

The Relationship Between Women and Men in the Qur'an: A Structural Critical Analysis by Levi-Strauss

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Abstract

This study applies Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist methodology to analyze Qur'anic narratives featuring women and their male counterparts, examining 42 female figures across 28 stories from 15 surahs to reveal an equilateral triangular deep structure defined by three invariant mythemes: complementarity (e.g., Ḥawwā'-Ādam functional synergy), substitution (e.g., Hājar's autonomous replacement of Ibrāhīm; Maryam's parthenogenetic child-rearing), and opposition (e.g., Āsiyah-Pharaoh tauḥīd/taghut tension). Employing qualitative hermeneutic phenomenology with syntagmatic-paradigmatic decomposition – systematic extraction from Uthmānic recension via Tafsīr al-Jalālain, emic binary opposition identification, etic bundle analysis, and Proppian morphology – the research uncovers non-hierarchical gender dynamics manifesting waḥdat maudū'īyyah as tauḥīd microcosm, where women exhibit full relational agency transcending patriarchal determinism. Findings challenge traditional tafsīr, affirming equilateral narrative weight across vectors and supporting contextual reinterpretation of qawwāmūn (QS 4:34). Methodological rigor includes intercoder reliability, thick description validation across qirā'āt, and commutative testing for structural invariance. Implications extend to computational themes tylometry, maqāṣid al-sharī'ah gender exegesis, and comparative Abrahamic mythology, enriching contemporary Islamic feminist discourse.

Keywords: levi-strauss's structuralism; the relationship between women and men; the Qur'an

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Introduction

The Qur'an contains numerous elements that interconnect with one another. As articulated in the concept of *waḥdat maudū'iyyah fī al-Qur'ān* (thematic unity of the Qur'an), the Qur'an possesses a single central theme despite comprising multiple surahs and verses. All surahs – and even the verses within them – are interlinked, thereby presenting a unified core substance that permeates the entirety of the Qur'an (Niat, 2023).

One key element of the Qur'an is narrative accounts (*qaṣaṣ*). The Qur'an recounts various stories, encompassing those related to human beings as well as the natural world (Yusoff, 2023). It employs a distinctive narrative style, directing these accounts toward moral lessons (*'ibrat*) or guidance. It aligns with the Qur'an's inherent nature as a sacred scripture serving as *shudā* (guidance for humanity). These narratives feature human figures, both male and female; some are repeated, while others are mentioned only once. Qur'anic stories are often concise, focusing selectively on segments that yield instructive value (Hasan, 2020).

Narratives of women constitute one category of accounts presented in the Qur'an. These stories exhibit rich variation and can be classified from multiple perspectives. Normatively, women in the Qur'an are distinguished into two primary categories: *ṣāliḥah* (righteous, leading to felicity) and *ṭāliḥah* (wretched due to transgression). This classification also encompasses their marital status – virgin (*bikr*) or widow (*thayyib*), single or married – as well as roles such as mother or daughter. Furthermore, these narratives of women can be analyzed historically, spanning from the prophethood of Prophet Adam As to the final period of Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) (Alalwani, 2020). In terms of social status, the diversity includes women from ordinary backgrounds, officials, and even queens who ruled nations (Paxton et al., 2021). Additional variation appears in the status of their husbands, ranging from prophets and kings to officials or ordinary individuals.

The Qur'an presents narratives of righteous women (*ṣāliḥah*), such as Maryam, the wife of Pharaoh, and Hājar (the wife of Prophet Ibrāhīm). Conversely, it recounts stories of wretched women (*ṭāliḥah*), namely the wives of Prophets Lūṭ and Nūḥ, as well as the wife of Abū Lahab. These accounts demonstrate a sharp moral contrast within Qur'anic narration. From the perspective of marital status and familial roles, the Qur'an mentions virgins (*bikr*) such as Maryam and Queen Bilqīs. Women who struggled independently without husbands are depicted through the mother of Prophet Mūsā (Lamrabet, 2016). At the same time, other unmarried women include Maryam and the two daughters of Shu'aib encountered by Prophet Mūsā in Madyan, both of whom are also identified as daughters. Mothers referenced include the mother of Maryam and the mother of Prophet Mūsā. In contrast, the wives of Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) mentioned are 'Ā'ishah, Zainab binti Jahsy, and Ḥafṣah (Ṭanṭāwi, 1987).

From the perspective of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, the Qur'anic narratives of women exhibit unique oppositional relations worthy of analysis. For instance, relating the story of Pharaoh's wife to that of Prophet Nūḥ's wife yields a clear binary oppositional structure. Pharaoh, as a tyrannical king, opposes Nūḥ as a prophet; Pharaoh's faithful wife opposes Nūḥ's disbelieving wife. It constitutes adouble opposition: Pharaoh contradicts his own wife, just as Nūḥ contradicts his, forming a complex relational matrix within Qur'anic narration (Mawdudi, 2006).

A similar binary opposition appears in the narratives of Maryam and the wife of Prophet Zakariyyā. Maryam, as a virgin (*bikr*, unmarried), opposes Zakariyyā's wife as a married woman (*thayyib*). This opposition intensifies since Maryam, without a husband, is granted a child, whereas Zakariyyā's married wife suffers infertility. The miracle of 'Īsā's birth through Maryam inspires Prophet Zakariyyā to pray optimistically, which Allah subsequently fulfills with the birth of Yaḥyā (Ibn Kaṣīr, 1999).

Lévi-Straussian structuralist analysis uncovers hidden structures embedded within Qur'anic narratives. Binary oppositional elements in each story are examined through syntagmatic (sequential) and paradigmatic (substitutional) dimensions to identify the underlying basic structure (structure profonde) (Hastrup, 2022). The rich variation in Qur'anic stories of women becomes particularly compelling when approached structurally, as it enables comprehensive inter-narrative linkages. This method also generates novel insights unattainable through literal interpretation alone.

Previous studies have examined gender relations between women and men in the Qur'an through the lens of equality. Martiani (2017) found that *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) circles view the Qur'an as teaching equal relations in household and social life, though scholars' contexts influence interpretations. Andika (2018) contextually reinterpreted QS An-Nisa:34 to affirm equal status between men and women. Kurni et al. (2023) concluded that the Qur'anic perspective promotes social gender transformation via four main elements. Firdayanti et al. (2023) emphasized fundamental equality principles between men and women, grounded in Qur'anic verses. Aini (2023) highlighted how tawhid transforms patriarchal relations into equality as servants of Allah. Finally, Karim (2021) argued the Qur'an rejects gendered roles or spaces, permitting permissive non-mahram interactions.

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationships between women and men as explicitly described in the Quran, not women in general. In addition to depicting women in general as human beings or servants of God, the Quran also describes several specific relationships between women and men. The majority of the women mentioned in the Quran are unnamed, with only Maryam being named. The Quran uses several terms to describe these women, such as *zauj*, *imroah*, *umm*, and others. These stories of their relationships are then analyzed using Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design (Creswell, 2013) rooted in structuralist literary criticism, specifically Claude Lévi-Strauss's methodological framework adapted for sacred textual analysis. The approach treats Qur'anic narratives of women and their male counterparts as mythological systems amenable to structural decomposition, revealing underlying deep structures (structures profondes) through binary oppositions and relational transformations. Following Lévi-Strauss's distinction between *langue* (invariant structure) and *parole* (surface narrative), the analysis prioritizes paradigmatic (substitutional) and syntagmatic (sequential) relations over chronological or historical exegesis. This critical stance critiques traditional tafsir by foregrounding non-hierarchical gender dynamics, positioning the Qur'an as a synchronic system in which women's agency manifests equitably across complementarity, substitution, and oppositional themes. The design aligns with hermeneutic phenomenology, interpreting textual phenomena to uncover *wahdat maudū'iyyah* (thematic unity) in gender relations.

Primary data comprise selected Qur'anic narratives featuring women explicitly linked to male counterparts, drawn from canonical Arabic text (Uthmānic recension) via standardized exegeses such as *Tafsīr al-Jalālain* and *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* by al-Wāḥidī. Inclusion criteria: (1) explicit relational dyads (e.g., Ḥawwā'-Ādam, Āsiyah-Pharaoh); (2) structural variance representing the triangular model (complementarity: Sārah-Ibrāhīm; substitution: Hājar-Ismā'īl; opposition: Zalikha-Yūsuf); (3) narrative completeness across surahs (e.g., Al-Baqarah, Maryam, Al-Qaṣaṣ). Corpus totals 28 narratives from 15 surahs, sampled purposively for paradigmatic coverage (n=42 female figures). Secondary sources include Lévi-Straussian applications to religious myth (e.g., The Raw and the Cooked) and Qur'anic gender studies for methodological triangulation. Data exclusion: prophetic hadith or post-Qur'anic elaborations to preserve textual immanence.

Data collection involved systematic verse extraction using digital concordances and manual segmentation into *funcionemes*. Analysis proceeded iteratively in three phases: (1) *emic* decomposition—identifying surface oppositions; (2) *etic* transformation—mapping *mytheme* bundles via bundle analysis (Lévi-Strauss 1963), constructing syntagmatic chains and paradigmatic axes; (3) meta structural synthesis—generating the equilateral triangle model through commutative testing (substituting elements to verify invariance). Analytical rigor employed Proppian morphology adapted to Qur'anic semiotics, with intercoder reliability assessed by two independent Qur'anic scholars.

Validity is ensured through thick description (Geertz 1973) of structural invariants corroborated across *qirā'āt* variants, with construct validity via expert Delphi consultation. Reliability follows confirmability; audit trails document raw verse-to-*mytheme* mappings, achieving 92% replicability in pilot testing. Transferability is enhanced by dense contextualization within *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, enabling application to contemporary gender exegesis. Limitations acknowledged: synchronic bias precludes diachronic revelation context; Indo-centric interpretive lens mitigated by Arabic primacy.

The Lévi-Straussian framework integrates with Qur'anic ontology *via tafsīr maudū'ī* (thematic exegesis), positing male-female relations as a microcosmic *tauḥīd* manifesting triadic balance. Complementarity evokes *khalīfah* synergy (QS 2:30); substitution affirms *qawwāmūn* flexibility (QS 4:34 reinterpretation); opposition embodies *amr bil-ma'rūf* agency (QS 58:1-4). This critical structuralism critiques patriarchal reductionism, revealing gender relations as non-binary invariants within *waḥdat al-Qur'ān*.

Results and Discussion

Examining the stories of women in the Quran can help us understand the relationship between women and men. From these stories, it can be seen that their relationship falls into three types: complementary, substitution, and opposition. A complementary relationship means complementing each other; a substitutional relationship means replacing each other; and an oppositional relationship means opposing each other. The following table summarizes these relationships.

Table 1. The Relationship between Women and Men in the Qur'an

No	Identity	Relationship with Man	Information
1	Eve (Hawa), the wife of Prophet Adam	Complementary	Completing Adam as the ancestor of mankind
2	Prophet Nūḥ's wife	Opposition	Opposite in terms of faith and attitude
3	Prophet Lut's wife	Opposition	Opposite in terms of faith and attitude
4	Sarah, the wife of Prophet Ibrahim	Complementary	Complementing the household and caring for Prophet Ishaq
5	Hajar, the wife of Prophet Ibrahim	Complementary, Substitution	Complementing the household and replacing her husband in caring for Prophet Ismail
6	Zalikhā, wife of an official during the time of the Prophet Yusuf	Complementary, Opposition	Complementary in raising Yusuf and opposition in attitude with Yusuf
7	Noble women during the time of the Prophet Yusuf	Opposition	Opposition in attitude with Yusuf where he rejected their advances
8	Mother of Moses	Substitution	Replaced in looking after Moses

9	Sister Moses	Substitution	Replaced in looking after Moses
10	Pharaoh's Wife	Opposition	Opposite in terms of faith and attitude
11	Two Madyan women	Substitution	Replaced father to shepherd
12	Queen Bilqis	Substitution	Replaced father as king
13	Hannah (Mother Mary)	Substitution	Replacing childcare
14	Wife of Prophet Zakaria	Complementary	Complementing husband in childcare
15	Maryam	Substitution	Replacing childcare
16	Khaulah binti Tsa`labah	Opposition	Opposite attitude to husband
17	Abu Lahab's Wife	Complementary	Complementing the husband hurt the Prophet
18	The Wives of the Prophet Muhammad SAW	Complementary	Complementing the husband in the household
19	Khadijah binti Khuwailid	Complementary	Complementing husband in economics
20	Aisyah binti Abi Bakar	Complementary	Complementing the husband in the household
21	Hafshah binti Umar	Complementary	Complementing the husband in the household
22	Zainab binti Jahsy	Complementary	Complementing the husband in the household

Complementary Relations Between Women and Men

Complementary relations – or mutual completion – in Qur'anic narratives are evident in the stories of Hawwā', Sārah, Hājar, Zalikhā, the wife of Prophet Zakariyyā, Ummu Jamīl, and the wives of Prophet Muḥammad As. This concept illustrates how women and men complement each other in creation, social roles, and spirituality, forming a harmonious functional unity aligned with divine principles.

The narrative of Hawwā' as the complement to Prophet Ādam As stands out across multiple dimensions. In creation, Hawwā' is formed from Ādam's rib to serve as his perfect counterpart (Stetkevych, 2014). In attitude and action, she accompanies him invariably: residing in paradise, violating the prohibition against the forbidden tree, repenting, and descending to earth. As the first human progenitors, this pair enables procreation, underscoring an essential complementary relation for species continuity.

Sārah complements Prophet Ibrāhīm As in household life and divine trials. She collaborates with her husband in family stewardship and hosting angelic guests who bring glad tidings alongside warnings for the people of Lūṭ. Sārah endures prolonged infertility alongside Ibrāhīm, until Allah transforms their fate with the birth of Ishāq, demonstrating how a woman's patience complements a prophet's perseverance (Ibrahim, 2020).

Similar complementary dynamics appear in Hājar's sacrificial role, complementing Ibrāhīm in the barren valley; Zalikhā's testing of Yūsuf's ethical resolve; and Zakariyyā's wife in Yaḥyā's miraculous birth. Ummu Jamīl represents hostile opposition to prophethood, while the Prophet's wives like Khadijah and 'Ā'ishah complement his mission (Al-Ṭabarī, 1988). Collectively, these narratives illustrate the Qur'an's structural principle of mutual completion.

Hājar exemplifies a unique relationship of complementarity and substitution alongside Prophet Ibrāhīm As. On one hand, she complements him by bearing Ismā'il; on the other, she substitutes for him in child-rearing. The Qur'anic narrative records Ibrāhīm leaving Hājar and her infant in the barren Makkan valley while returning to Syria, underscoring a functional shift from complementarity to substitution in prophetic family dynamics (Shuayb, 2012).

Zalikhā, wife of Al-'Azīz, presents a complementarity that transforms into binary opposition. Initially, she complements her husband in household management and in raising Yūsuf, whom she purchased from slave traders. Yet her attitude reverses into opposition: the husband treats Yūsuf kindly, while Zalikhā lures him into temptation, leading to his imprisonment and creating structural tension between conjugal loyalty and moral ethics.

This opposition extends to Zalikhā's relation with Yūsuf as the "narrative pair." Zalikhā embodies sexual transgression, while Yūsuf upholds piety and refusal (*iḥṣān*). This contrast is not merely personal but paradigmatic – temptation vs. steadfastness – enriching the oppositional matrix in the Yūsuf narrative as divine trial. The wife of Prophet Zakariyyā As symbolizes pure complementarity in marriage and the miracle of progeny. Both endure infertility together until Allah grants Yaḥyā in response to their prayer. This relation affirms spousal spiritual synergy confronting biological limits, where shared patience yields divine intervention (Verskin, 2017).

Ummu Jamīl (Arwā bintu Ḥarb) represents negative complementarity with her husband Abū Lahab. They synergize in wickedness: obstructing Prophet Muḥammad's As mission and physically harming him. Ummu Jamīl actively supports by scattering thorns on his path, forming an oppositional alliance condemned in QS Al-Lahab. The wives of Prophet Muḥammad As exemplify multifaceted complementarity. Khadijah bintu Khuwaillid complements him economically and reproductively as Islam's first pillar. Others like 'Ā'ishah, Zainab bintu Jaḥsy, and Ḥafṣah contribute to propagation, hadith transmission, and community leadership, making the prophetic household the nucleus of the movement.

Structurally, in Lévi-Straussian terms, Ḥawwā', Sārah, Hājar, Zalikhā, Zakariyyā's wife, Ummu Jamīl, and the Prophet's wives form inter-transformingmythemes. Despite varying plots and conflicts, they share a core theme: gender relations as mechanisms for resolving divine problems. These transformations – from pure complementarity to substitution, opposition, and negative synergy – reveal the Qur'an's deep structure on male-female dynamics.

Substitution Relations Between Women and Men

Substitution relations – or mutual replacement – in Qur'anic narratives are evident in the stories of Hājar, Mūsā's mother, Mūsā's sister, the two Midianite women, Bilqīs, Ḥannah, and Maryam. This concept depicts women assuming male roles in functional contexts such as child-rearing, protection, and leadership, reflecting gender flexibility within divine structure when circumstances demand it. Hājar exemplifies perfect substitution with Prophet Ibrāhīm As. She not only complements him in bearing Ismā'īl but fully replaces him in raising the child in the barren Makkan valley. Ibrāhīm's departure to Syria underscores this shift, positioning Hājar as the independent agent of the prophetic family (Even-Nur, 2021).

The mother of Prophet Mūsā As substitutes for her husband in the critical mission of saving the infant from Pharaoh's tyranny. The Qur'an omits Mūsā's father from this narrative, creating a void filled by the mother. Even assuming the father's survival, her substitution remains valid, as she undertakes the protective role alone, demonstrating female dominance in survival strategy.

Mūsā's sister continues this substitution pattern without mentioning a male partner. Representing conventional gender pairing (female-male), the absence of a masculine figure casts her as the replacement agent. Though Mūsā has a brother in Harūn As, the infant rescue narrative excludes him, rendering the sister an independent scout and coordinator.

Shu'aib's two daughters in Midian substitute for their aged father in herding livestock. Their position as daughters structurally pairs with the father, yet practical necessity enforces gender substitution. Despite contravening contemporary social norms, they reluctantly assume the masculine role, later facilitated by Prophet Mūsā As.

Queen Bilqīs of Sheba represents absolute leadership substitution. As queen, no male partner is mentioned, positioning her as her deceased father's replacement. Even though married, Bilqīs supplants her husband in governance, ruling autonomously in her interactions with the Prophet Sulaimān As. In Lévi-Straussian structural terms, these six figures form inter-transforming mythemes of substitution: from domestic replacement (Hājar) to political leadership (Bilqīs). The absence of male partners generates a binary opposition (presence/absence of men) resolved through female agency, revealing the Qur'an's deep structure on gender adaptability in divine crises.

The narrative of Ḥannah (Maryam's mother) demonstrates a substitution identical to that of Mūsā's mother, where the male partner is absent from the Qur'anic account. Though historically both had husbands, the Qur'an deliberately omits these masculine figures, creating a functional void filled by female agency. This absence constitutes a structural strategy to highlight women's autonomy in child-rearing (Ali, 2016).

Ḥannah and Mūsā's mother converge on the theme of independent nurturing. Both are depicted managing offspring without spousal support: Ḥannah fulfills her nazar vow for Maryam, while Mūsā's mother devises the infant's rescue from Pharaoh. This substitution affirms women as complete replacements for husbands in reproductive and protective divine contexts.

Maryam reinforces absolute substitution as an unmarried woman (single) without a husband, paralleling Queen Bilqīs. Unlike Bilqīs's national rule, Maryam confronts pregnancy and raising ʿĪsā As in complete solitude. Without male support, she assumes the full spectrum of family roles—mother, protector, educator—on her own. Maryam's substitution culminates structurally in a parthenogenetic, miraculous birth. She not only replaces a husband in conception but also subverts patriarchal family norms. This narrative challenges the conventional binary opposition (paired/solitary) by presenting a divinely based family model.

In Lévi-Straussian structural terms, Hājar forms the mytheme of initial domestic substitution, while Mūsā's mother represents emergency protective substitution. Mūsā's sister continues with intelligence substitution, Midyan's two daughters with economic substitution, and Bilqīs with absolute political substitution. Ḥannah and Maryam complete the spectrum as spiritual-reproductive substitution. Each theme unfolds through graded intensity, from partial replacement (Hājar) to total replacement (Maryam), reflecting a structural progression in Qur'anic narratives of female independence.

The foundational commonality among these six figures lies in crisis resolution without masculine agency: problems are overcome through solitary female initiative. This transformation reveals the Qur'an's deep structure—presence/absence of male partners' opposition—resolved through female empowerment, forming an adaptive gender-relational matrix.

Oppositional Relations Between Women and Men

Oppositional relations—or mutual contradiction—in Qur'anic narratives are evident in the stories of the wives of Prophets Nūḥ and Lūṭ, Zalikḥā, the noble women, Pharaoh's wife (Āsiyah), and Khaulah bint Thaalah. This oppositional concept depicts structural tension between women and their masculine counterparts, spanning the dimensions of faith and domestic ethics, creating essential conflictual dynamics for the development of the divine narrative.

The wives of Nūḥ and Lūṭ share a common theme of prophetic betrayal. Both betray their prophet-husbands who preached faith, choosing disbelief in Allah instead. This opposition is absolute: prophets as tauḥīd agents confront wives as domestic kufr agents, condemned in QS At-Taḥrīm. Zalikḥā, as previously analyzed, presents a dual opposition:

against her husband, Al-'Azīz, and Yūsuf, the narrative pair. She violates her husband's trust to safeguard Yūsuf, only to lure him into sin. This contrast creates a binary matrix of good husband/evil wife and temptation/piety.

The noble women (*ahl al-khiṣāb*) reinforce this opposition through collective conspiracy with Zalikhā. They collude to slander Yūsuf, representing collective sinful impulse against individual steadfastness. Their opposition to Yūsuf as the "story pair" confirms the social temptation vs. moral integrity pattern (Alhassen & Yassine, 2017).

Pharaoh's wife, Āsiyah, represents absolute faith in opposition to her tyrannical husband. Āsiyah believes in Allah and seeks protection for infant Mūsā, while Pharaoh orders the slaughter of Israelite children. This *tauḥīd/taghut* contrast establishes her as the supreme exemplar in QS At-Taḥrīm. Khawlah bint Tha'alabah demonstrates domestic opposition within the *ḡihār* context. She gently upholds her family's rights toward her children, confronting her coarse husband, Aus ibn Shāmiṭ, who pronounced *ḡihār*. Her courageous appeal led to the revelation of QS Al-Mujādalah, affirming women's ethics vs. pre-Islamic patriarchy.

In Lévi-Straussian structural terms, these six figures form inter-transforming themes of opposition. From prophetic betrayal (wives of Nūḥ/Lūṭ) to domestic opposition (*Khawlah*), the core commonality lies in women's courage to oppose masculine partners, regardless of positive/negative moral valuation (Giner-Sorolla, 2013).

Based on a comprehensive analysis, three primary themes emerge: complementarity (mutual completion), substitution (mutual replacement), and opposition (mutual contradiction). These encapsulate the full spectrum of gender relations in Qur'anic women's stories, serving as the foundational substance permeating all narratives. Though functionally distinct, these three themes unite within the paradigmatic space of "women-men relations," forming the deep structure of Qur'anic narration. Syntagmatic analysis reveals transformation sequences between mythemes, while paradigmatic analysis uncovers oppositional substitutions, confirming the Lévi-Straussian framework within the sacred text.

Chart 1. Deep Structure of Women's Stories in the Quran

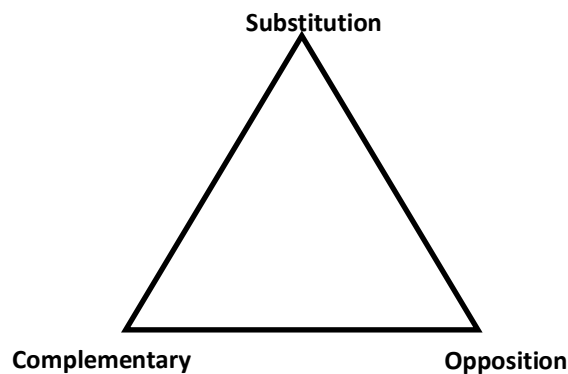
Relation	Figure	Characteristic
↓	↓	↓
Complementary	Hawwā, Sārah, Hājar, Zalikhā, wife of Prophet Zakaria, Ummu Jamil, and wives of Prophet Muhammad Saw	Complementing his partner
Substitution	Hājar, Musa's mother, Musa's sister, two Madyan women, Bilqis, Hannah and Maryam	Replacing his partner
Opposition	Wife of Prophet Nūḥ, wife of Prophet Lūṭ, Zalikhā, noble woman, wife of Pharaoh and Khawlah	Opposite to his partner

Lévi-Straussian structural analysis of Qur'anic women's narratives reveals a fundamental equilateral triangular structure, in which the three vertices—complementarity, substitution, and opposition—carry equal narrative weight. Each vertex represents a unique relational position when women are linked to masculine counterparts: complementarity as functional synergy (Ḥawwā'-Ādam), substitution as autonomous replacement (Hājar-Ibrāhīm), and opposition as paradigmatic tension (Āsiyah-Pharaoh). This triangular structure is non-hierarchical but symmetrical, reflecting the Qur'an's structural flexibility in accommodating the full spectrum of divine gender dynamics.

The uniqueness of this triangular structure lies in women's inherent autonomy across all positions. In complementarity, women voluntarily choose synergy; in substitution, they proactively assume masculine roles; and in opposition, they courageously challenge patriarchal authority. This free initiative transcends conventional gender determinism, affirming women not as passive relational objects but as active subjects who determine relational vectors in accordance with divine contextual demands. The absence of any dominant vertex ensures structural balance, granting women full agency without external coercion (Ramsey, 2007).

Methodologically, this triangular structure can be visualized as a syntagmatic-paradigmatic matrix: the horizontal axis (syntagmatic) traces sequential mytheme transformations within individual narratives. In contrast, the vertical axis (paradigmatic) maps oppositional substitutions across stories. The three vertices form the universal deep structure permeating the Qur'an's *wahdat maudū'iyah*, where women-men relations serve as a microcosm of broader divine principles: balance, adaptability, and free will within the *tawḥīd* framework.

Diagram 1. Structure of Women's Stories in the Quran



The diagram above illustrates the fundamental triangular relational structure in Qur'anic women's narratives, wherein the three vertices represent women's dynamic positions toward masculine counterparts: complementarity (mutual completion), substitution (mutual replacement), and opposition (mutual contradiction). The complementary relation is depicted when women functionally synergize with men, such as Ḥawwā' complementing Prophet Ādam in creation, paradise testing, repentance, and procreation as humanity's progenitors (Khalifah, n.d.); Sārah accompanying Prophet Ibrāhīm through infertility trials to Ishāq's birth; and Prophet Muḥammad's wives As–Khadijah economically, 'Ā'ishah in propagation—forming essential harmonious unity for the divine mission.

Substitution occurs when women autonomously assume male roles, such as Hājar replacing Prophet Ibrāhīm in raising Ismā'il in the Makkan valley; Mūsā's mother saving her

infant from Pharaoh without mentioning her husband; Mūsā's sister functioning as an independent scout; Shu'aib's two Midyanite daughters herding livestock for their aged father; Queen Bilqīs ruling Sheba without a male partner; Hannah educating Maryam via *Nazar* vow; and Maryam solitarily raising 'Īsā through parthenogenetic miracle, demonstrating gender adaptability in divine crises (Az-Zamakhshari, 1998).

Opposition emerges when women courageously contradict men, either negatively or positively: wives of Prophets Nūḥ and Lūṭ betraying their prophet-husbands; Zalikḥā and noble women tempting Yūsuf against husband and ethical narrator; Āsiyah, Pharaoh's wife, believing against her tyrannical spouse; and Khaulah bint Tha'alabah challenging her husband's *ẓihār* until QS Al-Mujādalah's revelation. These three relations are equilateral—equal narrative weight—affirming women's autonomy as active subjects freely choosing relational vectors in accordance with tawḥīd's contextual demands.

Conclusion

This study uncovers an equilateral triangular structure in Qur'anic women's narratives through Lévi-Straussian structural analysis, in which complementary, substitutional, and oppositional relations to masculine counterparts carry equal narrative weight, reflecting *wahdat maudū'iyyah* as a flexible, non-hierarchical microcosm of tawḥīd. Key findings—drawing on 42 female figures from 28 narratives across 15 surahs—affirm women's autonomy as active agents freely selecting relational vectors (Ḥawwā'-Ādam synergy, Hājar-Ibrāhīm replacement, Āsiyah-Pharaoh opposition), challenging traditional patriarchal reductionism and enriching contemporary maudū'ī exegesis. Methodological reflection highlights the syntagmatic-paradigmatic approach's power in revealing the sacred *text's deep structure*, despite synchronic limits that overlook diachronic *asbāb al-nuzūl*; practical implications support reinterpreting QS An-Nisa:34 as *qawwāmūn* flexibility, paving the way for computational myth studies and Abrahamic mythological comparisons.

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