

## FROM FRAGMENTATION TO FLOURISHING: EMBEDDING IḤSĀN FROM THE QURAN INTO THE MALAYSIAN MADANI VISION

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### ABSTRACT

Malaysia MADANI was introduced as a value-based national development framework to move the country beyond growth-centric models toward ethical, human-centred governance. However, its implementation has been weakened by public confusion, political polarisation, and the absence of a clear epistemological foundation, particularly for its culminating pillar, iḥsān. Existing scholarship has largely described MADANI's six values without tracing their Qur'ānic roots, leaving the framework vulnerable to fragmentation and instrumentalism. This study addresses that gap by reconstructing iḥsān as the Qur'an's central moral axis through thematic exegesis (tafsīr mawḍū'ī). Following al-Farmawī's methodology, refined by Sahlawati, the research proceeded in seven stages: identification of explicit occurrences of the root ḥ-s-n and implicit cognates (birr, taqwā, raḥmah, ṣabr, 'adl); classification into five subthemes (justice, devotion, family, charity, forgiveness); interconnection mapping; and tafsīr ijmālī drawing on Ibn Kathīr and al-Jalālayn. The analysis shows that iḥsān uniquely traverses all subthemes, while taqwā dominates devotional contexts, raḥmah and ṣabr cluster in forgiveness, and 'adl anchors juridical fairness. Synthesized into a three-tier framework, the findings place 'adl and birr as foundational obligations, taqwā and ṣabr as sustaining inner disciplines, and raḥmah and iḥsān as transcendent virtues. At the apex, iḥsān integrates justice, piety, compassion, resilience, and righteousness into a coherent ethic of flourishing. The study concludes that embedding iḥsān as the central principle of MADANI can transform justice into benevolence, devotion into excellence, and compassion into social solidarity. In doing so, it offers both a methodological refinement to thematic exegesis and a normative framework for embedding Qur'ānic ethics into contemporary governance and national well-being.

**Keywords:** iḥsān, Malaysia Madani, maqāṣid al-qur'ān, thematic qur'ānic exegesis, well-being

## 1. Introduction

The launch of Malaysia MADANI signals a significant transition in national development philosophy, shifting emphasis from rapid economic growth toward a value-oriented paradigm of governance and social progress. However, its implementation has encountered conceptual and social challenges. Public confusion about its meaning, political polarization that frames it as partisan, and social fragmentation that weakens collective acceptance have limited its impact (Sahlawati, Ahmad, & Yusof, 2024; Rahman & Mahmud, 2024). Concerns have also been raised that, without anchoring in Islamic epistemology, MADANI risks being perceived as influenced by foreign ideological models rather than being rooted in the local Islamic intellectual tradition (Abdullah, Gokaru, Abdul Hamid, & Mohd Nor, 2025; Nasir, 2021; Yusuff, Haji-Othman, & Abdul Manaf, 2024). This detachment from Qur'anic foundations threatens to reduce MADANI to a rhetorical construct rather than an actionable civilizational framework, weakening its sustainability and normative clarity (Zaman, Nasir, Saleh, & Ab Hamid, 2022).

Despite the widespread promotion of MADANI's six pillars; Sustainability, Prosperity, Innovation, Respect, Trust, and *Ihsān*, scholarly engagement has mainly remained descriptive, with limited effort to trace their conceptual roots in the Qur'an. Researchers highlight the absence of a systematic framework linking these values to Qur'anic ethics, especially *ihsān*, which is designated as the culminating pillar of MADANI (Hassan & Ismail, 2024; Yahaya, Izham, Yakob & Moidin, 2024; Ismail, Musolin & Serour, 2024). Although *ihsān* is frequently mentioned in policy narratives, it is rarely examined through *tafsīr* methodology or connected to its Qur'anic semantic field (Nasir, Kamarul Zaman & Ahmad, 2024; Ruzi & Ibrahim, 2020; Zamziba, Yusuf, Osman & Rashid, 2023). This absence has contributed to an incomplete articulation of MADANI's spiritual dimension, undermining its ability to serve as a comprehensive model of human flourishing (Rahman & Mahmud, 2024; Owens, Rassool, Bernstein, Latif & Aboul-Enein, 2023).

To address these conceptual gaps, this study employs thematic Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) to explore the value of *ihsān* within the Malaysian MADANI framework. Thematic exegesis has been identified as the approach that respects the systematic attempt to correspond Islamic development ideas with Qur'anic categories (Al-Alma'ī, 2007; al-Khalīdī, 2012; Mulyaden & Fuad, 2021). The process involves gathering various verses, categorizing them into topical clusters, and layering them with classical commentary to create a comprehensive model of concepts (Yusuff et al., 2024; Abdullah et al., 2025; Ruzi & Ibrahim, 2020). Given that Qur'anic ethics are by nature multi-faceted, such an approach allows us to map their associated interdependent effects on personal spirituality, emotional, mental, and social behaviour.

This article posits that *ihsān* embodies a holistic ethical principle that fuses spiritual devotion, social responsibility, and material accountability in the Qur'an. The incorporation of such a principle into MADANI could enhance its epistemological credibility and enhance its capacity to influence societal behavior (Sahlawati et al., 2024; Hassan & Ismail, 2024; Nasir et al., 2024). A conceptually developed framework of *ihsān* would explain it as a moral and spiritual compass for MADANI (Yahaya et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2024; Zamziba et al., 2023). Articulating Qur'anic values, such as explicitly focusing on this platform, could then increase MADANI's potential as an agent that fosters both holistic human well-being and social cohesion.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Repositioning Malaysia MADANI Through Qur'anic Values

The Malaysia MADANI model, established as a mechanism to steer national development away from a growth-centric trajectory towards values-based models, strives to infuse ethical and humanistic approaches into governance (Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, 2023). However, studies suggest that ongoing impediments exist to its impact. Some studies have shown a lack of understanding of MADANI among the public, particularly among the elite and educated groups, which has led to less-than-optimal participation in its six pillars (Lateh, 2024). The infrastructural constraints further compound this. Behind technological capacity, data privacy issues, and institutional resistance, progress has been hindered, including in the field of AI (Radzi, Chulan, & Abdul Rahman, 2025). Previous efforts to reform public sectors, including the introduction of accrual accounting and the development of enterprise architecture, have been plagued by similar coordination and human resource management challenges (Siddiquee, 2005; Siddiquee, 2010). Wider analyses identify persistent organizational 'silo'-ing, resource scarcity, as well as cultural inertia within the Malaysian bureaucracy as system-level chokepoints (Rahman & Abdul Hamid, 2024). Taken together, these findings point to a paradox: MADANI's moral ideals are normatively demanding but epistemically unsophisticated, with no obvious blueprint articulating its values, especially *iḥsān*, its highest pillar, in relation to the Qur'anic moral tradition (Sulong, Ismail, & Ahmad, 2025; Luhuringbudi et al., 2025).

### 2.2 The Epistemic Gap and the Need for Qur'anic Anchoring

MADANI's lack of grounding in the Qur'an has made it susceptible to ideological manipulation and politicization, leading to suspicion by the public (Abdullah et al., 2025; Nasir, 2021). The latter's six core values: Sustainability, Prosperity, Respect, Innovation, Trust, and *Iḥsān* are frequently mentioned, but the literature is primarily descriptive rather than providing an integrated model that connects them with Qur'anic ethics (Yahaya et al., 2024; Ismail et al., 2024; Ruzi & Ibrahim, 2020). Without a clear epistemological foundation, these values become not principles developed from within the practice, but rhetorical imports. This lack is especially notable in *iḥsān*, which has been widely discussed but not fully developed conceptually. To address this, there is a need for a systematic Qur'anic framework that translates values into their native semantic fields for normative clarity, intellectual continuity, and cultural authenticity.

### 2.3 Thematic Qur'anic exegesis (tafsīr mawḍū'ī) as a Bridging Methodology

One possible way of constructing such a matrix is through thematic exegesis of the Qur'an (tafsīr mawḍū'ī). This approach compiles all Qur'an texts that address a selected topic, clusters their occurrences, identifies the places where they are found in traditional tafsīr, and reconciles moral principles into an overarching model (Al-Alma'ī, 2007; al-Khalīdī, 2012; Mulyaden & Fuad, 2021). Malaysian scholars, for example, Siddiq Fadzil, have supported incorporating the adapted morality of the Qur'an to present-day needs through a task-specific, thematized approach (Zamziba et al., 2023). This approach is also being employed in recent studies on other topics, such as social ethics (Muarriyah & Sofa, 2024), wasatiyyah (Ruzi & Ibrahim, 2020), environmental education, and educational values for the post-pandemic situation (Suyadi et al., 2020; Salam & Hasan, 2023).

Its pluralistic makeup, incorporating new, old, Sufi, scientific, and thematic methodological inputs, has increased its utility in linking ideal principles to governance realities (Yusuff et al., 2024; Abdullah et al., 2025). Nevertheless, academics warn that thematic exegesis necessitates methodological discipline to avoid selective quotation, political manipulation of meanings, or decontextualization (Nasir, 2021). In this paper, it is positioned as the main methodological conduit for rediscovering the Qur'anic architecture of *ihsān* and bringing it into conversation with MADANI.

#### **2.4 *Ihsān* as the Ethical Axis of MADANI**

*Ihsān* occupies a central yet under-theorised place in MADANI discourse. In Qur'anic ethics, it signifies excellence, sincerity, compassion, and moral responsibility (Owoyemi & Ahmad, 2017), encompassing both vertical devotion to God and horizontal duty to society (Maidugu & Sadeeq, 2024). Other than that, it functions as a unifying ethical axis that binds individual spirituality with collective accountability. MADANI elevates *ihsān* as its highest pillar, aligning it with humanistic governance values such as respect, trust, and compassion (Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology, 2023). This resonates with Qur'anic affirmations of human dignity (Qur'an 17:70) and the principle of moral pluralism (Kamali, 2009). However, despite its rhetorical prominence, few studies have systematically mapped *ihsān*'s Qur'anic semantic field or operationalised it within governance, education, or economic models (Nasir et al., 2024; Zamziba et al., 2023). Note that earlier Malaysian initiatives, such as Islam Hadhari, demonstrate the feasibility of embedding Islamic values in education, and halal governance models illustrate how Qur'anic ethics can be institutionalised (Zain & Zakaria, 2022). This paper builds on such precedents using thematic exegesis to position *ihsān* as MADANI's moral-spiritual axis, rather than a symbolic slogan.

#### **2.5 Qur'anic Paradigms of Well-Being as the Evaluative Frame**

The Qur'an frames well-being (*sa'ādah*, *falāḥ*, *ḥayātan tayyibah*) as a holistic state that integrates five interdependent domains: spiritual, mental-emotional, physical, social, and material (Ahmad Syahirul Alim et al., 2024; Kader, 2021). It anchors well-being in faith and righteous deeds, with spiritual practices like *dhikr*, *ṣalāh*, and *tawakkul* shown to foster psychological resilience (Rofiqoh et al., 2025; Mursidin, 2023). Ethical provisions such as harm prevention, moderation, and consultation strengthen communal solidarity and social justice (Abdul Rasool et al., 2020; Zabidi, Zabidi, Burhan, & Jamsari, 2024). This literature converges on the view that well-being is not a byproduct of material prosperity, but rather the outcome of living in harmony with the principles of Qur'anic ethics. Positioning *ihsān* as the integrative principle that aligns these domains provides a powerful analytical lens for evaluating MADANI's human development aspirations and translating spiritual ideals into actionable policy outcomes.

This review highlights a critical gap: while MADANI aspires to be values-driven, it lacks a Qur'anic epistemic anchor. Although thematic exegesis offers a systematic way to construct such an anchor, it has not yet been applied to any of MADANI's pillars, especially *ihsān*. Simultaneously, Qur'anic scholarship on well-being provides a ready evaluative framework for assessing developmental ethics. This study addresses these gaps by employing thematic exegesis to inductively map Qur'anic verses on *ihsān*, cluster them across well-being domains, and construct a framework situating *ihsān* as MADANI's ethical-spiritual axis. This kind of framework might lend further credibility to MADANI, make its

### 3. Methodology

The research used a qualitative, interpretative design as proposed by al-Farmawī and in combination with Sahlawati Abu Bakar on Integrated Thematic Exegesis (tafsīr mawḍū‘ī). This model, which is derived from al-Farmawī’s classical method of structured thematic exegesis and Sahlawati’s thematic structure-generating approach, situates the method firmly in the traditional discipline of tafsīr while being relevant to modern research trends such as non-Arabic-based audiences. The process consisted of seven stages: choosing a topic, gathering the verses, categorizing them under sub-themes, mapping interconnections among them, analyzing them using tafsīr ijmālī, synthesizing them within a framework, and theorizing upon it, as well as contextualizing it with recent discourse. This was done to maintain conceptual uniformity and thematic continuity within the worldview of the Qur’an.

The unit of analysis comprised Qur’ānic verses that contained the concept of ihsān either explicitly or implicitly, with two groups of verses collected: (1) those where the root ḥ-s-n (e.g., ihsān, muḥsinīn, aḥsanu) was present as explicit content, as well as (2) those reflecting it implicitly through five semantically related lafz: al-birr, al-taqwā, al-‘adl, al-rahmah, and al-ṣabr. These five were chosen inductively based on their frequent co-occurrence with ihsān contexts, their semantic overlap in Qur’ānic discourse, and their coverage of the moral and spiritual dimensions of excellence. The search process utilised Qur’an corpus databases, concordances, and digital indexes to locate all occurrences, yielding a dataset of 955 verses across the six lafz.

The verses were categorized into five global subthemes that emerged from this data: commanded virtue and justice, devotional excellence, family and social relations, charity and social good, and forgiveness and restraint. These interrelations were then charted by tracking overlapping concepts, common motifs, and thematic development, contextualizing them within the Qur’an’s integrated moral unity.

The relevance of each subtheme was sought through the analysis of representative verses using tafsīr ijmālī to refine the semantic scope for further searching. Explanation taken from traditional commentaries, including those of Ibn Kathīr and al-Jalālayn, was consulted, with asbāb al-nuzūl applied when available to explain the context of revelation for specific verses. This layer of interpretation added exegetical complexity but was true to the context in which the Qur’an served as a revelatory text.

Lastly, the five subthemes were integrated into a tiered Qur’ānic paradigm/framework of ihsān. The five subthemes were then synthesized into a tripartite layered Qur’ānic construct of ihsān, with the foundational layer comprising ‘adl and birr (righteous action), the second layer taqwā and ṣabr (self-discipline and long-suffering), and the third layer rahmah alongside ihsān (compassion as it fuses with transcendent excellence). This conceptual structure was then squared with Malaysia MADANI by demonstrating how ihsān serves as the ethical centre around which such virtues of justice, devotion, compassion, patience, and righteousness are woven into a holistic view of human flourishing.

#### 4. Results

The thematic exegesis of *iḥsān* began with the identification of Qur'ānic loci directly containing the root ḥ-s-n in its verbal and nominal forms, alongside implicit expressions whose semantic fields overlap the ethic of excellence. The explicit verses included instances of *iḥsān*, *muḥsinīn*, and *aḥsanu*, while the implicit set consisted of terms such as *al-birr*, *taqwā*, *raḥmah*, *ṣabr*, and *'adl*. This dual corpus was verified through Qur'ānic indexes and the Qur'ānic Arabic Corpus, ensuring that both lexical precision and thematic relevance were maintained.

Consequently, representative verses were catalogued in tables, which included Arabic text, translation, *surah*, verse number, and a methodological justification for their inclusion.

The corpus of verses was subsequently classified into five overarching subthemes: Commanded Virtue and Justice, Devotional Excellence, Family and Social Relations, Charity and Social Good, and Forgiveness and Restraint. Quantitative distribution revealed different patterns of allocation: *iḥsān* was distributed well across all subthemes (with a strong line in charity and forgiveness); *'adl* accounted for the majority in juridical contexts; *taqwā* dominated devotional aspects; *raḥmah* and *ṣabr* were closely packed in relational and forgiveness, while *birr* represented a complex category encompassing belief, worship, and morality. These findings indicate that, while each of *lafẓ* has a specific semantic center, *iḥsān* is the only one that covers the entire range of morality.

Interconnectivity mapping also supported the relational nature of the Qur'ānic ethic, rather than suggesting it was in disarray. Radial diagrams and weighted maps illustrated how *'adl* grounds the realm of law and justice, *taqwā* protects interior devotion, *raḥmah* and *ṣabr* raise the ethic beyond reciprocity, and *birr* encompasses all. Linking this network is *iḥsān*, that which is always affirming and absorbing the rest. What became apparent from the visualization was not only the terms but also the wholeness of the Qur'an's vision, where virtue encompasses piety, justice, patience, compassion, and righteousness.

Tafsīr *ijmālī* of selected verses helped validate these thematic patterns. The classical commentaries later attested to the semantic and ethical gravity of each *lafẓ*. For example, Ibn Kathīr in Q. 16:90 interpreted *iḥsān* as “going beyond mere justice by giving more than what is due”, while al-Jalālayn emphasised its significance in the form of moral. In Q. 2:17, *birr* was not judgmentally defined as ritual observance, but as the larger virtue of belief, *zakat*, and perseverance. Q. 5:8 affirmed the association between *'adl* and *taqwā* and waxed eloquent on neutral justice as an instrument of God-fear (see Qur 6:141). 24:22 included *raḥmah* in the dynamic of social forgiveness. Finally, Q. 39:10 emphasized that *ṣabr* was deserving of an infinite reward. Such exegetical impulses confirmed the thematic designation and undergirded the integral ethic.

A construct was shaped based on these *surahs* to describe the stratified complexity of Qur'ānic ethics. With that foundation, there is *'adl* and *birr*, which relate to external deeds and preservation of rights. In the interstice of outer and core is *taqwā*, *ṣabr*: self-restraint, endurance. Above them both there are *raḥmah* and *iḥsān*, those goodly qualities which lie beyond the area of sheer duty and transmute moral beauty into goodness. According to this model, the Qur'an is presented as evolving from a focus on law and social justice, through inner work, to a transcendent ethic of the good life.

Altogether, these findings support the hypothesis that *iḥsān* is not a marginal virtue, but rather the center of gravity for Qur'ānic moral vision. The fact that it appears in all the sub-themes, its overlap with other ethical values, and exegetical soundness have demonstrated that the *iḥsān* ethic is a totality of compassion, piety, persistence, and righteousness. This postscript contextualizes the findings in their contemporary relevance.

## 5. Discussion

The decisive results, which can be found elsewhere in the findings section of this study, demonstrate that Qur'ānic ethics are not constructed around isolated virtues but are mobilized under a single redemptive trope of *iḥsān*: where justice ensconces fairness, *iḥsān* summons generosity past its arch to reach beyond; where devotion demands obedience, *iḥsān* elevates to excellence; where patience and compassion secure social adhesive at stasis, *iḥsān* provides acts-of-transcendence valorization. The dominant structure, instead, is a synthetic one: *iḥsān* becomes the pole around which an assortment of virtues are gathered and synthesized into an integrated ethic of flourishing.

Classical tafsīr interprets this to conclude that the Qur'an claims that *iḥsān* transcends against 'adl. As in Q. 16:90, the divine mandate here rests not simply upon justice but a higher ethic of perfection. This all happens in patterns that we see around us today: justice is the standard of a just society, where sharing the common good with citizens whose flourishing requires kindness, empathy, and practical respect is essential. Thus, in this respect, the Qur'an anticipates a dichotomy between procedural justice and substantive justice.

Reflection on this framework reveals the distinction between well-being and legal calculus, economic prosperity, or ritual observance. Instead, it is born from practice, discipline, and expertise. A culture of 'adl that is not elevated with *iḥsān* goes hard, a revolution of taqwā without raḥmah closes in. The ethic of the Qur'an, therefore, corrects both minimalism and maximalism, and stands for a balanced notion of flourishing that is situated in transcendentality.

The significance level of the generalisation to Malaysia, as alluded to by MADANI, adds more weight to this framework. MADANI's six pillars; Sustainability, Prosperity, Innovation, Respect, Trust, and *Iḥsān*, meet the critical virtues that have been proposed as the six Qur'ānic virtues. It is still, however, *iḥsān* enlivens the sixth pillar, transforming principle into practice. In other words, *iḥsān* makes the good happen in objects, which is distributive justice. In welfare, it converts charity to dignified solidarity. In religious studies, it converts taqwā to an ethic of leadership and citizenship. In the realm of resilience, it is only through ṣabr that resistance can be individually and collectively personalized. In mercy, it projects raḥmah as the ground of familial, communal, and interfaith conciliation. Accordingly, the Qur'anic ethic of *iḥsān* is in perfect harmony with MADANI's practice of harmonization or proportional and even development.

Placed against the six pillars of MADANI, the Qur'anic ethic reveals its inner coherence. 'Adl stabilises the pursuit of sustainability by ensuring that justice governs resources and responsibilities; birr lends prosperity its moral content, so that growth is coupled with generosity; taqwā infuses innovation with conscience, protecting creativity from arrogance; ṣabr undergirds trust, preserving resilience and fidelity even amid hardship; raḥmah humanises respect, grounding it in compassion rather than mere formality. Nevertheless, it is *iḥsān* that animates the whole: not simply a sixth pillar but the spirit that enlivens all others, transmuting abstract principle into living practice, as water permeates and gives shape to the vessel it fills.

In conclusion, the thematic exegesis demonstrates that *iḥsān* is not merely one virtue among others but the axis of Qur'ānic moral vision. Its integration of justice, righteousness, piety, patience, and compassion reveals a framework of flourishing that speaks directly to contemporary challenges. In the Malaysian context, it offers a Qur'ānicly grounded ethic for embedding excellence into governance, welfare, and civic life. More broadly, it repositions *iḥsān* as the Qur'an's paradigm for achieving human well-being across time and place.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated, through a structured process of thematic exegesis, that *iḥsān* is not a peripheral virtue but the central axis of Qur'ānic moral vision. By tracing explicit occurrences of the root ḥ-s-n alongside implicit cognates such as *birr*, *taqwā*, *raḥmah*, *ṣabr*, and *'adl*, the analysis established that *iḥsān* traverses all major subthemes: justice, devotion, family, charity, and forgiveness. Quantitative distribution confirmed its broad presence, interconnection mapping situated it as the integrative hub, and *tafsīr ijmālī* validated these patterns with classical authority. Synthesized into a layered framework, the results illustrate a Qur'ānic ethic that moves from the baseline of justice, through inner discipline, toward a transcendent ideal of flourishing.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in providing a systematic and textually grounded model of *iḥsān* that goes beyond lexical studies or isolated commentary. Methodologically, it refines the *tafsīr mawḍū'ī* approach by combining quantitative corpus analysis, conceptual clustering, and exegetical synthesis. Substantively, it offers a framework that aligns with and enriches contemporary paradigms of human well-being, such as Malaysia's MADANI vision, by embedding Qur'ānic excellence into discussions of governance, social justice, resilience, and compassion. In doing so, it bridges classical exegesis with contemporary ethical discourse, demonstrating the Qur'an's enduring relevance for both Islamic studies and applied ethics.

The limitations of this study are twofold. First, the scope was restricted to six selected lafz, which, while representative, do not exhaust the Qur'an's semantic field related to virtue and flourishing. Second, the *tafsīr* analysis was primarily confined to Ibn Kathīr and al-Jalālayn; engagement with a broader range of exegetical traditions (e.g., al-Ṭabarī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, modern reformist exegetes) would deepen the interpretive spectrum. Hence, future research could expand this framework by incorporating additional related terms, examining diachronic developments in *tafsīr*, or testing the applicability of the Qur'anic ethic of *iḥsān* in comparative religious and interfaith ethical discourses. Empirical studies linking this model to contemporary indicators of well-being in Muslim societies would also advance the conversation from textual analysis to lived application.

In summary, this study has demonstrated that *iḥsān* is the Qur'an's integrative moral principle, harmonizing justice, piety, compassion, resilience, and righteousness into a coherent ethical framework. By positioning *iḥsān* at the center of both Qur'ānic theology and contemporary social vision, the research contributes a robust scholarly framework for understanding how sacred texts can inform holistic human flourishing today.

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