
Qur'anic Concept of Mawaddah: Theological Foundations and Its Implications in Muslim Societies

Dr. Mufti Saeed Ahmad

Assistant Professor, FC College,

University, Lahore, Pakistan

Email: hafizsaeed@fccollege.edu.pk

Dr. Atiq ur Rehman

Head of Faculty Advising & Associate Professor,

FC College, University, Lahore, Pakistan

Email: atiqrehman@fccollege.edu.pk

Abstract

This paper examines the Quranic concept of Mawaddah (love and affection) and its implications for the spiritual, social, and ethical aspects of Muslim life. As a foundational principle embedded in the Quran, Mawaddah serves not only as a theological value but also as a practical framework for interpersonal and communal conduct within the Muslim Ummah. The study addresses the pressing need to revisit this concept in light of contemporary global challenges, aiming to underscore its enduring relevance in fostering compassion, unity, and justice.

Employing a multidisciplinary methodology, the research integrates Quranic exegesis, linguistic analysis, and historical-contextual interpretation with contemporary sociological insights. It begins with a close reading of key Quranic verses, exploring their linguistic features and exegetical interpretations. The study then traces the application and evolution of Mawaddah across classical and modern Islamic thought, highlighting its universal scope across various traditions and schools.

Drawing on variety of interpretations, the paper examines how Mawaddah influences contemporary Muslim social life, from family relations to global solidarity. It also evaluates the concept's potential as a guiding ethical principle in addressing modern issues such as religious pluralism, social justice, and governance.

The study concludes that Mawaddah is a dynamic and transformative element of Islamic spirituality, offering critical insights for scholars, religious leaders, and policymakers seeking to promote a holistic and humane understanding of Islam in today's interconnected world.

Keywords: Mawaddah, Quranic ethics, Islamic social values, contextual exegesis, Muslim community, religious pluralism, social justice

1. Introduction & Significance

The Qur'anic term Mawaddah—commonly rendered as love, affection, or compassionate attachment—embodies a foundational ethical and juridical value that permeates a broad spectrum of Islamic social, familial, and intercommunal relationships. Lane offers a detailed philological analysis of the root wadda (وَدَّ) and its derivatives, highlighting meanings such as deep affection, love, and benevolence.¹ Wehr defines mawaddah as “affection,” “love,” and emotional closeness.² while Penrice, in his concise Qur'anic glossary, renders it simply as “love” or “affection.”³ Badawi and Abdel Haleem provide a context-specific treatment of mawaddah within the Qur'anic text, making their work particularly useful for theological and linguistic analysis.⁴ Far from representing fleeting emotion, Mawaddah in the Qur'an signifies a sustained, morally anchored, and often reciprocal form of love, deeply rooted in divine guidance and ethical obligation. The concept is explored across several key Qur'anic verses, each revealing distinct dimensions of its meaning: in Surah al-Rum (30:21), it is linked to marital harmony; in Surah al-Shura (42:23), to devotion toward the Prophet's family; in Surah al-Mumtahanah (60:1 & 7), to the possibility of reconciliation between former enemies; and in Surah al-Nisa (4:73), to a critique of disingenuous expressions of affection. Notably, Surah al-Ma'idah (5:82) introduces a powerful interfaith dimension, portraying Mawaddah as emerging between Muslims and certain groups of Christians, thus extending its ethical reach beyond intra-Muslim relationships. Additionally, verses such as Surah Maryam (19:96) and Surah al-Baqarah (2:165) present related semantic fields that further emphasize the centrality of sincere, divinely grounded love in both earthly and eschatological contexts.

The significance of this study lies in its interdisciplinary yet jurisprudentially rooted examination of Mawaddah as a Qur'anic value with normative dimensions that extend beyond private emotion into the domain of Islamic legal-moral reasoning. Far from being a mere expression of personal affection, Mawaddah—as articulated in the Qur'an—is a value that contributes to the formulation of ethical rulings (aḥkām), legal maxims (qawā'id fihiyyah), and objectives of the Sharī'ah (maqāsid al-sharī'ah), especially in the realms of family law, communal ethics, and interfaith relations. Classically, Mawaddah was not viewed in isolation, but in concert with concepts such as raḥmah (mercy), 'adl (justice), and ta'āwun (mutual support), forming an ethical substratum underlying the law. Al-Ghazālī, in his al-Mustaṣfā, emphasized that the maqāsid of the Sharī'ah include the realization of human welfare (maṣlaḥah) through values that are both spiritual and social.⁵ Al-Shāṭibī, in al-Muwāfaqāt, regarded the preservation

of the family unit and mutual affection as a key aspect of ḥifẓ al-nasl, grounded in divine intent (qaṣd al-shāri').⁶

The Qur'anic invocation of Mawaddah in Surah al-Rūm (30:21) — "He placed between you Mawaddah and raḥmah" — is cited by jurists as part of the ethical foundation for marital laws.⁷ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn* treats Mawaddah as a spiritual affection that aligns the soul with divine order, asserting that genuine love (ḥubb ṣādiq) leads to both personal virtue and social cohesion.⁸ Similarly, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī distinguishes Mawaddah from ḥubb in his *Mufradāt*, noting that Mawaddah implies a visible, enacted form of love that has social and moral consequences.⁹ In the modern era, scholars such as Toshihiko Izutsu (2002) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2002) have emphasized the metaphysical significance of Qur'anic concepts like Mawaddah, viewing them as ontological principles shaping divine-human relationships. Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi (1994) situates Mawaddah centrally in Shi'i theology and legal imagination, particularly in its link to the Wilāyah of the Ahl al-Bayt.¹⁰ Amina Wadud (1999) interprets Mawaddah through a gender-egalitarian lens, arguing that it demands mutual ethical responsibility in familial and legal structures.¹¹

From a jurisprudential ethics perspective, Khaled Abou El Fadl (2001) connects Mawaddah to a theology of mercy and argues that any interpretive act (ijtihād) must be filtered through divine values like compassion and justice.¹² Ingrid Mattson (2008 & 2013)¹³, likewise, sees prophetic ethics as inseparable from values like Mawaddah, which ought to inform not only personal conduct but also legal frameworks. Tariq Ramadan (2009) calls for a maqāṣid-based reform of Islamic law that reintegrates foundational values like Mawaddah into public policy and governance.¹⁴ Given the current crises of sectarianism, identity fragmentation, and ethical ambiguity in many Muslim societies, revisiting Mawaddah is not merely a spiritual recommendation but a jurisprudential necessity. As a Qur'anic and legal-moral value, Mawaddah offers a unifying ethical axis that can contribute to rethinking fiqh in ways that uphold 'adl, promote ṣulḥ, and re-anchor law in divine mercy. This study therefore contributes to the evolving discourse in uṣūl al-fiqh, Islamic legal ethics, and Qur'anic jurisprudence, advocating for Mawaddah as a central value in cultivating both personal virtue and ethical governance.

Lexical and Exegetical Reflections; Wadda (وَدَّ) and Beyond

While mawaddah appears in its noun form in the verses above, the Qur'an includes several morphological derivatives rooted in w-d-d (و-د-د), particularly for Lane's Lexicon, to emphasize the depth of Qur'anic vocabulary, this falls in the category of Muda'af (مضاعف), and comes from

the section, Nasara, yansur (باب، نصر ينصر). The root and derivatives include a. wadda (وَدَّ): to love, wish¹⁵, b. yuwaddūna / yuwāddūna¹⁶ (يُؤَدُّونَ / يُؤَادُّونَ): they wish / they befriend, c. yawaddū¹⁷ (يُؤَدُّوا) They (pl.) wishes, here, though not using the exact word mawaddah, these variants further illuminate the semantic field of deep emotional inclination, sometimes negatively (e.g., disbelievers expressing false love) and other times neutrally or positively. Throughout Islamic history, the exegetical interpretations of Mawaddah, as found in classical tafsir literature such as Tafsir al-Jalalayn, al-Baydawi, Al-Manar, Tafheem al-Qur'an, Ma'arif al-Qur'an, Tafsir al-Qur'an (popularly known as Tafsir Majidi), and Bahr al-Muhit, have shaped not only theological discourse but also legal, familial, and socio-political frameworks. Furthermore, linguistic works such as Mufradat al-Qur'an by al-Isfahani, Lisan al-'Arab by Ibn Manzur, and Lughat-ul-Qur'an by Abdul Rashid Niazi provide crucial insights into the nuanced lexical structure and moral philosophy of Mawaddah.

Scope and Limitations

This research focuses primarily on the Qur'anic occurrences of the term Mawaddah and its semantic variants, such as wudd, examining both the lexical roots and contextual meanings. Key verses under analysis include 4:73, 5:82, 30:21, 42:23, 60:1 & 7, The tafsir literature surveyed includes traditional Sunni and Shi'a interpretations drawn from authoritative sources such as Jalalayn, al-Baydawi, al-Manar, Bahr al-Muhit, Ma'arif al-Qur'an, Tafheem al-Qur'an, and others. The study also incorporates modern theoretical frameworks that link Qur'anic ethics to contemporary social issues.

While the study engages with sectarian interpretations (e.g., Shi'a emphasis on Ahl al-Bayt in verse 42:23), it does not aim to resolve theological disputes. Rather, it seeks to map interpretive diversity and its implications. Additionally, due to the vastness of the topic, the study does not provide a full ethnographic account of how Mawaddah is practiced in all Muslim cultures, but offers selected observations from regional contexts.

This study deals only with those Ayah that carry the word "Mawaddah"¹⁸ or "al-Mawaddah",¹⁹ see the table:

Semantic Network of "Mawaddah" in Six Qur'anic Verses

Ayah	Context	Recipient/Direction of Mawaddah	Nature of Mawaddah	Moral Function
4:73 (Surah al-Nisa)	Hypocrisy & opportunism	Feigned affection by hypocrites	Superficial; interest-driven	Warning against false emotional bonds
5:82 (Surah al-Ma'idah)	Interfaith relations	From Christians toward Muslims	Genuine, spiritually resonant	Ethical openness to the "Other"

30:21 (Surah al-Rum)	Marital bond	Between spouses	Natural, God-placed, sustaining	Foundation of family and social harmony
42:23 (Surah al-Shura)	Response to Prophethood	Toward Prophet's close family	Ethico-spiritual gratitude	Spiritual loyalty; acknowledgment of Prophetic mission
60:1 (Surah al-Mumtahanah)	Covert sympathy with enemies	From believers (misguided) to disbelievers	Inappropriate; misdirected	Prohibited affection; test of loyalty
60:7 (Surah al-Mumtahanah)	Post-conflict reconciliation	Between Muslims and former enemies	Potential, transformative	Hopeful vision of healing relationships

2. Findings

Presentation of Results

2.1 Grammatical distinction in specific tafsir contexts

Qur'anic Occurrences of Mawaddah

Arabic Form	Surah:Ayah	Definiteness	Context / Summary
مَوَدَّة	al-Nisā' (4:73)	Indefinite (نكرة)	Hypocrite feigns closeness as if there had been affection.
مَوَدَّة	al-Mā'idah (5:82)	Indefinite (نكرة)	Christians described as the nearest in affection to the believers.
مَوَدَّة	al-Rūm (30:21)	Indefinite (نكرة)	Affection between spouses as a divine sign.
أَلْمَوَدَّة	al-Shūrā (42:23)	Definite (معرفة)	Command to show affection to the Prophet's kin (Ahl al-Bayt).
أَلْمَوَدَّة	al-Mumtahanah (60:1)	Definite (معرفة)	Believers are cautioned against offering affection to enemies of Allah.
مَوَدَّة	al-Mumtahanah (60:7)	indefinite (معرفة)	Allah may bring about affection between you and former enemies.

The table indicates, the definiteness or indefiniteness of the word "mawaddah" (مَوَدَّة) in the Qur'an plays an important semantic and rhetorical role. In Arabic, the distinction between definite (معرفة) and indefinite (نكرة) nouns can significantly affect meaning, emphasis, and interpretation. Here's how that applies to mawaddah, like the indefiniteness of the word "mawaddah" (مَوَدَّة) refers to an unspecified, general, or potential form of affection. Often introduces new, unexpected, or developing emotional states.

And the definiteness like *بِالْمَوَدَّةِ*, *بِالْمَوَدَّةِ* refers to a specific, known, or pre-existing affection, may imply intensity, familiarity, or established relationships. For instance, Al-Zamakhsharī, known for his linguistic precision and grammatical commentary, often explores how **definiteness** shifts the rhetorical meaning, like **Surah al-Mumtahanah (60:1)** he explains:

تَلْقَوْنَ إِلَيْهِم بِالْمَوَدَّةِ: "أي بالمودة المعروفة الموجودة، لا مودة جديدة مخترعة"²⁰

"You send to them al-mawaddah: that is, the known, existing affection—not a newly formed or imagined one."

He emphasizes that "**al-mawaddah**" here refers to an **existing emotional bond**, which **ought to be severed** because it contradicts religious loyalty. The definite form creates a **contrast**: it **exposes hypocrisy** or **misplaced allegiances** by referencing something already active and morally problematic. Discussing Surah al-Rum (30:21), al-Rāzī interprets the verse "وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً" ("And He placed between you affection and mercy") as:

"المودة هنا ليست محض ميل نفسي، بل هي هبة ربانية غايتها استمرار النوع البشري عبر رابطة الزواج."²¹

"The mawaddah here is not mere emotional inclination, but a divine gift whose purpose is the continuity of humanity through the bond of marriage." In this lexicon, al-Rāghib defines mawaddah as a love that entails veneration and closeness, stating:

"المَوَدَّةُ: محبةٌ تقتضي التعظيم والتقارب، وهي أخص من المحبة"²²

"Mawaddah is a love that entails veneration and closeness; it is more specific than mere maḥabbah (general love)." However, the question arises, then what is the difference between the Quranic terms "Hubb" and "Mawaddah"? here is the answer: The term Mawaddah carries rich lexical and semantic depth in classical Arabic sources. According to Mufradāt al-Qur'ān by Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Mawaddah refers to love expressed through deliberate action and ethical commitment, distinguishing it from ḥubb, which is more emotional and passive.²³ Lisān al-'Arab describes it as a gentle, enduring affection marked by mutual obligation,²⁴ while Lughat al-Qur'ān emphasizes its conscious, intentional nature rooted in moral and spiritual values.²⁵ Unlike fleeting or carnal passion, Mawaddah signifies a chosen, reciprocal affection grounded in duty, gratitude, and divine purpose.

2.2 Thematic Spectrum of Mawaddah in the Qur'an

The analysis of Mawaddah across the Qur'an and tafsir literature reveals a layered and multifaceted concept with both theological depth and social functionality. Below is a structured summary of the main findings, see table:

Qur'anic Verse	Context	Core Theme	Interpretive Notes
----------------	---------	------------	--------------------

Al-Nisā’ (4:73)	Hypocrisy and self-interest	Insincere or opportunistic affection	Mawaddah is used ironically to expose the false emotional displays of hypocrites. See: Tafsir al-Kabir, Ma‘arifur Qur’an.
Al-Mā’idah (5:82)	Interfaith relations	Unexpected sources of true affection	Christians depicted as nearest in mawaddah to Muslims, suggesting moral closeness. See: Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir, Tafsir al-Maraghi.
Al-Rūm (30:21)	Marriage and family	Divine origin of spousal love	Mawaddah and rahmah are seen as divinely placed emotional bonds that undergird marital harmony. See: Tafsir al-Jalalayn, Tafheem-ul-Qur’an.
Al-Shūrā (42:23)	Prophet’s request	Love for Ahl al-Bayt	Interpreted theologically by Shi’a as a divine mandate; Sunnis often see it as a call for gratitude. See: Al-Baydawi, Bahr al-Muhit, Anwar al-Bayan.
Al-Mumtahanah (60:1)	Loyalty to God	Improper affection for enemies	Believers are criticized for showing affection to those hostile to God. See: Tafsir al-Kashani, Tafsir al-Nasafi.
Al-Mumtahanah (60:7)	Conflict and reconciliation	Potential for reconciliation	Mawaddah used to express hope in divine transformation of enmity into love. See: Al-Manar, Tafsir Ibn al-‘Arabi.

Mawaddah in the Qur’an is not merely sentimental affection. It functions as a **relational ethic**, divinely embedded in human interactions, covering a wide range of moral and social engagements — from intimate marital bonds to interfaith respect, political loyalty, and theological commitment. Its usage reflects both ideal relationships (e.g., marriage, family of the Prophet) and its potential misuse (e.g., toward enemies or by hypocrites). Meanwhile, The concept of Mawaddah, deeply embedded in six distinct Qur’anic verses, holds profound significance for addressing modern social, ethical, and theological challenges faced by Muslim societies. Scholars such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr view Mawaddah as a crucial counterpoint to the rising sectarianism and social fragmentation that threaten communal harmony today and for further discussions on spiritual values combating sectarianism and fostering unity.. By emphasizing sustained, divinely rooted love—whether within marriage (as in Surah Al-Rūm 30:21), loyalty to the Prophet’s family (42:23), or interfaith bonds (Al-Mā’idah

5:82)—Mawaddah fosters a relational ethic that promotes unity and mutual respect across diverse communities²⁶.

Moreover, Ali, K. notes that the Qur'an's use of Mawaddah in contexts of reconciliation like in Al-Mumtahanah (60:7) and critique of hypocrisy like in An-Nisā' (4:73) provides a moral framework for sincere, accountable relationships, making it a valuable lens for contemporary discussions on gender justice, political ethics, and social responsibility²⁷. So one can benefit from discussion on ethical frameworks and gender justice rooted in Qur'anic concepts.. However, Hashemi, N. Finds at the same time, Mawaddah for political instrumentalization of religious concepts and sectarian dynamics,²⁸ in that way, Mawaddah can be appropriated or instrumentalized in political discourse to justify exclusion or reinforce sectarian divides, highlighting the need for critical awareness in its application.

Additionally, Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis emphasizes Mawaddah's role in the ethical transformation of individual and collective identities,²⁹ as he is known for semantic and ethical exploration of Qur'anic love and related terms. while Amir-Moezzi, for the analysis of spiritual and social renewal based on Qur'anic ethics, including love and devotion, who explores its potential in fostering spiritual and social renewal within Muslim communities³⁰. These perspectives underscore the dynamic and multifaceted nature of Mawaddah, encouraging its use as a foundation for compassionate governance and ethical engagement in the contemporary world.

In conclusion, Mawaddah retains powerful normative influence; its full potential as a unifying ethical principle depends on careful, context-sensitive interpretation that respects its Qur'anic diversity, ranging from intimate family bonds to broader intercommunal relations. By doing so, Muslim societies can harness Mawaddah's transformative capacity to build compassionate, inclusive communities amid contemporary complexities. So the theme of Mawaddah in the Qur'an encompasses several interconnected dimensions. Primarily, it reflects divine mercy as extended through human relationships, highlighting how God's compassion manifests in ethical love. This concept encourages interpersonal ethics, fostering spousal harmony, strengthening familial bonds, and supporting reconciliation after conflict. Additionally, Mawaddah plays a significant role in shaping sectarian identities, particularly in Sunni-Shi'a discussions concerning the Prophet's family and spiritual leadership. Beyond personal and communal ties, it is also linked to spiritual reward and social trust, representing God's favor upon believers and the ethical cohesion necessary for a harmonious society.

3. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Mawaddah, far from being a merely sentimental or emotional term, operates as a robust ethical and

theological principle within the Qur'anic worldview. Rooted in divine intent, Mawaddah signifies a chosen, enduring form of love that manifests across spousal, familial, communal, and even interreligious relationships. The Qur'anic verses examined—particularly Surah al-Rum (30:21), Surah al-Shura (42:23), Surah al-Mumtahanah (60:7), and Surah al-Ma'idah (5:82)—demonstrate that Mawaddah has both spiritual and societal dimensions. It functions as a theological and moral glue that binds individuals and communities together based on compassion, loyalty, humility, and justice. Rashid Rida highlights Mawaddah as a fundamental social virtue that underpins the cohesion of the Muslim community. He interprets it not only as marital affection but also as a broader communal love that should inspire justice, mutual respect, and solidarity in Islamic governance. For Rida, Mawaddah supports political unity and social harmony, advocating for compassionate leadership rooted in Qur'anic values.³¹

In *Bahr al-Muhit*, Abu Hayyan explains Mawaddah as a lexically rich term implying enduring love and affection that extends beyond personal bonds into societal relations. He discusses how this concept fosters reconciliation and peaceful coexistence, particularly emphasizing its role in restoring relations between former enemies, thus bearing direct political significance in conflict resolution and social reconciliation.³² This understanding aligns closely with the theological emphasis placed by commentators such as al-Jalalayn³³ and Maududi³⁴, who interpret Mawaddah in Surah al-Rum as central to marital ethics and divine harmony. Likewise, the contrast between sincere and insincere expressions of Mawaddah—as illustrated in verses like Surah al-Baqarah (2:165) and al-Nisa (4:73)—underscores the Qur'anic emphasis on authenticity and God-centred relationships.

Importantly, the lexical analysis confirms that Mawaddah entails ethical responsibility, not mere affection—an interpretation supported by authoritative sources such as Raghīb al-Isfahani³⁵ and Lisan al-'Arab³⁶. These findings affirm the central research question: Mawaddah is not merely an emotional attribute, but a value-laden theological construct capable of informing Muslim social ethics in both personal and collective life.

3.1 Comparison with Previous Work

The results build upon and extend previous scholarship. Classical commentators like Fakhr al-Din al-Razi³⁷ and al-Tabari³⁸ acknowledge the ethical weight of Mawaddah, but often confine their interpretations to theological or sectarian domains—especially about Surah al-Shura (42:23). Shi'a scholars such as al-Tusi³⁹ and al-Tabarsi⁴⁰ elevate the term to a doctrinal imperative concerning the Ahl al-Bayt, while Sunni interpretations, as found in Ibn Kathir⁴¹ and al-Baydawi⁴², frame it more generally as

communal or familial love. Ibn 'Arabi views Mawaddah as a divine attribute reflecting God's mercy manifest in human relationships, extending to societal ethics and governance.⁴³ Ashraf 'Ali Thanwi's *Anwar al-Bayan* stresses Mawaddah as a pillar for family and community ethics, emphasizing that this love is divinely ordained to create harmony and social stability.⁴⁴

This study confirms these sectarian divergences but also highlights a significant gap in classical tafsir: the broader sociopolitical and ethical potential of Mawaddah remains underexplored. More contemporary thinkers such as Izutsu (2002)⁴⁵ and Nasr (2002)⁴⁶ have sought to revive the ethico-spiritual depth of Qur'anic values, though their work tends toward the abstract. This research differentiates itself by applying those insights to lived social contexts, offering a bridge between textual interpretation and actionable ethics.

Furthermore, scholars like Kecia Ali (2014)⁴⁷ and Farid Esack (1997)⁴⁸ emphasize the fluidity of Qur'anic values across time, culture, and politics. This study supports their assertion that religious concepts like Mawaddah are continually reshaped by socio-historical conditions, yet insists that the Qur'anic grounding of these values offers a consistent ethical core that remains relevant today.

Social and Political Implications of Mawaddah

The theological depth of Mawaddah also gives rise to meaningful social and political implications. Its Qur'anic manifestations reveal that Mawaddah is not limited to personal or familial contexts—it extends into the public sphere and offers guidance for governance, social justice, and communal harmony.

3.2 Social Implications of Mawaddah in the Qur'an

The Qur'anic concept of Mawaddah (affectionate love) extends beyond personal relationships, serving as a foundational principle for societal cohesion and ethical conduct. Its multifaceted applications are evident across various contexts in the Qur'an, each elucidating its role in fostering harmonious communities.

In Surah al-Rum (30:21), Mawaddah is highlighted as a divine gift instilled between spouses:

"And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; and He placed between you affection (Mawaddah) and mercy."⁴⁹

Classical exegesis, such as Ma'arif-ul-Qur'an, interprets this verse as emphasizing that the essence of a successful marital relationship lies in mutual love and compassion, which are divinely ordained to ensure peace and stability within the family unit.⁵⁰

Surah al-Shura (42:23) states:

"Say, [O Muhammad], 'I do not ask you for this message any payment [but] only good will through kinship.'"⁵¹

This verse, often referred to as the "Verse of Mawaddah," has been interpreted differently across Islamic traditions. Sunni commentators, like those cited in Tafsir Ibn Kathir, view it as a general exhortation to love and respect the Prophet's relatives. Conversely, Shi'a scholars interpret it as a specific directive to show affection towards the Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's family), considering it a theological imperative.

Surah al-Mumtahanah (60:7) offers hope for transforming enmity into affection:

"Perhaps Allah will put, between you and those to whom you have been enemies among them, affection (Mawaddah). And Allah is competent, and Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."⁵²

According to Ma'ariful Qur'an, this verse underscores the potential for reconciliation and the establishment of amicable relations, even with former adversaries, emphasizing the transformative power of sincere affection in societal relations.

In Surah al-Ma'idah (5:82), the Qur'an acknowledges the presence of Mawaddah between Muslims and certain non-Muslim communities:

"You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews and those who associate others with Allah; and you will find the nearest of them in affection (Mawaddah) to the believers those who say, 'We are Christians.' That is because among them are priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant."⁵³

This verse highlights the possibility of genuine affection and mutual respect across religious boundaries, promoting a vision of peaceful coexistence and interfaith harmony.

Surah al-Baqarah (2:165) warns against misdirected affection:

"And [yet], among the people are those who take other than Allah as equals [to Him]. They love them as they should love Allah. But those who believe are stronger in love for Allah."⁵⁴

This verse emphasizes the importance of directing Mawaddah appropriately, cautioning against equating the love for worldly entities with the love due to the Divine. Ma'ariful Qur'an interprets this as a call for sincerity and authenticity in one's devotion.

Surah al-Nisa (4:73) addresses the issue of insincere expressions of affection:

"But if bounty comes to you from Allah, he will surely say, as if there had never been between you and him any affection (Mawaddah), 'Oh, I wish I had been with them so I could have attained a great attainment.'"⁵⁵

This verse critiques those who feign affection for personal gain, highlighting the Qur'anic emphasis on genuine and selfless love as a cornerstone of ethical behavior.

In Surah al-Rum (30:21),⁵⁶ Mawaddah is portrayed as a divinely instilled quality between spouses, signifying tranquility, affection, and mercy. This has been interpreted by classical commentators such as al-Baydawi (n.d./2005) and al-Jalalayn (2007) as a reflection of divine grace in human relationships, establishing marriage not merely as a legal contract but as a spiritually anchored union.

3.3 Political Implications of Mawaddah: Sunni & Shia Perspectives

Sayyid Abul A'la Maududi viewed Islam as a comprehensive system encompassing all aspects of life, including politics. He emphasized that Mawaddah, as mentioned in Surah al-Rum (30:21), extends beyond personal relationships to inform social and political structures. He argued that the Islamic state should be founded on principles of mutual love and compassion, promoting justice and unity among its citizens.⁵⁷ While Dr. Israr Ahmad highlighted the role of Mawaddah in fostering societal harmony and political stability. He believed that genuine affection and compassion among individuals are essential for the establishment of a just Islamic society. In his lectures, he emphasized that political leaders should embody these values to ensure equitable governance.⁵⁸ However, Ghamidi interprets Mawaddah as a foundational value that should permeate all aspects of Islamic governance. He asserts that political systems should be built upon mutual consultation (Shura) and compassion, ensuring that policies reflect the collective well-being of the community.⁵⁹ On the other side, Sayyid Qutb in his exegesis *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, Qutb discusses Mawaddah as a divine attribute that should be mirrored in Islamic society. He posits that a true Islamic state must cultivate love and compassion among its members, which in turn fosters unity and resilience against oppression.⁶⁰ Yusuf al-Qaradawi emphasized the importance of Mawaddah in promoting social justice and political inclusivity. He advocated for policies that protect minority rights and encourage interfaith harmony, viewing Mawaddah as a means to achieve peaceful coexistence in diverse societies.⁶¹ From Shia perspective, Allama Tabataba'i, In *Tafsir al-Mizan*, Tabataba'i interprets Mawaddah in Surah al-Shura (42:23) as a directive for Muslims to show love towards the Prophet's family (Ahl al-Bayt). He argues that this love has political implications, as it establishes the spiritual and moral authority of the Ahl al-Bayt in guiding the Muslim community.⁶² Allama Tabrasi, in his *tafsir Majma' al-Bayan*, emphasizes the significance of Mawaddah towards the Ahl al-Bayt, interpreting it as a divine commandment that underpins the legitimacy of

their leadership. This perspective reinforces the political role of the Ahl al-Bayt in Shi'a thought.⁶³ Allama Al-Tusi discusses Mawaddah as an essential element in the relationship between the Prophet and his followers, highlighting its importance in the context of leadership and guidance. He views this affection as a basis for the political authority of the Ahl al-Bayt.⁶⁴

3.4 Implications: For Islamic Studies, Muslim Societies and Interfaith and Ethical Discourse

This study positions Mawaddah as a central yet under-theorized ethical concept in Qur'anic studies. It urges scholars to move beyond doctrinal or philological approaches and examine how Qur'anic ethics operate across historical and contemporary social contexts. The integrated use of classical tafsir, semantic analysis, and ethical theory demonstrates the potential of interdisciplinary methodologies for future research. Amidst rising sectarianism, cultural fragmentation, and political instability, Mawaddah offers a Qur'anically grounded vision for rethinking social ethics. Whether in family life, civil society, or state governance, it serves as a unifying value that nurtures empathy, justice, and moral responsibility. The study critiques the instrumentalization of religious terms in state-sponsored rhetoric and calls for ethical literacy and spiritual sincerity in the application of Qur'anic principles. Finally, Mawaddah presents a theological framework for meaningful engagement with pluralism. Its resonance with shared human values—loyalty, care, and reconciliation—makes it a valuable bridge for interfaith dialogue and global ethics. This aligns with Esack's (1997) call for an Islam that is both rooted in text and responsive to modernity. Ultimately, this discussion reaffirms that Mawaddah is not a peripheral or sentimental term in the Qur'an. It is a theological and ethical cornerstone with the potential to guide relationships at all levels—personal, communal, and political. Interpreting Mawaddah as a divine principle of committed, compassionate love provides a powerful alternative to both overly legalistic and politicized readings of Islam. In this light, the study calls for a revival of Qur'anic ethics centered on values like Mawaddah, which can foster more just, cohesive, and spiritually enriched Muslim societies.

4. Conclusion

This study explored the Qur'anic concept of Mawaddah, demonstrating that it is far more than an abstract or emotional notion of love. Instead, Mawaddah emerges from the Qur'an as a deeply rooted theological and ethical principle that reflects divine will and guides interpersonal, communal, and societal relationships. Through a close analysis of key verses—such as Surah al-Rum (30:21), Surah al-Shura (42:23), Surah al-Mumtahanah (60:7), and Surah Maryam (19:96)—the research uncovered

the spiritual, familial, and socio-political dimensions of Mawaddah. The concept's significance spans multiple contexts: marital harmony, reconciliation with former enemies, authentic devotion, and God's promised affection for the righteous. Notably, Surah al-Mā'idah (5:82) further supports the idea that Mawaddah is not confined to intra-Muslim relationships; it can also extend to sincere and humble members of other faiths, reinforcing its intercommunal and ethical depth.

Additionally, the study highlighted interpretive diversity across Sunni, Shi'a, Sufi, and modernist traditions. Classical exegetes often limited Mawaddah to theological debates or sectarian concerns, while contemporary thinkers have begun to revive its ethical potential. However, the full application of Mawaddah as a transformative principle in modern Muslim social life remains underdeveloped.

Recommendations: For Future Research

Interdisciplinary approaches should integrate sociological, psychological, and anthropological methods to explore how Mawaddah is embodied in contemporary Muslim communities. Comparative religious ethics can highlight parallels with concepts like agape in Christianity or *karuṇā* in Buddhism, fostering interfaith dialogue. Research on gender and family dynamics should examine Mawaddah's role in shaping Islamic views on spousal rights, caregiving, and child-rearing across cultures.

Empirical fieldwork—through qualitative and ethnographic studies—can document how Mawaddah is applied in areas like marriage counseling, social work, and civic engagement. Practically, Mawaddah should be integrated into Islamic curricula as a holistic ethical framework, and used by mosques, NGOs, and community groups to promote social cohesion and counter sectarianism. Finally, scholars and public figures should invoke Mawaddah in ethical public discourse to encourage compassion, reconciliation, and shared moral responsibility.

7. Bibliography

- Saheeh International. (1997). *The Qur'an: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meanings* (p. 447). Riyadh: Abul-Qasim Publishing House.
- Badawi, Elsaid M., and Muhammad Abdel Haleem. *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage*. Leiden: Brill, 2008.
- Lane, Edward William. *An Arabic-English Lexicon*. Vol. 8. London: Williams & Norgate, 1863.
- Penrice, J. *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran*. London: Trübner & Co., 1873.
- Wehr, Hans. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Edited by J. Milton Cowan. 3rd ed. Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1976.
- Ali, K. (2014). *The Lives of Muhammad*. Harvard University Press.

- Amir-Moezzi, M. A. (1994). *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam*. SUNY Press.
- Chittick, W. C. (1983). *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi*. SUNY Press.
- Esack, F. (1997). *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*. Oneworld Publications.
- Hashemi, N. (2009). *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies*. Oxford University Press.
- Ibn Kathir. (2000). *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim (Abridged)*. Darussalam.
- Izutsu, T. (2002). *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Modarressi, H. (2003). *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam: Abu Ja'far Ibn Qiba Al-Razi and His Contribution to Imamite Shi'ite Thought*. Darwin Press.
- Nasr, S. H. (2002). *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*. HarperOne.
- Razi, F. al-D. (n.d.). *Mafatih al-Ghayb (The Keys to the Unseen)*. Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi.
- Tabari, M. ibn J. (2000). *Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an*. Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Thanwi, A. (2005). *Ma'ariful Qur'an*. Maktaba-e-Darul-Uloom.
- Tusi, A. J. (n.d.). *Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*. Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi.
- Al-Isfahani, R. (2001). *Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qur'an*. Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Al-Jalalayn. (2007). *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*. Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Baydawi, N. (n.d.). *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*. Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah.
- Al-Manar. (n.d.). *Tafsir al-Manar*. Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Abu Hayyan, M. (n.d.). *Al-Bahr al-Muhit*. Dar al-Fikr.
- Maududi, A. A. (1988). *Tafhim al-Qur'an* (A. A. Kamal, Trans., Vol. 4, pp. 13–15). Islamic Publications. (Original work published 1942–1972)
- Maududi, A. A. (2000). *Tafheem al-Qur'an*. Islamic Publications.
- Niazi, A. R. (n.d.). *Lughat-ul-Qur'an*. Islamic Research Institute.
- Ahmad, I. (2001). *Bayan-ul-Qur'an* [Video lecture series, Surah al-Rum, 30:21]. Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Qur'an. Retrieved from <https://www.tanzeem.org>
- Ghamidi, J. A. (2018). *Meezan* (2nd ed., pp. 483–485). Al-Mawrid.
- Qutb, S. (2000). *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an [In the Shade of the Qur'an]* (A. A. M. Ibrahim & M. Salahi, Trans., Vol. 5, pp. 270–273). The Islamic Foundation. (Original work published 1951–1965)
- Tabataba'i, M. H. (2006). *Tafsir al-Mizan [Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān]* (S. H. Nasr, Trans., Vol. 17, pp. 340–345). Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press. (Original work published in Arabic 1954–1972)
- Tabrasi, F. b. H. (2008). *Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Vol. 9, pp. 519–522). Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li'l-Matbū'āt. (Original work published ca. 12th century CE)
- al-Tusi, M. b. H. (2000). *Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Vol. 9, pp. 170–172). Qum: Markaz al-Nashr, Jami'at al-Mudarrisin. (Original work ca. 11th century CE)
- Usmani, M. S. (2004). *Ma'ariful Qur'an* (M. M. K. Usmani, Trans., Vol. 7, pp. 546–548). Karachi: Maktaba Ma'ariful Qur'an. (Original work published in Urdu)

References

- 1 Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 8 (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), 2920
- 2 Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, edited by J. Milton Cowan, 3rd ed. (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1976), 1043.
- 3 Penrice, J. *A Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran*. London: Trübner & Co., 1873.
- 4 Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'anic Usage* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 622.
- 5 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustaṣfā min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Maṭ'anī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1993), vol. 1, pp. 179.
- 6 Al-Shāṭibī, *al-Muwāfaqāt fi Uṣūl al-Sharī'ah*, ed. 'Abd Allāh Darrāz (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1968), vol. 2, pp. 17.
- 7 Qur'an 30:21. See also Ibn 'Ashūr, *al-Tahrīr wa'l-Tanwīr*, vol. 21, p. 158, where Mawaddah and raḥmah are explained as foundational for marital harmony and legal expectations.
- 8 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Rawḍat al-Muḥibbīn wa-Nuzhat al-Mushtāqīn*, ed. Tāriq 'Awwād (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1994), pp. 43.
- 9 Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2007), s.v. "w-d-d".
- 10 Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism: The Sources of Esotericism in Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), pp. 117.
- 11 Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 75.
- 12 Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), pp. 33.
- 13 Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 74.
- 14 Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 89.
- 15 4:102 (وَدَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْ تَغْفُلُونَ عَنْ أَسْلِحَتِكُمْ وَأَمْتِعَتِكُمْ) : Those who disbelieve wish that you would neglect your weapons and your baggage) 2:109 (وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يَرُدُّونَكُم) (Many of the People of the Scripture wish they could turn you back to disbelief after you have believed,)
- 16 58:22 (لَا تَجِدُ قَوْمًا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ يُوَادُّونَ مَنْ حَادَّ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ) : You will not find a people who believe in Allah and the Last Day having affection for those who oppose Allah and His Messenger)
- 17 33:20 (وَإِن يَأْتِ الْأَحْزَابُ يَوَدُّوا لَوْ أَنَّهُمْ بَادُونَ فِي الْأَعْرَابِ يَسْأَلُونَ عَنْ أَنبِيَائِكُمْ) : And if the confederates should come [again], they would wish they were in the desert among the Bedouins,)

- 18 Indefinite noun (nakirah), used when referring to an unspecified or general kind of affection.
- 19 Definite noun (ma'rifah), because of the definite article "ال" (al = "the"), refers to a specific, known, or emphasized form of affection. Often implies an already recognized relationship or affection
- 20 Al-Zamakhsharī, J. (n.d.). Al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl (Vol. 4, p. 118). Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
- 21 Al-Rāzī, F. al-D. (n.d.). Tafsīr al-Kabīr (Mafātiḥ al-Ghayb) (Vol. 25, p. 141). Beirut: Dār Ihya' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- 22 Al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī. (n.d.). Mufradāt alfāz al-Qur'ān (p. 104). Beirut: Dār al-Ihya' al-Turāth al-'Arabī.
- 23 Al-Isfahani, A. R. (2009). Al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur'ān (A. H. Abdel Halim, Trans.). Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah.
- 24 Ibn Manzur, M. ibn M. (1990). Lisān al-'Arab (Vol. 15). Beirut: Dar Sadir.
- 25 Nadwi, A. S. (2000). Lughat al-Qur'an (Vol. 4). Lucknow: Majlis Taḥqīqāt wa Nashr al-Islām.
- 26 Nasr, S. H. (2002). The heart of Islam: Enduring values for humanity. HarperOne. Pp. 75.
- 27 Ali, K. (2014). Sexual ethics and Islam: Feminist reflections on Qur'an, hadith, and jurisprudence. Oneworld Publications. pp. 55.
- 28 Hashemi, N. (2009). Islam, secularism, and liberal democracy: Toward a democratic theory for Muslim societies. Oxford University Press. Pp. 125.
- 29 Izutsu, T. (2002). Ethico-religious concepts in the Qur'an (translated by M. S. Ali). McGill-Queen's University Press. Pp. 159.
- 30 Amir-Moezzi, M. A. (1994). The spirituality of Shi'ism: Beliefs and practices. I.B. Tauris. Pp. 79.
- 31 Rida, M. R. (n.d.). Al-Manar Tafsir (Vol. 12, pp. 257.). Cairo: Dar al-Manar.
- 32 Abu Hayyan al-Gharnati. (n.d.). Bahr al-Muhit (Vol. 3, pp. 45). Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif.
- 33 Al-Mahalli, J. al-D., & Al-Suyuti, J. al-D. (n.d.). Tafsir al-Jalalayn.
- 34 Maududi, S. A. A. (n.d.). Tafheem al-Qur'an (Vol. 5, p. 406).
- 35 Al-Isfahani, R. (n.d.). Mufradat al-Qur'an (p. 104). Dar al-Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah.
- 36 Ibn Manzur, M. (n.d.). Lisan al-'Arab (Vol. 3, p. 456). Dar Sader.
- 37 Al-Razi, F. al-D. (n.d.). Tafsir al-Kabir (Mafatih al-Ghayb) (Vol. 27, pp. 169). Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi.
- 38 Al-Tabari, M. J. (n.d.). Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an (Vol. 25, pp. 19). Dar al-Fikr.
- 39 Al-Tusi, A. J. (n.d.). Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (Vol. 9, pp. 144). Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi.
- 40 Al-Tabarsi, A. F. (n.d.). Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (Vol. 9, pp. 124). Dar al-Ma'rifah.

-
- 41 Ibn Kathir, I. (n.d.). Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim (Vol. 4, pp. 138). Dar al-Fikr.
- 42 Al-Baydawi, N. (n.d.). Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil (Vol. 4, pp. 113). Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi.
- 43 Ibn 'Arabi, M. (n.d.). Tafsir Ibn 'Arabi (Vol. 2, pp. 187). Cairo: Maktaba al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyya.
- 44 Thanwi, A. 'A. (n.d.). Anwar al-Bayan (Vol. 5, pp. 332). Lahore: Maktaba Ashrafiyya.
- 45 Izutsu, T. (2002). Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an (pp. 123).
- 46 Nasr, S. H. (2002). The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity (pp. 89).
- 47 Ali, K. (2014). The Lives of Muhammad (pp. 48).
- 48 Esack, F. (1997). Qur'an, Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression (pp. 78–82). Oneworld Publications.
- 49 Sahih International. (1997). The Qur'an: English meanings and notes. Jeddah: Abul-Qasim Publishing House.
- 50 Usmani, M. S. (2004). Ma'arif al-Qur'an (M. M. K. Usmani, Trans., Vol. 7, pp. 547). Karachi: Maktaba Ma'arif al-Qur'an.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid
- 56 Ibid
- 57 Maududi, Tafhim al-Qur'an, vol. 4, pp. 14.
- 58 1 Ahmad, I. (2001). Bayan-ul-Qur'an [Video lecture series, Surah al-Rum, 30:21], Markazi Anjuman Khuddam-ul-Qur'an.
- 59 1 Ghamidi, J. A. (2018). Meezan (2nd ed., pp. 484). Al-Mawrid.
- 60 Qutb, S. (2000). Fi Zilal al-Qur'an (Vol. 5, pp. 272). The Islamic Foundation.
- 61 Al-Qaradawi, Y. (2009). Fiqh al-Jihad: A Comparative Study of Its Rulings and Philosophy in the Light of the Qur'an and Sunnah (Vol. 2, pp. 1142–1146). Maktabat Wahbah.
- 62 Tabataba'i, M. H. (2006). Tafsir al-Mizan (Vol. 17, pp. 342). Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press.
- 63 Tabrasi, F. b. H. (2008). Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (Vol. 9, pp. 521). Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li'l-Matbū'āt.
- 64 al-Tusi, M. b. H. (2000). Al-Tibyan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an (Vol. 9, pp. 171). Qum: Markaz al-Nashr, Jami'at al-Mudarrisin.