



*Al-Qawārīr - Vol: 02, Issue: 04,  
July - Sep 2021*

**OPEN ACCESS**

*Al-Qawārīr*  
pISSN: 2709-4561  
eISSN: 2709-457X  
journal.al-qawarir.com

## ***The Qur’ānic Word al-Imra’a: Its Significations and Implications***

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**Version of Record**

**Received: 01-Sep-21 Accepted: 17-Sep-21**

**Online/Print: 30-Sep-2021**

### **ABSTRACT**

*The Qur’ān, a quintessential code of conduct and an ultimate authority for guidance, is exceptional in exquisite splendor of its language and diction. Its eloquence, cadence, phraseology and articulation is nonpareil. A reader is overwhelmed by its rhetoric even before its dignified message breaks upon him. Every single word is couched with several styles and meanings. There are many words used multiple times in the Qur’ān, but have different significations, meanings and implications. The exegetes have endeavored hard to determine their connotation with the aid of transmissions and with respect to milieus of verses. This article has been written to unveil the significations and relational implications of a word “Imra’a (امْرَأَة)” used in the Qur’ān. Moreover, it would mention synonymous words of that relation with brief literal elaboration. Descriptive and Analytical research methodologies have been opted in this work to accentuate the grandiose of linguistic elegance of the Qur’ān through Prophetic Traditions, exegetical citations, lexicological references and tabular presentations.*

**Key words:** *Imra’a, Homonyms (Wujūh), Significations (Dalālāt), Implications, Exegetical, Lexicological.*

### **Introduction**

One of the major factors, contributing to inimitability of the Qur’ān, is its linguistic excellence. The Almighty Allah has challenged all creatures of the Universe to produce even a single Sūrah like that of the Qur’ān and declared explicitly the failure of every creature to do that. Even the severe opponents of Islam, not only



admitted its rhetoric supremacy at that time, but many Orientalists, despite their hostility, spoke very high of it.

The Science of Homonyms and Synonyms is one of the most interesting topics of the Qur'ānic Sciences. Many scholars have written solitary books on the subject and many others made it an important discussion of their books. There are many words in the Qur'ān which agree in wording but have different meanings and are called Wujūh (Homonyms). Imām Suyūṭī defined them as follows:

“الْوُجُوهُ لِلْفِطْرِ الْمَشْتَرِكِ الَّذِي يُسْتَعْمَلُ فِي عِدَّةٍ مَعَانٍ.”<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, there are many words with structural resemblance and they share one meaning and are called Nazā'ir (Synonyms). Imām Suyūṭī defined them as:

“النَّظَائِرُ كَالْأَلْفَاظِ الْمُتَوَاطِئَةِ.”<sup>2</sup>

This article has been written to enlighten the substantiation of a word “*Imra'a*”, a homonym in the Qur'ān, which has been mentioned for various significations and different relational implications. The past and present exegetes have narrated multiple transmissions to determine its most appropriate signification with respect to the context of the verse. Here, transmissions of those exegetes will be quoted who have comprehensibly discussed the signification of *Imra'a* in a certain verse. Moreover, additional information will be cited from other commentaries. The expert scholars of the Qur'ānic Sciences have also mentioned specific significations of the subject word, which would also be cited in this research paper.

### **Literature Review:**

The research works which were reviewed before attempting to write this article are:

#### **١. المرأة في القرآن**

This is more likely a booklet of 142 pages which has been written by 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Iqād and was published in 2003 by Nahḍa Miṣr. It portrays the rank, dignity and moral attributes of a woman, her rights and the glorified attributes of wives of the Prophet ﷺ.

#### **٢. معجم المرأة**

This book has been written by Dr. 'Isā Barhūma. It was published by Wazārat al-Thaqāfa in 2010 and comprises of 297 pages. It is a dictionary of adjectives used for a woman; her physical characteristics, her noble and evil ethical qualities; the words used for her foolishness, sanctity and her ornamentation of apparel and jewelry and the words used for her in a role of mother, wife, daughter etc.

#### **٣. دلالة الفظتي الزوجة وامرأة في القرآن الكريم**

This is an article written by Abdul Jawwād Abdul Ḥassan 'Alī and published by Journal of Ahl al-Bayt, Issue: 13 (pg. 117-124). It mainly focusses on linguistic

meanings of the words *Zauja* and *Imra'a*, their usage in the Qur'ān and the differentiation in their meanings.

### Novelty and Significance of the Topic:

There is a lot of literature available on woman as a gender; her social, domestic, religious, moral, political and relational rights, duties and Qur'ānic injunctions. This research paper is quite different from all the publications mentioned in the literature review because it would bring to light the signification of the word *Imra'a*, as interpreted by the exegetes with the aid of Prophetic Traditions and narrations. It also enlightens the proclamation by experts of the Qur'ānic Sciences, being one of the homonyms of the Qur'ān. Moreover, a distinctive feature of this article is the explication of synonyms of *Imra'a* when implied to various relations. Keeping in view the aforementioned aspects of research, it was deemed necessary to present it by necessary abridgement without losing its essence.

### Research Questions:

1. What are the significations of *Imra'a* in the Qur'ān as perceived by the exegetes?
2. What are the significations of *Imra'a* in the Qur'ān as perceived by experts of the Qur'ānic Sciences?
3. How has the word *Imra'a* been implied to various relations in the Qur'ān?
4. What are the synonyms of those relational implications for which the word *Imra'a* has been used in the Qur'ān?

### Literal Meaning of *Al-Imra'a*:

The word (إمرأة) is a noun with root letters م ر ء. It can be written as (إمْرَأَة) or (مَرْأَة) which means a woman.<sup>3</sup>

In *Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*, it is stated that:

المَرْءُ [مثلثة الميم]: الرَّجُلُ وَالْأُنْثَى مَرْأَةٌ وَمَرْءَةٌ. والجمع: نِسَاءٌ، وَنِسْوَةٌ<sup>4</sup>

In *Al-Mu'jam al-Lughat al-'Arabiyyah al-Mu'āṣirah*, it has been defined as:

إمْرَأَةٌ [مفرد]: جمع نِسَاءٍ (من غير لفظها) ونِسْوَةٌ (من غير لفظها)، مذ امرؤ: أنثى الرَّجُلِ :-  
اشترى لامرأته خاتماً ثميناً،

”وراء كل رجل عظيم إمْرَأَةٌ. {وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ}“<sup>5, 6</sup>

المَرْأَةُ: تطلق - عند تعريفها بال- بمعنى أنثى الرَّجُلِ :- أعطى الإسلام المرأة جميع حقوقها- الدُّنْيَا  
مَتَاعٌ وَخَيْرٌ مَتَاعِ الدُّنْيَا الْمَرْأَةُ الصَّالِحَةُ“<sup>7, 8</sup>

In *Baṣā'ir dhawī al-Tamyīz*, it is mentioned:

” اعلم أَنَّ الْمَرْءَ وَالْمَرْأَةَ اسْمَانِ عَلَى فَعْلٍ وَفَعْلَةٍ. وهما من الاسماء الموصولة: مثل ابن، وابنة،  
واثنين. واثنين“ والمَرْءُ وَالْمَرْأَةُ - مثلثة الميم - الإنسان. ولا يجمع من لفظه.“<sup>9</sup>

From the above lexicological explanations, it can be derived that:

1. The word (المَرْء) means a man and its feminine is (المرأة). Generally, they both mean a human being and are among the Relative Pronouns.
2. (المرأة) is singular and has no verbal plural. Its nonverbal plural is *Nisā'* or *Niswa*.
3. It represents gender of a female which means a woman.
4. The word *Imra'a* is usually used with attribution towards a relation with man, like wife.

The reason of naming a woman as (المرأة) is described as under:

”وتسمية الأُنثى بالمرأة جاءت من تأنيث امرئ، وهي من المروءة، وهي تدل على أن الفعل كان من إقدام النفس عليه بغير سبب.“<sup>10</sup>

The name given to a female as (المرأة) is the feminine of the word (امرئ) which comes from (المروءة), it implies on the self-act of some person without the effect of any external factors.

(مروءة) can also be defined as under:

” المُرُوءَةُ فُعُولَةٌ مِّنْ لَفْظِ المَرْءِ، كَالْفُتُوَّةِ مِنَ الفَتَى، وَالإِنْسَانِيَّةُ مِنَ الإِنْسَانِ. وَلِهَذَا كَانَ حَقِيقَتُهَا: اتِّصَافَ النَّفْسِ بِصِفَاتِ الإِنْسَانِ الَّتِي فَارَقَ بِهَا الحَيَوَانَ المِهْمِ، وَالشَّيْطَانَ الرَّجِيمَ.“<sup>11</sup>

***Al-Murū'at***: It is a psychological attribute of a human being by which he is distinguished from an animal and an accursed Satan.

#### **The Word *Imra'a* in the Qur'ān:**

The Word *Imra'a* has been used 26 times in the Qur'ān in various forms. The following table shows its word forms and existence in the Qur'ān:

Word Forms of <i>Imra'a</i>	No. of Times appeared in the Qur'ān	Verse Numbers
امْرَأَةٌ	11 times	(3: 35), (4: 12), (4: 128), (12: 30), (12: 51), (27: 23), (28:9), (33:50), twice in (66: 10), (66: 11)
امْرَأَاتِكَ	2 times	(11: 81), (29: 33)
امْرَأَاتِهِ	8 times	(7: 83), (11: 71), (12: 21), (15: 60), (27: 57), (29: 32), (51: 29), (111: 4)
امْرَأَتِي	3 times	(3: 40), (19: 5), (19: 8)
امْرَأَتَيْنِ	1 time	(2: 282)
امْرَأَتَيْنِ	1 time	(28: 23) <sup>12</sup>

### Ways of writing *Imra'a* in 'Uthmānic Script of the Qur'an:

There are two ways of writing *Imra'a* in the Qur'an, one with tā' marbūta as (امْرَأَةٌ) and other with tā' maftūha (also called majrūra/ muṭawwala/ mabsūta) as (امْرَأَات). When it is written with tā' marbūta, it depicts a common noun in which something is partially or fully unknown e.g. (وَإِنِ امْرَأَةٌ خَافَتْ) whereas, when written with tā' maftūha, it indicates imputation of woman towards her husband or some known woman e.g. (امْرَأَتُ الْعَزِيزِ), (امْرَأَتُ عِمْرَانَ). At seven places in the Qur'an, the word *Imra'a* has been written with tā' maftūha.<sup>13</sup> It is the excellence of 'Uthmānic Script that difference in the meaning of both the words is well exhibited by the way of inscription.

### Qur'anic Readings of the word *Imra'a*:

Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī stated:

كَتَبُوا: امْرَأَةٌ عِمْرَانَ، بِالتَّاءِ لَا بِالْهَاءِ، وَكَذَلِكَ امْرَأَةُ الْعَزِيزِ فِي مَوْضِعَيْنِ، وَامْرَأَةٌ نُوحٍ، وَامْرَأَةٌ لُوطٍ، وَامْرَأَةٌ فِرْعَوْنَ، سَبْعَةٌ مَوَاضِعَ. فَأَهْلُ الْمَدِينَةِ يَقْفُونَ بِالتَّاءِ اتِّبَاعًا لِرِسْمِ الْمُصْحَفِ وَوَقَفَ أَبُو عَمْرٍو، وَالْكَسَائِيُّ: بِالْهَاءِ وَلَمْ يَتَّبِعُوا رِسْمَ الْمُصْحَفِ فِي ذَلِكَ، وَهِيَ لُغَةٌ أَكْثَرُ الْعَرَبِ.

The people of Medina used to recite the subject word as *Imra'at* with tā' in the end as they follow 'Uthmānic Script of the Qur'an; whereas Abū 'Amr and Kisā'i read it with hā' in the end as they did not follow traditional script but the language of most Arabs.<sup>14</sup>

### Signification of *Imra'at* in Exegetical Literature:

The word *Imra'a* signifies various women in the Qur'an. Various exegetes have narrated multiple traditions regarding their signification in the Qur'an. Here, only those verses, out of twenty six, would be discussed in which the word *Imra'a* indicates different women.

١ - إِذْ قَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ عِمْرَانَ<sup>15</sup>

“When the wife of 'Imran said”

Imām Ṭabarī stated that the wife of 'Imrān was the mother of Maryam A.S. who was the daughter 'Imrān and mother of 'Isā A.S. and her name has been reported to be Hanna b. Fāqūdh b. Qatīl.<sup>16</sup> He further quoted a narration from Muḥammad b. Ishāq that 'Imrān and Zakariyya A.S. married two sisters; the mother of Yaḥya A.S. was Zakariyya's wife and the mother of Maryam A.S. was 'Imrān's wife. 'Imrān died when her wife was pregnant and that's why she vowed to Allah to accept what was in her belly.<sup>17</sup>

وَإِنِ امْرَأَةٌ خَافَتْ مِنْ بَعْلِهَا نُشُورًا أَوْ إِعْرَاضًا فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِمَا أَنْ يُصْلِحَا بَيْنَهُمَا صُلْحًا<sup>18</sup>

“If a woman fears ill treatment from her husband, or desertion, it is no sin for them twain if they make terms of peace between themselves.”

Imām Qurṭubī mentioned that this verse has been revealed for Ḥaḍrat Sawda b. Zam'a R.A. and inferred from the following Prophetic Tradition quoted in Tirmidhī:

“Sawdah feared that the Prophet (ﷺ) was going to divorce her, so she said: 'Do not divorce me, but keep me and give my day to 'Aisha.'

So he (ﷺ) did so, and the following was revealed: Then there is no sin on them both if they make terms of peace between themselves, and making peace is better (4:128). So whatever they agree to make peace in something then it is permissible”<sup>19, 20</sup>

He further mentioned a narration from Sa'īd b. Musayyib that this verse has been revealed for Khawla b. Muḥammad b. Maslama who was the wife of Ḥaḍrat Rāfi' b. Khadij R.A. He disliked his wife for some reason and intended to divorce her but she requested him not to leave her and allocate whatever the turn he wished for her. So, a new custom was introduced and verse 4: 128 was revealed.<sup>21</sup>

Another tradition narrated by Ḥaḍrat 'Ā'isha R.A. has been quoted by Imām Qurṭubī from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī:

“Regarding the explanation of the following verse: *"If a wife fears Cruelty or desertion on her husband's part."* (4.128). A man may dislike his wife and intend to divorce her, so she says to him, "I give up my rights, so do not divorce me." The above verse was revealed concerning such a case.”<sup>22, 23</sup>

وَقَالَ نِسْوَةٌ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ امْرَأَتُ الْعَزِيزِ تُرَاوِدُ فَتْمَهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ<sup>24</sup>

*“And women in the city said: The ruler's wife is asking of her slave-boy an ill-deed”*

Imām Ṭabarī narrated from Ibn Ishāq that name of Egypt's ruler's wife was Rā'īl b. Ra'ā'īl.<sup>25</sup> Ibn 'Aṭiya reported that woman was Rā'īl or it is said that she was Rabīḥa or Zalīkhā and she was a disbeliever because Yūsuf A.S. saw an idol in her house.<sup>26</sup> Imām Qurṭubī quoted from Ibn Ishāq that Itfīr b. Ruwaiḥab (ruler of Egypt) purchased Yūsuf A.S. for his wife Rā'īl and it is also said that her name was Zalīkhā<sup>27</sup> Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā mentioned that Firdawsī, a Persian poet, wrote a love story of Zalīkhā and Yūsuf A.S. in a beautiful manner. In history, the name of ruler's wife is found to be Zalīkhā and it is also said that her name was Rā'īl.<sup>28</sup> The wife of Egypt's ruler has also been mentioned in Sūra Yūsuf, 12: 21.

إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ<sup>29</sup>

*“I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given (abundance) of all things, and hers is a mighty throne.”*

Imām Ṭabarī mentioned that the ruling woman's name was Bilqīs b. Sharāḥīl, she belonged to Labība and her people were Heretics.<sup>30</sup> Tha'alabī mentioned a

Prophetic Tradition that one of Bilqīs’s parents was a jinn; but the chain of transmitters is weak.<sup>31</sup> Imām Qurṭubī stated that *Imra’at* means Bilqīs b. Sharāḥīl whose mother was among Jinns and her name was Bal’ama b. Shaiṣān.<sup>32</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr explicated that { الْمَرْأَةُ } in this verse is Bilqīs b. Sharāḥīl. The historians remained confused in determining her and her father’s name but it is authentic that she was a contemporary of Sulaimān A.S. and built The Great Dam of Mārib. She ascended the throne after her father’s death, Shurahbīl or Sharāḥīl. Her matrimonial relationship has not been found anywhere in the Qur’ān. It is said that she got married to Shadad b. Zar’a who died soon after marriage. Her people were worshipers of the Sun.<sup>33</sup> Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī also declared her name Bilqīs b. Sharāḥīl and elaborated that her throne was at a wonderful location in the palace and was embedded with precious jewels. This glamorous depiction is a sign of any ruler’s magnificence.<sup>34</sup>

١- وَقَالَتِ امْرَأَتُ فِرْعَوْنَ قُرْتُ عَيْنِي لِيْ وَلَكَ<sup>35</sup>

*“And the wife of Pharaoh said: (He will be) a consolation for me and for you”*

Imām Baghawī expounded that Pharaoh married a woman of Banī Israel whose name was Āsiya b. Muzāhim. She was a noble woman from the progeny of Prophets. She used to have mercy on the needy, give alms to them and feed them.<sup>36</sup> Exegetes narrate that when Moses defeated the sorcerers, she believed in him. When it became clear to Pharaoh that she had converted to Islam, he tied her hands and feet with four pegs. She was tormented in the scorching heat of sun and when they turned away from her, the angels shadowed her. She prayed to Allah to build a house for her in Paradise and Allah showed her the house she asked for. Pharaoh ordered to throw a big stone on her, hence, her soul was seized away, so the rock was thrown on a body without a soul, and she had no pain.<sup>37</sup>

Ibn ‘Āshūr quoted a Prophetic Tradition from Bukhārī:<sup>38</sup>

“Narrated Abū Mūsā: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Many amongst men reached (the level of) perfection but none amongst the women reached this level except Asiya, Pharaoh's wife, and Mary, the daughter of `Imran. And no doubt, the superiority of `Aisha to other women is like the superiority of Tharīd (i.e. a meat and bread dish) to other meals.”<sup>39</sup>

٢- وَأَمْرَأَةٌ مُّؤْمِنَةٌ إِنَّ وَهَبْتَ نَفْسَهَا لِلنَّبِيِّ<sup>40</sup>

*“And a believing woman if she give herself unto the Prophet”*

Imām Ṭabarī asserted that the verse has been revealed for Maimūna b. Ḥārith R.A. who presented herself to the Prophet (ﷺ).<sup>41</sup> Imām Zamakhsharī stated that four women presented themselves to the Prophet (ﷺ): Maimūna b. Ḥārith, Zainab b.

Khuzaima, Umm e Sharīk b. Jābir and Khawla b. Ḥakīm (May Allah be pleased with them).<sup>42</sup> Imām Qurṭubī referred to a Prophetic Tradition reported in Ṣaḥīḥīn:

“Narrated Ḥishām's father: Khawla b. Ḥakīm was one of those ladies who presented themselves to the Prophet (ﷺ) for marriage. `Aisha said, "Doesn't a lady feel ashamed for presenting herself to a man?" But when the Verse: "(O Muhammad) You may postpone (the turn of) any of them (your wives) that you please," (33.51) was revealed, " `Aisha said, 'O Allah's Messenger (ﷺ)! I do not see, but, that your Lord hurries in pleasing you.'”<sup>43</sup>

He further mentioned that the scholars dissent in the names of those women who presented themselves to the Prophet ﷺ. He quoted from Qatāda that she was Maimūna b. Ḥārith; Sha‘bī said that she was Zainab b. Khuzaima; ‘Alī b. Ḥussain, Ḍaḥḥāk and Maqātil proclaimed that she was Umm e Sharīk b. Jābir Asadiyya and ‘Urwa b. Zubair asserted that her name was Umm e Ḥakīm b. Auqaṣ Sulamyā. Imām Qurṭubī further mentioned that it is said that she was Umm e Sharīk and her name was either Ghuzayya or Ghuzaila. It is also narrated that she was Lailā b. Ḥakīm. He commented that indeed Allah is the best knower about her name and whereabouts.<sup>44</sup>

۳- ضَرَبَ اللهُ مَثَلًا لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا امْرَأَتَ نُوحٍ وَ امْرَأَتَ لُوطٍ<sup>45</sup>

“Allah cites an example for those who disbelieve: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot”

The above verse exhibits two significances of *Imra'a* i.e. wife of Nūḥ (A.S.) and wife of Lūṭ (A.S.).

Imām Qurṭubī narrated from Maqātil that Nūḥ's (A.S.) wife was Wāliha and Lūṭ's (A.S.) wife was Wāli'a. Further, he cited a Prophetic Tradition from Ḥaḍrat ‘Ā'isha R.A. that Gabriel came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and told him the name of Nūḥ's wife as Wā'ila and that of Lūṭ's wife as Wāliha. Both were disbelievers and were not sincere to their pious husbands. He quoted from Sulaimān b. Qatta that Nūḥ's wife used to tell people that her husband is insane and Lūṭ's wife used to spill the beans about his sacred guests. Qushairī mentioned the consensus of exegetes that their betrayal was in religion only as they both were disbelievers and hypocrites.<sup>46</sup>

- **Wife of Nūḥ A.S:**

Ibn ‘Āshūr asserted that Nūḥ's wife has not been mentioned anywhere else in the Qur'ān other than this verse. Nūḥ A.S. did not know about his infringement but Allah revealed to him.<sup>47</sup> .<sup>48</sup>

- **Wife of Lūṭ A.S:**

Imām Baghawī professed that Lūṭ A.S. was ordered to migrate with his family in a part of the night, and was also instructed to let not anyone of them turn around. Lūṭ



A.S. took his wife with him, when she heard the agony of torment, she turned around in affection of her people. Suddenly a stone hit her and she was slayed.<sup>49</sup> The wife of Lūṭ A.S. has also been mentioned in the Qur’ān in the following verses:

١ - إِنَّا مُنْجُوكَ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا أُمَّرَأَتَكَ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ<sup>50</sup>

“We are to deliver you and your household, (all) save your wife, who is of those who stay behind”

٢ - فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا أُمَّرَأَتَهُ<sup>51</sup>

“And We rescued him and his household, save his wife”

٣ - وَأُمَّرَأَتُهُ قَائِمَةٌ فَضَحِكَتْ فَلَبَسَ نَهْجًا بِإِسْحَاقَ وَمِنْ وَرَاءِ إِسْحَاقَ يَعْقُوبَ<sup>52</sup>

“And his wife, standing by laughed when We gave her good tidings (of the birth) of Isaac, and, after Isaac, of Jacob”

Imām Ṭabarī quoted from Abū Ja‘far that (وامرأته) is Sāra b. Hārān b. Nāḥūr b. Sārogh b. Arghawā b. Fālagh and she was the cousin of Ibrāhīm A.S.<sup>53</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr cited a reference of Eighteenth Chapter of Genesis in Torah which described the name of Ibrāhīm’s (A.S.) wife as Sāra. The verse is: “Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him. “There, in the tent,” he said.<sup>54, 55</sup>

٤ - وَأُمَّرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةٌ أَحْطَبِ<sup>56</sup>

“And his wife, the wood-carrier”

Imām Qurṭubī narrated that *Imra’at* is Umm e Jamīl. Ibn ‘Arabī mentioned that she was Umm e Qabīh, her name was ‘Aurā’ and she was blind from an eye. Ibn ‘Abbās R.A., Mujāhid, Qatāda and Suddāī opined that she was a back biter. Qatāda further elaborated that she used to embarrass the Prophet (ﷺ) for his poverty but she herself was such a miser that in spite of being abundant with wealth, she used to carry wooden sticks on her back. Murra Hamdānī narrated that she used to carry bundle of small wooden branches to strew in the path of Muslims. One day, after being tired, she sat on a stone to have rest, an angel pushed her backwards and she died.<sup>57</sup>

Ibn ‘Āshūr stated: (وامرأته: أَي زَوْجُهُ). He expounded that *Imra’at* is Umm e Jamīl, her name was Arwa b. Ḥarb b. Umayya. She was the sister of Abū Sufyān R.A. It is said that her name was ‘Aurā’ and it is also said that it was her peculiarity because she was one eyed. It has also been reported that her name was ‘Awwā’.<sup>58</sup>

٥ - قَالَ رَبِّ أَيْ يَكُونُ لِي غُلْمٌ وَقَدْ بَلَغَتْنِي الْكِبَرُ وَأُمَّرَأَتِي عَاقِرٌ<sup>59</sup>

“He said: My Lord! How can I have a son when age has overtaken me already and my wife is barren?”

Imām Tha‘alabī asserted that Imrān (Father of Maryam A.S.) and Zakariyya A.S. (Father of Yaḥyā A.S.) married two sisters; wife of Zakariyya A.S. was Īshā‘ b. Fāqūdh and wife of Imrān was Ḥanna b. Fāqūdh.<sup>60</sup> Imām Baghawī quoted that the

age of Zakariyya's (A.S.) wife was 98 years when she was given the glad tidings.<sup>61</sup>

The wife of Zakariyya A.S. has also been mentioned in verse number 5 and 8 of Chapter 19 (Sūra Maryam) in the Qur'ān.

٦ - فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيْنِ فَرَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَتْنِ مِمَّنْ تَرْضَوْنَ مِنَ الشُّهَدَاءِ أَنْ تَضِلَّ إِحْدَاهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَاهُمَا الْأُخْرَى<sup>62</sup>

*“And if two men be not (at hand) then a man and two women, of such as ye approve as witnesses, so that if the one errs (through forgetfulness) the other will remember”*

Imām Ṭabarī cited from Abū Ja'far that if anybody does not find two men for witness, then it is permissible to have witness by a man and two women. He commented that if there are two men, even then it is permissible to bear witness from a man and two women.<sup>63</sup> In the above verse, (امْرَأَتْنِ) denotes those two woman who are believers and are independent enough to bear witness.

٧ - وَوَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهِمُ امْرَأَتَيْنِ تَذُودِنِ<sup>64</sup>

*“And he found apart from them two women keeping back (their flocks)”*

Imām Qurṭubī stated that the name of one woman was Layyā and the other's was Ṣafūriya. Both were the daughters of Yathrūn who was Shu'aib A.S. One of the opinions is that they were the granddaughters of Shu'aib A.S. and he had died till then but most of the scholars consent that they were the daughters and not the granddaughters.<sup>65</sup> Abū Ḥayyān Andalusī reported that the name of younger daughter was 'Abrā and elder one's was Ṣabūrā.<sup>66</sup>

### **Significations of al-Imra'a in the books of Qur'ānic Sciences:**

Many adept scholars of the Qur'ānic Sciences have made the subject word a part of their discussion while explaining its variant significations. The following table would describe the opinions of scholars in signifying *Imra'a* in the Qur'ān. Moreover, it would identify the verse numbers in which the word has been used as a homonym.

Author	Ibn Jawzī <sup>67</sup>	Dāmghānī <sup>68</sup>	Ferūzābādī <sup>69</sup>	Verse Number of Homonyms
<b>HOMONYMS</b>	<b>12 (Twelve)</b>	<b>12 (Twelve)</b>	<b>12 (Twelve)</b>	
	Zalīkhā	Zalīkhā	Zalīkhā	Yūsuf, 12: 21
	Bilqīs	Bilqīs	Bilqīs	Naml, 27:23
	Āsiya	Āsiya b. Muzāḥim	Āsiya	Qaṣas, 28: 9
	Sāra	Sāra	Sāra	Ḥūd, 11: 71
	Ḥanna	Ḥanna	Ḥanna	Āle-‘Imrān, 3: 35
	Wālī‘a	Wāghla	Wāhila	Ḥūd, 11: 81
	Wāliha	Wāhila	Wā‘ila	Taḥrīm, 66: 10
	Umm e Jamīl	Umm e Jamīl	Umm e Jamīl	Lahab, 111: 4
	Khawla b. Muḥammad	Khawla b. Muḥammad	Khawla b. Muḥammad	Nisā’, 4: 128
	Younger daughter: ‘Abrā Elder daughter: Ṣabūrā	Daughters of Shu‘aib A.S. (Brother of Yathrūn)	Daughters of Shu‘aib A.S.	Qaṣas, 28: 23
	Umm e Sharīk	Umm e Sharīk b. Jābir al-‘Āmiriyya	Umm e Sharīk	Aḥzāb, 33: 50
Anonymous	Anonymous	Any woman among Muslims who is righteous and honest	Baqara, 2: 282	

### Implications of the Word *Imra’a* and Similar Words in the Qur’ān:

The word *Imra’a* has been found to be used for three relations in the Qur’ān: as a wife, as a daughter and as a woman generally. It is inimitability and linguistic beauty of the Qur’ān that it uses a same word for various relations depending upon the contextual background of verses. There are many other words which represent the same relation; but the usage of a certain word entirely depends on the milieu of verses as well as literal meaning of a word. When the secret behind their usage becomes known, optimal and supreme lexicological eloquence of the Qur’ān is revealed. Here, implications of the word *Imra’at* have been mentioned and the other words used for the same relation will be mentioned and differences for the cause of usage would be briefly elaborated:

### 1. The word *Imra'a* used as a Wife:

The word *Imra'a* has been used for both the married and unmarried women in the Qur'ān and mostly for a wife who is attributed to a certain man.

For instance, while interpreting the verse

وَقَالَ الَّذِي اشْتَرَاهُ مِنْ مِصْرَ لِامْرَأَتِهِ<sup>70</sup>

Ibn 'Āshūr wrote:

وَامْرَأَتُهُ: مَعْنَاهُ زَوْجُهُ، فَإِنَّ الزَّوْجَةَ يُطْلَقُ عَلَيْهَا اسْمُ الْمَرْأَةِ وَيُرَادُ مِنْهُ مَعْنَى الزَّوْجَةِ<sup>71</sup>

### Other words used for Wife in the Qur'ān:

a. *Al-Zauja* (الزَّوْجَةُ): For a relation of wife, the word (الزَّوْجَةُ) has been frequently used in the Qur'ān. It is a feminine form of (زَوْج) which means a person of equal rank and capacity, pair of similar things or a husband. Anything that is associated with the other according to similarity or contradiction is also called *Zauj*.<sup>72</sup>

Imām Ibn Qayyim explicated in a detailed way the reason of using *Zauja* and *Imra'a* for the same relation in various verses. It has been summarized as under:

“(الأزواج) is the plural of (زوج) and it may be called (الزَّوْجَةُ) but the first one is more eloquent as said in the Qur'ān: <sup>73</sup> { يَا أدم اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ } . Ibn 'Abbās R.A. said about 'Ā'isha R.A. that she is the wife of your Prophet ﷺ in this world and in the life hereafter. In the Qur'ān, reports about the believer wives have been mentioned with the word *Zauja* or its plural and the reports disbeliever wives have been mentioned by the word *Imra'a* like the wife of Abū Lahab, Lūṭ A.S., Nūḥ A.S. A group of scholars like Suhailī said those wives are not described by word *Zauja* who will not be married to their men in the life hereafter because marriage is a matter of religion. After that, Suhailī raised a self-query that why the word *Imra'a* has been used for the wives of Zakariyya A.S. and Ibrāhīm A.S. and replied to it by clarifying that being a wife, ability of childbirth and fertility is greatly necessary; and in both the cases, the wives were barren at that time, so mentioning the word *Imra'at* is more appropriate for them. After they were made fertile by Allah, the word of *Zauj* is mentioned in the Qur'ān. 'Umar b. Khattāb R.A. said that spouses are the counterparts of each other, righteous ones will be with each other in the Heaven and the wicked ones in the Hell. If you ponder upon the words of the Qur'ān, you will always

find consistence in the meaning. In the verse of inheritance, the word *Azwājukum* has been used (Nisā, 4:12) because the ruling of inheritance is applicable in the marriage of proportionality and conformity and there is no similarity or proportionality between believer and disbeliever. The secrets of the vocabulary of the Qur'an and its compounds are above the minds of the worlds".<sup>74</sup>

Therefore, it can be precisely said that the word *Zauja* has been used for the wives with whom relationship of marriage is complete to their husbands in compatibility, religion, conjugation and harmony; whereas, *Imra'a* has been used for the case opposite to that.

**b. Al-Moḥṣana (المُحْصَنَة):** Another word used for a married woman in the Qur'an is *Moḥṣana* (المُحْصَنَة) and it can also be pronounced as *Moḥṣina*. It is an Accusative Noun (*Ism Maf'ūl*) and feminine form of the adjective (أَحْصَنَ). The root letters of *Moḥṣana* are (ح ص ن), *Hiṣn* means a fortress for protecting a town and *al-Hiṣān* means a protected woman either by her chastity or wedlock or honor and freedom. Imām Rāghib stated:

والحصان في الجملة: المُحْصَنَة، إما بعقمتها، أو تزوجها، أو بمانع من شرفها وحرمتها<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, it can be derived that *Moḥṣana* is used when a woman becomes married or chaste or free. The fundamental aspect of *Hiṣān* is the protection. A married woman is protected by wedlock, as she is prevented from fornication and her husband becomes her guardian. A chaste and free woman prevents herself from evil and Islam provides her protection.

**c. Al-Ṣāḥiba (الصاحبة):** It is a feminine of *al-Ṣāḥib* which means someone who physically stays with the other forever, an intimate companion. In the Qur'an, it has been used many times like (اصحاب النار), (اصحاب الكهف), (اصحاب الاعراف) etc.<sup>76</sup> It shows that the subject word is a female companion for some cause or similarity. The word *Ṣāḥiba* is used as a wife in the Qur'an as well e.g. in the following verse:

بَدِيعُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ صَاحِبَةٌ<sup>77</sup>

“The Originator of the heavens and the earth! How can He have a child, when there is for Him no consort?”

## 2. The word *Imra'a* used as a Daughter:

In the verse 23 of Sūra al-Qaṣaṣ, the word *Imra'atain* denotes two daughters of Shu'aib A.S. The common word for daughters could be used here but the word *Imra'atain* has been used. In fact, it indicates the independence of both woman. They were carrying out that work which was indeed the responsibility of a man but their father was older enough to perform the task. Therefore, to represent confident

and responsible females, the word *Imra'at* has been used for them who were not dependent to take their flocks to well.

The common word used for a daughter in the Qur'ān is (بِنْت) which is feminine form of (الْبَنُّ) i.e. son.

### 3. The word *Imra'a* used as a General Woman:

The word *Imra'a* has been used for a common woman in various verses. It does signify a certain woman but the ruling is general for every woman. e.g. The verse in which woman who fears ill treatment from her husband has been mentioned, signifies the wife of Ḥaḍrat Rāfi' b. Khadij R.A. but its ruling can be applied to any woman who faces the same situation.

#### Other words used for a Woman in the Qur'ān:

a. ***Al-Nisā'***: This is a noun with root letters (ن س و) or (ن س ي). The word (نساء) represents a woman who has reached to the age of puberty and able to bear child and does not apply to immature girls. It depicts the concealed attributes of a woman like menstruation and pregnancy.<sup>78</sup> For instance:

وَأَذَقْنَا لِكَلِمَاتِ الْمَلَكَةِ يَمْرُومًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ<sup>79</sup>

“And when the angels said: O Mary! Allah has chosen you and made you pure, and has preferred you above (all) the women of creation.”

In the above verse, preference of Maryam A.S. has been mentioned over all the women of the world and the word used is (نساء) because here, the preference is typically for the process of giving birth to a Prophet (‘Īsā A.S.).

b. ***Al-Untha***: It is a word used opposite to (الذكر) and describes the feminine part of a woman. In actual, *Zakara* and *Untha* are the names of genital parts of a man and woman respectively and latterly, it used to represent the gender of a male and a female.<sup>80</sup> Therefore, this word is used when the physical and womanly characteristics of a female are to be described like appearance, fragility, soft heartedness, aesthetic sense etc. For example:

وَأَنَّهُ خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَى<sup>81</sup>

“And that He created the two spouses, the male and the female”

In the above verse, especially creation of male and female has been discussed which pertains to physicality, therefore (أُنثَى) has been used.

#### Usage of *Imra'a* with respect to religion of a woman:

The word *Imra'a* has been used for two moral and religious categories in the Qur'ān. One for pious or righteous women and the other for wicked and non-believer women. The following table would depict segregation of both the categories:

Believers	Non-Believers
Wife of Pharaoh (Āsiya), Wife of Ibrāhīm (Sāra), Wife of ‘Imrān (Ḥanna), Wife of Zakariyya (Īshā‘), Daughters of Shoaib A.S. (Layyā and Ṣafūra), Queen of Ṣabā (Bilqīs), Khawla b. Maslama, Umm e Sharīk, Any two believer women for witness	Wife of Egypt’s Ruler (Zalīkhā), Wife of Lūṭ A.S., Wife of Nūḥ A.S., Wife of Abū Lahab (Umm e Jamīl)

The above table shows that the word *Imra’ a* has been used in the Qur’ān to denote both the women who are at summit of their faith or at the summit of insurgence. <sup>82</sup>

### Conclusion:

- The Science of Homonyms (*Wujūh*) is one of the significant topics of the Qur’ānic Sciences which pertains to linguistics of the Qur’ān.
- *Al-Imra’ a* is one of the homonyms in the Qur’ān used for variant significations (*Dalālāt*).
- *Al-Imra’ a* { الإمْرأة } means a woman. It is feminine form of (المْرء) which means a man. Both words come from (المْرؤءة) which implies on the actions of some person without the effect of external factors. It is the fineness of a human being which make him able to distinguish between good and evil.
- The word *Imra’ a* has been used twenty six times in the Qur’ān, out of which there are thirteen significations as interpreted by exegetes and twelve by Qur’ānic Sciences’ experts.
- It has been inscribed in the Qur’ān in two ways: (امْرَأَةٌ) and (امْرَأَات) which depicts beauty of the ‘Uthmānic Script as the way of writing has an impact on their meaning. There are two readings of the subject word: one with tā’ in the end and the other with hā’ in the end.
- Many exegetes cited various narrations to determine the signification of *Imra’ a* in a particular verse. Some of them are very certain and some have variant interpretations.
- The experts of Qur’ānic Sciences also mentioned the names of those women for which they were certain.
- The word *Imra’ a* implies on the relation of wife and daughter; and also denotes a general woman. The other words used for a wife in the Qur’ān are: *Zauja*, *Moḥṣana* and *Ṣāḥiba*; for a daughter: *Bint* and for a general woman: *Nisā’* and *Untha*.
- This word has been used for both believers and non-believer women in the Qur’ān.
- *Al-Imra’ a* is among those Qur’ānic words for which the exegetes endeavored to point out its exact signification through various narrations

pertaining to cause of revelation but at some places, despite its signification, the injunction is general for all the women.

More than one signification and implication of the word *Imra'a* not only reveals rhetoric supremacy and utmost eloquence of the Holy Qur'ān but it also discloses the importance of such homonyms and multi-significational words found in the Scripture.

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- <sup>41</sup> Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 19/132
- <sup>42</sup> Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1407 A.H.), 3/550
- <sup>43</sup> Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Book of Wedlock, Chapter: Is it permissible for a woman to present herself for marriage to somebody?, No. 5113
- <sup>44</sup> Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 17/182-3
- <sup>45</sup> Taḥrīm, 66: 10
- <sup>46</sup> Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 21/102-3
- <sup>47</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥnīr wa'l Tanwīr*, 28/374-5
- <sup>48</sup> The wife's name of Noah A.S. is Naamah in the Bible (Genesis 4: 22), a she was descendant of Cain and her parents were Lamech and Zillah (Genesis 4: 23).
- <sup>49</sup> Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*, 4/193
- <sup>50</sup> 'Ankabūt, 29: 33
- <sup>51</sup> A'rāf, 7: 83

- <sup>52</sup> Hūd, 11: 71
- <sup>53</sup> Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 12/472-3
- <sup>54</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa'l Tanwīr*, 12/119
- <sup>55</sup> Genesis 18: 9
- <sup>56</sup> Al-Masad, 111: 4
- <sup>57</sup> Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 22/550
- <sup>58</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa'l Tanwīr*, 30/605
- <sup>59</sup> Āle 'Imrān, 3: 40
- <sup>60</sup> Tha'alabī, *Al-Kashf wa'l-bayān*, 3/54
- <sup>61</sup> Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*, 2/35
- <sup>62</sup> Al-Baqara, 2: 282
- <sup>63</sup> Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 5/86
- <sup>64</sup> Al-Qaṣaṣ, 28: 23
- <sup>65</sup> Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 16/260
- <sup>66</sup> Abū Ḥayyān, *Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, 8/296
- <sup>67</sup> Ibn Jawzī, *Nuzhatul A'yun al-Nawāzīr fī 'Ilm al-Wujūh wal Naḥā'ir*, (Beirūt: Al-Risālah Publishers, n.d.), P. 571-2
- <sup>68</sup> Al-Dāmghānī, *Qāmūs al-Qur'ān*, (Beirūt: Dār al-'Ilm lil-Malāyīn, 1983), P. 431-2
- <sup>69</sup> Ferūzābādī, *Baṣā'ir dhawī al-Tamyīz*, 2/61-2
- <sup>70</sup> Yūsuf, 12: 21
- <sup>71</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa'l Tanwīr*, 12/245
- <sup>72</sup> Rāghib Aṣfahānī, *Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, P. 383
- <sup>73</sup> Al-Baqara, 2: 35
- <sup>74</sup> Ibn Qayyim, *Jilā' al-Afhām*, (Kuwait: Dār al-'Urūba, 1987), 1/229-233
- <sup>75</sup> Rāghib Aṣfahānī, *Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, P. 239
- <sup>76</sup> Muḥammad Ḥassan Ḥassan Jabal, Dr., *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 2010), P. 1197-8

<sup>77</sup> Al-An'ām, 6: 101

<sup>78</sup> Muḥammad Ḥassan *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī*, P. 2183

<sup>79</sup> Āle 'Imrān, 3: 42

<sup>80</sup> Rāghib Aṣfahānī, *Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, P. 93

<sup>81</sup> Al-Najm, 53: 45

<sup>82</sup> Muḥammad Shamlūl, *I'jāzu Rasm al-Qur'ān wa I'jāz al-Tilā wa*, P. 174