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Sayyid Quṭb's Exegesis of Hospitality in Prophetic Narratives


Pentafsiran Sayyid Quṭb tentang Hospitaliti dalam Naratif Kenabian

Syed Mohamad Zainudin Bichk Koyak , Muhammad Akmalludin Mohd Hamdan , Ahmad Salahuddin M Azizan , & Muhammad Rezi 

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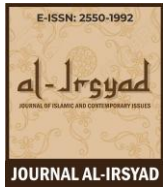
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Sayyid Quṭb's Exegesis of Hospitality in Prophetic Narratives



[*Pentafsiran Sayyid Quṭb tentang Hospitaliti
dalam Naratif Kenabian*]

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Hospitality, Sayyid Quṭb,
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ABSTRACT

This study examined Sayyid Quṭb's interpretive approach to the Quranic narratives of hospitality in his seminal *tafsīr*, *Fī Zīlāl al-Qur'ān* (In the Shade of the Quran). Focusing on the stories of Prophet Abraham and his honored guests, and Prophet Lot and his people, the study analyzed how Quṭb situates these episodes within his broader project of *tafsīr ijtīmā'ī wa ḥarakī* (social and movement-oriented exegesis). This study highlighted Quṭb's hermeneutical methods, including his emphasis on thematic unity within the *sūrah*, his literary sensitivity to Quranic imagery, and his insistence on linking Quranic guidance to the lived realities of Muslim societies. Through his reading of these narratives, Quṭb derives a set of ethical principles governing hospitality: the obligation to welcome guests warmly, the duty to provide food promptly and generously, the importance of ensuring guests' comfort and safety, and the moral imperative to uphold their dignity. In Quṭb's view, these Quranic stories do not only recount historical events but also serve as paradigms for cultivating justice, mercy, and communal solidarity in contemporary Muslim life. By foregrounding hospitality as a Quranic ethical principle, this study argued that Quṭb's *tafsīr* underscores the role of Islam in addressing social challenges and fostering human dignity.

Contribution: Ultimately, this study positions Quṭb's reflections on hospitality as a distinctive contribution to Quranic exegesis and as a framework of enduring relevance for modern ethical and social discourse.

Kata Kunci:

Hospitaliti, Sayyid Quṭb,
Tafsiran Sosiologi

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini meneliti pendekatan tafsiran Sayyid Quṭb terhadap naratif al-Quran berkaitan dengan konsep hospitaliti sebagaimana yang dibincangkan

dalam karya tafsir agungnya, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*. Dengan memberi tumpuan kepada kisah Nabi Ibrahim AS bersama para tetamu mulia serta kisah Nabi Lut AS bersama kaumnya, kajian ini menganalisis bagaimana Quṭb meletakkan episod-episod tersebut dalam kerangka tafsir *ijtimā'ī wa ḥarakī* (tafsir sosial dan berorientasikan gerakan). Kajian ini menyorot kaedah hermeneutik Quṭb, termasuk penekanan beliau terhadap kesatuan tema dalam sesuatu surah, kepekaan sastera terhadap gaya bahasa al-Quran, serta keterikatannya dalam menghubungkan panduan al-Quran dengan realiti masyarakat Islam. Melalui pembacaan beliau terhadap naratif ini, Quṭb merumuskan prinsip etika hospitality, seperti kewajipan memberi salam kepada tetamu, penyediaan makanan yang segera dan murah hati, kepentingan memastikan keselesaan dan keselamatan tetamu, serta keutamaan mempertahankan maruah mereka. Pada pandangan Quṭb, kisah-kisah al-Quran ini bukan sekadar catatan sejarah, tetapi berfungsi sebagai paradigma untuk membina keadilan, rahmat, dan solidariti komuniti dalam kehidupan Muslim semasa. Dengan menampilkan hospitaliti sebagai etika Qurani, makalah ini berhujah bahawa tafsir Quṭb menegaskan peranan Islam dalam menangani cabaran sosial serta memartabatkan maruah insani.

Sumbangan: Kajian ini menempatkan refleksi Quṭb mengenai hospitaliti sebagai sumbangan unik kepada khazanah tafsir al-Quran dan sebagai kerangka yang kekal relevan bagi wacana etika dan sosial moden.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates the intellectual contributions of Sayyid Quṭb (1906–1966), one of the most influential Muslim thinkers of the twentieth century, to Quranic exegesis with particular emphasis on the theme of hospitality (*al-ḍiyāfah*). Quṭb's life and scholarship, culminating in his martyrdom in 1966 (Al-Khālidi, 1994), left a lasting impact on the landscape of modern Islamic thought. His *tafsīr*, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* (In the Shade of the Quran), stands as his magnum opus, widely recognized not only as a commentary on the Quran but also as a manifesto for the revival of the Muslim community. Within this vast work, Quṭb engages deeply with Quranic narratives to extract ethical, social, and spiritual principles that transcend historical context and remain relevant for contemporary readers.

The study pays special attention to Quṭb's methodology of social and movement-oriented exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-ijtimā'ī wa al-ḥarakī*), which distinguishes his work from classical *tafsīr* traditions. Unlike purely linguistic or juristic interpretations, Quṭb insists that the Quran is a dynamic guide for society, offering principles for justice, solidarity, and moral reform. His approach combines literary sensitivity to Quranic style with a conscious effort to draw lessons applicable to modern crises, such as materialism, social fragmentation, and moral decline (Al-Khālidi, 2000). This hermeneutic lens provides a valuable entry point into understanding how Quranic narratives of hospitality are not merely historical anecdotes but paradigmatic models for ethical conduct.

Central to this analysis are the stories of Prophet Ibrāhīm and his angelic guests, as well as Prophet Lūṭ and his embattled community, which Quṭb interprets across multiple *sūrahs* including Hūd [11], al-Ḥijr [15], and al-Dhāriyāt [51]. Through these narratives, Quṭb underscores the virtues of generosity, promptness in serving guests, and the defense of their dignity even under social and moral pressure (Al-Khālidi, 2000). He contrasts the nobility of Ibrāhīm, who hastened to prepare a roasted calf for his guests, with the corruption of Lūṭ's people, whose actions violated not only hospitality but the very order of creation. By situating these stories within the Quran's broader moral framework, Quṭb reveals hospitality as a lens through which larger social and theological themes, such as mercy, justice, and human dignity can be understood.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to extract and systematize the ethical principles of hospitality embedded in the Quranic discourse and articulated through Quṭb's interpretive method. These principles include greeting guests warmly, serving them generously, ensuring their safety and comfort, and protecting their honor against harm. More broadly, Quṭb presents hospitality as a manifestation of Quranic values that foster cohesion, compassion, and mutual respect within the community. By foregrounding this ethic, the study highlights how *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* not only preserves the Quranic message for exegetical purposes but also reorients it toward the pressing social challenges of the modern Muslim world, thereby affirming the Quran's enduring relevance as a guide for ethical and communal life.

2. BIOGRAPHY OF SAYYID QUṬB

Sayyid Quṭb Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn Shādhilī was born on October 9, 1906, in the village of Musha, located in Asyut, Upper Egypt (Quṭb, 1946). His father, Ḥājj Quṭb Ibrāhīm, was politically engaged and a reader of the nationalist newspaper *al-Liwā'*, while his mother was a devout Muslim woman known for her piety and commitment to Islamic values (Al-Khālidi, 2002). Some accounts suggest that his family may have had Indian ancestry due to the use of the title *al-Faqīr* among his forebears, though his brother Muḥammad Quṭb rejected this claim, asserting their Arab lineage: "We heard from our father that his name ended with the title *al-Faqīr 'Abd Allāh...* but we have no evidence to confirm an Indian origin." (Al-Khālidi, 2002). Quṭb's upbringing in a household of affection, solidarity, and religion fostered in him an early attachment to Islamic identity.

2.1 Early Education and Quran Memorization

By the age of ten, Quṭb had completed the memorization of the entire Quran, having begun formal schooling at six and mastering ten *ajzā'* per year (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984). His childhood experiences in the rural environment of Musha left a lasting impression on him, inspiring his later autobiographical work *Tifl min al-Qarya* (A Child from the Village), in which he described the moral beauty and simplicity of village life (Quṭb, 1946). Even as a boy, Quṭb demonstrated intellectual curiosity by not only listening to sermons at the mosque but also questioning and debating the teachers delivering them (Al-Khālidi, 2002).

2.2 Studies in Cairo and Academic Formation

In 1920, Quṭb moved to Cairo to live with his uncle Aḥmad Ḥusayn 'Uthmān, a graduate of al-Azhar and an active journalist affiliated with the Wafd Party. There, he entered the Teachers' Training School in 1922 and graduated in 1924, followed by studies at Dār al-'Ulūm (1925–1929), where he specialized in Arabic language, Islamic sciences, logic, and philosophy (Al-Khālidi, 2002). During this period, Quṭb became acquainted with prominent literary figures, including 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, whose influence helped shape his critical style (Hassan, 1996).

2.3 Career, Intellectual Development, and Martyrdom

Following his graduation, Quṭb worked as a teacher and later as an inspector in the Ministry of Education. He proposed reforms such as creating school libraries across Egypt to promote intellectual growth (Quṭb, 1939). In 1948, he traveled to the United States as part of an educational mission, where he observed what he perceived as a spiritually barren and morally decadent society, a turning point that deepened his conviction that the Quran is the ultimate guide for humanity (Haddad, 1983). Upon his return, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood, eventually becoming one of its leading ideologues.

Quṭb's writings, particularly *al-ʿAdālah al-Ijtimāʿiyyah fī al-Islām* (Social Justice in Islam) in 1949 and *Fī Zilāl al-Qurʿān* in 1952–1965), solidified his reputation as a foremost Islamic thinker. His opposition to the authoritarian policies of President Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir led to his imprisonment (Md Isa & Shakhruddin, 2024). Despite enduring harsh conditions, he continued his *tafsīr* writings, revising and expanding *Fī Zilāl al-Qurʿān* while in prison. In 1966, he was executed by hanging, a death that enshrined him as a martyr (*shahīd*) whose life and thought continue to inspire Islamic movements worldwide (Musallam, 1993).

3. SAYYID QUṬB METHODOLOGY IN *FĪ ZILĀL AL-QURʿĀN*

Quṭb's *Tafsīr Fī Zilāl al-Qurʿān* represents a distinctive exegetical methodology that differs from both the classical and modernist approaches of his time. Scholars such as al-Khālīdī (2002) and Musallam (1993) have emphasized that his work should not be read as a traditional commentary that meticulously records all variant opinions. Instead, Quṭb sought to render the Quran a living text, an ongoing guide for faith, action, and social transformation. His interpretive framework is often referred to as *al-tafsīr al-ijtimāʿī wa al-ḥarakī*, where the Quran is seen not only as revelation but also as a blueprint for shaping community life and confronting injustice.

One of Quṭb's most prominent methodological principles was his focus on *al-waḥdah al-mawḍūʿiyyah* (thematic unity of the *sūrah*). He insisted that each chapter of the Quran possesses a unique character, central theme, and internal coherence, making it necessary to interpret verses in light of the whole (Quṭb, *Fī Zilāl al-Qurʿān*, vol. 1, introduction). For example, he highlighted how *Sūrah al-Anʿām* emphasizes the foundations of faith and the recognition of God's sovereignty, whereas *sūrah al-Aʿrāf* retells stories of past prophets to illustrate the historical struggle between truth and falsehood (Al-Khālīdī, 2002). This approach allowed him to emphasize the Quran's unity of message across its different contexts.

Another feature of his methodology was the literary and artistic appreciation of Quranic language, which he described as *al-taṣwīr al-fannī fī al-Qurʿān* (artistic imagery in the Quran). In his early book *al-Taṣwīr al-Fannī fī al-Qurʿān* (1939), Quṭb had already articulated the Quran's power to evoke images, emotions, and spiritual states beyond mere linguistic explanation (Hassan, 1996). This literary sensitivity carried into *Fī Zilāl*, where he refrained from lengthy linguistic or juristic digressions, stating in his introduction: "All I have attempted is not to drown myself in linguistic, theological, or jurisprudential debates that obscure the Quran from my soul or my soul from the Quran." (Quṭb, 1953).

Quṭb also employed a selective use of *tafsīr bi'l-ma'thūr* (interpretation based on transmitted reports), drawing on earlier exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī but without reproducing all their variant opinions (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964; Ibn Kathīr, 1998). Instead, he favored concise references to prophetic traditions and early authorities, prioritizing what reinforced the central moral or spiritual point. His aim was not philological completeness but to uncover the guidance embedded in the Quran's discourse. This approach reflects what modern scholars describe as his effort to balance reverence for classical sources with the need for contemporary application (Musallam, 1993).

Finally, Quṭb's *tafsīr* was deeply shaped by his socio-political vision. He consistently drew connections between Quranic verses and the challenges of his age, colonialism, materialism, injustice, and moral decline. For instance, in discussing the narratives of Ibrāhīm and Lūṭ, he did not limit himself to historical retelling but interpreted them as lessons in moral courage, hospitality, and resistance to social corruption (Quṭb, 1953). His interpretive lens positions the Quran as an active force in shaping an Islamic worldview capable of confronting the crises of modern society (Ali, 2011).

In sum, Quṭb's methodology in *Fī Zilāl al-Qurʿān* can be characterized by five key features: (1) emphasis on thematic unity within *sūrahs*; (2) literary-aesthetic appreciation of Quranic expression; (3) selective reliance on transmitted reports; (4) focus on extracting ethical and social guidance; and (5) orientation toward a movement-driven understanding of the Quran as a catalyst for reform. Together, these principles mark his *tafsīr* as a pioneering work in the field of sociological exegesis (Amir, 2025).

4. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF HOSPITALITY EXTRACTED FROM QUṬB'S *TAFSĪR*

4.1 Prophet Ibrāhīm and His Honored Guests Story

The Quran narrates the story of Prophet Ibrāhīm's encounter with his angelic guests in several places, notably in *sūrahs* Hūd [11]: 69–83, al-Ḥijr [15]: 51–60, and al-Dhāriyāt [51]: 24–30. Quṭb, in his *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, devotes careful attention to the nuances of each passage, extracting profound ethical lessons related to hospitality (*al-diyāfah*).

4.1.1 The roasted calf and the blessing of Isaac

The narrative begins with the arrival of divine messengers who greeted Ibrāhīm in *sūrah* Hūd [11] verse 69:

﴿وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَىٰ قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَنْ جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ حَنِيذٍ ﴿٦٩﴾﴾

Meaning:

“And certainly did Our messengers come to Abraham with good tidings; they said, ‘Peace.’ He said, ‘Peace,’ and did not delay in bringing them a roasted calf.”

Quṭb presents the scene of Ibrāhīm's angelic visitors with remarkable vividness. He describes the moment as unfolding in an almost cinematic sequence: the angels arrive and say *salām*, Ibrāhīm immediately returns the greeting, and without delay he appears with a roasted calf prepared for them. Quṭb (1953) emphasises two major themes in his analysis. First, he highlights the speed and spontaneity of Ibrāhīm's hospitality, *fa-mā labitha* indicates that he did not pause to question who his guests were; rather, his first instinctive reaction was to serve them generously. Such immediacy, according to Quṭb, demonstrates that hospitality is not peripheral but is the natural moral reflex of a believer. Second, Quṭb focuses on the quality of the food: the offering of a *‘ijl ḥanīdh* (a roasted calf) reflects Arab–Bedouin customs, where roasting meat on heated stones symbolised honour and generosity. Quṭb then universalises this detail into an ethical principle, true hospitality must be swift, sincere, and uncalculated, a sign of the believer's noble character (Quṭb, 1953).

In contrast, al-Qurṭubī begins his commentary with linguistic and juristic analysis. He discusses the structure of *fa-mā labitha*, citing early grammarians such as al-Farrā' and al-Kisā'ī on whether *mā* is *nāfiyah* (negating) or *mawṣūlah* (relative), and whether the subject of the verb *labitha* is Ibrāhīm or the act of bringing the calf. Al-Qurṭubī then elaborates on the term *ḥanīdh*, explaining that it refers to meat roasted over heated stones, and provides lexical parallels such as *ḥanadhtu al-shāh* in classical Arabic usage (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964). Although he ultimately derives the ethical lesson of *ta'jīl al-qirā'*, the desirability of hastening to offer food to guests, his emphasis remains primarily linguistic and fiqh-oriented, centering on the grammatical and juristic dimensions of the verse rather than constructing a broader social ethic.

Ibn 'Āshūr, in *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, provides yet another interpretive angle, focusing on the rhetorical architecture of *Sūrah* Hūd. He argues that the placement of the Ibrāhīm narrative is a deliberate literary device that prepares the audience for the subsequent account of the people of Lūṭ. For Ibn 'Āshūr, the *bushrā* (good tidings) encompasses not only the birth of Iṣḥāq but also the impending destruction of Lūṭ's community. He further notes the stylistic “compression” (*ikhtiṣār badī'*) of the story in *Sūrah* Hūd compared to its more expansive treatment in *sūrah* al-Dhāriyāt, demonstrating how Quranic concision intensifies meaning (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984). Though he acknowledges the element of hospitality, Ibn 'Āshūr does not foreground it; instead, he emphasises the literary coherence and structural function of the passage within the *sūrah*.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, approaches the same verse through his characteristic *kalām*-oriented methodology. He enumerates various theological and narrative possibilities: whether the *bushrā* refers primarily to the promise of a child or the destruction of Lūṭ's people; why the angels appeared in human form; and what wisdom lies in their initial concealment of their identity. This leads him into broader reflections on divine power, the nature of miracles, and the relationship between *'āda* (natural order) and *kharq al-'āda* (miraculous intervention) (Al-Rāzī, 1981). In his analysis, hospitality appears only incidentally; his main concern is with the philosophical and theological dimensions of the narrative.

Taken together, these differences highlight what is unique about Quṭb's approach. While al-Qurṭubī prioritises linguistic precision and juristic implications, Ibn 'Āshūr emphasises literary structure and rhetorical

coherence, and al-Rāzī explores theological multiplicity and the metaphysics of divine action, Quṭb brings the story into the realm of lived moral experience. He transforms the simple phrase *fa-mā labitha an jā'a bi 'jlin ḥanīdh* into a universal ethical paradigm: that the believer's first instinct towards others should be immediate, generous hospitality. In doing so, Quṭb elevates an ancient desert custom into a timeless moral value at the heart of Islamic spirituality (Razali, Hassan, Awang, & Yusof, 2024). When the angels refrained from eating, Ibrāhīm grew uneasy (Q. [11]: 70):

﴿فَلَمَّا رَأَىٰ أَيْدِيَهُمْ لَا تَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ نَكِرَهُمْ وَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً قَالُوا لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِ لُوطٍ ﴿٧٠﴾﴾

Meaning:

“But when he saw that their hands did not reach for it, he mistrusted them and felt a fear of them. They said, ‘Do not be afraid. Indeed, we have been sent to the people of Lot.’”

Quṭb explains that within Arab desert culture, refusing to eat from a host's food functioned as a symbolic declaration of hostility or treachery. In this cultural code, a guest who partakes of the host's food enters into a tacit covenant of peace, whereas one who refuses effectively signals that he stands outside this bond of trust. Thus, when Ibrāhīm observes that the guests' hands “do not reach” the food, he immediately “finds them strange” and feels a surge of inward fear. Quṭb expands this into a refined ethic of *adab al-ḍiyāfah*, arguing that true hospitality is not fulfilled merely by placing food before guests; the host must also be sensitive to their emotional comfort, ensuring that no atmosphere of tension or unease surrounds the meal. He further notes that when the angels quickly reassure him, *lā takhafinnā ursilnā ilā qaḥmi Lūt*, this reflects an ethical expectation upon the guest as well: once a misunderstanding arises, the guest should promptly remove the host's anxiety, demonstrating mutual moral consideration rather than a one-directional virtue (Quṭb, 1953).

Classical *tafāsīr* corroborate the cultural background Quṭb describes, though they typically do not extend the discussion into a systematic ethic of social interaction. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, transmits reports from Qatādah and others noting that Arabs traditionally considered it an ominous sign if a guest refused to eat, for such refusal was associated with ill intent or hostility (Al-Ṭabarī, 2000). Al-Qurṭubī likewise mentions this Bedouin custom, citing narrations in which the refusal to eat foreshadows potential harm or treachery, but his analysis remains focused on explaining the reason behind Ibrāhīm's fear rather than extracting broader interpersonal ethics (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Al-Rāzī introduces a distinctive theological nuance by exploring why precisely Ibrāhīm felt fear. He questions whether the fear arose from perceiving the angels as unfamiliar humans who might intend harm, or whether, as he suggests is more fitting for a prophet of Ibrāhīm's spiritual rank, it stemmed from realising they were angels whose divine mission was still unknown. Al-Rāzī leans toward the latter interpretation, using it as a point of entry into broader discussions on the nature of prophetic fear, its compatibility with *tawakkul*, and the limits of human awareness concerning divine decrees, topics that draw the narrative into the domain of *kalām* and metaphysical analysis (Al-Rāzī, 1981).

Ibn 'Āshūr, meanwhile, reads the verse primarily through a rhetorical lens. He interprets Ibrāhīm's fear as a narrative device that sets the stage for his subsequent *mujādalāh* on behalf of the people of Lūt, framing the emotional tension as structurally necessary for the unfolding discourse. The description of Sarah “standing” (*wa-mra'atuhu qā'imā*) is treated as a circumstantial clause that links this emotionally charged moment to the divine promise that follows, thereby preserving the narrative's cohesion and dramatic momentum (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984).

Seen through these comparisons, the distinctiveness of Quṭb's approach becomes clear. While al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī foreground historical custom, and al-Rāzī and Ibn 'Āshūr focus on theological or rhetorical implications, Quṭb centers the psychology of the moment. For him, the exchange between Ibrāhīm and the angels models a modern ethic of mutual human sensitivity: just as the host must alleviate the discomfort of the guests, so too must the guests alleviate the worry of the host. In Quṭb's reading, hospitality emerges as a reciprocal moral relationship rooted in awareness, empathy, and emotional intelligence (Q. [11]: 71).

﴿وَأَمْرَانَهُ قَائِمَةٌ فَضَحِكْتُمْ فَبَشَّرْنَاهَا بِإِسْحَاقَ وَمِنْ وَرَاءِ إِسْحَاقَ يَعْقُوبَ ﴿٧١﴾﴾

Meaning:

“And his wife was standing and she laughed; then We gave her good tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac, Jacob.”

Quṭb observes that the turning point in the dialogue occurs precisely with Sarah's sudden reaction. He explains that her laughter may have arisen from joy at hearing of the impending destruction of the morally corrupt people of Lūṭ, or from relief after witnessing the lifting of fear from her husband. Immediately after this moment of emotional release, the angels deliver the glad tidings of not only a son, Ishāq, but also a grandson, Ya'qūb, an extraordinary "double glad tidings" bestowed upon a woman described as barren and elderly. For Quṭb, this moment captures the inner tremor of an ageing woman whose long-standing sterility is overturned by divine grace, and he subtly links this blessing to the moral excellence of Ibrāhīm's household: a family marked by faith, righteousness, and an exceptional standard of hospitality becomes the locus of continued prophetic lineage (Quṭb, 1953).

In contrast, al-Rāzī, presents an extensive philological and theological investigation of the verb *fa-daḥikat*. He collects differing views from early authorities, noting that the majority interpret it as literal laughter, either at the announcement of Lūṭ's people's punishment or at the resolution of Ibrāhīm's fear. Yet he also reports the alternative interpretation held by scholars such as Mujāhid and 'Ikrimah, who assert that *daḥikat* here means "she menstruated," citing dialectal evidence supported by lexical sources like *Lisān al-'Arab*. Al-Rāzī meticulously evaluates the linguistic foundations of this reading, discusses its narrative logic, where menstruation signals the restoration of fertility, and considers the objections of grammarians such as al-Farrā' and Abū 'Ubaydah, who reject this interpretation on linguistic grounds. His focus, however, remains primarily on philological precision and on the mechanics of how divine power restores fertility, rather than on Sarah's emotional experience (Al-Rāzī, 1981).

Al-Qurṭubī, similarly records multiple explanations for Sarah's laughter: joy at the downfall of Lūṭ's people, relief after seeing Ibrāhīm reassured, or surprise at the extraordinary news. He notes that *qā'ima* may indicate that she was standing in service to the guests or behind a curtain, observing the scene from a nearby position. Al-Qurṭubī also includes the interpretation equating *daḥikat* with menstruation, acknowledging its basis in certain Arabic dialects, but like al-Rāzī, he maintains his focus on transmitted reports and linguistic analysis rather than psychological depth (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Ibn 'Āshūr, takes a literary-rhetorical approach. He interprets *wa-mra'atuhu qā'ima* as a circumstantial clause that places Sārah within the immediate dramatic setting, attentive to the conversation. For him, *fa-daḥikat* signifies genuine laughter of astonishment and joy. Ibn 'Āshūr also draws a significant theological inference from the explicit mention of Ya'qūb: since Sārah is promised not only a son but also a grandson, this necessarily implies that Ishāq will live to adulthood. This supports the view held by many exegetes that the son intended for sacrifice in *sūrah* al-Ṣāffāt must be Ismā'īl, not Ishāq (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984).

Against these classical interpretations, Quṭb's approach stands out in its distinct focus. While al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī centre their discussions on the philological meaning of *daḥikat*, and Ibn 'Āshūr highlights literary structure and doctrinal implications, Quṭb dwells on Sarah's emotional world the shock, joy, and trembling of a woman whose barrenness is suddenly cured by divine intervention. He transforms a brief Quranic expression into a window onto personal religious experience, particularly feminine spiritual psychology, and connects that experience with the family's moral qualities of faith, purity, and generous hospitality. For Quṭb (1953), this household's devotion and righteousness make it a natural vessel for the continuation of prophetic lineage (Q. [11]: 73).

﴿قَالُوا أَتَعْجَبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ رَحِمْتُ اللَّهُ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ إِنَّهُ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ﴾

Meaning:

"They said, 'Do you marvel at the command of Allah? May the mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you, O people of the house. Indeed, He is Praiseworthy, Glorious.'"

For Quṭb, this verse becomes the foundation for an extended theological and spiritual reflection on God's absolute freedom over what human beings call "laws of nature." He insists that there is "no wonder" in God's command, for what people commonly describe as *'āda* or natural law is simply the habitual manner in which God chooses to govern the cosmos, not a constraint upon His power. When God wills to depart from habit, such as granting a barren, elderly couple a son and even a grandson, this remains entirely within His *sumān*, which are far broader and more comprehensive than anything human perception can grasp. Quṭb uses this insight to criticise modern attitudes that attempt to "bind the divine will" to what contemporary science happens to observe at a given moment. Genuine understanding of *ulūhiyyah*, he argues, requires acknowledging that God's will is eternally *ṭalīqah*, unrestricted and unfettered by the structures of causality He Himself created. At this

point, Quṭb interweaves themes of hospitality, prophecy, and miracle: a household that lives in full trust of God's unbounded grace becomes a fitting recipient of extraordinary divine gifts (Quṭb, 1953).

Ibn 'Āshūr interprets the phrase *a-ta 'jabīna min amri Allāh* as a gentle reproach of Sarah's *istib 'ād*, her judging the event improbable due to human habit. He explains *amr Allāh* here as the creative command (*amr takwīnī*), which necessarily includes the possibility of breaking ordinary patterns of nature. Ibn 'Āshūr then turns to the rhetorical structure of the verse: he reads *rahmat Allāh wa barakātuahu 'alaykum* as a *ta 'līl*, an explanatory clause that removes the grounds for astonishment, for this household has long been immersed in God's mercy and blessing. He identifies *ahl al-bayt* as the present family of Ibrāhīm and Sarah, and explains that the concluding phrase *innahu Ḥamīd Majīd* signals that God praises those who obey Him and that the majesty of His will renders extraordinary favours unsurprising. Thus, although Ibn 'Āshūr affirms the theological point that God can break 'āda, his approach remains analytic and rhetorical, focusing on how each phrase contributes to negating Sarah's astonishment rather than engaging in direct critique of modern rationalism (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984).

Al-Qurṭubī, meanwhile, reads the angels' words as a straightforward reproach: they question why Sarah finds God's decree astonishing, given that His power encompasses all possibilities. He highlights that this very verse has been cited by many scholars as evidence that the sacrificial son was Ismā'īl, not Ishāq, since God promises that Ishāq will live long enough to father Ya'qūb, making it impossible for him to have been the intended victim in *sūrah al-Ṣāffāt*. For al-Qurṭubī, the phrase *rahmat Allāh wa barakātuahu 'alaykum ahl al-bayt* becomes a textual proof of the family's elevated status, characterised by prophethood, miracles, and divinely bestowed honours, an idea he extends into discussions on the theological significance of *ahl al-bayt* more broadly (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Al-Rāzī explains that the angels' words emphasise that Sarah's amazement is unwarranted because God has already enveloped this household in extraordinary graces, prophethood, repeated miracles, and continuous divine favour. If they have long witnessed *kharq al-'āda* in their own lives, al-Rāzī argues, why should they be astonished at yet another miraculous event? He therefore interprets *rahmat Allāh wa barakātuahu 'alaykum ahl al-bayt* as a deliberate enumeration of accumulated *karamāt*, intended to remove any sense of improbability from the divine promise. His method remains systematic and theological, cataloguing God's gifts and deriving kalām-oriented conclusions about divine power and human perception (Al-Rāzī, 1981).

These contrasts reveal the unique thrust of Quṭb's interpretation. While al-Qurṭubī and al-Rāzī use the verse to establish doctrinal points, such as the identity of the sacrificial son or the nature of *kharq al-'āda* and Ibn 'Āshūr dissects its rhetorical structure, Quṭb transforms the passage into a direct critique of modern rationalism that confines God's action to observable "laws." He situates the story within a contemporary intellectual struggle: the God who blesses Ibrāhīm's household is the very God whose will cannot be restricted by scientific habit. For Quṭb, the account of Ibrāhīm's guests becomes a living declaration of an Islamic worldview in which ethical hospitality and radical trust in God's boundless grace stand united against both social corruption and spiritual materialism (Quṭb, 1953).

4.1.2 The fear and the divine mission

In *sūrah al-Ḥijr* [15] verses 52 and 53, the narrative emphasizes dialogue:

﴿إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ إِنَّا مِنْكُمْ وَجِلُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾ قَالُوا لَا تَوْجَلْ إِنَّا نُبَشِّرُكَ بِغُلَامٍ عَلِيمٍ ﴿٥٣﴾﴾

Meaning:

"When they entered upon him and said, 'Peace.' He said, 'Indeed, we are fearful of you.' They said, 'Fear not; we bring you glad tidings of a learned boy'."

In *sūrah al-Ḥijr*, the Quranic narrative shifts from the detailed hospitality scene found in *sūrah Hūd* to a more concise, dialogue-centered account. The angels enter Ibrāhīm's home and greet him with *salām*, to which he responds by expressing fear, and they immediately reassure him with the glad tidings of a "learned boy" (*ghulam 'alīm*). Quṭb notes that the Quran here intentionally omits mention of the roasted calf, for the thematic purpose of this passage is not to highlight hospitality but to illustrate the emotional tension and subsequent reassurance that precedes the divine announcement. For Quṭb, *sūrah al-Ḥijr* emphasises the psychological dimension of prophetic experience and the certainty of divine decree. The omission of food, he argues, demonstrates the

Quran's selective narrative economy in *sūrah* Hūd, mercy is expressed through provision, but in al-Ḥijr, mercy is expressed through reassurance and the reaffirmation of divine promise (Quṭb, 1953).

Classical *mufassirūn* approach this passage differently. Al-Ṭabarī focuses on the literal narrative flow, transmitting reports from early authorities that Ibrāhīm's fear arose because he did not recognise the visitors and suspected they might be adversaries. His commentary centres on explaining the reason for Ibrāhīm's fear and the meaning of *ghulam 'alim*, which he interprets as a boy who will possess profound knowledge and intelligence, identifying him as Iṣḥāq (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001).

Al-Qurṭubī likewise emphasises the lexical and theological aspects of the dialogue. He explains that *lā tawjal* is a divine reassurance conveyed through the angels, and he analyses *ghulam 'alim* using narrations describing Iṣḥāq's future prophethood and distinction. He further notes that the structure of the verse underscores God's gentleness toward His prophets, though he does not link this to a broader psychological reading as Quṭb does (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Al-Rāzī approaches the verse through theological inquiry, examining why Ibrāhīm expressed fear despite being accustomed to angelic encounters. He suggests that such fear does not contradict prophetic dignity, for prophets may experience natural human emotions before divine reassurance reaches their hearts. Al-Rāzī also expands on the description of the promised child as *'alim*, viewing it as an indication of spiritual knowledge and prophecy, and engages in *kalām* discussions on the nature of angelic communication and divine promise. His analysis focuses on metaphysical subtleties rather than the narrative's emotional tone (Al-Rāzī, 1981).

Ibn 'Āshūr, the passage through a literary-rhetorical lens. He explains that the omission of the hospitality episode here is a deliberate stylistic feature: *sūrah* al-Ḥijr aims to highlight the sequence of fear, reassurance, and prophecy, not the social ritual of hosting. Ibn 'Āshūr argues that the angels' immediate response, "Do not fear," serves as the structural pivot that introduces the glad tidings. He interprets *ghulam 'alim* as a description of Iṣḥāq's destined knowledge and prophethood, reflecting the *sūrah*'s overarching theme of divine wisdom and protection. For him, the brevity of the scene exemplifies Quranic *ījāz* (eloquent conciseness), intensifying the emotional resonance of the exchange (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984).

Through comparison, Quṭb's distinctive contribution becomes clear. Whereas al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī emphasise transmitted reports and lexical meaning, and al-Rāzī explores theological implications, and Ibn 'Āshūr focuses on rhetorical structure, Quṭb foregrounds the psychological and spiritual dynamic of the encounter. He sees the omission of the food scene not merely as literary economy but as a purposeful shift in theme from hospitality as mercy to reassurance as mercy and frames the verse as part of a larger Quranic philosophy where divine will operates beyond human expectation and where emotional reassurance itself becomes a form of divine provision.

4.1.3 The archetype of generosity

In *sūrah* al-Dhāriyāt [51] verses 24 to 27, the account returns to the detail of food:

﴿هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ ضَيْفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ ﴿٢٤﴾ إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ قَوْمٌ مُنْكَرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾ فَرَاعَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ فَجَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ سَمِينٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ فَقَرَّبَهُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾﴾

Meaning:

"Has the story reached you of the honored guests of Abraham? When they entered upon him and said, 'Peace,' he said, 'Peace, strangers.' Then he went quietly to his family and brought a fat calf. And he placed it near them, saying, 'Will you not eat?'"

In *sūrah* al-Dhāriyāt, the Quranic narrative returns to the detailed portrayal of Ibrāhīm's hospitality, beginning with the arrival of honored guests and culminating in his offering of a "fat calf" (*'ijl samīn*). Quṭb highlights how the passage illustrates the refined *adab* of Ibrāhīm: he responds to unfamiliar guests with warmth and courtesy, hastens quietly to his family so the visitors will not feel awkward or compelled to stop him, and presents an abundant meal far exceeding the number of those present. For Quṭb, these actions reflect Ibrāhīm's role as the archetype of generosity (*karam*), a man who "did not measure hospitality by the number of mouths, but by the sincerity of giving." Even his inquiry *alā ta'kulūn?* is presented as a gentle, respectful invitation rather than a directive, embodying the ethical ideal that a host must honour guests with both provision and courtesy (Quṭb, 1953).

Classical *mufassirūn* expand the narrative in diverse ways. Al-Ṭabarī explains that when Ibrāhīm describes the visitors as *munkarūn*, he merely means that he did not recognise them, not that he suspected evil. Al-Ṭabarī also cites early reports describing the calf as “fat and tender,” emphasising that Ibrāhīm offered the best of his wealth, and notes that his phrase *alā ta'kulūn?* reflects both inquiry and encouragement, demonstrating refined politeness toward guests (Al-Ṭabarī, 1954).

Al-Qurṭubī similarly comments on the excellence of Ibrāhīm's hospitality, analysing the verb *farāgha ilā ahlihi* as indicating quiet swiftness, out of sensitivity to the guests' feelings. He further discusses the juristic implications of the passage, noting that the verse establishes the commendability of honouring guests and presenting food without delay (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Al-Rāzī turns the scene into a locus for theological reflection. He examines why the Quran describes the guests as “honored” (*al-mukramīn*), arguing that their honoured status derives both from their angelic nature and from Ibrāhīm's noble treatment of them. Al-Rāzī also contemplates the wisdom behind Ibrāhīm's offering of a lavish meal, interpreting it as a manifestation of prophetic character that harmonises generosity, humility, and subtlety. While acknowledging the narrative details, his analysis ultimately shifts toward exploring the metaphysical contrast between the physical food and the angels' non-corporeal nature, which explains their refusal to eat (Al-Rāzī, 1981).

Ibn 'Āshūr, adopting a literary-rhetorical approach, explains that *sūrah* al-Dhāriyāt presents the hospitality scene in an expanded, vivid form to underscore Ibrāhīm's exemplary character. The description of the calf as “fat” (*samīn*) amplifies the sense of abundance and readiness, while the verb *qarrabahu ilayhim* (he placed it near them) highlights Ibrāhīm's attentiveness and respect. Ibn 'Āshūr interprets Ibrāhīm's question *alā ta'kulūn?* as part of the narrative's gradual tension-building, preparing the reader for the moment when he realises they are angels. For him, the stylistic richness of this account serves the thematic purpose of presenting Ibrāhīm's generosity as a moral archetype and preparing for the subsequent announcement of divine punishment upon the people of Lūṭ (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984).

Through these comparisons, Quṭb's distinctive voice emerges clearly. While al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī emphasise transmitted reports, lexical meanings, and juristic implications, and al-Rāzī interprets the scene through philosophical theology, and Ibn 'Āshūr focuses on narrative structure and stylistic function, Quṭb foregrounds the *spiritual psychology* of generosity. For him, the scene in *sūrah* al-Dhāriyāt is not merely a historical report but an ethical portrait; Ibrāhīm becomes the living embodiment of selfless hospitality, whose actions model a timeless moral standard for believers.

4.2 Ethical Synthesis from Ibrāhīm's Hospitality

4.2.1 Greeting and warmth

The first ethic emphasized in Ibrāhīm's story is the principle of greeting (*salām*) and initiating social warmth, as in Hūd [11] verse 69. Quṭb highlights that Ibrāhīm not only returned the greeting but did so in a way that conveyed reassurance and dignity (Quṭb, 1953). For Quṭb, the act of greeting represents the opening door of hospitality, as it sets the tone of acceptance even before physical acts of service. This ethic aligns with the Prophetic tradition: “*Spread the salām among yourselves*” (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*), where greeting is not mere formality but the first form of generosity extended to another human being. Thus, Ibrāhīm's immediate and warm reply exemplifies the Quranic ethic of opening one's heart before opening one's house.

4.2.2 Swiftness in service

The second ethic is the host's duty to act swiftly in serving his guests, without delay or hesitation. The Quran describes:

“*He did not delay in bringing them a roasted calf.*” (Q. [11]: 69).

Quṭb comments on the phrase *fa-mā labitha* (he did not linger), emphasizing that it conveys a sense of urgency and eagerness in fulfilling the rights of guests (Quṭb, 1953). He contrasts this with social practices where guests may be left unattended or served late, which contradicts the spirit of Quranic hospitality. For Ibrāhīm, honor was expressed not only in the quality of food but also in the speed of service, ensuring guests felt immediately

cared for. Classical exegetes like [al-Qurṭubī \(1964\)](#) also noted that swiftness in preparing the best available meal reflects both generosity and efficiency core attributes of true *karam* (nobility) ([Hossain & Aktar, 2025](#)).

4.2.3 Generosity of provision

The third principle centers on generosity in the quality and abundance of food. *Sūrah* al-Dhāriyāt specifies:

“Then he went quietly to his family and brought a fat calf” (Q. 51:26).

Quṭb underscores that the description “fat” indicates abundance and quality, showing that Ibrāhīm did not serve a minimal or symbolic offering but selected the best of his herd ([Quṭb, 1953](#)). Importantly, Quṭb notes that while the guests were only three, the offering was sufficient for an entire group, symbolizing generosity that exceeds practical need. This extravagance in giving, he argues, reflects a Quranic ethic where hospitality is measured not by necessity but by abundance, signaling a host’s open heart. The Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) affirmed this ethic when he said: “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should honor his guest” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*). For Quṭb, Ibrāhīm’s abundance sets the highest standard of guest-honor in Islam.

4.2.4 Ease and comfort for guests

The fourth ethic relates to ensuring that guests feel comfortable and at ease during their stay. The Quran narrates:

“And he placed it near them, saying, ‘Will you not eat?’” (Q. [51]: 27).

Quṭb reflects that Ibrāhīm not only presented the food generously but also gently invited them to partake, phrasing his invitation as a question rather than an imposition ([Quṭb, 1953](#)). This demonstrates that a host must respect the dignity of guests, avoiding coercion while ensuring they feel welcomed. Furthermore, Quṭb notes Ibrāhīm’s presence with them, he did not abandon them after serving but remained, embodying the Arab custom that eating together reinforces trust and security. The host’s role, therefore, extends beyond material provision to psychological reassurance. In this, Quṭb observes the Quran’s subtle pedagogy: true hospitality is relational, not transactional ([Jaiyeoba, Ushama, & Amuda, 2024](#)).

4.2.5 Divine blessing as reward for hospitality

The final ethic extracted is the link between hospitality and divine blessing. The Quran records that Ibrāhīm’s wife received the glad tidings of a son, Isaac:

“And his wife was standing and she laughed, so We gave her good tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac, Jacob” (Q. [11]: 71).

Quṭb interprets this sequence as significant: the angelic visitors did not come only to foretell destruction to Lūṭ’s people but also to bestow mercy upon Ibrāhīm’s household in the very setting of hospitality ([Quṭb, 1953](#)). From this, he concludes that acts of generosity invite divine mercy, not merely as worldly reward but as spiritual barakah (blessing). Classical commentators such as [Ibn Kathīr \(1998\)](#) also emphasized that the blessing of prophetic offspring was tied here to the setting of generous hosting. Thus, Quṭb reads the episode as proof that hospitality is not a social custom alone but a Quranic pathway to divine favor.

4.3 Prophet Lūṭ and His Guests: Hospitality Under Social Corruption

The Quran narrates the arrival of Lūṭ’s angelic guests in multiple *sūrahs*, including *sūrahs* Hūd [11]: 77–83-al-Ḥijr [15]: 61–77, and al-ʿAnkabūt [29]: 31–35). In *Sūrah* Hūd [11] verse 77, the story is vivid:

﴿وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِئَاءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَصِيبٌ ﴿٧٧﴾﴾

Meaning:

“And when Our messengers came to Lūṭ, he was distressed for them and felt constrained for them, and he said, ‘This is a difficult day.’”

In Hūd, the narrative shifts from Ibrāhīm's serenity to the anguish of Prophet Lūṭ. The verse states that when the angels still appearing in human form arrived at Lūṭ's home, he was immediately *distressed* by their presence and felt *constrained* on their behalf. Quṭb emphasises that the Quran here communicates not only the sequence of events but also the inner emotional turmoil of Lūṭ. His distress expresses the profound tension between his sacred obligation to protect guests and the overwhelming corruption of his society. For Quṭb, this reveals that hospitality in Islam is not merely a cultural courtesy but a moral trust so weighty that it provokes genuine anxiety when it is threatened. Lūṭ's cry "This is a difficult day" becomes, in Quṭb's reading, the utterance of a righteous man caught between competing moral responsibilities, highlighting the intense psychological drama of prophetic experience (Quṭb, 1953).

Classical exegetes offer complementary perspectives. Al-Ṭabarī explains that Lūṭ's distress arose because he recognised the extreme vulnerability of his guests in a town infamous for moral depravity, and he feared for their safety. He interprets *dhāqa bihim dhar 'an* as an idiom expressing severe emotional constriction, describing a person who cannot see any viable course of action to protect those under his care (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001).

Al-Qurṭubī likewise emphasises Lūṭ's sense of helplessness, noting that his distress stemmed from two simultaneous obligations: safeguarding the honour of his guests a fundamental virtue in prophetic and Arab ethics and resisting the corrupt demands of his people. Al-Qurṭubī explores various linguistic explanations of *yawm 'aṣīb*, describing it as a day of hardship, fear, and moral trial, and he treats the verse as a demonstration of the prophet's integrity under social pressure (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Al-Rāzī brings the discussion into theological territory, analysing why Lūṭ reacted with such visible distress if he recognised the visitors as divine messengers. He proposes that Lūṭ likely did not yet know their true identity, or that he feared the gravity of the divine decree they brought. Al-Rāzī uses the verse to explore the nature of prophetic anxiety and whether such emotional constriction is compatible with prophetic trust in God. He argues that human prophets may legitimately experience fear when confronting overwhelming moral danger, as long as they maintain reliance on God in the end. His analysis thus focuses on the metaphysical and psychological dimensions of prophetic responsibility rather than the legal or cultural aspects of hospitality (Al-Rāzī, 1981).

Ibn 'Āshūr interprets the verse with his characteristic focus on rhetoric and narrative design. He explains that the Quran deliberately depicts Lūṭ's distress to reveal the moral collapse of his people; the prophet's emotional state becomes a literary device that amplifies the severity of the societal corruption he confronts. According to Ibn 'Āshūr, Lūṭ's reaction represents not personal weakness but the height of moral sensitivity: he is torn between reverence for the right of the guest and sorrow over the near-hopelessness of reforming his people. The phrase *dhāqa bihim dhar 'an* functions as a concise rhetorical image depicting a righteous man pressed to the limits of endurance, while *yawm 'aṣīb* is presented as a metonym for the cumulative moral crisis of the town (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984).

Set against these classical interpretations, Quṭb's contribution remains distinct. While al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī emphasise transmitted reports and linguistic clarity, al-Rāzī examines psychological theology, and Ibn 'Āshūr analyses rhetorical structure, Quṭb highlights the ethical and emotional weight of hospitality. For him, Lūṭ's distress is not simply fear of immoral people; it is the anguish of a man whose sacred duty to honour and protect his guests clashes with the surrounding environment of corruption. In Quṭb's reading, this scene becomes a powerful moral lesson: true hospitality in Islam demands not only generosity but also protection, honour, and courage virtues that become most meaningful when tested in moments of intense moral danger (Quṭb, 1953).

4.3.1 The violation of hospitality by the people of Lūṭ

The crisis deepens when the people of Lūṭ approach with immoral intent, Allah says in *sūrah* Hūd [11] verse 78:

﴿وَجَاءَهُمْ قَوْمُهُ يُهْرَعُونَ إِلَيْهِ وَمِنْ قَبْلُ كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ ۗ قَالَ يَاقَوْمِ هَؤُلَاءِ بَنَاتِي هُنَّ أَطْهَرُ لَكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تَخْزُونِ فِي صَيْفِي ۗ أَلَيْسَ مِنْكُمْ رَجُلٌ رَشِيدٌ ﴿٧٨﴾

Meaning:

"And his people came rushing to him, and before this they had been doing evil deeds. He said, 'O my people, here are my daughters; they are purer for you. So fear Allah and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not among you a man of reason?'"

In this verse, the Quran depicts the moral collapse of Lūṭ's society with striking vividness: his people came rushing toward his home in a frenzy, driven by the deviant desires that had long defined their behaviour. Quṭb interprets this moment as a double violation, a violation of *fiṭrah* (the natural moral order) and a violation of *diyāfah* (the sanctity of hospitality). For Quṭb, the people's shameless pursuit of indecency is inseparable from their betrayal of the sacred trust of the guest–host relationship, a value deeply ingrained in both Arab custom and Quranic ethics. Lūṭ's desperate plea “Do not disgrace me regarding my guests” thus reflects a prophet's anguish at witnessing the collapse of fundamental human decency. In Quṭb's reading, their sin is compounded on multiple levels: sexual deviance, rejection of human nature, and dishonouring the divine amānah of protecting one's guests (Quṭb, 1953).

Classical exegesis provides complementary yet distinct expansions of this episode. Al-Ṭabarī explains that *yuhr 'una ilayhi* describes a hurried, aggressive rush, similar to an animalistic charge, revealing the people's loss of rational restraint. He cites early reports that the “daughters” whom Lūṭ offered were either his biological daughters or the women of the town, for prophets are spiritual fathers to their communities. In either case, Lūṭ's intention was to redirect them toward lawful purity (*aṭharu lakum*) rather than corrupt desire (Al-Ṭabarī, 1954).

Al-Qurṭubī likewise discusses both interpretations, emphasising that Lūṭ's appeal was framed within legal and moral parameters, not desperation. He highlights Lūṭ's phrase *lā tukhẓūnī* “do not disgrace me” as an affirmation of the profound value of honouring one's guests, a virtue at the heart of prophetic character and pre-Islamic Arab ethics alike (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Al-Rāzī approaches the verse from a theological perspective. He analyses Lūṭ's argument as an attempt to appeal to whatever moral reasoning remained among his people, hence his rhetorical question: “Is there not among you a man of reason?” Al-Rāzī notes that this expression reflects Lūṭ's hope that even a single sane individual might restrain the mob. He also explores the semantic nuances of *aṭharu lakum*, explaining that Lūṭ was not merely offering an alternative but identifying the path of purity and divine approval. For al-Rāzī, the moral chaos of the people illustrates the depth of their spiritual inversion, making their rejection of Lūṭ's counsel a testimony to God's justice in the punishment that follows (Al-Rāzī, 1981).

Ibn 'Āshūr, reading the verse through a literary-rhetorical lens, identifies the description of the people's rush as a deliberate stylistic device that heightens the dramatic tension and reveals the degeneracy of their character. He explains that Lūṭ's reference to “my daughters” reflects the broader societal structure, where the prophet is regarded as the spiritual father of his community, and thus their lawful marriages to the women of the town represented the correct, dignified path. Ibn 'Āshūr emphasises that Lūṭ's appeal simultaneously invokes religious authority, familial honour, and moral rationality, encapsulated in his final question about the absence of even one *rajal rashīd* a man of sound judgment. For Ibn 'Āshūr, the verse demonstrates not only the depravity of the people but also the emotional and moral gravity of Lūṭ's prophetic mission (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984).

Against this backdrop, Quṭb's interpretation stands apart in its ethical framing. While al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Rāzī focus on linguistic, legal, and theological dimensions, and Ibn 'Āshūr highlights rhetorical structure, Quṭb foregrounds the total collapse of hospitality as a moral category. For him, the people's assault on Lūṭ's guests is not merely sexual aggression but the destruction of a foundational moral covenant. Hospitality, in Quṭb's perspective, is a sacred trust that reflects the spiritual health of a society; thus, its betrayal signals a civilisation in moral freefall (Quṭb, 1953).

4.3.2 Lūṭ's defense of his guests

Lūṭ's plea in *sūrah* Hūd [11] verse 78:

“And do not disgrace me concerning my guests. Is there not among you a man of reason?.”

The plea of Prophet Lūṭ, “Do not disgrace me concerning my guests” forms, in Quṭb's view, the emotional and moral centre of the entire narrative. Quṭb explains that Lūṭ's anxiety was not rooted in personal humiliation alone but in his profound sense of responsibility for the honour and dignity of those who had sought refuge in his home. For Quṭb, this verse reveals the depth of prophetic integrity: Lūṭ was prepared to face the hostility of his people rather than relinquish his sacred duty to protect his guests. The act of hospitality, therefore, is elevated beyond courtesy to moral guardianship, requiring courage, sacrifice, and steadfastness even in the face of overwhelming social corruption (Quṭb, 1953).

Quṭb further clarifies that Lūṭ's reference to “my daughters” does not imply a literal offering of his biological daughters, but rather an appeal to the lawful and honorable path of marriage, an alternative grounded in *ṭahārah*

(purity) and moral legitimacy. This interpretation aligns with the classical view that prophets are spiritual fathers to their communities, and therefore the “daughters” may signify the women of the town whom the men could marry lawfully (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Classical *mufasssīrūn* expand on Lūṭ's phrase *lā tukhẓūnī*, emphasising that honouring and protecting guests was one of the highest moral obligations in prophetic and ancient Arab tradition. Al-Ṭabarī explains that Lūṭ's fear of disgrace was tied to the violent intent of his people, who sought a sinful act that would not only violate divine law but also desecrate one of the most sacred cultural covenants the safety of the guest (Al-Ṭabarī, 1954).

Al-Rāzī reflects on Lūṭ's rhetorical appeal “*Is there not among you a single man of reason?*” as an attempt to awaken their last remnants of moral consciousness. For al-Rāzī, this question reveals both the prophet's despair and his hope that even one morally upright individual might restrain the mob. He also interprets the verse as evidence of the people's total moral inversion, for not even one person stood to defend the principle of honouring guests (Al-Rāzī, 1981).

Ibn 'Āshūr reads the verse through a rhetorical lens, noting that Lūṭ's plea intensifies the dramatic tension and highlights the gravity of the moral collapse in his society. The structure of the verse, especially the final interrogative “*Is there not among you a man of sound judgment?*” functions as a literary device that underscores the total absence of moral reason among the people (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1984).

Through these readings, Quṭb's distinct emphasis becomes clear. Whereas al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī focus on historical and legal aspects, and al-Rāzī and Ibn 'Āshūr engage theological and rhetorical dimensions, Quṭb foregrounds the moral psychology of hospitality. He reads Lūṭ's words as a testament to prophetic courage: in a moment of extreme societal corruption, the prophet stands alone to uphold the sanctity of protection, honour, and moral purity. For Quṭb, this scene becomes an ethical paradigm true hospitality in Islam is not passive generosity but active moral defence, rooted in loyalty, responsibility, and unwavering fidelity to divine principles (Quṭb, 1953).

4.3.3 The moral inversion of a society

Allah says in Hūd [11] verse 82:

﴿فَلَمَّا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا جَعَلْنَا عَلَىٰهَا سَافِلَهَا وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهَا حِجَارَةً مِّن سِجِّيلٍ مَّنصُودٍ ﴿٨٢﴾﴾

Meaning:

“So We made the highest part of the city its lowest, and rained upon them stones of layered hard clay.”

Quṭb devotes particular attention to what he terms the spiritual pathology of the people of Lūṭ. In his commentary, he describes their behaviour as the complete collapse of *fiṭrah*, the natural human disposition with which God created mankind. Quṭb vividly writes that “sexual deviance collides with life itself, extinguishing it by planting seeds of life in barren soil unfit to receive them,” portraying their practice as not merely immoral but as an existential inversion of life's natural order. For him, their corruption was not limited to private sin; rather, it manifested in the public betrayal of hospitality one of the most sacred moral trusts. Once the sanctity of the guest is violated, Quṭb argues, all other ethical boundaries become eroded. Thus, the people of Lūṭ serve as the archetype of a society where lust overwhelms reason, hospitality is desecrated, and human dignity is trampled, setting the stage for their divinely decreed destruction (Quṭb, 1953).

Classical *mufasssīrūn* similarly emphasize the magnitude of their moral corruption, though each through a distinct interpretive lens. Al-Ṭabarī, drawing from early reports, explains that their deviance encompassed sexual perversion, violent intent, and the abandonment of all norms of social decency. He notes that the severity of their actions made divine punishment inevitable, and he interprets *ja'alnā 'āli-hā sāfilahā* as a literal overturning of the town, an act demonstrating God's absolute justice when corruption reaches its limits (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001).

Al-Qurṭubī expands on this by cataloguing the various forms of their moral transgression. He notes that they were the first to commit such sexual misconduct openly, and because they combined indecency with hostility toward guests, their punishment was enacted with exceptional severity. The raining of stones, described as *min sijjil manḍūd*, is interpreted by al-Qurṭubī as both a physical torment and a symbolic sign that their sins had reached unbearable proportions (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964).

Al-Rāzī, frames the destruction of Lūṭ's people within a theological and philosophical context. He argues that the inversion of the city its highest part made lowest serves as a metaphysical symbol of their inner moral

inversion. Their hearts had overturned the natural order, so the external world was overturned in response. Al-Rāzī reflects on the meaning of *sijjīl*, interpreting it as stones marked for punishment and perfectly fitted to each sinner, and he emphasises that such punishment becomes necessary when a society reaches a point where rational admonition no longer has any effect (Al-Rāzī, 1981).

Ibn ‘Ashūr approaches the verse with a focus on rhetorical precision and moral philosophy. He explains that the Quran’s description of the destruction uses vivid, dramatic language to impress upon listeners the gravity of the community’s deviation. According to Ibn ‘Ashūr, *‘āli-hā sāfilahā* is both a literal event and a metaphor for the complete collapse of societal structure. He highlights the phrase *imṭarnā ‘alayhā ḥijārah min sijjīl* as a deliberate contrast to the hospitality they violated: instead of welcoming guests with generosity, they were visited with stones that carried divine wrath. This juxtaposition underscores the moral coherence of the divine response to human corruption (Ibn ‘Ashūr, 1984).

When these interpretations are compared, Quṭb’s distinctive perspective becomes clear. While al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Rāzī underscore the theological, legal, and cosmological dimensions of the punishment, and Ibn ‘Ashūr analyses the rhetorical artistry of the Quranic narrative, Quṭb is primarily concerned with the ethical psychology of societal collapse. In his reading, the story is not merely historical but a moral warning for all societies: when *fiṭrah* is erased, when hospitality is betrayed, and when lust becomes a public ethos, a community destroys itself long before divine punishment descends. The overturning of Lūṭ’s town thus mirrors the overturning of their moral compass, a punishment perfectly aligned with their inner corruption (Quṭb, 1953).

4.4 Ethical Synthesis from Lut’s Hospitality

4.4.1 Hospitality as protection and safeguarding of dignity

The first ethic extracted from Lūṭ’s story is that true hospitality extends beyond serving food or offering shelter, it requires safeguarding the dignity (‘*ird*) and security of one’s guests in Lūṭ’s words as in Hūd [11] verse 78:

“Do not disgrace me concerning my guests.”

This verse illustrates his sense of sacred responsibility. Quṭb emphasizes that here, hospitality becomes a matter of *amānah* (trust), where the host is duty-bound to protect the guest even at personal risk (Quṭb, 1953). Unlike Ibrāhīm’s context of blessing and generosity, Lūṭ’s narrative frames hospitality as a struggle under threat. For Quṭb, this ethic warns contemporary Muslim societies that hospitality is not a superficial courtesy but a moral covenant: the guest’s honor is inviolable.

4.4.2 Resistance to societal pressure

The second lesson is that the duty of hospitality may require resisting overwhelming social pressure. Lūṭ stood against his entire community, pleading:

“Is there not among you a man of reason?”

Quṭb interprets this as evidence of Lūṭ’s moral courage, he chose to defend his guests rather than conform to the collective immorality of his people (Quṭb, 1953). For Quṭb, the verse demonstrates the Quranic principle that truth is not determined by numbers but by fidelity to divine guidance. In the modern context, this ethic implies that Muslims may need to uphold values of generosity, chastity, and protection of the weak even when broader social norms encourage selfishness or exploitation. Hospitality, then, becomes a site of moral resistance.

4.4.3 Hospitality and the preservation of family and *fiṭrah*

Lūṭ’s offer:

“Here are my daughters; they are purer for you.” (Q. [11]: 78)

This verse interpreted by Quṭb not as desperation but as an attempt to redirect his people toward lawful and natural relations through marriage. Quṭb highlights that this plea reflects the connection between hospitality, family integrity, and preservation of *fiṭrah* (the natural disposition) (Quṭb, 1953). By contrasting

marriage with homosexual assault, the narrative shows that hospitality is not just about individual conduct but is tied to broader social structures that sustain purity and communal health (Al-Qurṭubī, 1964; Ibn Kathīr, 1998). Thus, Quṭb argues that defending guests also entails defending the divine order of family, chastity, and human dignity. Hospitality is therefore linked with preserving the very foundations of society.

4.4.4 The warning against betrayal of guests

The fourth ethic is that betrayal of guests represents the collapse of civilization. The people of Lūṭ not only violated divine law but also broke a universal moral code: the protection of the stranger. In Arab culture, the violation of guest rights was considered one of the gravest forms of dishonor. Quṭb underscores that by attempting to assault Lūṭ's guests, the community displayed not just moral corruption but also the breakdown of human solidarity (Quṭb, 1953). This betrayal justified their destruction, as the Quran states:

“So We made the highest part of the city its lowest, and rained upon them stones of layered hard clay.” (Q. [11]: 82).

For Quṭb, the obliteration of their city is a timeless warning that societies which betray the sanctity of guests and pervert the ethics of human dignity will face divine retribution.

4.4.5 Moral courage and the universality of hospitality

Finally, Lūṭ's example teaches that hospitality is universal, transcending time, culture, and circumstance. Even as a minority in his society, he did not abandon the ethic of guest protection, embodying the Quranic principle that righteousness is not relative but absolute. Quṭb comments that Lūṭ's stand symbolizes the struggle of every believer who must uphold divine ethics even in hostile environments (Quṭb, 1953).

The lesson is clear: hospitality in Islam is not conditional on ease but becomes most meaningful under adversity. For contemporary Muslims, this ethic inspires perseverance in maintaining human dignity, offering refuge, and resisting dehumanization, whether in private households or in addressing global refugee and humanitarian crises (Musallam, 1993; Al-Khālidi, 2002).

5. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Quṭb's *Fi Zilāl al-Qur'ān* provides a unique and profound framework for understanding the Quranic ethic of hospitality (*al-ḍiyāfah*). Through the stories of Prophet Ibrāhīm and Prophet Lūṭ, Quṭb identifies hospitality not simply as a social courtesy but as a divine mandate tied to justice, dignity, and human solidarity. Ibrāhīm exemplifies generosity in times of ease greeting guests warmly, serving them swiftly and abundantly, and receiving divine blessings in return while Lūṭ represents the defense of hospitality under extreme moral and social pressure, where safeguarding guests became an act of resistance against corruption. Together, these narratives form a Quranic paradigm that integrates generosity and protection as inseparable aspects of true hospitality.

In practical terms, Quṭb's exegesis underscores that hospitality remains central to the ethical and communal life of Muslims today. The principles drawn from Ibrāhīm's example warm greetings, swiftness in service, and abundant generosity encourage Muslims to cultivate trust, solidarity, and mercy in their personal and communal interactions. From Lūṭ's example, believers learn that hospitality extends beyond material provision to the defense of human dignity, even in hostile contexts. These insights hold implications for contemporary challenges, such as caring for refugees, protecting vulnerable communities, and fostering inclusive societies. By situating hospitality within the Quran's broader vision of justice and mercy, Quṭb provides a lens for Muslims to address modern ethical and social dilemmas with fidelity to revelation.

Beyond affirming the Quran's timeless values, this research highlights the need for further exploration of *tafsīr* as a source of social ethics. Future studies could investigate comparative approaches among different *mufasssīrūn* to themes like generosity, protection of the vulnerable, or communal solidarity, thereby expanding our understanding of *tafsīr ijtimā'ī*. Scholars might also examine the role of Quranic ethics of hospitality in interfaith dialogue, humanitarian discourse, and policy-making on migration and asylum. Ultimately, this paper affirms that revisiting Quranic narratives through Quṭb's hermeneutic lens not only enriches the field of *tafsīr* but also equips Muslim societies with ethical resources urgently needed in today's fractured world.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Syed Mohamad Zainudin Bichk Koyak handled tafsir analysis, Muhammad Akmalludin Mohd Hamdan examined hadith evidence, Ahmad Salahuddin M Azizan contributed social exegesis, and Muhammad Rezi conducted linguistic analysis. All authors participated in reviewing and approving the manuscript.

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