

Quraish Shihab's Hermeneutics in Examining Gender Verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah: Efforts to Find Egalitarian Values in the Qur'an

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Abstract

The interpretation of Quranic verses concerning gender relations has been a broad topic in Islamic tradition. Many classical interpretations place women in a subordinate position, which in the current context can be considered gender bias. This study aims to analyze the hermeneutical method used by M. Quraish Shihab to explain gender-related verses in Tafsir al-Misbah. The method used is qualitative with a literature study approach. The results show that Quraish Shihab applies a hermeneutical approach that considers the social context, historical background, and linguistic meaning in interpreting the verses. Thus, he offers a gender-just perspective on current developments. Verses such as QS. al-Nisa': 34, QS. al-Baqarah: 228, and QS. Al-Baqarah: 282 conservation does not emphasize male dominance but regulates social relations responsive to societal conditions. This interpretation also emphasizes that justice in Islam does not necessarily mean absolute equality but fairness in the rights, responsibilities, and respect for each individual's potential. This research recommends the need for more critical studies of classical interpretations to produce more inclusive and gender-just interpretations.

Keywords: *Hermeneutics, Gender, Quraish Shihab, Tafsir al-Misbah, Islamic Justice.*

Abstrak

Penafsiran ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an mengenai hubungan gender telah menjadi topik yang luas dalam tradisi keislaman. Banyak tafsir klasik menempatkan perempuan pada posisi yang lebih rendah, yang dalam konteks saat ini bisa dianggap sebagai bias gender. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis metode hermeneutika yang dipakai oleh M. Quraish Shihab dalam menjelaskan ayat-ayat yang berkaitan dengan gender dalam Tafsir al-Misbah. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi pustaka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Quraish Shihab menerapkan pendekatan hermeneutika yang mempertimbangkan konteks sosial, latar belakang sejarah, dan makna bahasa dalam penafsiran ayat-ayat tersebut. Dengan demikian, beliau menawarkan perspektif yang adil gender dan sesuai dengan perkembangan zaman. Ayat-ayat seperti QS. al-Nisa': 34, QS. al-Baqarah: 228, dan QS. al-Baqarah: 282 ditafsirkan bukan untuk menegaskan dominasi laki-laki, melainkan sebagai pengaturan hubungan sosial yang responsif terhadap kondisi masyarakat. Tafsir ini juga menegaskan bahwa keadilan dalam Islam tidak selalu berarti kesetaraan mutlak, tetapi kesetaraan dalam hak, tanggung jawab, dan

penghargaan terhadap potensi masing-masing individu. Rekomendasi dari penelitian ini adalah perlunya lebih banyak kajian kritis terhadap tafsir klasik agar dapat menghasilkan interpretasi yang lebih inklusif dan adil gender.

Kata Kunci: Hermeneutika, Gender, Quraish Shihab, Tafsir al-Misbah, Keadilan Islam

A. Introduction

Long before Islam was revealed, women experienced various forms of discriminatory acts. For example, in ancient Mesopotamia, a rule called the Code of Hammurabi contained restrictions on women. Men had unlimited authority, and a woman who failed to meet societal expectations was threatened with being thrown into the water.¹ When Islam was revealed in the Arabian land, the society there was deeply ingrained with a patriarchal culture², known in history books as the Jahiliyyah period, which was characterized by moral degradation, including the treatment of women, such as burying newborn baby girls alive, selling the honor of enslaved women, and many more.³ Through Prophet Muhammad, Islam sought to spread and practice the values of the Qur'an, one of which was to free humans from all forms of discrimination, regardless of physical differences, lineage, or anything else.⁴

However, history has also shown us that after the era of the Prophet and his companions passed, male dominance over women reappeared in various generations. Women were seen as incapable of leadership; their roles were limited to the home, subject to the authority of men. There was even an argument that considered it would lead to destruction if women became leaders of a country.⁵ However, Islam places women in a position equal to men by granting civil rights and obliging women to study and enrich themselves with knowledge, as it is a necessity for women.⁶

Nowdays, women have proven their ability to work in publik sphere and occupy positions that were previously dominated by men, such as Megawati Soekarno Putri (Indonesia's first and only female president), Halimah binti Yacoob (former president of Singapore), and Hillary Clinton (who served as Secretary of State, Senator, Secretary of

¹ Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin et al., *Rekonstruksi Metodologis Wacana Kesetaraan Dalam Islam* (Pustaka Pelajar, 2002). 108-110

² Asma Barlas, *Believing Woman in Islam Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of The Qur'an* (University of Texas Press, 2019). 10

³ Faisal Ismail, *Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Islam Periode Klasik (Abad VII-XIII M)* (IRCiSoD, 2017). 52-53

⁴ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Jender Perspektif Al-Qur'an*, II (Paramadina, 2001). 13

⁵ Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, Pen. Farid Wajidi Dan Cici Farkhana, *Hak-Hak Perempuan Dalam Islam* (Pustaka Pelajar, 2000). 63

⁶ M. Quraish Shihab, *Islam Yang Saya Pahami, Keragaman Itu Rahmat* (Lentera Hati, 2017). 123

State, and First Lady of the United States⁷). Additionally, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) indicates that formal workers in 2024 will account for 36.32% of the total labour.⁸

From the brief explanation above, a new understanding of Qur'anic texts is undoubtedly needed to accommodate the developments of this era, where many women now pursue careers, unlike in the past. However, they often face a double burden, pressured to be professional in the workplace and complete all household chores. Strangely, however, men do not experience this double burden. This can be indicated by the fact that society does not oblige men to do domestic work⁹.

Professor Quraish Shihab's thought was chosen as the primary focus of this research for several reasons. Firstly, through his *tafsir* (exegesis), he provides textual interpretations, connects them with classical exegetes, and integrates them with current societal realities, making his interpretations more moderate and accommodating. Secondly, through his works such as *Perempuan*¹⁰, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an*¹¹, *Islam yang Saya Pahami*¹², and *Islam yang Disalahpahami*¹³, he has offered many new perspectives on viewing women that undoubtedly differ from what society commonly knows and believes.

Studies discussing Quraish Shihab's thoughts on Gender already exist. Still, this paper delves deeper into the hermeneutical method he used to examine gender-nuanced verses to gain a more profound understanding of gender justice. Thus, several Qur'anic verses often used as arguments against gender justice are collected to prove that the Qur'an fundamentally desires justice between men and women.

⁷ Tetty Yukesti, *51 Perempuan Pencerah Dunia* (PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2015). 34

⁸ Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, "Persentase Tenaga Kerja Formal Menurut Jenis Kelamin - Tabel Statistik," accessed July 23, 2025, <https://www.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/MTE3MCMY/persentase-tenaga-kerja-formal-menurut-jenis-kelamin.html>.

⁹ Anita Rahmawati, "Harmoni Dalam Keluarga Perempuan Karir: Upaya Mewujudkan Kesetaraan Dan Keadilan Gender Dalam Keluarga," *Palastren : Jurnal Studi Gender* 8, no. 1 (2015), <https://journal.iainkudus.ac.id/index.php/Palastren/article/view/932>.

¹⁰ M. Quraish Shihab, *Perempuan : Dari Cinta Sampai Seks ; Dari Nikah Mut'ah Sampai Nikah Sunnah ; Dari Bias Lama Sampai Bias Baru* (Lentera Hati, 2018).

¹¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an Tafsir Maudhu'i Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umar* (Mizan, 1996).

¹² Shihab, *Islam Yang Saya Pahami, Keragaman Itu Rahmat*.

¹³ M. Quraish Shihab, *Islam Yang Disalahpahami: Menepis Prasangka, Mengikis Kekeliruan* (Lentera Hati, 2018).

B. Research Method

This research on Quraish Shihab's Hermeneutics in Explaining Gender Verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah is classified as library research. The method used in this research is the Hermeneutic Method, which means to elaborate, or in everyday language, to interpret. In its position as a way to interpret, hermeneutics is used to unravel the meanings of holy scriptures, which can be divided into two ways. First is the external stage, which discusses the substance of a word or sentence. Second is the internal stage, which aims to find implicit messages within the holy book (in this case, the Qur'an).¹⁴

For example, in interpreting Q.S al-Nisa (4): 34, the word *qawwamun* is examined linguistically, starting from the root word, the possible textual meanings intended, such as leader or person in charge, or caretaker. This is used to give an initial meaning to the word by relying on a grammatical and semantic approach. However, interpretation does not stop here. In the 'inner stage,' efforts are made to understand the verse contextually, considering factors such as societal realities, family conditions, the functions of bodily anatomy, human psychology, and many others.¹⁵ Thus, using these two stages enables the interpretation of the Qur'an to not only focus on textual meaning but also relate to human needs and universal values of justice.

This method was introduced as one that gives rise to various interpretations, commonly called text polysemy. Initially, when interpreting, one would try to find the actual meaning intended by the author of the text (in this case, Allah ﷻ), which is called text monosemy. However, over time, a philosopher named Gadamer offered a new perspective called text polysemy, which allows for various interpretations due to the interpreter's subjectivity, including their level of knowledge, life journey, and many more.¹⁶

The flow of this method is to refer to the text, then provide a new interpretation (this interpretation may emerge to give a new meaning relevant to the current era). Thus, interpretation is an ongoing process.¹⁷ This research is classified as qualitative research. Data was obtained by collecting pertinent documents of written texts directly related to the theme under discussion¹⁸, in this case, Tafsir Al-Misbah by Quraish Shihab and his other works.

¹⁴ Akhyar Yusuf Lubis, *Filsafat Ilmu Klasik Hingga Kontemporer* (Rajawali Press, 2022). 181-182

¹⁵ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 2 (Lentera Hati, 2002). 424-426

¹⁶ Lubis, *Filsafat Ilmu Klasik Hingga Kontemporer*. 199

¹⁷ Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy, *Islamic Studies Pendekatan Dan Metode* (Insan Madani, 2011). 189-190

¹⁸ A. Muri Yusuf, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif & Penelitian Gabungan* (Kencana, 2017). 391

C. Results and Discussion

Brief Biography of M. Quraish Shihab and Tafsir Al-Misbah

Muhammad Quraish Shihab, the author of Tafsir Al-Misbah, was born on February 16, 1944, in Sidenreng Rappang, South Sulawesi. His father, Abdurrahman Shihab, was a Professor of Tafsir and once served as the rector of the Institut Agama Islam Negeri Alauddin (now UIN Alauddin). His father was also one of the founders of the Universitas Muslim Indonesia in Makassar. He departed for Egypt in 1958 to study at Al-Azhar University, starting his education at the 2nd level of Tsanawiyah until 1982, when he completed his education up to the doctoral level. He was the first person in Asia to obtain a doctoral degree in Qur'anic Studies at Al-Azhar University, Egypt.¹⁹

M. Quraish Shihab was moved to compile Tafsir al-Misbah due to several concerns he expressed in the foreword of his tafsir, including the limited time to study the entire content of the Qur'an. He felt this when teaching tafsir in university, where, within approximately 6 months, only a dozen verses had been thoroughly studied, leading to students having difficulty understanding the values of the Qur'an due to time constraints.²⁰

His following reason was that many Muslims read various specific surahs in the Qur'an, such as Surah Yasin and Al-Waqi'ah, but found it difficult and complicated to understand what they were reading. He also believed that the arrangement of verses in the Qur'an still faced various obstacles because many scholars studying Islam compared it to scientific works. However, according to him, the arrangement of the parts of the Qur'an has deeper learning aspects.²¹

In terms of writing method, Tafsir al-Misbah uses the *tartib mushafi method*, which means interpreting verses according to the sequence in the Qur'an, starting from Al-Fatiha, consecutively to Al-Nas.²² In terms of interpretation method, he uses the *Tahlili* method, which is a method of interpreting the Qur'an by elaborating on its meaning according to the sequence of the Qur'anic mushaf and including the interpreter's analysis. This method is the oldest among other methods.²³

¹⁹ Saifuddin Herlamban Munthe, *Studi Tokoh Tafsir Dari Klasik Hingga Kontemporer* (Pontianak Press, 2018). 112-113

²⁰ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1 (Lentera Hati, 2005). IX

²¹ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1. X

²² Zaenal Arifin, "Karakteristik Tafsir Al-Misbah," *Al-Ifkar: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 13, no. 1 (2020), <http://ejournal.kopertais4.or.id/mataraman/index.php/ifkar/article/view/4063>. 14

²³ Muhammad Amin Suma, *Ulumul Qur'an* (Rajawali Press, 2013). 379

In terms of approach, Tafsir al-Misbah uses two methods. The first is called *tafsir bil Ma'tsur*, which is a method of interpretation done by interpreting the Qur'an with the Qur'an, or with Hadith/Sunnah of the Prophet, then the opinions of the companions, and then the opinions of the tabi'in (some scholars include the tabi'in in this definition).²⁴ The second approach is *tafsir bil Ra'yi*, a process of interpretation based on the rational *ijtihad* of an interpreter, using a linguistic approach from various angles, including dialects, pronunciations, poetry, and many more.²⁵

Gender Verses in Tafsir Al-Misbah

In examining gender versus, there will undoubtedly be pros and cons, especially from those who still consider male superiority over women legitimate, as men are believed to have advantages over women. Names like Az-Zamakhsyari, Fakhrudin Razi, Muhammad Thahir bin Asyur, Muhammad Husain ath-Thabatha'bi, and the imams of the four madhabs are scholars who believe that men have indeed been favored by Allah in several aspects, making them worthy of a higher position than women.²⁶

Classical Islamic literature, when viewed from a modern perspective, certainly contains many things that can be categorized as gender-biased. However, these scholars' opinions should not be said to be wrong because of the differences in male-female relationships in different eras. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to a society's social conditions to understand the foundations of the relationships between men and women.²⁷ For this reason, we will focus on the verses often used as *hujjah* (arguments) to legitimize male dominance over women.

Are Men the Leaders of Women? Interpretation of Q.S. Al-Nisa (4); 34

This verse is placed first because it is the most frequently used argument for placing women under the authority of men; this perspective is supported by traditional interpreters such as Ibn Katsir, Imam at-Thabari, Wahbah Az-Zuhaili, az-Zamakhsyari, Fakruddin ar-Razi, Muhammad Abduh, and his student Muhammad Rasyid Ridha, and many others. The verse reads as follows:

²⁴ Suma, *Ulumul Qur'an*. 333

²⁵ Suma, *Ulumul Qur'an*. 351

²⁶ Husein Muhammad, *Fiqih Perempuan Refleksi Kiai Atas Tafsir Wacana Agama Dan Gender* (IRCiSoD, 2019). 52-57

²⁷ Dzuhayatin et al., *Rekonstruksi Metodologis Wacana Kesetaraan Dalam Islam*. 86-87

لرِّجَالٌ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ
 فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَنِتَاتٌ حَفِظَتْ لِلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ
 وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
 كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا

*"Men are qawwamun of women, because Allah has given some of them more (strength) than others, and because they support them with their means. Therefore, righteous women are devoutly obedient and guard in (the husband's) absence, which Allah would have them guard. As for those women whose disobedience you fear, admonish them, refuse to share their beds, and (finally) strike them (lightly). But if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance). Surely, Allah is Most High, Most Great."*²⁸

When explaining the meaning of this verse, Quraish Shihab's approach is somewhat similar to that of earlier scholars; he begins by discussing the word الرجال (*ar-rijal*), which is translated as men. Initially, he considered that the men referred to here were husbands, based on the consideration of the subsequent part of the verse, which discusses providing for maintenance, which is due to the marital bond. However, he later changed his opinion after reading the work of Muhammad Thahir bin Asyur, who explained in his work that the word *ar-rijal* has never been used in Arabic or the Qur'an as a term to refer to husbands. Therefore, the word *ar-rijal* indeed relates to men.²⁹

Continuing to the term often used to legitimize male authority over women, namely قوامون (*qawwamun*), interpreters generally define *qawwam* as "leader, manager, educator, and so on". This is due to the advantages men possess in reasoning and capability.³⁰ For example, in the tafsir of Ibn Katsir, he explains that men are superior because they lead, act as decision-makers for their wives, and educate women when they deviate from the right path. Furthermore, women are prohibited from leadership because of a prophetic hadith stating that female leadership cannot bring good fortune³¹.

However, it is a mistake to say that the superiority of men over women is considered absolute. After all, it comes from God, because in this day and age, not all of these qualities are present in men; some women have capacities equal to men, which is an undeniable fact.³²

²⁸ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 2. 422

²⁹ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 2. 424

³⁰ Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan Refleksi Kiai Atas Tafsir Wacana Agama Dan Gender*. 70

³¹ Tim Ahli Tafsir, *Shahih Tafsir Ibnu Katsir Pen. Abu Ihsan al-Atsari*, vol. 2 (Pustaka Ibnu Katsir, 2006). 501

³² Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan Refleksi Kiai Atas Tafsir Wacana Agama Dan Gender*. 71

In explaining this verse, he states that the term comes from قام (*qama*), which means to do something completely, with all conditions and procedures fulfilled. قائم (*qa'im*) refers to the doer, then "qawwam" if the act is done continuously, it becomes "qawwamun" to denote the plural of the act and becomes a continuation of the previous word, namely الرجال (*ar-rijal*). However, according to him, translating the word "qawwamun" as leader cannot fully explain all the messages it contains, although one of its meanings is indeed leader. But other meanings seem hidden, such as fulfilling needs, providing attention, protecting, and providing guidance.³³

Allah has appointed men as leaders in a family because every level in society requires a leader, including the family.³⁴ This is based on two reasons. First, according to Quraish Shihab, Allah has given both unique qualities. The unique qualities in men support the role of a leader in the family³⁵. In contrast, women's distinctive qualities predominantly support their role in providing a sense of peace and tranquility and assisting them in caring for their children. Second, the wording of the verse explains a condition that has existed since the past and continues to this day, where men bear the responsibility of supporting women.³⁶

In another work, he further explains that if a husband cannot fulfill these two reasons, the wife may take over as the leader in the household. If one of the conditions is still met, then a woman does not yet have the legitimacy to become a leader.³⁷ However, he also reminds us that even though a man is a leader, he is not free to treat his partner as he pleases and must prioritize the concept of *shura* (consultation) in his family.³⁸

This indeed has differing opinions among scholars and academics, but fundamentally, they all desire to create a harmonious condition in the husband-wife relationship. For example, Dr. YUSDANI, a lecturer at the Faculty of Islamic Religious Sciences, Universitas Islam Indonesia, offers a concept of leadership called "Collective Leadership," which is a concept where both husband and wife are positioned as leaders in their household.³⁹ Then there is also K.H. Husein Muhammad, who holds the view that male leadership is not absolute, and verse 34 of Surah al-Nisa, according to him, is only

³³ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 2. 424-425

³⁴ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 2. 425

³⁵ Shihab, *Perempuan : Dari Cinta Sampai Seks ; Dari Nikah Mut'ah Sampai Nikah Sunnah ; Dari Bias Lama Sampai Bias Baru*. 341

³⁶ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 2. 425-428

³⁷ Shihab, *Perempuan : Dari Cinta Sampai Seks ; Dari Nikah Mut'ah Sampai Nikah Sunnah ; Dari Bias Lama Sampai Bias Baru*. 341-342

³⁸ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 2. 429

³⁹ YUSDANI, *Fikih Keluarga Era Milenial: Menuju Fikih Keluarga Berkeadaban* (Pustaka Satu, 2020). 203

information about the social reality that existed when the verse was revealed, where at that time, men indeed had advantages in many aspects that women did not possess, and providing for maintenance was the man's duty at that time,⁴⁰ so the verse, according to him, is not a command.⁴¹

Are Women inferior to Men? Interpretation of Qs. Al-Baqarah (2); 228

The next verse that is often used as an argument is a part of this surah, which reads:

.. وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرِدَّهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِنَّ
بِأَلْمَعْرُوفِ وَاللَّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

“And women have rights equal to their obligations according to what is reasonable. However, husbands have one degree (level) above their wives. Allah is Almighty and Wise.”⁴²

Scholar Ibn Katsir explains in his tafsir that men and women have rights that apply to them, and each is required to fulfill their partner with kindness. However, men are still considered superior to women in terms of physique, behavior, and position because men provide for maintenance. It is even mentioned that men have advantages both in this life and the afterlife.⁴³

When explaining this verse, Quraish Shihab states that it is one form of Islam's recognition of women's rights and prioritizes their rights over their obligations because, in the Mecca phase, most women did not have a place in society, except for noble women who had influential relatives in Mecca. However, he reaffirms that the rights and obligations of men over women and women over men are balanced, not identical.⁴⁴

Therefore, mutual participation between husband and wife is needed in the division of labor between domestic and public spheres, where this division is not rigid; a husband can do household chores and a wife can act as a breadwinner. So, each can position themselves according to their circumstances, expertise, and abilities.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Husein Muhammad, *Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan* (IRCiSoD, 2021). 107-108

⁴¹ Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan Refleksi Kiai Atas Tafsir Wacana Agama Dan Gender*. 73

⁴² Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1. 486

⁴³ Tim Ahli Tafsir, *Shahih Tafsir Ibnu Katsir Pen. Abu Ihsan al-Atsari*, vol. 1 (Pustaka Ibnu Katsir, 2006). 745-747

⁴⁴ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1. 490-491

⁴⁵ Yusdani, *Fikih Keluarga Era Milenial: Menuju Fikih Keluarga Berkeadaban*. 204-205

Moving on to the last part of the verse, which states that men have a higher degree than women, this verse is often misunderstood to mean that men are indeed leaders over their wives because of their degree.⁴⁶ However, the degree meant here is not based on gender differences. Instead, a degree can be obtained if a husband treats his wife well, honors her, helps her, and performs various other forms of goodness.⁴⁷ He quoted Ibn Jarir's opinion, which stated that :

*"The content of the above verse is a command to the husband to treat his wife with praiseworthy qualities so that the husband obtains the intended degree."*⁴⁸

Are Two Women Equal to One Man? Interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 282

وَأَسْتَشْهِدُوا شَهِيدَيْنِ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُونَا رَجُلَيْنِ فَرَجُلٌ وَامْرَأَتَانِ مِمَّن تَرْضَوْنَ
مِنَ الشُّهَدَاءِ أَنْ تَضِلَّ إِحْدَاهُمَا فَتُذَكِّرَ إِحْدَاهُمَا الْأُخْرَى...

*"And call to witness two witnesses from among your men. If there are not two men, then one man and two women from among those you approve as witnesses, so that if one of them forgets, the other may remind her."*⁴⁹

In Ibn Katsir's tafsir, it is explained that this is one of the signs that women are considered to have less intellect than men. Therefore, in such testimony, two women are equated with one man, and this only applies to matters related to property, not including testimony about criminal acts, divorce, and related issues.⁵⁰

Quraish Shihab explains that witnesses are people who are known for their honesty and have repeatedly been appointed as witnesses so as not to cause apprehension. And no less importantly, the witnesses are chosen based on the agreement of both parties. And the witness remains based on the provisions of the verse above. Furthermore, he explains that in the madzhab of Imam Abu Hanifah, the provisions differ from Ibn Katsir's tafsir. Women are allowed to be witnesses, and their testimony is accepted not only in matters related to marriage, but also in most cases, except in criminal cases. This is based on the concern that women would be subjected to *qisas* (retaliation) or flogging, which contradicts the general nature of women who have gentle feelings. Another consideration is that society expects women to be more capable of caring for and nurturing their children and families.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Shihab, *Islam Yang Disalahpahami: Menepis Prasangka, Mengikis Kekeliruan*. 182

⁴⁷ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1. 491-492

⁴⁸ Shihab, *Islam Yang Disalahpahami: Menepis Prasangka, Mengikis Kekeliruan*. 185

⁴⁹ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1. 602

⁵⁰ Tim Ahli Tafsir, *Shahih Tafsir Ibnu Katsir Pen. Abu Ihsan al-Atsari*, vol. 2. 85-86

⁵¹ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1. 606

The main question is, what is the basis for equating the testimony of one man with two women?

Scholar Ibn Katsir argues that the 2:1 ratio is due to the weakness and deficiency of women's intellect, based on several hadiths. Meanwhile, later scholars like Shaykh Muhammad Abduh argue that while the Qur'anic provision sets a 2:1 ratio, it must be viewed contextually—first, the verse talks explicitly about debt. Second, the verse should not be understood as a basis for justifying a woman's lack of intellect and memory. When the verse was revealed, few women were involved in the world of trade, so their knowledge and memory were not as good as men, who were engaged in trade at that time. Thus, the reason is not women's lack of intellect, as old scholars believed.⁵²

In line with this, Quraish Shihab also expresses a similar opinion that men and women have primary responsibilities assigned to them. The primary responsibility of men is to provide for their families, while the primary responsibility of women is to provide a conducive environment and attention to the lives of their offspring. However, as explained earlier, this division is not rigid.⁵³ Even the Prophet performed tasks generally done by women, such as caring for his clothes and repairing his damaged ones. This shows that household chores are a shared responsibility.⁵⁴

Returning to the discussion of witnesses, the division of labor certainly affects the memory and mindset of each person. A husband generally involved in business-related work will naturally be sensitive, and his memory will easily recall things closely related to him. On the other hand, women, who are involved with household objects from the beginning, will naturally record more about those things than men. So, this verse does not indicate an intellectual problem in women being viewed as inferior to men, but somewhat different inclinations and involvements between the two.⁵⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim argues that:

"If there is a development such that women's abilities, experiences, and customs develop, then their testimony can be accepted even if it is from only one woman."⁵⁶

D. Conclusion

Based on the study results, it was concluded that the hermeneutical approach used by Quraish Shihab in understanding gender-related verses has presented a new perspective in

⁵² Nasaruddin Umar and dkk, *Pemahaman Islam Dan Tantangan Keadilan Jender*, II (Gama Media, 2002). 71-72

⁵³ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1. 607

⁵⁴ Yusdani, *Menuju Fiqh Keluarga Progresif* (Kaukaba, 2015). 170

⁵⁵ Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, vol. 1. 607

⁵⁶ Shihab, *Islam Yang Disalahpahami: Menepis Prasangka, Mengikis Kekeliruan*. 161

contemporary interpretive discourse. This approach explains the text's literal meaning and reveals other implied and contextual perspectives in line with the changing times and social dynamics. Through his interpretation, Quraish Shihab has successfully demonstrated that gender justice is not something that contradicts Islamic teachings but rather something that is in harmony with them. The values of justice, equality, and respect for women are universal messages of the Qur'an. Interpretations that are discriminatory toward women reflect the interpreter's social, cultural, and political context rather than the sacred text itself.

This research is not perfect; it's merely a small step in understanding gender equality within the Quran. For activists striving for women's rights, this writing can briefly reference Quraish Shihab's thoughts, offering a theological basis for gender equality, especially concerning leadership rights, household justice, and witness. For researchers and academics, this study can be a methodological model in contemporary *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) studies, employing a critical approach to socially biased classical interpretations.

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