh

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Memahami al-Quran melalui nama-nama Allah memerlukan pemerhatian yang mendalam terhadap kajian tematik-struktur al-Quran itu sendiri. Kajian ini bertujuan mendapatkan hasil pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang salah satu nama Allah; al-Rahman, dan kaitannya dengan Surah Maryam. Manusia biasanya melihat hubungan dengan Allah melalui nama atau sifat-Nya sebagai cara untuk meningkatkan zikir kerohanian mereka. Namun, ia tidak menonjolkan hakikat sifat Allah terutamanya apabila membaca surah tertentu. Justeru, penyelidikan ini memfokuskan kepada kemunculan al-Rahman dalam Surah ke-19 al-Quran dengan tiga objektif; menyiasat definisi perkataan al-Rahman secara umum dan dalam al-Quran, menganalisis hubung kait antara perkataan al-Rahman dan Surah Maryam, dan menemukan pemurnian pemahaman tentang kemukjizatan al-Rahman dalam Surah Maryam. Pemilihan al-Rahman sebagai subjek penelitian adalah berdasarkan kemunculannya sebanyak 16 kali dalam Surah ini, dan merupakan nama Allah yang paling banyak disebut dalam sesuatu Surah al-Quran. Menelusuri teori al-Nazm oleh Farahi, penyelidikan ini akan menggunakan elemen utamanya; perkataan terpilih, 'amūd, dan pengelompokan Surah sebagai alat menganalisis di mana pemahaman yang lebih halus mengenai al-Rahman didedahkan dalam tema surah Maryam yang sedia ada. Akhirnya, kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa asas keimanan Nabi Ibrahim – dianalisis daripada perbualan dengan bapanya di mana perkataan al-Rahman disebut – adalah tepat untuk menjadi titik pusat Surah Maryam berdasarkan tafsiran tematik-struktur ini. Seterusnya, dapatan ini juga membawa kepada penemuan perkataan al-Rahman dalam Surah Maryam sebagai petunjuk yang munasabah wujudnya susunan organik dalam keseluruhan al-Quran. Tambahan pula, penyelidikan ini menyumbang secara saintifik kepada perspektif baharu terhadap pentafsiran al-Quran dengan al-Quran dengan mendedahkan kehubungkaitan antara nama Allah dan sesuatu sūrah.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MARS	Muslim Attitudes Towards Religion
IRS	Islamic Reflection Scale
CAC	collaborative approach of coherence



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, problem statement, research questions, research objectives, research limitations, research importance, and thesis structure.

1.1 Background of the Studies

Under the shade of revelation, since it was sent down a thousand years ago, we urge ourselves to find and ponder the linguistic secrets in the Book of Allah, the subtle literary structure that lies behind its messages, and try to describe its meanings and how they can be seen with our intellectual mind.

The inimitability of the words of Allah has become a major topic of discussion in scientific research ever since, making the academic works of the early Muslim scholars the primary source of such knowledge after two key references: the Quran and the Hadith, or the sayings of the Prophet (ﷺ). Although they had suggested many theories and frameworks, the majority of them related to the literary studies of the Quran. The common ground where every discipline puts its root is the truth of the revelation itself, which makes the Quran studies a thinking book that attracts even the non-Muslim scholars to give their attempt to study the Muslim's holy book (Draz, 2000).

The challenges to create something like the Quran come a few times in this divine book. These verses have been significant to everyone throughout the centuries, until the last day. For the Arabic Quran scholars, this art of speech in the Quran has to be the evidence for the concrete being of revelation, on which they should focus to dig the language and the meaning deeper rather than making the Quran merely a sacred book that cannot be argued or inquired into.

1.1.1 Divine Being of the Quran in Academic Research

First and foremost, the study of the Quran from the perspective of a believing Muslim will tend to be considered as 'biased' or problematic by the disbelieving experts, which tend to regard the Quran like other literary books that they can produce or criticise (Kasi, Wadad and Mir, 2003). Nonetheless, the systematic, if not scientific, Quranic study that is carefully examined would possibly or slightly be seen as having a subjective inclination to the Quran.

This is the challenge that needs to be taken into account. In the world of academic, such problem has yet been respected fully, giving other intellects the academic freedom to evaluate the Quran upon what they desire. Therefore, in stepping into the Quranic knowledge, the principles as perceived in the Islamic history and the life of the last Prophet, Muhammad (ﷺ) should be respected (Farahi, 2010). The Quran was revealed to him continually in the period of 23 years with the real life of hardship, hope, sovereignty, leadership, brotherhood, and humanity. On top of that, it was revealed with the honour of the Arabic language of that time which had secured the specialization of the native Quraish dialect that is known for its eloquence and rhetorical specialty.

For that reason, the Quran is not just sent down to the believers as “the spring of my heart” or *rabī qalbī* (Arabic: رَبِّيعَ قَلْبِي), “the light of my chest” or *nūr ṣadri* (Arabic: نُورَ صَدْرِي), “the clarity of my grief” or *jalā’ ḥuznī* (Arabic: جَلَاءَ حُزْنِي), and “the departure of my anxiety” or *dhahāb hammī* (Arabic: ذَهَابَ هَمِّي), it is also made specifically for the disbelievers by challenging them to create something like the Quran, linguistically and literary. al-Sha’rawī (1995) explained that when the Quran was revealed in the land of Arabs, it did not speak other languages than theirs, it rather differed from their mother tongue not of the alphabet but because of the composition. Here, the prevalence of language is observed, moreover, the Arabs were famous for their art of speech and poetry which they would compete with each other for it aiming to escalate their social ranking. The challenge by the Quran, uniquely, proved that it is inimitable and timelessly relevant to all mankind as guidance.

1.1.2 Scientific Challenges in the Quran

The challenges come in the Quran a few times. These verses are significant to everyone throughout the centuries until the last day. For the Arabic Quran scholars, this art of speech in the Quran has to be the evidence for the concrete being of revelation which they should focus to dig the language and the meaning deeper rather than making the Quran merely a sacred book that cannot be argued or inquired into.

The following verses show the Quran’s different styles of challenging the Arabs at the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), which is applicable to the day.

First of all, challenging to produce a chapter or surah the like thereof, as mentioned in Surah al-Baqarah, verse 23:

{وَأِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّمَّا نَزَّلْنَا عَلَىٰ عَبْدِنَا فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ ۚ وَادْعُوا شُهَدَاءَكُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ}

Translated: And if you are in doubt about what We have revealed to Our servant (Muhammad ﷺ), then produce a surah like it and call your helpers other than Allah, if what you say is true.

Secondly, challenging to come with a chapter, as in Surah Yunus, verse 38:

{أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۚ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ ۚ وَادْعُوا مَنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ}

Translated: Or do they claim, "He (The Prophet ﷺ) made it up!"? Tell them 'O Prophet', "Produce one sūrah like it then, and seek help from whoever you can—other than Allah—if what you say is true!"

Thirdly, challenging to produce ten chapters, as in Surah Hud, verse 13:

{أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۚ قُلْ فَأْتُوا بِعَشْرِ سُورٍ مِثْلِهِ ۚ مُفْتَرِيَاتٍ ۚ وَادْعُوا مَنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ}

Translated: Or do they say, "He (The Prophet ﷺ) has fabricated this 'Quran'!"? Say, 'O Prophet,' "Produce ten fabricated sūrahs like it and seek help from whoever you can—other than Allah—if what you say is true!"

Lastly, challenging mankind and the jinn to create something similar to the Quran, as in Surah al-Isrā', verse 88:

{قُلْ لِّئِنْ أَجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَٰذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيرًا}

Translated: Say, 'O Prophet,' "If 'all' humans and jinn were to come together to produce the equivalent of this Quran, they could not produce its equal, no matter how they supported each other."

Afterward, the Quran concludes its inimitability from the given challenges in another similar stylistic, proclaiming that no creature can ever produce something like the Quran even though everyone is supportive of each other. This statement is also a shred of clear evidence that the Quran has an endless chance for investigation for its inimitability as the Divine speech, in which Allah says in Surah Şad, verse 29:

{كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبَارَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا ۚ آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ}

Translated: "This is" a blessed Book which We have revealed to you 'O Prophet' so that they may contemplate its verses, and people of reason may be mindful.

1.2 Problem Statement

In this discussion, we will see the gaps in the interrelated studies of three main subjects; Quran's literature, al-'Asmā al-Husnā (Arabic: الأسماء الحسنى)—where the word al-Rahman is taken, and scientific studies of the Quran.

1.2.1 Al-'Asmā' al-Husnā in the Scientific Study of Arabic-Quran

The earlier discussion for this research that came into consideration was the "Quranic literature" before being narrowed down to the study of al-Rahman from thematic-structural analysis, specifically in Surah Maryam. Omar (2000) expressed his personal reason why he chose this nineteenth chapter of the Quran for his discourse analysis; it has the most mentioned of the word al-Rahman, which is 16 times in this surah, compared to the other chapters in the Quran. He had not taken further investigation on the significance of this matter and emphasised only the element of repetition under the study of al-i'jāz (Arabic: الإعجاز), which generally, this Arabic word is translated as inimitability and used widely in the study of the Quran. Significantly, this research will not only discover the correlation between the word al-Rahman and Surah Maryam in the shade of the Quranic literature, but consistently examined through the thematic-structural approach as it is more scientific for the field of the Arabic Quran.

Many academic works that are putting the inimitability of the Quran as their subject matter find its root in the Quran's subtlety. They have no disagreement on this point, even though their approaches are different, various and sometimes interrelated. On the other hand, the study of the names of Allah is generally separated from the science of the Quran, which sometimes is attached to the theological perspective in an intense relatedness that commonly will make the study well known only and directly in the matters of spirituality, the unseen, and the philosophy.

Among the famous works related to al-'Asmā' al-Husnā are the books by Ibn Taimiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim and al-Ghazali (رحمه الله). Scholars like Toshihiko Izutsu, who wrote a doctrinal framework of the god-man relationship in the Quran, preferred to do more research related to the comparative and philosophical aspects. Having said that, the earlier scholars of Islam such as Ibn Taimiyyah and al-Ghazali, who were the pioneers of the doctrinal approach of al-'Asmā' al-Husnā, had associated the subject with the study of the Islamic creed or al-'aqīdat (Arabic: العقيدة), or the concept of knowing God.

Historically, after the rise of Islam and its branches of knowledge, Muslims began to apply scientific studies to the Quran (Dahlawi, 2013). From the study of the Quran itself, there were many major branches evolved, including the Islamic

exegesis of the Quran or al-tafsīr (Arabic: التفسير), the linguistic and literary aspect of studies like al-Kasysyāf by Zamakhshariy, the science of the Quran or ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān (Arabic: علوم القرآن), the scientific explorations based on the Quranic verses about the universe, and many more Quran-claimed approach. The early scholars showed their interest in investigating the words of Allah more likely as their spiritual aspiration rather than a career, so much so there are many similarities can be found in their academic approaches, methods, and findings. Some early scholars had not differentiated any major field from the other; in a simple description, they can be regarded as the scholar of many disciplines.

1.2.2 Taste of Literature in Thematic-Structural Analysis

As highlighted earlier, this study attempts to widen the borderless meaning of the inimitability of the Quran based on its literary features thematically and structurally. The concept of an interrelated framework through the Quranic methodology of al-Nazm hopefully will get back the missing track in interpreting the names of Allah and how it can be correlated with a surah in the Quran. Besides, it attempts to acknowledge the significance of the Quran’s organic order which is anticipated to be found. Nevertheless, Quran’s independent capacity of being inimitable which no other religious texts claim of should be an open license that enables many other similar studies; including the massive specialization of the science of eloquence or al-balāghaṭ (Arabic: البلاغة). When we talk about the literature of the Quran, it must not be confused with human literature as we understand it. The term “literature” has some influences from the nations it was born into.

El-Awa listed some of the scholars who had their concern on the in-depth studies of the Quran, such as prominent scholars for the textual relations study like al-Zarkashi and al-Razi who were focusing on al-munāsabaṭ (Arabic: المناسبة) in the classical period, and Richard Bell, Sayyid Qutb, Amin Ahsan Islahi, and Neal Robinson from the modern period (El-Awa, 2006). Besides, al-Baqilani and al-Jurjani had preferably studied the aspect of inimitability as a branch of the Quranic sciences (Kasi, Wadad and Mir, 2003), whereas Zamakhshari led other scholars in the field of literary interpretation or al-balāghaṭ in which he exposed his ability to refine indirect messages from the Quranic verses. In our modern age, we can find the same effort had been made by Farahi, who was the pioneer of al-Nazm theory which includes the grouping of the surahs as one of its main elements (Farahi, 2010). On the other hand, Sayyid Qutb in his tafsir and especially the book al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī (Arabic: التصوير الفني) in an attempt to harmonise the element of imagination with the understanding of Quranic literature (Qutb, 2004).

The biggest problem when it comes to this argument is how most of us would imagine the “literature” as introduced by the Western or any other cultural perspectives, as well as not even the Arabic literature can copy how it is divinely

structured. al-Quran is the direct say from its Owner, who is Allah (Akhtar, 2008). The benchmark of studying the Quranic literature must be in line with what Islam has introduced – through the Quran itself or the narration of the Prophet (ﷺ) and his companions (رضي الله عنهم) – and what it has influenced especially to the Arabic language (Farahi, 2010).

Last but not least, the issue of the “literature” of the Quran as being misunderstood can be corrected through the Quran itself. This is the strength found in the theory of Quranic coherence, which gradually will make people rethink the term “al-adab” (Arabic: الأدب) – the literature – that is related to the Quran is totally different from the meaning of man-made “literature.” The role of a specific word; al-Rahman, shall lead us to the right meaning if we are keen to investigate not only with depth but also through the scientific research which is formed within this Divine speech.

1.2.3 Anticipated Contribution Through Coherence Study

Scholars vary in using the term al-munāsabaṭ, or tartīb al-āy (Arabic: ترتيب الآي), or irtibāṭ al-āy (Arabic: ارتباط الآي) to represent al-Naẓm (Abd. Rahman, 2018), which is best translate as coherence. Besides, the terms tanāsub (Arabic: تناسب) or tanāsuq (Arabic: تناسق) are also used to define the same terminology. In general, the science of al-munāsabaṭ has been broadened wisely, which the study related to this science is narrowly focusing on the structure part of the Quran, like the correlation between the beginning and the ending of a surah with the other, the thematic unity between the surahs (Abd. Rahman, 2018) and the presence of the central point in each surah (Farahi, 2010).

However, there is a hurdle whereby it is not easy to see the study of the beautiful name of Allah can be directly related to the theory of coherence in the Quran. On the other hand, the term coherence is arguable and debatable when it comes to its meaning in the Arabic language. The masterpiece of some prominent scholars in the field of Quran's interpretation such as al-Khatibi, al-Baqillani, al-Razi, al-Zarkashi, al-Alusi, or from the contemporary study like Ibn 'Asyur, Sayyid Qutb, Hamiduddin Farahi and his student Amin Ahsan Islahi, who later on were followed by contemporary scholars like Mustansir Mir and Muhammad Akram Nadwi, are remarkable with their works in Quranic methodological study. A mass explanation with scientific analysis is done to examine significant questions, like how a verse in the Quran can correlate with other verse in different chapters, how a chapter of the Quran is naturally in an organic order, and how every chapter of the Quran has its pair and group, and among every group, there are other rings connecting each other.

The term al-Naẓm was introduced respectively. Nonetheless, scholars differ in determining the natural tool which can best represent this term in examining the

meaning of the Quran. The exegesis work of an Indian scholar, Hamiduddin or Abdul Hamid Farahi, called *Niẓām al-Qur’ān* is considered the success of applying al-Naẓm in modern tafsir’s world. However, he did not correlate any attribute or name of Allah with the theory to be the park in any surah, allowing the coherence analysis to start here as the focal point. In almost all books and references, the discussion of literary aspects of the Quran focuses on verses pertaining to indirect messages or which relate to metaphorical, figurative, narrative storytelling and many more of its kind. Not to mention, the studies of al-Naẓm or the coherence of the Quran.

This theoretical framework basically consists of a refined methodology, either grammarily, rhetorically, thematically, structurally, or semantically. Having said that, the studies related to the names of Allah with the impact of coherence study should be more seriously done. The science of the Quran should be connected with the Arabic aspect of the Quran in a bigger perspective, which can lead to a more profound discovery of interpreting the Quran with the Quran. This is something that needs attention, especially among scholars of the Arabic language and Quran studies. They should initiate the effort to circulate scientific research on the inimitability of the Quran into the latest version of investigation that provides beneficial findings through Allah’s beautiful names and the intra-Quranic interpretation.

1.2.4 Bridging the Gaps

Up to the recent study, the research done for this topic can take place initially by integrating the subject of *al-Asmā’ al-Husnā* with the theory of al-Naẓm, moreover it can be a novel contribution to be applied in any specific chapter of the Quran. Therefore, this research aims to merge three main subjects: the word al-Rahman, Surah Maryam, and the concept of al-Naẓm, in the hope that a refined understanding of the inimitability of the Quran will be exposed. The hidden correlation that is based on any beautiful name of Allah should be paid more attention to in the future as it can pave other connecting rings that may occur in the Quranic orderly arrangement.

On the other hand, the study of Surah Maryam with a focus on the attributes of Allah is not a well-known subject either. However, investigating the semantical perspective is one of the most common studies to be done in this surah without following any specific thematic-structural method. This problem is obvious among the knowledge seekers, even though there is only one attribute of Allah – al-Rahman – that appears in this surah that can open a constructed research for the surah. Regrettably, this focus has yet to be found, moreover, that is founded on al-Naẓm study. Mir (2011) has seen the issue and explained that the attempt at scholarly work should be wider and deeper, as according to him it needs to be more proactively detailed, like what he referred to as ‘literary criticism.’

The concept of coherence is commonly applied in the literary study of the Quran in order to understand its inimitability. Unlike the study of al-Asmā' al-Husnā in the Quran, the coherence study has more opportunities to be examined in a Quranic chapter, if not in the whole Quran. The challenge to blend both subjects in a systematic study is quite real, as it is considered a fresh idea in academic research of the Arabic Quran. Therefore, not many exact references can be found. Nonetheless, some modern works in theologies are paying less attention too to the roles of the attributes of Allah in contributing to a better understanding of the Quran.

1.3 Research Questions

This study shall provide the answers to the following questions:

- 1- What is al-Rahman in general and in the Quran?
- 2- What is the correlation between the word al-Rahman and Surah Maryam?
- 3- How this correlation affects a better understanding of al-Rahman in Surah Maryam?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims at:

- 1- Investigating the definition of the word al-Rahman in general and in the Quran.
- 2- Analysing the correlation between the word al-Rahman and Surah Maryam.
- 3- Discovering a refined understanding of the inimitability of al-Rahman in Surah Maryam.

1.5 Research Limitation

This study will focus only on one of the 99 names or attributes of Allah or al-Asmā' al-Husnā; al-Rahman, in a generic view of its mention in the Quran and will analytically study its correlation with Surah Maryam. As an extra contribution, this research will indirectly include the other six Quranic chapters; three chapters that preceded and three chapters that come after Surah Maryam – which are included in Group 3 altogether – to examine the thematic-structural possible correlation around the neighbourhood. At the same time, a brief comparative study between Surah Maryam and Surah Ali Imran is presented in Chapter 5 to show the potential application of a new or refined framework, which subsequently evolves from the finding of this study that based on the original framework.

1.6 Research Importance

This research will discover a new way of interpreting the inimitability of the Quranic meaning through the concept of al-Nazm, where it is built on the correlation between a word in the Quran, basically Allah's name al-Rahman, and a particular Quranic chapter (Surah Maryam). Since the studies of al-Nazm had previously suggested some features like words chosen, central point or 'amūd, word-meaning approach, linear connection, thematic-structural unity, chapter pair, and grouping of the surahs, it is possible to anticipate an extended approach, if not a new method, to be introduced in such academic works.

1.7 Thesis Structure

The thesis structure is important in this research in order to progressively reach the outcomes of the analysis. The flow starts from general observation to specific observation, reviewing the data to analysing the conclusion, and from principal resources to independent research. The investigation and discussion of this research will be divided into five chapters, in which Chapter 3 and 4 of this research will include the most critical discussion regarding the methodology used and the findings produced.

1.8 Conclusion

Since there are many newly research done with the finding of an organic order from a central point in a surah, this study can be an extra contribution to the existing method by Farahi, and at the meantime, harmonising the elements of al-Nazm that can be applied not just in a surah, or with a specific word in the Quran, but also in the entire book of revelation that later hopefully to become an academic reference in the field. Likewise, we can see in the latest century that the curiosity of studying the Quran is widely spreading in many regions or societies, either Muslims or non-Muslims. Because of that, the need to bring the right and complete understanding of the Quran is really urgent and essential.

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