



Hermeneutik: Jurnal Ilmu Al Qur'an dan Tafsir

ISSN 1907-7246 E-ISSN 2502-6402

Tersedia online di <https://journal.iainkudus.ac.id/index.php/Hermeneutik/index>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/hermeneutik.v19i2.33389>

The Meaning of *Syarab* in QS. An-Nahl [16]:69: Integrating Qur'anic Exegesis and Roland Barthes' Semiotics

Muliadi

UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

muliadi@uinsgd.ac.id

Astri Vitria Febiani

UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

astrivitria23@gmail.com

Asef Syaeful Millah

Universitas Al-Azhar Kairo, Mesir

asyaefulm@gmail.com

Abstract

The interpretation of the Qur'anic verses does not stop at a literal understanding, but demands an approach capable of uncovering layers of symbolic meaning. This study analyzes the term *syarab* in QS. An-Nahl [16]:69 using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, which divides meaning into two sign systems: the first level (denotation/linguistics) and the second level (myth/connotation). This research employs a qualitative method with descriptive-analytical analysis through library research. The primary data sources include the Qur'an, books of tafsir (exegesis), and hadith, supported by secondary data from dictionaries and related articles. The results indicate that denotatively, *syarab* means "a drink", which is anything that can be consumed. At the connotative level, *syarab* is

understood as honey, which has various colors and healing properties, as affirmed in various classical and modern exegesis books. Honey is positioned as a symbol of divine pleasure, a sign of Allah's power, and a medium for healing since the time of the Prophet. Barthes' semiotic approach expands the scope of interpretation of the Qur'anic text by bridging textual and contextual meanings, and proves the relevance of semiotic studies in Qur'anic exegesis. This finding contributes to the strengthening of contemporary exegesis methodology and opens opportunities for further research on the application of semiotics in Qur'anic studies.

Keywords: Syarab, Honey, QS. An-Nahl 69, Roland Barthes' Semiotics.

Abstrak

Penafsiran ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an tidak hanya berhenti pada pemahaman literal, namun menuntut pendekatan yang mampu mengungkap lapisan makna simbolik. Kajian ini menganalisis istilah *syarab* dalam QS. An-Nahl [16]:69 menggunakan teori semiotika Roland Barthes yang membagi makna ke dalam dua system tanda: tingkat pertama (denotasi/linguistik) dan tingkat kedua (mitos/konotasi). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan analisis deskriptif-analisis melalui studi kepustakaan. Sumber data primer meliputi Al-Qur'an, kitab-kitab tafsir, dan hadits, didukung data sekunder dari kamus dan artikel terkait. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara denotative syarab bermakna "minuman", yaitu segala sesuatu yang dapat diminum. Pada tingkat konotatif, syarab dipahami sebagai madu yang memiliki beragam warna serta khasiat penyembuhan, sebagaimana ditegaskan dalam berbagai kitab tafsir klasik dan modern. Madu diposisikan sebagai symbol kenikmatan ilahi, tanda kekuasaan Allah, serta media penyembuhan sejak masa Nabi. Pendekatan semiotika Barthes memperluas ruang interpretasi terhadap teks Al-Qur'an dengan menjembatani makna tekstual dan kontekstual, serta membuktikan relevansi kajian semiotika dalam studi tafsir Al-Qur'an. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada penguatan metodologi tafsir kontemporer dan membuka peluang penelitian lanjutan mengenai penerapan semiotika dalam studi Al-Qur'an.

Kata kunci: Syarab, Madu, QS. An-Nahl 69, Semiotika Roland Barthes.

Introduction

In literary and exegetical studies, texts are not merely understood in a literal sense but are approached as complex and symbolic structures of meaning. The Qur'an, as a sacred text endowed with profound semantic depth, provides ample space for multidisciplinary interpretive approaches. One such approach is semiotics. Semiotic analysis focuses on systems of signs as a means of uncovering meaning. Since language functions as the primary medium of communication and contains multiple sign systems, semiotic analysis inevitably involves linguistic structures. Signs emerge within the

interpreter's cognitive framework and are produced through interpretative processes (Ambarini AS dan Umayya, 2010). The primary function of semiotics is to reveal ideas or meanings that lie behind signs. Given that language constitutes the most significant system of signs, semiotics becomes particularly relevant for analyzing linguistic signs found in literary works as well as sacred texts such as the Qur'an.

Art van Zoest emphasizes two principal benefits of semiotics. First, its theoretical benefit lies in its contribution to the formulation and development of semiotic theories, involving scholars from various disciplines such as medicine, architecture, art history, linguistics, literature, and cultural anthropology. Second, its practical or applied benefit refers to the application of semiotic theory in specific fields, the results of which may be utilized by the broader public (Taufiq, 2016).

Roland Barthes' engagement with texts opens significant possibilities for renewed interpretation and the generation of new meanings. In the context of religious texts, Barthes offers alternative ways of understanding that expand textual meanings and allow them to continually interact with contemporary realities (Mulyaden, 2021). In this regard, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory is particularly relevant, as it proposes two levels of meaning analysis: denotation and connotation. These two levels aim to uncover symbolic and ideological messages embedded within texts. This study is grounded in the understanding that signs in the Qur'an do not function merely as literal indicators but also as manifestations of divine and social values embedded within linguistic structures.

Surah An-Nahl [16]:69, which describes the phenomenon of bees and honey using the term *syarāb*, presents a compelling object of analysis. This verse contains rich layers of literal and symbolic meaning, particularly concerning healing, divine blessings, and the manifestation of Allah's power concealed within His creation. The lexical choice of *syarāb* invites deeper exploration, as it encompasses both material and metaphysical dimensions of meaning.

Previous studies employing semiotic approaches to Qur'anic texts demonstrate a growing scholarly interest in this field. Several studies have successfully applied Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to analyze various Qur'anic concepts. For instance, Ilham Akbar Habibie and Moh. Azwar Hairul examined the concept of charity (*ṣadaqah*) in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:27, revealing that its denotative meaning refers to the act of giving

wealth to alleviate the burden of those in need with the intention of drawing closer to Allah. At the connotative level, *ṣadaqah* signifies broader ethical actions such as kindness, good speech, greeting others with peace, commanding good deeds, and prohibiting injustice (Habibie, I. A. dan Hairul, 2023).

Another study by Firdaus Maulana Akbar on the term *kursī* in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]:255 explains that its denotative meaning refers to Allah's knowledge and authority, while its connotative meaning expands to emphasize Allah's absolute sovereignty over all creation and the incomparability of His essence (Akbar, 2024). Additionally, research on the term *shifā'* in Surah Al-Isrā' [17]:82 demonstrates that its meaning extends beyond psychological healing to include physical healing, advocating treatment through the Qur'an within lawful practices while prohibiting forms of healing associated with polytheistic beliefs (Wijaya, 2021).

Despite these valuable contributions, previous studies have predominantly focused on ethical or abstract symbols and have not extensively analyzed concrete objects derived from natural phenomena as primary semiotic signs. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the term *syarāb*, which possesses a wide range of meanings extending from linguistic aspects to biological symbolism related to honey production by bees. By integrating Roland Barthes' semiotic theory with classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegesis as well as Prophetic traditions (ḥadīth), this research offers a more comprehensive reading and expands the scope of semiotic studies of the Qur'an.

This research employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method. The primary focus is the analysis of the term *syarāb* in Surah An-Nahl [16]:69. Data collection is conducted through library research. Primary sources include the Qur'an, classical and modern tafsir works, and Prophetic traditions, while secondary sources consist of Arabic lexicons, scholarly books, and relevant academic articles. The objective of this study is to uncover the denotative and connotative meanings of the term *syarāb* in Surah An-Nahl [16]:69 through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. This study is expected to demonstrate how sign systems within the Qur'anic text construct complex ideological and symbolic meanings, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of Qur'anic verses as divine revelation rich in layered significance. Furthermore, this research aims to affirm the relevance of semiotic approaches in Qur'anic exegesis and to

elucidate how the representation of honey as a healing substance reflects the dynamic relationship between sacred text and empirical reality.

Theoretical Studies

Semiotics

Semiotics is a field of study that can be traced back to classical philosophy, particularly to Plato (428–348 BCE), who examined the origins of language in *Cratylus*. Plato's semiotic reflections in *Cratylus* can be summarized as follows: (1) verbal signs, whether natural or conventional, can never fully represent reality; (2) the study of words does not reveal the origin of all things, which reside in the realm of ideas separate from their linguistic representations; and (3) knowledge is indirectly mediated through signs, which occupy a subordinate position within the hierarchy of knowledge. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) also examined linguistic signs, particularly nouns, in his work *Poetics* and *On Interpretation* (Jamaludin, M. Aini, N. Millah, 2021).

The term *semiotics* derives from the Greek word *sēmeion*, meaning “sign,” and *sēme*, meaning “interpreter of signs.” In English, the term *semiotics* refers to “the study of signs and symbols and of their meaning and use” (Hornby, cited in Taufiq, 2016, (Taufiq, 2016). Aart van Zoest defines semiotics as a branch of knowledge concerned with the study of signs and everything related to them, including sign systems and the processes governing their use. Ferdinand de Saussure, on the other hand, defines semiology as a science that studies signs within social life, considering it a branch of social psychology, while linguistics constitutes a part of semiology.

Roland Barthes, who further developed Saussure's semiology, defines semiology as the study of forms rather than content. For Barthes, the study of signification must be conducted independently of what is signified. Saussure's assertion that language (*langue*) is a system of signs that expresses ideas reinforces this view. Language, therefore, can be compared to other sign systems such as alphabets for the deaf, ritual symbols, religious symbols, forms of etiquette, and military signals. What distinguishes language is its status as the most important sign system among them (Taufiq, 2016) Based on these definitions, scholars generally agree that semiotics is the discipline concerned with the study of signs.

According to the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, a sign (*tanda*) is something that serves as an indicator, evidence, identifier, symbol, or guide (Kamus Bahasa Indonesia, 2008). Berger explains that a sign is something that stands for something else or adds a different dimension to an object by using anything that can be employed to interpret one thing in terms of another. For Berger, the most significant signs are words or language. For example, the word “tree” differs from the actual physical object it denotes. Words function as signs representing ideas or concepts. In communication, it is essential to remember that signs always signify something beyond themselves (Taufiq, 2016).

Historically, semiotics was formally identified as a branch of knowledge concerned with signs, sign systems, and sign usage processes in the late eighteenth century. The term was also introduced by J. H. Lambert, a German philosopher. For a considerable period, discussions on semiotics received little attention from philosophers and scholars of language and literature (Ambarini AS dan Umay, 2010). However, semiotics gained significant prominence in the twentieth century, particularly with the rise of logocentrism in philosophical discourse. This intellectual movement was driven primarily by two foundational figures in semiotics: Ferdinand de Saussure in Europe and Charles Sanders Peirce in America. Although they lived contemporaneously, they developed distinct semiotic frameworks due to differing disciplinary backgrounds. Saussure was a modern linguist, while Peirce specialized in logic and pragmatism. Consequently, European scholars tend to use the term *semiology*, whereas American scholars prefer *semiotics*. According to Alex Sobur, these two terms represent a dialectical relationship between the Saussurean and Peircean traditions of modern semiotics, differing mainly in paradigmatic orientation, scope, methodological approach, and application. Linguistic and social-psychological semiotics largely draw upon Saussure, whereas philosophical, logical, and pragmatic semiotics are rooted in Peirce's framework (Mulyaden, 2021).

The object of semiotics encompasses anything that can be regarded as a sign. Saussure himself emphasized that the primary object of semiology is a collection of sign systems grounded in arbitrariness and convention. Any means of expression accepted within a society is based on collective habits or conventions. Thus, semiotics primarily examines conventional sign systems (Taufiq, 2016).

Biography of Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes was born in 1915 in Cherbourg and grew up in Bayonne, a small coastal town near the Atlantic Ocean in southwestern France. He came from a Protestant middle-class family. When Barthes was one year old, his father, a naval officer, was killed in action during a battle in the North Sea. Thereafter, Barthes was raised by his mother and grandparents. At the age of nine, he moved to Paris with his mother, who worked as a bookbinder. Barthes developed an interest in piano, which he learned from his aunt.

In 1934, Barthes planned to enroll at the École Normale Supérieure, but his plans were disrupted by tuberculosis, which required him to undergo treatment in the Pyrenees. A year later, he returned to Paris and entered university, studying Latin, French, and Greek. His tuberculosis later relapsed, forcing him to spend an extended period in a sanatorium in the Alps. During this time, Barthes devoted himself to reading, particularly the works of Marx and Sartre, leading him to identify as both Marxist and Sartrean.

After his recovery, Barthes taught in Romania and later in Egypt, where he studied modern linguistics under A. J. Greimas. Upon returning to France, he worked in the cultural services division of the government, which focused on overseas education. In 1962, Barthes became a lecturer at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. In 1976, he was appointed Professor of Literary Semiology at the Collège de France. In February 1980, after attending a luncheon with socialist politicians and intellectuals, Barthes was struck by a laundry truck while crossing the street in front of the Collège de France. He died four weeks later as a result of the accident (Taufiq, 2016).

Barthes produced numerous influential works, including *Le Degré Zéro de l'Écriture* (*Writing Degree Zero*), which critiques bourgeois culture. Another notable work is *Michelet*. His most famous and widely discussed book is *Mythologies*, first published in 1956, which compiles essays analyzing cultural phenomena such as the Tour de France, newspaper advertisements, and other aspects of bourgeois consumer society. This work operates within two analytical frameworks: linguistic semiotics and ideology as expressed through language.

In 1964, Barthes published *Elements of Semiology*, which established him as a key figure in structural semiology. His later work, *The Fashion System*, applied structural

analysis to women's clothing by examining fashion articles in magazines from 1958–1959, revealing that seemingly trivial fashion trends are governed by underlying systems (Akbar, 2024).

Roland Barthes' Semiotic Theory

This study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. Barthes was a French semiologist who focused on written language and sign systems. In 1956, Barthes read Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, which inspired him to explore the application of semiotics beyond linguistics. Unlike Saussure, Barthes argued that semiotics is not a broader system encompassing language; rather, semiotics is itself a part of linguistics. According to Barthes, signs in non-linguistic domains can be understood as languages that convey meaning through structured relationships between signifiers and signifieds (Akbar, 2024).

In *Mythologies*, Barthes asserts that by treating collective representations as sign systems, one can move beyond exposing superficial falsehoods to uncover deeper ideological processes. He emphasizes the need to analyze the process of mystification through which bourgeois culture presents itself as universal and natural (Barthes, 1970). Barthes views Saussurean semiology as a first-order system that must be extended into a second-order system, known as myth. In this second-order system, the sign of the first level becomes the signifier, while the signified is constructed by the reader within a broader cultural framework (Taufiq, 2016).

For Barthes, myth is a system of signs produced through social construction and collectively recognized within society. Myth conveys meanings that emerge from the relationship between visible signs and invisible cultural values. Barthes' semiotic analysis does not merely focus on surface meanings but seeks to reveal how signs generate ideology within society. In *Mythologies*, Barthes demonstrates how everyday cultural objects, including children's toys, embody ideological meanings that transmit adult values to children (Bailana, 2024).

Semiotic analysis begins with denotation, which operates at the first level of meaning and focuses on literal, linguistic interpretation. The second level, connotation, reveals implicit meanings shaped by historical, cultural, and emotional factors.

Denotative meaning is generally objective and widely understood, whereas connotative meaning is subjective, emotional, and accessible only to a relatively limited interpretive community. A word is considered connotative when it carries emotional or evaluative value, whether positive or negative (Mulyazir dan Fadillah, 2023).

Barthes' semiology, which articulates two levels of linguistic systems, positions language at the first level as an object and at the second level as a metalanguage. The interaction of these levels produces myth as a second-order sign. When applied to Qur'anic verses, this framework does not negate their literal meaning but instead enables the exploration of deeper messages shaped by contextual factors (Jamaludin, M. Aini, N. Millah, 2021).

Meaning emerges through the associative relationship between the signifier and the signified. A sign is the unity of a material form (signifier) and a conceptual idea (signified). The signifier refers to meaningful sounds or written forms, while the signified denotes the mental concept or idea associated with them (Asrofah, 2014). This relationship can be illustrated through the following semiotic schema.

Table 1. Semiotic Schema.

Linguistics	{	2. Signifier I	2. Signified I (Signifier I)
		3. Sign I (Denotative Sign)	b. Signified II (Connotative Sign)
Myth	{	a. Signifier II (Connotative Sign)	
		c. Sign II (Connotative Sign)	

Two-Level Semiotic Structure of Roland Barthes

Based on the above scheme, Roland Barthes explains that semiotics operates through two levels of signification. The first level consists of the relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified*. At this level, meaning emerges from the relationship between

the signifier (object or form) and the signified (concept or meaning) within the sign, as well as from the relationship between the sign and its referent in external reality. This level corresponds to denotative meaning, which refers to the literal, actual, or “real” meaning of a sign.

The second level of signification occurs when the sign produced at the first level enters into interaction with broader cultural contexts, giving rise to connotative meaning. In Barthes' terminology, connotation is one of the three modes through which signs operate at the level of second-order signification, alongside myth and symbol. Connotation describes the interaction between a sign and the emotions, feelings, and historical values of its users. A crucial element in connotation is the signifier at the first level, which becomes the basis for the construction of meaning at the second level (Mulyazir dan Fadillah, 2023).

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design and adopts a descriptive-analytical method. This method seeks to analyze and describe phenomena by examining existing conditions, relationships, prevailing viewpoints, or ongoing processes. Within this framework, the present study analyzes the term *syarāb* as found in Surah An-Nahl [16]:69.

Data collection is conducted through library research. Accordingly, the study relies on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the Qur'an, classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir), and Prophetic traditions (ḥadīth). Secondary sources consist of Arabic lexicons, scholarly books, and relevant academic articles that support the analysis.

Result and Discussion

Surah An-Nahl derives its name from verse 68, which speaks about bees. This surah enumerates numerous blessings bestowed by Allah; therefore, some scholars have also referred to it as Surat al-Ni'am (the Chapter of Blessings)(Shihab, 2022). Sayyid Qutb characterizes this surah as being rich in lessons and wisdom. Although it addresses diverse

themes, it remains consistent with the thematic orientation of Meccan revelations prior to the Prophet's migration (hijrah), particularly those concerned with fundamental issues of human faith such as divinity, revelation, and resurrection. Furthermore, the surah discusses the nature of divine will and human will, especially in relation to faith and disbelief, guidance and misguidance. It also outlines the primary mission of the messengers, explanations of what is lawful and unlawful, and commands related to migration in the path of Allah (Qutb, n.d.).

Al-Biqā'ī argues that the principal objective of Surah An-Nahl is to demonstrate the perfection of Allah's power, the vastness of His knowledge, and His absolute freedom to act according to His will. This purpose is most clearly illustrated through the characteristics and behavior of an-naḥl (the bee). The bee's attributes and conduct represent the intended meaning of the surah in a particularly vivid manner. Bees exhibit remarkable intelligence and order, especially in their ability to construct highly precise and organized hexagonal hives. Moreover, their maintenance systems, the diversity of honey colors they produce, and the medicinal properties of honey all reflect the meticulous order of Allah's creation, despite bees deriving their sustenance from various types of flowers and fruits, some of which may be beneficial while others potentially harmful.

According to al-Biqā'ī, the uniqueness of bees lies not only in their behavior and products but also in their biological and social structures. Bees consist of male, female, and neutral types, inhabiting hexagonal hives that are neatly arranged and coated with a fine layer that prevents the entry of air and bacteria. Their colonial life is governed with strict discipline under the leadership of a queen bee, who possesses distinctive characteristics and roles. The queen is described as exhibiting modesty by not engaging in indiscriminate mating, despite being surrounded by thousands of worker bees, whose numbers may reach approximately thirty thousand. The marvel of bees is also evident in their communication system and language, which have long attracted scientific attention. Among the scholars who studied this phenomenon is the Austrian scientist Karl von Frisch, who successfully identified bee communication patterns through body movements or "bee dances" that convey information about food sources (Shihab, 2022).

Surah An-Nahl does not merely explain themes of monotheism, revelation, and resurrection; it also presents cosmological and biological beauty in the Qur'an in a unique manner. The surah illustrates how Allah's creation operates harmoniously in nature, serving as evidence of His greatness and mercy. One of the distinctive features of this surah appears in verse 69, which describes the emergence of *syarāb* from the bellies of bees. The term *syarāb* in this verse possesses a depth of meaning that is particularly suitable for semiotic analysis. Linguistically, *syarāb* refers to anything that is drunk, whether water or other liquids (Mandzur, 1960). However, within the context of this verse, its meaning extends beyond the physical notion of a liquid or beverage to function as a theological symbol encompassing spiritual, health-related, and divine dimensions.

The honey referred to as *syarāb* thus becomes a sign (*sign*) of Allah's mercy and the majesty of His creation, uniting biological, medical, and theological elements within a single semantic framework. Accordingly, this study analyzes the term *syarāb* in Surah An-Nahl [16]:69 through the two systems of signification proposed by Roland Barthes: the first level (denotation) and the second level (connotation/myth). The analysis demonstrates how a seemingly technical biological term transforms into a complex theological symbol. The findings are presented as follows.

First Level: Denotative Analysis

At the first level, the analysis focuses on the denotative or literal meaning of the term *syarāb*. Lexical studies of several Arabic dictionaries indicate that *syarāb* means "anything that is drunk," as stated in *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Mandzur, 1960) and *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān* (Al-Asfahani, n.d.). In Surah An-Nahl [16]:69, the phrase *yakhruju min buṭūnihā syarābun* ("from their bellies comes a drink") indicates that *syarāb* refers to a liquid substance produced by bees.

Denotatively, the term is neutral and does not explicitly mention honey; instead, it refers to a general category, namely a "drinkable liquid." Thus, at this level, the signifier (Signifier I) is the word *syarāb*, while the signified (Signified I) is "a drink." The relationship between the two forms a denotative sign that is objective and linguistic in nature.

Second Level: Connotative Analysis (Myth System)

At the second level, the term *syarāb* is no longer understood merely as a “drink” but is specifically interpreted as “honey,” which is not only a biological substance but also a sign of Allah’s power and mercy, as well as a metaphor for healing. Classical Qur’anic commentaries such as those by al-Marāghī and al-Qurṭubī emphasize that *syarāb* refers to honey produced by divine command, serving as an indication of monotheism and the miraculous nature of creation. The phrase *yakhruju min buṭūnihā* (“from their bellies it comes forth”) signifies that honey emerges from the internal processing of food within the bees’ bodies (Al-Qurthubi, 2006).

From a semiotic perspective, this meaning functions as the second signifier (Signifier II), or the first-level sign (Sign I), wherein honey is understood as a drink produced from the bellies of bees. The connotative signified (Signified II) is the recognition of honey as a means of healing for various ailments. Wahbah al-Zuhaylī explains that honey contains glucose, levulose, and natural enzymes that function as antibacterial agents and immune stimulants. Consequently, the second-level sign signifies that honey, produced from the bellies of bees, possesses multiple therapeutic properties and can be used as a remedy for various diseases.

The application of Roland Barthes’ semiotic analysis enriches Qur’anic exegesis by revealing how layered sign systems within the Qur’an generate multi-level structures of meaning. This process is illustrated in the following table.

Table 2. multi-level structures of meaning

Linguistics	1. Signifier I Meaning of <i>Syarab</i>	2. Signified I (Signifier I) A beverage is something that can be drunk.
	3. Sign I (Denotative Sign) a. Signifier II (Connotative Sign) The meaning of <i>Syarab</i> in QS. An-Nahl [16]:69 is that honey is a drink that is secreted or produced from the stomach of bees.	b. Signified II (Connotative Sign) Honey can be used as a remedy for various diseases.
Myth	c. Sign II (Connotative Sign) One of the signs of God's power is honey, which is secreted or produced from the stomach of bees. Honey also has various properties that can be used as medicine for various diseases.	

This study demonstrates that Roland Barthes' semiotic framework provides a productive analytical tool for exploring the layered meanings of Qur'anic texts. Through the two levels of signification—denotation and connotation—the analysis of the term *syarāb* in Surah An-Nahl [16]:69 reveals that Qur'anic language operates not merely at a literal level but also constructs complex symbolic meanings. At the denotative level, *syarāb* refers to a drinkable substance produced by bees, while at the connotative level it signifies honey as a symbol of divine mercy, healing, and the perfection of Allah's creation. This dual structure of meaning confirms that Qur'anic signs function within an integrated linguistic, biological, and theological system.

Furthermore, the findings highlight how the Qur'an integrates natural phenomena with profound theological messages. The narrative of bees and honey in Surah An-Nahl illustrates how empirical reality is transformed into a sign (*āyah*) that points to Allah's power, wisdom, and benevolence. Honey, as *syarāb*, is not only a biological product but also a symbolic representation of divine guidance and care for humanity. This integration underscores the Qur'an's capacity to communicate religious meaning through observable natural processes, thereby reinforcing the harmony between revelation and creation.

In conclusion, the application of Barthes' semiotic theory in Qur'anic studies proves to be both relevant and insightful. It enriches classical and contemporary tafsir by offering a systematic method to uncover deeper ideological and symbolic meanings without negating the literal sense of the text. This study contributes to the broader discourse on Qur'anic hermeneutics by demonstrating that semiotics can serve as a complementary approach in understanding the Qur'an as a text rich in signs that continuously invite reflection, interpretation, and awareness of divine reality.

The First-Level Meaning of Syarāb: The Linguistic System

At the first level, namely the linguistic system, the analysis traces the denotative meaning of a term. This linguistic system is also understood as a textual reading, which in this study focuses on the meaning of *syarāb* in Surah An-Nahl [16]:69.

“Then eat of all kinds of fruits and follow the paths of your Lord that have been made easy for you.” From their bellies comes forth a drink of varying colors, in

which there is healing for humankind. Indeed, in that there is truly a sign for people who reflect.” (QS. An-Nahl[66]:69)

The word شَرَابٌ is derived from the word شَرِبَ – يَشْرِبُ (*syariba-yashrobu*) which linguistically means ‘a drink’ or ‘beverage’. The term is also used to refer to an intoxicating drink. Terminologically, the word refers to something that is consumed as a drink, whether in the form of plain water or liquid that has undergone processing resulting in changes in its color and taste (Ensiklopedia Al-Qur’an Kajian Kosa Kata, 2007).

In Lisān al-‘Arab, the term is defined as ‘a drink,’ namely anything that can be consumed in liquid form and does not require chewing (Mandzur, 1960). Meanwhile, in the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia, a drink is defined as anything that is consumed as a beverage (Kamus Bahasa Indonesia, 2008).

“In the Qur’an, the word *syarāb* is used with the same meaning, namely ‘a drink,’ both in worldly and eschatological contexts. In both cases, it can be understood that the basic meaning of *syarāb* is a *lafzī* (literal) meaning, referring to an actual drink. Physically, water is one of the vital necessities for humans, plants, and animals. Allah explicitly commands humankind to eat and drink from the blessings provided in nature. Regarding sources of drink derived from animals, the Qur’an mentions that this liquid is stored within the animals’ bodies, located between blood and waste, as stated in His word in QS. An-Naḥl [16]:66.”

“Indeed, in livestock there is truly a lesson for you. We give you to drink from what is within their bellies—pure milk emerging from between excretion and blood—pleasant for those who drink it.” (QS. An-Naḥl [16]:66)

Similarly, Allah’s statement in QS. An-Naḥl [16]:69 also mentions a drink that emerges from within the belly of the bee, namely honey. This type of drink is highly sterile and can be consumed directly without heating, and it contains healing properties. This differs from *syarāb*, or drinks, in the worldly context. In the Hereafter, *syarāb* appears in two contrasting forms. First, the drink of Paradise, which signifies pleasure and delight, granted by Allah SWT as a reward to His servants who perform righteous deeds in this world. Second, the drink of Hell, which represents suffering and punishment for those who commit evil during their earthly lives. This type of drink is referred to as *bi’sa al-*

sharāb (the worst of drinks) بئس الشراب “the worst of drinks” (Ensiklopedia Al-Qur'an Kajian Kosa Kata, 2007).

At this first level, the analysis focuses on the denotative meaning of syarāb. Following a textual analysis of various dictionaries and reference works, the meaning of syarāb consistently converges on ‘a drink,’ namely something that is drinkable. From this analysis, the first-level signifier, which represents the material aspect, is the term syarāb, while the first-level signified is ‘something that can be consumed as a drink.’

Meaning of Syarāb at the Second Level: The Mythical System

At the second level, namely the mythological system, the analysis traces the connotative meaning of syarāb in order to arrive at a broader and deeper interpretation. At the previous first level, the denotative meaning of syarāb was established as ‘a drink,’ namely something that can be consumed. This denotative meaning then functions at the second level as a second-order signifier or a connotative sign. Subsequently, this second level involves a more in-depth analysis of syarāb to uncover its connotative meaning. In addition, this level can also be understood explicitly as reflecting a myth, analyzed through various classical and modern Qur'anic commentaries and Prophetic traditions (ḥadīth).

In Tafsīr al-Azhar, the word syarāb is interpreted as the sweetness produced by bees, namely honey, which may appear in various colors such as yellow, red, black, whitish, and others. These colors are produced according to the types of flowers from which the bees extract nectar and the locations where they build their hives. Honey is believed to possess numerous medicinal properties for healing diseases, a fact long acknowledged by traditional healers, physicians, and medical doctors. The honey considered most efficacious for healing is black honey originating from the Arabian land (Hamka, 1989). Sayyid Quṭb similarly asserts that the scriptural statements concerning honey as a healing substance for humankind have been scientifically validated by many medical experts, as explained in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad SAW (Quṭb, n.d.).

In line with this view, Wahbah al-Zuḥaylī, in his Qur'anic commentary, clearly interprets the word شرابٌ “as honey (Az-Zuhaili, 2013). He further describes honey

through three main specifications. First, it functions as a drink, either consumed directly in its pure form or used as an ingredient in the preparation of various beverages. Second, it appears in diverse colors, including red, white, yellow, and others. Third, it serves as a remedy for various illnesses. Honey contains chemical components consisting of approximately 25–40% glucose, 30–45% levulose (fructose), and 15–25% water. Honey is beneficial as a tonic and nutritional supplement, as well as an antidote to toxic substances such as arsenic, mercury, gold, and morphine. Moreover, honey is effective in counteracting toxins caused by various diseases, including urinary poisoning resulting from liver disorders, stomach and intestinal disturbances, toxic fevers caused by viral infections such as typhoid, pneumonia, meningitis, smallpox, angina pectoris, cardiac weakness, cerebral congestion, and acute nephritis (al-(Az-Zuhaili, 2013).

Al-Maraghi interprets the word عسل as شراب, which means honey. He even describes how honey is formed, namely by worker bees sucking nectar from flowers and storing it in their stomachs. There, the nectar mixes with a special substance and turns into honey. The bees then return to their hive and release the honey from their mouths into hexagonal wax cells. Each time a cell is full, the bees cover it with a layer of wax and move on to another cell (Maraghi, 1946). Honey is also used as medicine, as mentioned in the hadith of the Prophet, among others:

From Sa'id bin Jabir from Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, from the Prophet, peace be upon him, who said: "Healing is found in three things: cupping, drinking honey, and kay (therapy with hot iron), but I forbid my people from kay." (Narrated by Bukhari)

From Abu Sa'id, that a man came to the Prophet SAW and said, "My brother has a stomach ache." The Prophet said, "Give him honey." Then he came again a second time and said, "I gave him honey, but it did not cure him; in fact, he became even more ill." The Prophet said again, "Go and give him honey again." He came a third time and said the same thing. The Prophet said, "Allah is Great, and your brother's stomach is wrong. Go and give him honey again." So, he gave him honey again, and his brother was cured. (HR. Bukhari) (Bukhori, 2006).

Some early medical experts explained the events in the hadith. The man suffering from diarrhea had a lot of food residue in his stomach. When his brother gave him hot honey, the residue broke down and came out quickly. So his diarrhea seemed to get worse. His brother went to see the Prophet Muhammad because he thought that honey had a

harmful effect on his brother's illness. In reality, however, honey was beneficial and helpful for his brother's condition (Az-Zuhaili, 2013)

From Abu Hurairah, who said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Whoever licks honey three times in the morning every month will not be afflicted with a major trial." (Narrated by Ibn Majah)(Majah, n.d.).

From Abdullah, he said: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Use two remedies: honey and the Qur'an." (Narrated by Ibn Majah). Honey is also a symbol of a drink that reflects the pleasures of paradise. As the Prophet Muhammad SAW said:

The Prophet SAW said: "In heaven there are oceans of fresh water, oceans of honey, oceans of milk, and oceans of wine, and rivers flow from these oceans." (HR. Tirmidzi) (Tirmidzi, 1999)

According to Quraish Shihab in his interpretation, the word شراب is also interpreted as honey. That is, something that contains fructose and perferentous (easily digestible sugar). Modern medical science has concluded that glucose is very useful for the healing process of various diseases through injection or oral administration, which acts as a booster. In addition, honey also has a fairly high vitamin content, especially vitamin B complex. The medicinal content of honey is indicated in the following sentence, namely that honey "contains healing medicine." However, he criticizes scholars who say that honey is a cure for all diseases, namely that not all medicines are found in honey. The phrase "not all medicines" is understood from the nakirah form, which is not expressed in a negative way, so it does not mean "all." Honey cannot be a medicine for people who have certain factors that make their bodies incompatible with honey (Shihab, 2022).

Based on the above explanation, a hidden (connotative) meaning of the word syarab is found, which almost always refers to honey. If we look at the wording in the verse, after the word syarab there is the word mukhtalifun alwanuhu (various colors). This indicates that honey comes in various colors, namely red, white, yellow, and black, depending on the nectar of the flowers from which it is extracted and the location of the hive. The uniqueness of honey does not stop there. The phrase that follows, fihī syifaun linnas (in it there is healing for humans), indicates that honey can be used as a remedy for various diseases. In fact, it has been used since the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. The Qur'an's affirmation of the therapeutic function of honey is then reinforced by a

number of hadiths that describe how the Prophet made it part of his medical practice, thus clarifying that the connotative meaning of syarab is not only related to the pleasure of consumption, but also has a healing dimension that has a strong textual and historical basis.

Theoretically, this study expands the use of Roland Barthes' semiotics by applying it to the lexical unit syarab in QS. An-Nahl 69, presenting a new analysis model that integrates linguistic signs with biological phenomena and classical to contemporary interpretive explanations. Practically, this study reaffirms the function of honey as a healing medium based on the Qur'an and hadith, while offering a multidisciplinary approach that academics can use to understand the verses of the Qur'an in a more contextual manner. The novelty of this research concept lies in the combination of Barthes' semiotics, empirical data on honey, and sources of interpretation, which produce a comprehensive reading that syarab does not only mean drink, but also a symbol of divine pleasure, a medium of healing, and the wisdom of creation. Thus, this research enriches the methodology of interpretation with a semiotic approach and opens up opportunities for the development of similar studies on other Qur'anic terms related to natural phenomena.

Conclusion

This study is grounded in the awareness that Qur'anic texts do not merely convey literal meanings but also contain symbolic meanings that require deeper exploration. Through Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, this research analyzes the term syarab in QS. An-Nahl [16]:69, which is understood denotatively or linguistically as "a drink," while connotatively it refers to honey as a representation of divine blessing, a medium of healing, and a manifestation of Allah's power. The main contribution of this study lies in integrating semiotic analysis with classical and modern Qur'anic exegesis, hadith literature, and empirical data concerning honey, thereby producing a more comprehensive reading of the verse. The impact of this study is the expansion of contemporary tafsir approaches by opening a more dynamic space of understanding between the text, natural phenomena, and theological symbolism. This research recommends the application of semiotic approaches to other Qur'anic terms related to

natural phenomena in order to enrich the methodological discourse of Qur'anic exegesis and deepen the understanding of divine messages within a modern context.

References

- Akbar, F. M. (2024). Makna Kursi dalam Surat Al-Baqarah (2):255 Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes. *Jurnal Mauriduna*, 5(1), 257–274.
- Al-Asfahani, R. (n.d.). *Al-Mufradat Fi Gharib Al-Qur'an*. Maktabah Nazar Musthafa Al-Bazi.
- Al-Qurthubi. (2006). *Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an*. Ar-Resalah.
- Ambarini AS dan Umayya, N. M. (2010). *Semiotika: Teori dan Aplikasi pada Karya Sastra*. Upgris Press.
- Asrofah. (2014). Semiotik Mitos Roland Barthes dalam Analisis Iklan di Media Massa. *Sasindo*, 2(1).
- Az-Zuhaili, W. (2013). *Tafsir Al-Munir; Terj. Abdul Hayyie al Katani* (7th ed.). Gema Insani.
- Bailana, U. (2024). Analisis Kata “Nikmat” Perspektif Teori Semiotika Roland Barthes dalam Surah Ar-Rahman. Konferensi Nasional Mahasiswa Bahasa dan Sastra Arab.
- Barthes, R. (1970). *Mythologies*. The Noonday Press.
- Bukhori. (2006). *Shahih Bukhori* (Maktabah A).
- Ensiklopedia Al-Qur'an Kajian Kosa Kata. (2007). *Tim Penyusun Ensiklopedia Al-Qur'an* (3rd ed.). Lentera Hati.
- Habibie, I. A. dan Hairul, M. A. (2023). Mitologi Sedekah: Penerapan Semiotika Roland Barthes pada QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:271. *Jurnal Al-Qudwah*, 1(1), 30.
- Hamka. (1989). *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. Pustaka Nasional PTE LTD.
- Jamaludin, M. Aini, N. Millah, A. S. (2021). Mitologi dalam QS. Al-Kafirun Perspektif Semiotika Roland Barthes. *Jurnal Jalsah*, 1(1), 45-61.
- Kamus Bahasa Indonesia. (2008). *Tim Penyusun Kamus Pusat Bahasa* (4th ed.). Pusat Bahasa.
- Majah, I. (n.d.). *Sunan Ibnu Majah* (1st ed.). Dar Ihya' al-Kutub Al-Arabiyyah.
- Mandzur, I. (1960). *Lisan Al-Arab*. Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Maraghi, A. M. (1946). *Tafsir Al-Maraghi* (14th ed.). Musthafa Al-Halabi.

- Mulyaden, A. (2021). Kajian Semiotika Roland Barthes terhadap Simbol Perempuan dalam Al-Qur'an. *Jurnal Hanifiya*, 4(2), 139–154.
- Mulyazir dan Fadillah, M. (2023). Konsep Semiotika Roland Barthes dan Aplikasinya Terhadap Kajian Al-Qur'an. *Jurnal Al-Fathanah*, 3(1), 28–37.
- Qutb, S. (n.d.). *Tafsir fi Dzilal Al-Qur'an*, Terj. As'ad Yasin (7th ed.). Gema Insani.
- Shihab, M. . (2022). *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* (7th ed.). Lentera Hati.
- Taufiq, W. (2016). *Semiotika untuk Kajian Sastra dan Al-Qur'an*. Yrama Widya.
- Wijaya, R. (2021). Makna Syifa dalam Al-Qur'an (Analisis Semiotika Roland Barthes pada QS. al-Isra 82). *Jurnal Al-Adabiya*, 16(2), 185–196.