



Gender Equality in the Qur'an: A Thematic and Critical Interpretation of Women-Related Verses

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Abstract: Gender inequality in some Muslim societies is often legitimized by narrow interpretations of religious texts. This study investigates the concept of gender equality in the Qur'an through a thematic-critical analysis of verses concerning women. Employing a qualitative library research method, it integrates *tafsir maudhu'i* (thematic exegesis) with critical hermeneutics. Primary sources include the Qur'an and authentic hadiths, while secondary sources consist of classical and contemporary tafsir literature, along with feminist interpretations by scholars such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas. The findings indicate that the Qur'an affirms gender equality in terms of spiritual dignity, moral responsibility, and human potential. However, the historical development of tafsir has often been shaped by patriarchal contexts, leading to gender-biased interpretations. This study outlines a progression from literalist to more contextual hermeneutical approaches, highlighting the Qur'an's interpretive flexibility in addressing evolving social realities. The study concludes that recovering the Qur'an's original message of justice and equality necessitates a contextual and inclusive interpretive framework. Reaffirming the equal status of men and women as moral agents and servants of God, it contributes to contemporary discussions on gender justice in Islam.

Keywords: Qur'anic Interpretation; Gender; Equality; Women; Contemporary Islam

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1. Introduction

The discourse on gender within Islamic thought has garnered significant scholarly interest, particularly about how the Qur'an conceptualizes the role and status of women in both spiritual and social dimensions. In the face of rapid globalization and socio-cultural transformation, the interpretation of Qur'anic verses about gender has become increasingly critical.¹ This urgency stems not only from theological considerations but also from the broader implications of such interpretations for contemporary Muslim societies. Divergent exegetical perspectives have emerged: some emphasize role differentiation grounded in biological and traditional frameworks, while others advocate for gender equality across all spheres of life. These differing viewpoints have often led to socioreligious polarization, particularly in debates surrounding female leadership, reproductive autonomy, and women's participation in the public sphere.

Historically, Islam introduced a transformative paradigm of justice and human dignity that stood in stark contrast to pre-Islamic social hierarchies. The Qur'an emphasized moral worth based on piety (*taqwā*) rather than social class, race, or gender.² Central to this moral vision was the elevation of women's status through legal and spiritual recognition. Before Islam, women in many societies, including the Arab, Greek, and Roman civilizations, were systematically marginalized. In ancient Greece, for instance, women were often denied civil rights, confined to domestic spaces, and excluded from inheritance. Similarly, Roman women were subordinated to male authority and treated as property rather than individuals with legal or moral agency. These civilizations, despite their intellectual achievements, institutionalized the subjugation of women under patriarchal norms.³

Against this historical backdrop, the Qur'anic message offered a significant departure by affirming the spiritual equality of women and men and by instituting protections for women's rights. While several previous studies have explored gender in the Qur'an, many have done so through partial or isolated verse-by-verse analysis, often without sufficient engagement with the socio-historical context or a comprehensive thematic framework.⁴ Studies by scholars such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas have pioneered gender-conscious hermeneutics, yet a systematic and integrative approach that combines *tafsīr maudhū'ī* (thematic exegesis) with contextual analysis remains limited.⁵

This study seeks to address that gap by applying a thematic-critical approach that synthesizes relevant verses, situates them within their historical and ethical contexts, and examines their implications for contemporary gender discourse. By doing so, it aims to construct a holistic understanding of the Qur'an's vision of gender, one that emphasizes justice, dignity, and mutual responsibility. This method not only avoids fragmentary interpretations but also allows for a reexamination of how Islamic teachings can respond to modern challenges related to gender equity.

The urgency of this research is further underscored by ongoing tendencies to invoke religious texts, often selectively, to legitimize discriminatory practices against

¹ Wadud, A. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. (Oxford University Press, 2019) p. 45-67.

² QS. Al H{ujura>t/49: 13

³ Sayid Muhammad Husain Fadhillah, *Dunia Wanita Dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Lentera, 2000), p. 11.

⁴ Said Abdullah Seib Al-Hatimy, *Cintra Sebuah Identitas Wanita Dalam Perjalanan Sejarah* (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti 1994), h. 5., R. Magdalena, "Kedudukan Perempuan dalam perjalanan Sejarah," *Harkat an-Nisa: Jurnal Studi Gender dan Anak II*, No. 1, 2017, h. 13-36.

⁵ Noer Huda Noor, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an Tentang perempuan* (Makassar: Alauddin Press, 2011), h.1.

women. A critical and comprehensive investigation is therefore essential to clarify the Qur'an's actual stance on gender, particularly about justice, equality, and human dignity. Islam, as this study contends, decisively rejects the oppressive structures of pre-Islamic civilizations and offers a theological framework in which women are recognized as equal and active members of the moral and social community.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a library research design. The primary method employed is thematic exegesis (*tafsīr maudhū'ī*), combined with critical analysis of religious texts.⁶ This approach was selected because it enables a systematic and comprehensive examination of the theme of gender in the Qur'an. Primary sources include the Qur'an and authentic *ḥadīth* related to gender and women, while secondary sources consist of classical and contemporary exegetical works (*tafsīr*), scholarly journals, and academic books discussing gender in Islam. Data were collected through documentary analysis, which involved compiling relevant Qur'anic verses, identifying authentic *ḥadīth* about the research theme, examining *tafsīr* literature from various schools of thought and historical periods, and reviewing recent peer-reviewed academic publications on gender in Islam. Thematic exegesis was applied through a series of interpretive steps, including the classification of verses into subthemes, analysis of literal and contextual meanings, comparison of interpretations among various exegetes (*mufasssīrūn*), synthesis of recurring patterns and overarching ideas, and contextualization of the findings within contemporary socio-religious settings. To ensure the validity of the findings, the study employs source triangulation by comparing interpretations from multiple authoritative *tafsīr* works and peer-reviewed scholarly sources with established academic credibility.⁷

3. Results

3.1. The essence of gender equality

In the Big Indonesian Dictionary, the word gender is defined as sex.⁸ However, the concept of gender exhibits various nuances in the Qur'an. The Qur'an refers to men using the term *rajul*, while the term *dzakar* also denotes masculinity.⁹ For women, the Qur'an employs several terms, including *imra'ah*, *nisaa'*, *niswah*, and *untsaa*, with *untsaa* generally conveying the idea of femininity.¹⁰ The term gender itself originates from the Latin word *genus*, meaning "type" or "kind." Gender refers to the traits and behaviors associated with men and women that are shaped by social and cultural influences. It can be understood as the condition in which individuals, biologically born as male or female, are then assigned social characteristics of masculinity or femininity through values, systems, and symbolic representations within a particular

⁶ Shihab, M. Q. *Kaidah Tafsir: Syarat, Ketentuan, dan Aturan yang Patut Anda Ketahui dalam Memahami Ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an*. (Lentera Hati, 2019), p. 78-95.

⁷ Esack, F. *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*. (Newworld Publications, 2018), p. 134-156.

⁸ Kementrian Pendidikan dan Budaya, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Daring* <https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entry/gender>

⁹ Muh}ammad Fuad 'Abd al Baqi, *al Mu'jam al Mufah}ras li Alfaz al Qur'an al Karim* (Kairo: Darul Hadits: t.tp.), p. 302-303. Lihat: Sayyid Thanthawi, *Tafsir Al Wasith*, Juz X (Kairo: Darussa'adah, 1987), p. 272

¹⁰ Muh}ammad Fuad 'Abd al Baqi, *al Mu'jam al Mufah}ras li Alfaz} al Qur'an al Karim*, p. 699.

society. In essence, gender is the social construction of biological sex into roles and behaviors.¹¹

Gender pertains to the social relationships between men and women, boys and girls, and how these relationships are structured and interpreted. These roles are dynamic and evolve.¹² The concept of equality, often paired with gender as gender equality, refers to a state of being equal in terms of status, position, and rights. In Arabic, this is sometimes expressed as *al-musāwāh baina al-jinsain* (equality between the two sexes). Gender equality implies equal rights and responsibilities for men and women in all aspects of life. Despite significant progress in promoting gender equality, gender-based discrimination persists globally.¹³

Gender equality embodies the principle that all individuals should receive equal treatment and not face discrimination based on their gender identity. This principle is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations, which advocates for equality in both social and legal domains, including democratic participation, access to employment, and fair wages.¹⁴

3.2. The development of gender equality issues

The capitalist system is often viewed as an oppressive structure that perpetuates patriarchal culture for the benefit of one party, namely, men. The prevalence of workers, particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries, who were subjected to hard labor and low wages was highlighted by feminists and socialist figures, including Rosa Luxemburg. While the notion that capitalism serves as a support for patriarchal culture may appear axiomatic, this assumption was challenged by American female philosopher Ayn Rand.¹⁵

In practice, capitalism continues to exploit women as a means of asserting its hegemonic control over the world. In response, Western countries have developed metrics to assess the seriousness of each nation in promoting gender equality. Consequently, the discourse on gender equality continues to gain momentum. The West promotes the idea that if women assume roles identical to men in the workforce, the global GDP could increase by 28 trillion dollars by 2025. In this way, capitalism contributes to the erosion of traditional family roles.¹⁶

Gender equality, as it is widely understood today, emerged from the radical women's liberation movement. The push toward gender equality has become a global trend. This radical feminist movement began with the granting of extensive freedoms to women in the Western world. Feminists in these societies sought to legitimize their

¹¹ Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan, *Analisis Gender Dalam Pengelolaan Konflik Sumber Daya Hutan*. Wibesite Resmi.

https://elearning.menlhk.go.id/pluginfile.php/854/mod_resource/content/1/analisis%20gender/pengertian_gender.html

¹² Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak Republik Indonesia, *Gender*, <https://www.kemennppa.go.id/index.php/page/view/20>

¹³ Kementerian Pendidikan dan Budaya, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) Daring* [https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/tara%20\(1\)](https://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id/entri/tara%20(1))

¹⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights". *wwda.org*. United Nations. December 16, 1948.

¹⁵ Reynaldi Adi Surya, *Feminisme, Kesetaraan Gender, dan Kapitalisme di Mata Ayn Rand* - Suara Kebebasan (2022) <https://suarakebebasan.id/4295-2/>

¹⁶ Hamsina Halik, *Kesetaraan Gender, Kapitalisme Terus Mengeksploitasi Perempuan*. <https://www.mediasulsel.com/kesetaraan-gender-kapitalisme-terus-mengeksploitasi-perempuan/>. Lihat juga: Nurul Shalihin, Firdaus, "Transformasi Gender: Strategi Pembebasan Perempuan dari Jerat Pembangunan dan Kapitalisme." *SAWWA: Jurnal Studi Gender* 14, No 1 (2019): 109-140. Lihat juga: Andik Wahyun Muqoyyidin, "Wacana Kesetaraan Gender: Pemikiran Islam kontemporer tentang Gerakan Feminisme Islam," *Jurnal Al-ulum* 13, no. 2, 2013. p. 491-512.

perspectives by referencing religious texts such as the Bible, going so far as to replace the masculine term "God" with the feminine "Goddess."¹⁷

This trend extended beyond Christianity, as some Muslim women also began to promote gender equality by asserting that Islamic teachings are restrictive and oppressive toward women. Efforts to delegitimize the Qur'an emerged, with claims that the text is inherently gender-biased.¹⁸

However, the social roles assigned to women in Islam differ significantly from the conceptions upheld by Western feminist movements. The pioneers, advocates, and activists of the women's liberation movement demanded absolute equality with men in all aspects of life. Such demands, taken to an extreme, risk stripping women of their unique identity. Many women unknowingly face psychological and social dilemmas when taking on roles identical to men in public life, particularly when pursuing careers outside the home. One major consequence is the neglect of domestic responsibilities, which can adversely affect children and husbands, ultimately threatening the integrity of the family unit. If the family structure collapses, the broader social fabric of society becomes fragile, as the family is the foundational pillar of a nation.¹⁹

Disputes or misunderstandings regarding gender equality and justice would not arise if gender advocates were willing to examine Islam's primary reference, namely the Noble Qur'an (*Kitabullah al-Qur'an al-Karim*). Within it, the concept of gender relations is described as follows:

للرجال نصيب مما اكتسبوا وللنساء نصيب مما اكتسبن²⁰

Translation:

For men is a share of what they have earned, and for women is a share of what they have earned.

If the gender community can refine its intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence and understand the essence of divine guidance, then negative assumptions about Islam in the context of gender will naturally fade. Similarly, impulsive judgments driven by desires, such as envy toward the natural roles and functions of men and women, will vanish from the deepest recesses of the soul.²¹

The next step is to foster synergy between the two partners so that they may work together in a harmonious and efficient manner. In support of this commitment, Islam offers a solution, as Allah (SWT) says:

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ²²

Translation:

And the believing men and women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, establish prayer, give alms, and obey Allah and His Messenger. It is they upon whom Allah will bestow His mercy. Indeed, Allah is Almighty and All-Wise.

¹⁷ Adian Husaini, *Wajah Peradaban Barat: Dari Hegemoni Kristen ke Dominasi Sekuler Liberal*. (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2005), p. 16.

¹⁸ Adian Husaini, *Wajah Peradaban Barat: Dari Hegemoni Kristen ke Dominasi Sekuler Liberal*, p. 16-17.

¹⁹ Andi Bahri S, "Perempuan dalam Islam", *Jurnal Al-Maiyyah* 8 No. 2 Juli-Desember 2015, p. 179-199.

²⁰ AL-Quran al-Karim, Q.S. al-Nisa' /4: 32

²¹ Pristiwiyanto, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Perspektif Islam (Meretas Ketidakadilan Politik Terhadap Kemanusiaan Manusia)", *Jurnal Fikrop*. 4 No. 2 Januari 2011, p. 137-153.

²² AL-Qur'an al-Karim, Q.S. al-Taubah/9: 71

Regarding the essence of the values contained in the verse, it is evident that the existence of women is equal and equivalent to that of men in terms of brotherhood, compassion, and participation in social, economic, and political activities. However, women are not obligated to participate directly in warfare, which serves as both an expression of honor and a form of just treatment extended by Islamic teachings to women.²³ According to the Islamic conception, a healthy balance of justice lies in ensuring equality between rights and obligations for all individuals.²⁴

In the context of gender, it would be unjust to equate two inherently different entities in terms of rights and responsibilities. While both men and women are human beings, they differ in their essential nature; thus, treating women identically to men would constitute an unfair act and a violation of women's dignity. Justice, therefore, demands that women be accorded rights and responsibilities appropriate to their nature as women, rather than being measured against standards rooted in male attributes.²⁵

The history of Qur'anic exegesis reveals an evolving understanding of gender equality, which may be categorized into several historical phases. During the Classical Period (1st–5th century AH), Qur'anic interpretation tended to be literal and was heavily shaped by the prevailing Arab social context. Exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī emphasized role differentiation based on existing societal norms, though they recognized the spiritual equality of men and women.

The Medieval Period (6th–12th century AH) witnessed the rise of various schools of thought that influenced Qur'anic exegesis. Scholars such as al-Rāzī and al-Bayḍāwī developed more nuanced interpretations, though still largely confined within the intellectual frameworks of their time. The Modern Period (19th–20th century CE) marked the emergence of Islamic reform movements, led by figures such as Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā. These reformers introduced new hermeneutical approaches to gender-related verses, emphasizing the necessity of interpreting the Qur'an in light of contemporary realities and the evolving needs of the Muslim community. Finally, the Contemporary Period (21st century CE) is characterized by the significant contributions of Muslim women scholars to Qur'anic interpretation. Figures such as Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Riffat Hassan have developed Islamic feminist hermeneutics that highlight gender equality as an intrinsic value within the Qur'an.

4. Discussion

The previous explanation briefly illustrates how Islam places significant concern on the issue of gender equality. This is evident not only during the early development of Islam in the Arab world but also in the present day across the globe, where Islamic teachings uphold the dignity and honor of women, an undeniable reality. At the very least, the Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic teachings, presents numerous

²³ R. Ridha, *Aduhai Kaum Hawa Beginilah Seharusnya Wanita Bersikap*. Cet. I (Jakarta: Sanabil Pustaka 2006), p. 56.

²⁴ A.M. Al-Aqqad, *Filsafat Qur'an*. Cet. I (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1986), p. 5.

²⁵ Pristiwiyanto, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Perspektif Islam (Meretas Ketidakadilan Politik Terhadap Kemanusiaan Manusia)," *Jurnal Fikrop*. 4 No. 2 Januari 2011, p. 137-153.

verses addressing this matter. However, in certain contexts, some individuals may perceive these verses as giving an impression of inequality.²⁶

History records many instances that reflect the voices and actions of Muslim women in the past. Their demands were not driven by sexist motives or mere personal gratification, but rather by the pursuit of equal opportunities and the elevation of a Muslim woman's status. When they came to the Messenger of Allah and asked, "O Messenger of Allah, why are only men mentioned in the Qur'an while we are not?" Allah then revealed Surah al-Ahzab (33):35, a verse that affirms men and women have equal potential to attain nobility in the sight of God.²⁷

Islam is a divine teaching that brings enlightenment to differences of opinion on matters related to human life, including differing interpretations of texts that may appear contradictory, as illustrated above. Through the guidance of the Qur'an and Hadith, Islam provides a comprehensive reference for navigating life's complexities, including the proper understanding of equality between men and women.²⁸ Based on the Islamic paradigm, several fundamental principles of gender equality can be identified in the Qur'an:

4.1. Both are servants of Allah

Allah says:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ²⁹

Translation:

I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.

Certainly, this verse presents a general statement regarding the obligation placed upon every individual, whether human or jinn. There is no distinction between men and women in this regard, and it is universally acknowledged that the worship of God is a right afforded to every individual. This means that Allah commands them to worship Him not because He needs their worship, but as an expression of their servitude.³⁰

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭalḥah narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās (may Allah be pleased with him) that this verse signifies a willing acknowledgment of servitude. Ibn Jarīr held the opinion that the verse refers to the act of recognizing Allah's divinity. The act of worship should not be restricted—neither monopolized by men nor designated exclusively for women. Worship is a fundamental right and responsibility. There is no dichotomy in one's opportunity to attain closeness to God, as this is a right and an obligation that applies equally to all, accompanied by the freedom to worship and obey.

²⁶ The verses that are commonly used as discriminatory texts such as ar-rijalu qowwamuna (QS al Nisa'/4: 34) and waqorna fi buyutikunna (QS. al-Ahzab/33: 33), are also included in the Hadith such as "there will be no success, a nation or a society that leaves its affairs to women".

²⁷ Abu al Hasan ‘Ali bin Ahmad bin Muhammad bin ‘Ali al Naisaburi, *Asbab Nuzul al Qur'an* (Damam: Dar al Islah}, 1992), p. 365.

²⁸ Hasnani Siri, "Gender dalam Prespektif Islam," *Jurnal Al-Maiyyah* 7, No. 2 Juli-Desember 2014., p. 232-251

²⁹ Al-Qur'an al-Karim, Q.S. al-Dzariyat/51: 56

³⁰ Abu al Fida 'Isma'il bin Umar bin Katsir, *Tafsir al Qur'an al-Adzim*, Juz 7 (t.t: Dar Tayyibah, 1999), p. 245.

4.2. Both are entrusted with the task of being Allah's vicegerents on Earth

As Allah says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَكُمْ خَلَيفَةَ الْأَرْضِ وَرَفَعَ بَعْضَكُمْ فَوْقَ بَعْضٍ لِّيَبْلُوكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ سَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ وَإِنَّهُ لَعَزِيزٌ رَّحِيمٌ³¹

Translation:

And it is He who has made you caliphs on earth, and He has raised some of you above others, to test you for the gift He has given you. Indeed, your Lord is very quick to punish, and indeed, He is Forgiving, Most Merciful.

In another verse it is also explained:

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ³²

Translation:

And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to make a caliph on earth." They said, "Do you want to make the one who destroys and sheds blood there, while we praise You and sanctify Your name?" He said, "Truly, I know what you do not know.

This group of verses begins with Allah's declaration to the angels regarding His intention to create human beings on Earth. The announcement is significant because the angels will be entrusted with various responsibilities concerning humankind: some will record human deeds, others will protect them, guide them, and so forth. This revelation, when later made known to humans, will lead them to express gratitude to Allah for His grace, summarized in His dialogue with the angels: "Indeed, I will place a vicegerent on Earth," said Allah.³³

The concept of *khalifah* (vicegerency) is not limited to the idea of leadership in the sense of domination or control; rather, it refers to stewardship, guidance, and responsibility for sustaining and improving life on Earth. This role is not restricted by gender; it is a trust from God bestowed upon humanity as a whole.³⁴ In Islamic discourse, the concept of leadership has often been associated with men. However, leadership is not an exclusively male attribute. In the dynamics of social life, Islam allows for the possibility of women assuming leadership roles, as women may possess leadership competencies comparable to men.³⁵

Nevertheless, the issue of women's leadership remains a subject of scholarly debate in Islam. Some *ulama'* accept it, while others reject it, often citing Surah al-Nisā' [4]:34 as justification. However, this perspective should not be interpreted in isolation. It must be understood in connection with the preceding verse, which prohibits envy or wishful thinking regarding the specific advantages granted by Allah

³¹ Al-Qur'an al-Karim, Q.S. al-An'am/6/165

³² Al-Qur'an al-Karim, Q.S. al-Baqarah/2: 30

³³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah (Pesan, Kesan, Keseraian al-Qur'an)*, Vol. I (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), p. 140-141.

³⁴ Kurniawan, K., Putra, D. N., Zikri, A., & AH, N. M. (2020). Konsep kepemimpinan dalam islam. PRODU: Prokurasi Edukasi Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.15548/p-prokurasi.v2i1.2244>

³⁵ Mhd. Abrar, "Kepemimpinan Wanita Perspektif Hukum Islam" *Teraju: Jurnal Syariah dan Hukum* 2, No. 1 Maret 2020, p. 53-63.

to each individual, male or female. The verse ultimately addresses the distinct functions and obligations assigned to each gender in life.³⁶

4.3. Both men and women equally accepted the primordial covenant

As affirmed in the Qur'an (Surah al-A'raf [7]:172), Allah says:

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ³⁷

Translation:

And [remember] when your Lord brought forth from the loins (*sub*) of the children of Adam their descendants, and made them testify regarding themselves, [saying], “Am I not your Lord?” They said, “Yes, we testify.” This, lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, “Indeed, we were unaware of this.”

The previous verse (Surah al-A'raf [7]:172) discusses the story of Prophet Moses and the Children of Israel by reminding them of a special covenant. In the following verse, Allah refers to a universal covenant, not only for the Children of Israel but for all of humanity, which is the covenant of servitude to Him. Allah says: “And [remember] when your Lord brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their descendants...” He made them bear witness to themselves regarding His divinity, providing signs through His creation. These natural signs were intended so that, through reason and conscience, human beings might inherently recognize and affirm the oneness of God.³⁸

The origin of humankind in this context is not limited to men alone or women alone. Rather, all human beings, regardless of gender, testified to the divine reality and acknowledged the knowledge and lordship of Allah.³⁹

4.4. Man (Adam) and woman (Hawwa) are both active participants in the events of the cosmic drama

As explained in several verses, such as Surah al-Baqarah [2]:35 and Surah al-A'raf [7]:20–23, Allah says:

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ⁴⁰

Translation:

We said, "O Adam, dwell thou and thy wife in Paradise, and eat of the delicacies therein as thou pleasest, and approach not this tree, that thou mayest be of the wrongdoers!

³⁶ Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, *Tafsir Ringkas*, Jilid 1 (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, 2015), p. 231.

³⁷ Al-Qur'an al-Karim, Q.S. Al-A'raf: 7: 172

³⁸ Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an, *Tafsir Ringkas*, Jilid 1, p. 461.

³⁹ Abu al Qasim Mahmud bin Amr bin Ahmad al Zamakhsyari, *Al Kasysyaf 'An Haqaiq Gawamid al Tanzil*, Juz 2, (Beirut: Dar al Kitab al 'Arabi, 1407 H), p. 176.

⁴⁰ Al-Qur'an al-Karin, Q.S. al-Baqarah/2: 35

Adam and Hawwa were the first human beings to engage in an extended conversation with Satan, which ultimately led both of them to commit a mistake. The error was not in merely approaching the forbidden tree, but in disobeying the command that had previously been given to them. In fact, within most theological traditions, both Islamic and non-Islamic, it is widely accepted that Adam was the first human to be given a companion to alleviate the loneliness of solitude, a companion created from his rib. It may be said that a man cannot live normally without being allowed to form relationships, even if only to have someone to converse with. This implies that in the pursuit of meaningful goals, the role of women must not be overlooked.

4.5. Both possess the same potential for achievement

The achievements of both women and men are inevitable, whether they result from personal efforts, such as through a career, or from entitlements not directly pursued, such as dowries, grants, and inheritance. The Qur'an emphasizes that actions, whether carried out or attempted, by both men and women are equally acknowledged and rewarded. As stated in Surah Āli 'Imrān (3):195, Allah (SWT) says:

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّمَّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ ۖ بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ ۗ فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا
مِّن دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُودُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقُتِلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَا أَكْفِرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَا دَخَلَتْ جَهَنَّمَ جَنَّتِ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ
عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ⁴¹

Translation:

So their Lord granted their supplication (saying), "Surely I do not waste the deeds of those who do good among you, whether male or female, (for) Some of you are the offspring of others. So those who emigrate, those who are expelled from their homes, those who are harmed in My cause, those who fight and those who are killed, surely I will expiate their wrongs and surely I will admit them into Paradise where rivers flow beneath, as a reward from Allah. And with Allah is a good reward.

This is also emphasized in Surah An-Nisā' (4):124, where Allah (SWT) states regarding this matter:

وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِنَ الصَّالِحَاتِ مِمَّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ نَبِيًّا⁴²

Translation:

And whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, and believes, they will enter Paradise, and they will not be wronged in the least.

It is also mentioned that Allah says in QS Gafir/40: 40

مَنْ عَمِلَ سَيِّئَةً فَلَا يُجْزَىٰ إِلَّا مِثْلَهَا ۖ وَمَنْ عَمِلَ صَالِحًا مِّمَّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ يُرْرُونَ
فِيهَا بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ⁴³

⁴¹ Al-Qur'an al-Karim, Q.S. Āli 'Imrān/3: 195

⁴² Al-Qur'an al-Karim, Q.S. al-Nisā'/4: 124

⁴³ Al-Qur'an al-Karim, Q.S. Gafir/40: 40

Translation:

Whoever does evil will not be rewarded except in proportion to that evil. Whoever does good, whether male or female, while he is a believer, will enter Paradise. They will be given sustenance therein without reckoning.

The above verses essentially provide women with the opportunity to actualize themselves by demonstrating their respective competencies. In Islam, women are required to seek knowledge just as men are. Islam has equated women and men in matters of spirituality and religious obligations, without any distinction in terms of access to knowledge and education.⁴⁴

Nasaruddin Umar states that Islam affirms that individual achievement, whether in the spiritual domain or professional career, should not be monopolized by one gender. Both men and women are entitled to equal opportunities to attain optimal achievement.⁴⁵

5. Conclusion

Based on a thematic-critical analysis of Qur'anic verses related to gender, it can be concluded that Islam advocates a comprehensive and balanced concept of gender equality. This notion is rooted in fundamental principles: equality in creation, intrinsic human dignity, and shared moral responsibility. The evolution of interpretations regarding gender equality within Islamic thought reveals a significant progression, from highly contextual understandings in the classical period to more universal and inclusive perspectives in the contemporary era. This demonstrates the inherent flexibility of Qur'anic texts to be interpreted in light of changing contexts, while still maintaining their core theological and ethical foundations. Across the five principal dimensions of equality examined, the Qur'an consistently affirms that men and women possess equal status as servants of God, vicegerents on earth, recipients of the primordial covenant, bearers of equal spiritual potential, and achievers of comparable moral merit. Existing differences are primarily functional and contextual, rather than hierarchical or discriminatory.

The contemporary relevance of these findings is particularly significant in addressing current gender-related challenges. A proper understanding of gender equality within the Islamic framework can serve as a foundation for establishing a just and equitable society, one in which the potential of every individual is fully realized, free from gender-based discrimination. This study recommends the development of more inclusive and context-sensitive exegetical methodologies for interpreting gender-related Qur'anic verses. It also underscores the importance of fostering deeper engagement between traditional scholars and contemporary Muslim intellectuals to produce interpretations that are both theologically sound and responsive to the needs of the modern age.

⁴⁴ M. Athiyah al-Abrasyi, *Dasar-Dasar Pokok Pendidikan Islam*, Terj. P. Bustami A Gani dan Bohar Bahry (Jakarta : Bulan Bintang, 1974), p. 122.

⁴⁵ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Perspektif al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Dian Rakyat, 2010), p. 265.

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