

# Empowering Women: A Multi-perspective Discourse Analysis of Women's Dignity and Equality in Qur'an

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**Abstract:** According to Qur'an, God's divine merit-demerit system never allows for any biased treatment towards men or women. Dignity instead is what God has granted on all children of Adam. The present article, hence, sought to trace back women's dignity and equality to the discourse of Qur'an working on a sample of 11 Surahs. The discourse analysis was based on combinatory perspectives of text linguistics, pragmatics, and rhetoric. The results revealed that the most salient marked discursual devices of women's equality and dignity were the techniques such as parallelism, anaphoric repetitions, juxtaposition of the believers' attributes, emphatic negative propositions. In addition, the sometimes situated hierarchical pattern of relationship between men and women were not indicative of any unfair evaluation of either gender. Instead, the yardstick was the amount of the believers' efforts in the way of God's "forgiveness and reward".

**Keywords:** Equality, Dignity, Proposition, Parallel, Qur'an, Rhetoric

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## 1. Introduction

Humans are "entities with natural capacities for thought and free choice" (Lee & George, 2008, p. 175). No matter in what culture they start their life journey, they can almost make sure that improving their existence mostly depends on their ongoing commitment to knowledge gaining, regulatory compliance, upward mobility and actualization of dignity by means of which their mental, physical, and societal robustness are ensured. Dignity, singled out, encourages individuals to deepen their virtuous qualities since it prevalingly operates in normative, constitutional, and doctrinal dimensions of human life (Weinrib, 2016). In this regard, most heavenly teachings have ventured to raise awareness in people of their inalienable rights, and ability to do the best and feel dignified.

Drawn originally from Qur'an, Islamic teachings envisage dignity as a manifestation of equity and a transcendent value regardless of race, ethnicity, wealth, and gender. As stated in Qur'an, "We have bestowed dignity on the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them the good and conferred upon them special favors above the greater

part our creation" (Q: 17:70). This conceptualization of "special favor", "dignity", and equality for "children of Adam" manifestly celebrates a point of departure from erstwhile long-standing mentality to treat women and people of different ethnicities as inferiors. All through Qur'an, in cosmological, ontological and injunctive verses, human beings are equally held responsible for what they opt unto God, and it is, sometimes, people's shallowness of faith that leads to irrationally unjust practices. Qur'an admits of no doubt that men and women's differences allow for different roles, but not any type of biased appraisal. As reported in the divine merit -demerit system of Qur'an, God's reward or chastisement is fair, equitable, and gender-neutral. Women are thus depicted as integral parts of all spectrums of social, cultural, economic, and judicial practices. "And those who will do some good deeds, male or female and be a Muslim, then they shall enter Paradise, and they shall not be wronged a bit" (Q: 4:124).

The present article, though limited in scope, addresses women's unequivocal right to equity, and dignity as established through the rhetoric of Qur'an. The study, thus, deliberately deploys a multi-perspective, micro- macro

discourse analysis for a sample of verses where women are in the foregrounding. The main question of the present study, accordingly, concerns the discursive marked features that reinforce women's equal sharing of accountability and social presence before God.

## 2. Review of Related Theories and Concepts

The study of Qur'an has been encouraged by the very Qur'an: "[it is] a book we have revealed to you abounding in good that they may ponder over its verses, and that those endowed with understanding may be mindful" (Q: 38:29). There are ample studies on Qur'an's rhetorical eminence, literary style, semantic arrangements, pragmatic features, thematic analysis, textual and architectural superiority, and more recently the data mining studies of its texts to discover respective semantic or syntactic algorithms (e.g. Alhawarat, Hegazi, & Hilal, 2015; Javadi Amoli, 2005; Khorram-Shahi, 1994; Mir, 2016; Qutb, 1967).

Religious discourses have communicating their messages and winning people's full attention as their paramount goals. Studying religious texts, however, imposes some problems for scholars since such discourses are usually entwined with various textual strategies and devices including metaphorical language, contradiction, negation, and paradox (Sztajer, 2011, p. 2-4). Scholars and exegetes, therefore, employ a combination of methods, quite compatible with the nature of discourse studies, to analyze and uncover the intended meanings of overt or covert messages. Indeed, discourse analysis can be viewed as an ingathering of approaches comprising data analysis, metatheoretical and theoretical assumptions (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Johnstone and Eisenhart (2008) maintain that discourse studies should regularly incorporate an interdisciplinary fabric of rhetorical studies, genre analysis, semantics, pragmatics, and other aspects of applied linguistics. In fact, to unmask the functional aspect of language nothing works better than a multiperspective approach with a combination of discourse analysis and stylistics (Stubbs, 1983). In many discourse analysis models of religious texts, the discovery level most favors descriptive fashion (Bodine, 1995). The reason is, in part, attributable to the multi-layered organization of religious messages that requires an analyst's holistic attention to marked and unmarked clues while any direct access to precompiled knowledge is not possible.

### 2.1. The Trichotomous Rhetorical Analysis of Islamic Scripts

In its classical sense, rhetoric refers to the art of delivering a persuasive discourse. Rhetorical studies are age long in different cultures. For example, Aristotle believed that "taxi" or the order of elements in the configuration of a discourse had an undeniable role in making it rhetorically persuasive (Reboul, 1991). The classical Aristotelian rhetoric is based on

three pillars of pathos, ethos, and logos<sup>1</sup>. While at the level of pathos, an analyst tries to create both emotional effect and the right environment for audiences to get the intended message (Legget, 2012), at the ethos, his aim is to project his own authoritative image. He then works with logical induction and deduction to deliver a convincing oration at the logos level (Williams, 2015).

In view of Qur'anic discussion, the goal of Qur'an is not merely to present its sublime eloquence, but rather to offer persuasive guiding principles to be socially conveyed and communicated. Thus, the literary features of Qur'an are not singularly of aesthetic value, but so much valuable for their unique ability to convey intended messages (Robinson, 2004). Knowing this, Arab rhetoricians, much ahead of western modern linguists, developed a three-dimensional approach in rhetorical studies that encompasses the three discursive pillars of ethos, pathos, and logos in a much more comprehensive way. Arabic rhetorical approach incorporates three disciplines or constituents as well:

- ilm-al-ma'ani
- ilm al-bayan
- ilm al-badi

The first one in the trichotomy revolves around cultural, socio-pragmatic nature of discourses that leads to meaning making by the parties involved ("Arabic gems", 2006). The other components accordingly deal with literary figures of speech and embellishments that beautify a discourse ("Bayan", 2016). It is mainly the first component that has captured the attention of sociolinguists and discourse analysts though the other two are also believed to serve as important enforcers of communicative messages (Abdul-Raof, 2006):

"The rhetorical discipline of ilm al-mani is concerned with juxtaposition of sentence constituents in various word orders that lead to distinct pragmatic significations. Rhetorically, ilm al-ma'ani denotes the pragmatic functions of word order. The study of ilm al-ma'ani is interrelated to semantic syntax and discourse analysis" (p. 97).

Minding the three-component analysis system, Abdul Mohsen (2013) assigns the rhetorical uniqueness of Qur'an to its threesome features of concise and persuasive semantization, balanced and harmonious composition, and tangible artistic imagery. On the socio-pragmatic plane, ilm-al-ma'ani, Tzortis (2015, 2013) offers a summative opinion saying that Qur'an's vastness of rhetorical features makes it even different from usual Arabic discourse since Qur'an applies these features in such a unique dynamic way that conforms to the theme of a text while enhancing the impact of its conveyable messages. All in all, one can concur on the idea that Qur'an's "sea of rhetorical features" has a pragmatic overtone since it is primarily a divine guidance to be taught and instructed in different life situations.

### 2.2. Text Linguistics and Aspectual Analysis in Qur'anology

According to Kilgour (1999), studying a text can include

<sup>1</sup> In Aristotle. (2004). *Rhetoric*. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts

various language-bound aspects of human institutions such as religion, politics, law, and medicine. On the other hand, in a broader interpretive discourse level a blend of situated, interactive, and communicative aspects of spoken or written texts, considerations of authors as well as addressees make that textual study worthwhile (Trappes-Lomax, 2004). In other words, linguistic scholars attend to two convoluted constitutive levels comprising a text: manifest and hidden. Manifest, in text linguistics, refers to the structural variables that appear in a linguistic texture making it different from other texts and the later to the functional driving forces behind those variables (Shiffrin, 1994). Having this in mind, the challenging job of discourse interpretation can better proceed when one attends to both levels.

Concerning Qur'anic studies, it is a heartfelt Islamic conviction that Qur'an must be highly cherished and the believers are required to fathom the real value of its instructions that go beyond words. Islamic exegetists, therefore, deal with two discourse practices in Qur'anic research, namely *ta'wil* and *tafsir* in handling the manifest and the hidden layers. *Tafsir* is an Arabic equivalent used mostly for the exegesis of Holy Qur'an. The term is more general than *ta'wil* that refers to the assignment of special meaning to a verse or verses (Kamali, 2003). In the exegesis of Qur'an, some verses elucidate the meaning of other ones and help the scholars in *ta'wil*-*tafsir* practices (Taqi Usmani, 2006, p. 339). In other words, Qur'an itself is regarded as a source where some intertextual parts are clarified by some other discourse chunks (e.g. Taha et al., 2013; Tzorits, 2012; Abdul-Raof, 2003). Furthermore, the exegesis of Qur'an spans not a single tradition, but a variety of competing traditions such as discourse and textual criticism aimed at finding the historical and cultural origin of a Qur'anic text, different communicative devices, literary genres, grammatical, morphological, and syntactical aspects of the script. Such multi-dimensional aspectual frame work of Qur'anic exegesis operating at both *ta'wil* and *tafsir* levels is, in fact, an endeavor to make the job of macro-level interpretation easier and to establish some new analytic micro models. In the science of Qur'analogy, such a discussion is known as linguistic aspectual study (Najjarzadigan, 2012, p. 4-6).

Historically speaking, in aspectual and pragmatic studies of utterances, *ilm-al-ma'ani* rhetoricians have also found it beneficial to determine the illocutionary intended forces of text samples. Their concern have mainly centered around various speech act taxonomies such as constatives and performatives (Al-Hindawi, Al-Masu'di & Mirza, 2014) This way, they have been further able to decide on the types of effects text samples produce in the real world. Matloob (as cited in AL-Hindawi et al., 2014), for instance, believes that discourse pragmatics is part of the scholastic theology of Islam since the verses of Holy Qur'an command, prohibit and constate to bring about some changes in the world.

The main speech acts are of nature directional and have the world-to-word, the word-to-world, the double, and the empty direction of fit (Tsohatzidis, 1994). The direction of fit

concept refers to the fact that in some situations, our words matches the world thus having the word-to-the world direction whereas in some other situations the world matches the speech act in the opposite direction. Searle and Vanderveken (1985) briefly classify the main speech acts in the following way:

- **Constatives:** statements that may be assessed true or false because they tend to describe a state of affairs in the world
- **Performatives:** The speaker performs an action in uttering specific words. Performatives include the following sub-categories:
  - **Directives:** statements or propositional contents that guarantee an action by the addressees.
  - **Commissives:** statements in which a speaker takes a course of action as expressed by the propositional content
  - **Expressives:** statements that convey attitudes or emotions about state of affairs in propositional contents of the utterances
  - **Declaratives:** statements that a speaker makes to bring changes in the state of affairs by the very act of uttering them

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. The Study Framework

The present exploratory study tries to exhibit a multi-perspective approach in surveying the taxonomic classification of linguistic devices, and marked discursal features of a sample of Qur'anic verses followed by some supporting discussions. Since translated verses impose either semantic or stylistic problems, as in case of any translated work, to ensure accuracy, the related Arabic verses<sup>2</sup> alongside their translations by Marmaduke Pickthall are presented<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, within the main traditions of discourse analysis<sup>4</sup>, the combinatory structural and functional approach of the study borrows ideas from text linguistics, pragmatics and rhetoric to establish a kind of interlink between the samples and their social functioning.

#### 3.2. The Data

The sample verses that address women's dignity have been drawn from 11 Surahs: Al-e-Imran, An-Nisa, An-Nahl, Maryam, Al-Ahzab, An-Najm, Ar-Rahman, Al-Hadid, Al-Mumtahanah, At-Tahrim, and At-Takwir. A list of the rhetorical terms used in the study has been provided in

<sup>2</sup>All the Arabic verses of the survey have been extracted from <http://www.parsquran.com/eng/>

<sup>3</sup>All the translations by Pickthall have been extracted from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/pick/>

<sup>4</sup>Conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and critical linguistics, Interactional sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication, Foucauldian discursive discourse studies and Bakhtinian research (Wetherell, Taylor, Yates & Open University, 2001)

Appendix A<sup>5</sup>. The study also knowingly detaches its thread of thought from any copycat feministic orientation or interpretation and seeks to trace back women's equity and dignity to the discourse of Qur'an through the given Surahs.

3.3. The Analysis Procedure

Verses of Qur'an are both microcosmic and macrocosmic in nature (Herlihy, 2009, p. 110). The microcosmic nature of a verse refers to the fact that even a single verse encapsulates a wholesome discourse for an analyst to construe and the macrocosmic nature emphasizes the point that each single verse is connected to the overall discourse of Qur'an. The analysis, therefore, hinges on the connection of verses to each other and the propositions they make. The following table captures both structural and functional aspects of the analysis:

Table 1. The combinatory structural and functional approach of the study.

Structural	Functional
Textual, rhetorical devices contributing to the functional uniqueness or salience of ideas (see Appendix A)	Pragmatic force of utterances
Frequent occurrence of any lexical item or larger syntactic units	layers of pathos, ethos, logos, or emotion, authority and logic
Any nuances, presences, or absences of some textual elements such as the interjection O for addressing someone	Thematic ideas, or expressions emphasized
Arrangement of structural units in terms of linearity or parallelism	Functional significance of the marked features

4. Discussion

It is worth reminding that Qur'anic verses are of three main types: cosmological, ontological, and injunctive, each to increase insight and contemplation in men and women about the power of God the Almighty. Regarding injunctive verses, the use of third person male pronouns does not exclude women since third-person male pronouns are frequently used in generic sense in Qur'an (Javadi Amoli, 2005, p. 115-119). Pay attention to the following verse (i.e., verse 97) from Surah An-Nahl:

مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيَاةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ. (97)

Translation: Whosoever doeth right, whether male or female, and [he] is a believer, him verily we shall quicken with good life, and We shall pay them a recompense in proportion to the best of what they used to do. Q: 16:97

The first proposition of the verse that sets a condition encompasses both female and male servants by putting them on an equal plane via the use of independent coordinating conjunction "or" shown as "أو" in Arabic. Therefore, the phrase "مَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ" (i.e., "Whosoever doeth right, whether male or female") links the potential agents of both genders equally to the commissive illocutionary

propositions appearing later in the verse:

- we shall quicken [him] with good life
- We shall pay them a recompense in proportion to the best of what they used to do

Neither the single third-person male pronoun "هُوَ" (i.e., he in English) nor the plural male pronoun "هُمْ" and the masculine verbs "عَمِلَ" and "كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ" (i.e., doeth and do) refer to masculine gender; therefore, the commissive propositions, apodotes, that result from the first condition are gender equal. The point on gender equality of the propositions is further confirmed noting that "وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ" (i.e., and [he] is a believer) is a kind of rhetorical epistasis or an affirmation device to amplify the already stated ideas. In fact, the gender equality of the divine merit-and-chastisement system holds for whole verses where the addressees are given either cautionary advice, or promises of reward. By the same token, the following verse from Surah Al-e-Imran exhibits a very similar formula that is further elucidated in the following table.

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّمَّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُوذُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حَسَنُ الثَّوَابِ. (95)

Translation: And their Lord hath heard them (and He saith): Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male, or female, to be lost. Ye proceed one from another. So those who fled and were driven forth from their homes and suffered damage for My cause, and fought and were slain, verily I shall remit their evil deeds from them and verily I shall bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow - A reward from Allah. And with Allah is the fairest of rewards. Q: 3:195

Table 2. Analytic description of the features of the verse 195.

Combinatory structural and functional features
Potential agents of both genders are addressed: "مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ" (i.e., male, or female)
We have use of independent coordinating conjunction "أو" (i.e., "or") to signify equality.
Rhetorical epistasis such as "بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ" has been employed (i.e., Ye proceed one from another) for further emphasis of the previously stated ideas.
Illocutionary commissive propositions of rewards include both genders equally.

In contradistinction to conferring reward on both men and women justly, we have the awaiting chastisement for infidels, nonbelievers and idolaters either male or female as presented in the verses 6, 7, 8 of Surah 66, At-Tahrim. The point to be mentioned is that all the aforementioned verses start with masculine interjection words and masculine pronouns that is to say with "يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ" (i.e., O ye) to address either believers or disbelievers of both genders. For the sake of conciseness, just the beginnings of the verses 6, 7, 8, and 9 of Surah At – Tahrim, are offered in sequence in both Arabic and English:

- يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا : O ye who believe! Ward off
- يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَعْتَذِرُوا : O ye who disbelieve! Make no excuses
- يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا تُوبُوا : O ye who believe! Turn unto Allah

<sup>5</sup> The terms are extracted from Silva Rhetoricae, <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>

in sincere repentance

- يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ جَاهِدِ : O Prophet! Strive against

Each single verse, from the verse 6 to the verse 9, develops into directive illocutions: "Ward off", "Make no excuses", "Turn unto... in sincere repentance", and "Strive against". As noticed, as the opener of the verse 9, God directly commands the prophet and the believers to take action against non-believers and gives account of believers and non-believers through three clear exemplifications in indicative mood in the verses 10, 11 & 12:

صَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأةَ نُوحٍ وَامْرَأةَ لُوطٍ كَانَتَا تَحْتَ عَبْدَيْنِ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا صَالِحِينَ فَخَانَتَاهُمَا فَلَمْ يُغْنِيَا عَنْهُمَا مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَقِيلَ ادْخُلَا النَّارَ مَعَ الدَّٰخِلِينَ (١٠)

*Translation:* Allah citeth an example for those who disbelieve: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot, who were under two of Our righteous slaves yet betrayed them so that they (the husbands) availed them naught against Allah and it was said (unto them): Enter the Fire along with those who enter. Q: 66:10

وَصَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا امْرَأةَ فِرْعَوْنَ إِذْ قَالَتْ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنْ فِرْعَوْنَ وَعَمَلِهِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ (١١)

*Translation:* And Allah citeth an example for those who believe: the wife of Pharaoh when she said: My Lord! Build for me a home with thee in the Garden, and deliver me from Pharaoh and his work, and deliver me from evil-doing folk. Q: 66:11

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا وَصَدَقْتَ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُنْتِ مِنَ الْفَائِزِينَ (١٢)

*Translation:* And Mary, daughter of 'Imran, whose body was chaste, therefor We breathed therein something of Our Spirit. And she put faith in the words of her Lord and His scriptures, and was of the obedient. Q: 66:12

In the above verses, "امْرَأةَ نُوحٍ وَامْرَأةَ لُوطٍ" (i.e., "the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot"), "امْرَأةَ فِرْعَوْنَ" (i.e., "the wife of Pharaoh"), and "مَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ" (i.e., "Mary, the daughter of 'Imran") are God's female exemplifications of "الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا" and "الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا", or the Qur'an's believers and non-believers. Obviously, the juxtapositions of "الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا" as a masculine pronoun followed by a masculine verb immediately with the phrases like "امْرَأةَ نُوحٍ وَامْرَأةَ لُوطٍ", and in the same manner the masculine pronoun and verb as observed in "الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا" with the phrase "امْرَأةَ فِرْعَوْنَ" present neither a gender incongruity nor an opacity.

In view of logic, the fact is that Qur'an speaks of the attainability of the utmost degree of nearness to God, taqarrub<sup>6</sup>, neither through gender exceptive propositions nor through exclusive ones. Therefore, we do not have the like of the two following exclusive and exceptive propositions<sup>7</sup>:

- "None but men are muqarrabun<sup>8</sup> (i.e., مقربون meaning close to God)" as well as "All muqarrabun are men."
- "All except women are muqarrabun" as well as "All non-women are muqarrabun"

Clearly, being of a gender does not pragmatically adjoin

any privilege in the divine evaluation system and thus both gender groups are of equal standing. Quite interestingly, the presence of a rhetorical anaphora or the repetition of the phrase "صَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِلَّذِينَ" (i.e., "And Allah citeth an example for those") at the opening of the two successive verses 10 and 11 emphatically asserts the no-gender-exception message about the assembly of believers or non-believers.

The emphasis on equality in Qur'an is sometimes rendered through some techniques other than the repetition of a word or a phrase as noted by Ahmad Khan (2013) in the opening verse of Surah An-Nisa. On the significance of women's inalienable rights to respect and dignity, God says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا (١)

*Translation:* O mankind! Be careful of your duty to your Lord Who created you from a single soul and from it created its mate and from them twain hath spread abroad a multitude of men and women. Be careful of your duty toward God in whom ye claim (your rights) of one another, and toward the wombs (that bear you). Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer. Q: 4:1

The verse semantically expresses the equality of men and women both intrinsically and extrinsically. That is to say, the equality of genders has been emphasized in terms of the very nature of their creation since they are from a single soul (i.e., "مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ"), and their duties before God. In God's persuasive terms, the use of "the wombs" (i.e., "الْأَرْحَامَ") at the end of the verse intensifies women's dignity. To a reader or a listener, the persuasiveness of the verse smoothly grows in intensity since the illocutionary force of such an admonitory verse is strengthened by the anaphoric repetition of the verb "اتَّقُوا" (i.e., "be careful of") and a rhetorical auxesis (i.e., a kind of emotional climax) ending in "الْأَرْحَامَ" (i.e., "the wombs"). Moreover, the metonymic use of the term "the wombs" instead of women semantically produces a climactic effect and amplifies the contrast between the hidden, or the esoteric versus the apparent, or the exoteric. The point is further confirmed when the attention is drawn to the use of the term "رَقِيبًا" that, once more, semantically emphasizes the superiority of what God knows since he is the authoritative observer or "رَقِيب". In terms of logic, the application of sorites that is a kind of concatenated syllogisms explaining why the believers must be "careful" well accords with the gradual process of natural evolution of which women are considered as undeniable members. Moreover, the conjunctive propositions that are connected to each other with "وَ", and build upon one another further heighten the solidity of God's argumentation. The diagrammatic figure below shows how the verse emotionally progresses and resolves in the phrase "وَالْأَرْحَامَ" :

<sup>6</sup> in Steingass, Johnson, Richardson, & Wilkins (1988). *A comprehensive Persian-English dictionary*

<sup>7</sup>From "Translating Propositions" (2013)

<sup>8</sup>In "Tafsiru Kalimat'it Tawhid" (2015)

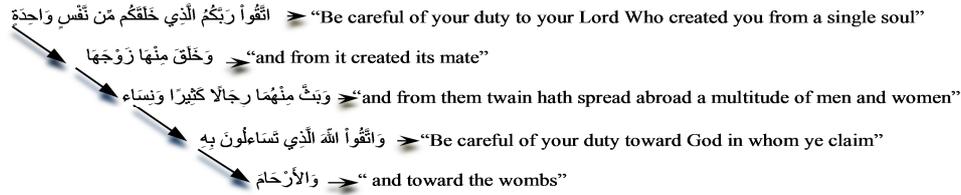


Figure 1. The chain of syllogistic arguments of the verse 1 of Surah An-Nisa.

Taking into account the organizational mode of Qur'anic discourses, we can also find a hard-hitting reproach leveled against any defective male culture in Surah At-Takwir (i.e., Q: 81) in the verses 6, 7, and 8.

- (6) : وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ Q: 81:6
- (7) : وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ Q: 81:7
- (8) : وَإِذَا الْمَوْؤُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ Q: 81:8
- (9) : بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ Q: 81:9

The governing illocutionary force of the Surah is assertive and the emotional intensity of the verses is strengthened with their short, parallel syntactic patterns. In other words, most verses are rhetorically isocolonic with the same repetitive endings in parallel positions (i.e., "ت"). The latter rhetorical technique is called homioptoton with the goal to illicit maximum response from audiences. On the other hand, the anaphoric repetition of " وَإِذَا " (i.e. "And when") doubly puts emphasis on the great determinate event of the future when the oppressed girls are invoked to witness before God and to ask why they were been buried alive:

- وَإِذَا الْمَوْؤُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ
- بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ

Table 3. Summary description of the rhetorical features of the verses in At-Takwir.

Combinatory structural and functional features
Assertive illocutionary force for the beginning verses 1-8
Short, parallel, syntactic pattern for isocolonic verses
Anaphoric repetition of "وَإِذَا" (i.e., And when)
Homioptoton of "ت" in سُئِلَتْ, زُوِّجَتْ, سُجِّرَتْ, خُلِقَتْ to add to the rhythmic effect

Qur'an also includes the example of women who have attained the maximal closeness to God for which they are addressed through the intermediacy of God's angles. In Surah Maryam, the deliberate choice of parallel syntax is highly captured when both Zechariah and Maryam are addressed in the same equal terms in the verses 8-9 & 20-21:

- (8) : قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَىٰ هَيْئٍ (i.e., He said: So [it will be]... It is easy for Me)
- (9) : قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَىٰ هَيْئٍ (i.e., He said: So [it will be]... It is easy for Me)

قَالَ رَبُّ أُنَىٰ يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَكَانَتْ امْرَأَتِي عَاقِرًا وَقَدْ بَلَغْتُ مِنَ الْكِبَرِ عِتِيًّا (8) قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَىٰ هَيْئٍ وَقَدْ خَلَقْتِكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَمْ تَكُ شَيْئًا (9)

Translation: He said: My Lord! How can I have a son when my wife is barren and I have reached infirm old age? He said: So [it will be]. Thy Lord saith: It is easy for Me,

even as I created thee before, when thou wast naught. Q: 19:8-9

قَالَتْ أَنَّىٰ يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَلَمْ يَمْسَسْنِي بَشَرٌ وَلَمْ أَكُ بَغِيًّا (٢٠) قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَىٰ هَيْئٍ وَلَنَجْعَلَنَّ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَرَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَكَانَ أَمْرًا مَقْضِيًّا (٢١)

Translation: She said: How can I have a son when no mortal hath touched me, neither have I been unchaste. He said: So [it will be]. Thy Lord saith: It is easy for Me. And (it will be) that We may make of him a revelation for mankind and a mercy from Us, and it is a thing ordained. Q: 19:20-21

Not only the same syntactic structure is repeated in the verses 9 & 21, but also similar diction has been maintained. The use of parallelism, here in the Surah, can implicate three important pragmatic functions:

- Creating phatic balance, harmony, equal weight and functional equality ("Parallel Construction", 2009)
- Linking different chunks of texts
- Showing the rhetorical continuity and progression<sup>9</sup> of the same thing

Parallel structures, indeed, invite exegetes not to interpret a text linearly, but to attend to larger portions of the text to get an impact beyond the meaning of individual sentences, as noticed in Surah Maryam. Moreover, sometimes, ambiguous words can be clarified only in the light of some larger context (s) where instances of parallelism are observed (Bratcher, 2013). Thus, the same wording of Qur'an in the two different commissive verses 9 & 21 as well as similar syntactic structures indicate not only an emphatic signification, but also a kind of plausible status likeness of the two addressees.

For sure, maintaining the idea of status equality of men and women believers does not negate their differential physical, psychological, and social characteristics. The status equality view instead solidifies the fair judgment and evaluation of all believers as human beings who are responsible before God. Such a view is manifestly observable in the verse 35 of Surah Al-Ahzab where a spectrum of detailed, itemized pairs of masculine and feminine nouns is displayed.

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَائِتِينَ وَالْقَائِتَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّائِمِينَ وَالصَّائِمَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا (٣٥)

Translation: Lo! men who surrender unto Allah, and women who surrender, and men who believe and women who believe, and men who obey and women who obey, and men who speak the truth and women who speak the truth, and men who persevere (in righteousness) and women who

9 in الحادي عشر والتاسع "Glossary of Arabic rhetoric" by Abdul-Raof

persevere, and men who are humble and women who are humble, and men who give alms and women who give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their modesty and women who guard (their modesty), and men who remember Allah much and women who remember - Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward. Q: 33:35

The masculine-plus-feminine pairs in this long verse such as (i.e., ... "المُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ") make the pathos effect of the verse weightier and deeper. The pairs are not just a congeries of dissimilar terms, but rather similar in the sense that they all converge in the idea of "أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا" (i.e., Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward"). Grammatically explaining, the masculine plural pronoun "لَهُمْ" in "أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا" has all the preceding masculine-plus-feminine pairs as its anaphoric reference (s). Providing "لَهُمْ" as the syntactic reference of the pairs noticeably consolidates the gender-equal evaluation of the believers. In other words, though we have a detailed classification of believers with varying attributes, the very end of their story that is "forgiveness and a vast reward" happen in unison. Pragmatically, the verse 35 is a commissive illocution emphatically opening with "إِنَّ" (i.e., verily, or Lo! in English) and the world-to-word direction of fit. That is to say, God wills to transform the world for the believers, female or male, to match the propositional content of the commitment (Humberstone, 1992). The table below recapitulates the points made on the verse 35.

Table 4. The features of the verse 35 of Surah Al-Ahzab.

Combinatory structural and functional features
Commissive illocutionary force
A rhetorical congeries of masculine-plus-feminine pairs to signify equality
Plurality synthesized into unity when all the pairs end in "Allah hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward" (i.e., "أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا")
The world-to-word direction of fit

In theological perspective, religion infuses all aspects of the believers' lives. This kind of perspective is important for ensuring balance, vindicating rights, defining limits and rendering justice. Acts of any type, in this perspective are bearers of meaning and effect. Thus, justness, balance, and lawful limits, or "المِيزَانَ" encompass all forms of human conduct, as it is doubly emphasized in the verses 7 and 8 of Surah 55, Ar-Rahman:

- "وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ (٧) : "and He hath set the measure" Q: 55:7
- "أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانَ (٨) : "That ye exceed not the measure" Q: 55:8

To elaborate the point on men-women equitable treatment, some further examples are advanced in which technical rhetoric helps in strengthening the notion of justness and maintaining harmony between different pieces in the verses 35, and 32 of An-Nisa, and 10 of Al-Mumtahanah:

وَأَنْ خِفْتُمْ شِقَاقَ بَيْنِهِمَا فَابْعَثُوا حَكَمًا مِنْ أَهْلِهِ وَحَكَمًا مِنْ أَهْلِهَا إِنْ يُرِيدَا إِصْلَاحًا يُوَفِّقِ اللَّهُ بَيْنَهُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا خَبِيرًا (٣٥)

Translation: And if ye fear a breach between them twain (the man and wife), appoint an arbiter from his folk and an

arbiter from her folk. If they desire amendment Allah will make them of one mind. Lo! Allah is ever Knower, Aware. Q: 4:35

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا جَاءَكُمْ الْمُؤْمِنَاتُ مَهَاجِرَاتٍ فَامْتَحِنُوهُنَّ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِإِيمَانِهِنَّ فَإِنَّ عَلِمْتُمُوهُنَّ مُؤْمِنَاتٍ فَلَا تَرْجِعُوهُنَّ إِلَى الْكُفَّارِ لَا هُنَّ حِلٌّ لَهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحِلُّونَ لَهُنَّ... (١٠)

Translation: O you who believe, when the believing women come to you as emigrants, examine them. Allah is most knowing as to their faith. And if you know them to be believers, then do not return them to the disbelievers; they are not lawful [wives] for them, nor are they lawful [husbands] for them... Q: 60:10

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ لِلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا وَ لِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِمَّا كَسَبْنَ وَ سَأَلُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا. (32)

Translation: And covet not the thing in which Allah hath made some of you excel others. Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned, and unto women a fortune from that which they have earned. (Envy not one another) but ask Allah of His bounty. Lo! Allah is ever Knower of all things. Q: 4:32

Prima facie, the verses 35, 32, and 10 are of directive illocutionary force, the world-to-word direction of fit, and on different topics. They are accordingly on dissension in the believers' spousal relationship, suitability of female believers just for male believers, and the fortunes the believers may earn. The verses also have the world-to-world direction since the believers must undertake the things ordered. In the below, the parallel syntactic items in the verses are displayed:

- فَأَبْعَثُوا حَكَمًا مِنْ أَهْلِهِ وَ حَكَمًا مِنْ أَهْلِهَا
- ... لَا هُنَّ حِلٌّ لَهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحِلُّونَ لَهُنَّ
- لِلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا وَ لِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِمَّا كَسَبْنَ

Surpassing the mere rhetoricity, parallel forms indicate markedness and importance. In each single case, there are two equally structured propositions. In fact, the equal structures linguistically signal that the same out-world reactions or perlocutionary effects are expected towards the two genders. Therefore, what is done for men is equally done for women and vice versa. Pay attention to the translated pieces of the verses mentioned above:

- "...appoint an arbiter from his folk" & "...[appoint] an arbiter from her folk"
- "...they are not lawful [wives] for them" & "...they lawful [husbands] for them"
- "Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned" &
- "Unto women a fortune from that which they have earned"

In the plane of logic, we also differentiate between different identities and agents of change from act to act. Hence, in the verses, the repetitive propositional contents for men and women can as well emphasize their lawfully distinguishable identities, acts, and possessions. Women are thus neither biased nor taken as juror minors, but on par with men in whatever they cause, receive, and achieve. On the other hand, it is rationally a certainty that equitable treatment of men and women in the God's law does not negate their

socially and contextually different divisions of labor. People have different roles and amount of social involvement that entail different duties for them. In terms of the hierarchy of status, two types of relationship patterns have also been indicated in Qur'an: between equals (i.e., "بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ") and between unequals, or hierarchical (i.e., "بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ").

However, these situated hierarchical patterns never allow for biased, heedless, domineering, or oppressive behaviors against the parties involved. Furthermore, we can customarily observe similar hierarchical patterns in men-to-men, or women-to-women relationships. For a better elucidation of the idea, some more sample verses (i.e., Q: 4:32, Q: 3:195, Q: 4:35 and Q: 57:23) are studied. The translations of the verses are also offered in the following:

وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۗ لِلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبُوا ۗ وَ  
لِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا كَسَبْنَ ۗ وَ سَأَلُوا اللَّهَ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمًا (32)  
أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ ۖ بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ (195)  
الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ ۖ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ ۗ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ  
أَمْوَالِهِمْ (35)

ولا تفرحوا بما آتاكم والله لا يحب كل مختال فخور (23)

- And covet not the thing in which Allah hath made some of you excel others. Unto men a fortune from that which they have earned, and unto women a fortune from that which they have earned...Q: 4:32
- Lo! I suffer not the work of any worker, male or female, to be lost. Ye proceed one from another...Q: 3:195
- Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women)... Q: 4: 35
- Nor yet exult because of that which hath been given. Allah loveth not all prideful boasters. Q: 57:23

By comparison, the verses enclose similar phrases with slightly different wordings as observed in the Arabic phrases "بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ" and "بَعْضُكُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ". The marked rhetorical technique, here, is called *reptotia* that can pragmatically signal the connection between the propositions with similar phrases. Putting all the above verses together, we can construe more about the men-women equity in God's evaluation system:

- Hierarchicality of the men-women status in the verses is presented simultaneously with the use of the restrictive device "بِـ" (i.e., because, or for the reason that) or similarly with another restrictive device "بِـ" to signify the situated nature of the hierarchy.
- Men and women are regarded on par in doing the good in the way of God's satisfaction:  
"أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ ۖ بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ"
- The rebuking tone of the negative directive propositions (i.e., "وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا", and "وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا") of Q: 4:32 and Q: 57:23 shows that God disapproves of any condescending attitude of men towards women or vice versa.
- "Every" (i.e., كل) in the verse Q: 57:23, "والله لا يحب كل مختال فخور" is inclusive of both genders and is a direct admonition of any tendency of men and women to act

overbearingly.

Excogitating a, b, c, & d, we are justified in assuming that Qur'an offers crystal clear propositions on equality through different Surahs. In this view, women and men should know that they are all in equal footing in God's merit-demerit system since the ultimate goal is God's satisfaction and that the dynamics of their duties and responsibilities may sometimes allow for the hierarchicality of their relationships.

## 5. Conclusion

In Islamic teachings, human beings' dignity is envisaged an important transcendent value regardless of race, ethnicity, wealth, and gender. The present article, hence, ventured to study the marked discursal features of 11 Surahs of Qur'an in which women had been addressed. The aim was to find how local verses were connected to each other in a macro-level to help in the discourse of women's dignity and equality. The discussions were based on both structural and functional perspectives of text linguistics, pragmatics, and rhetoric. In the verses studied, parallel structures were among the most prominent marked rhetorical features that contributed to the notion of equality and dignity. Some other explicit techniques such as anaphoric repetitions, juxtaposition of the believers' attributes, emphatic negative propositions were among the features that amplified the notion of God's equitable evaluation. Then, as indicated in Qur'an, the sometimes hierarchical standing of women in their relationship with men was context-bound and such hierarchicality could as well happen in men-to-men relationship. As inferred through the whole study, Qur'anic evaluative criterion is based on the amount of the believers' efforts in the way of God's "forgiveness and reward". The study, after all, can be an incentive for more deliberate researches in similar areas.

## Appendix

The list of related rhetorical terms from "Silva Rhetoricae online dictionary"

*Anaphoric repetition*: Repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses, sentences, or lines

*Apodoses*: the result of a conditional clause

*Auxesis*: Climactic emotional effect

*Congeries*: A series of similar words

*Emotional climax*: Building up of the pathos effect

*Epitasis*: A kind of amplification of what has already been stated

*Homoiopoton*: The repetition of similar case endings in nearby words or in words in parallel position

*Reptotia*: Repetition of similar phrases with minor differences in diction or style

*Restrictive device*: a device for making an exception

*Sorites*: Concatenated syllogisms

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