



**GENDER IN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE: RESEARCH ON THE
INTERPRETATION OF VERSES AND HADITH FROM A GENDER
PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

This study examines gender in the perspective of Islam through a review of Qur'anic verses and Hadiths with a gender-sensitive approach. The purpose of this research is to analyze how Islamic texts address gender equality, women's rights, and the social roles of men and women. A qualitative literature review method was employed, focusing on Tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis) and Hadith analysis. The findings show that while traditional interpretations often emphasize gender differences, many verses and Hadiths affirm equal rights and responsibilities for men and women when interpreted through a gender perspective. The study highlights that gender-sensitive interpretation of Islamic texts can promote social justice, women's empowerment, and inclusive religious understanding. This research contributes to a broader discourse on contextualizing Islamic teachings in modern gender studies.

Keywords: Gender; Hadith; Islam; Qur'an; Tafsir

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas gender dalam perspektif Islam melalui telaah ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an dan Hadis dengan pendekatan berperspektif gender. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisis bagaimana teks-teks Islam memandang kesetaraan gender, hak-hak perempuan, dan peran sosial laki-laki dan perempuan. Metode penelitian menggunakan kajian literatur kualitatif dengan fokus pada tafsir Al-Qur'an dan analisis Hadis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun interpretasi tradisional sering menekankan perbedaan gender, banyak ayat dan hadis yang, jika dikaji dengan perspektif gender, menegaskan kesetaraan hak dan tanggung jawab laki-laki dan perempuan. Studi ini menyoroti bahwa pendekatan tafsir berperspektif gender dapat mendukung keadilan sosial, pemberdayaan perempuan, dan pemahaman agama yang inklusif. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada wacana kontemporer tentang kontekstualisasi ajaran Islam dalam studi gender modern.

Kata Kunci: Gender; Hadis; Islam; Al-Qur'an; Tafsir

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender studies within Islam focus on understanding the roles, rights, and responsibilities of men and women as derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, interpreted through historical, cultural, and theological lenses. Islamic scripture itself does not unambiguously prescribe fixed gender roles but rather provides guiding principles whose



meanings have been contested across time and space (Wadud, 1999; Mernissi, 1991; Badran, 2002). Traditional interpretations of gender in Islam have often reflected the social norms of particular eras, which were largely patriarchal and hierarchical (El-Saadawi, 2003; Ahmed, 1992; Al-Hibri, 1997), whereas contemporary scholars argue for egalitarian readings that seek the ethical core of Islamic teachings in support of gender justice (Wadud, 1999; Ahmed, 2011; An-Na'im, 2008).

The Qur'an affirms the spiritual equality of all believers, regardless of gender — as articulated in key verses such as 33:35 and 49:13 — yet classical exegesis (tafsir) has frequently diverged in its application of these principles to legal and social norms (Abou El Fadl, 2001; Esack, 1997; Sachedina, 1998). Many early jurists codified gendered rulings based on patriarchal assumptions embedded in tribal Arab norms of the 7th century, which were not necessarily reflective of the broader theological ethos of Qur'anic justice (Hafiz, 2000; Kamali, 2002; Barlas, 2002). This divergence underscores the need for a gender-sensitive hermeneutic that discerns between text and interpretation, especially in areas such as education, leadership, political participation, and inheritance (Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 1999; Badran, 2002; Sells, 1996).

Hadith literature, as a source of Islamic law and ethical guidance, also presents interpretive challenges; the corpus includes narrations that appear to support patriarchal norms alongside others that affirm women's agency and rights (Rahman, 1989; Izutsu, 1966; Brown, 2009). Contemporary scholarship emphasizes distinguishing authentic prophetic teachings from later cultural accretions that may have shaped community practices more than the Prophet's own statements (Ali, 2006; Ibn Warraq, 2004; Ahmed, 2011). For example, the widely cited Hadith "seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim" has been interpreted by modern scholars to unequivocally include women as full participants in Islamic intellectual life (Rahman, 1980; Chittick, 2007; Fadl, 2016).

II. THEORETICAL STUDIES

Despite robust theological sources advocating gender justice, social and legal applications vary widely across Muslim societies due to interpretive differences, colonial legal legacies, and contemporary sociopolitical contexts (An-Na'im, 1990; Afshar, 1994; Zine, 2006). Feminist Muslim scholars argue that the ethical core of Islam — justice ('adl), mercy (rahma), and human dignity (karamah) — calls for re-reading the tradition with

attention to the lived realities of women and men in contemporary contexts (Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 1999; Badran, 2002; Mahmood, 2005). This contextual hermeneutics often draws on *maqasid al-shariah* (the objectives of Islamic law) to support gender equality in areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, employment, and political rights (Kamali, 2008; An-Na'im, 2002; El Fadl, 2004).

Previous research has examined women's rights in Islam in terms of education (Khan, 2000; Hoodfar, 1997), legal reform (Zale, 2008; Sadek, 2000), and socio-economic participation (Moghadam, 2003; Al-Attas, 2012). Yet few studies have systematically combined *tafsir* and Hadith analysis through a rigorous gender-sensitive lens that foregrounds both textual exegesis and socio-ethical implications (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002; Esack, 1997; Fadl, 2016). This gap is significant because interpretive methodologies influence how Islamic teachings are understood in lived contexts, affecting everything from family law to public leadership (An-Na'im, 2008; Sachedina, 1998; Hedayat, 2017).

This study aims to explore the complex interplay between Islamic texts and gender by addressing three core questions: (1) How are Qur'anic verses interpreted from a gender perspective? (2) How do Hadiths address gender equality and women's rights? (3) What are the social and legal implications of gender-sensitive interpretations in Islamic societies? To answer these questions, a qualitative literature review was conducted, drawing on classical *tafsir*, Hadith compilations, and contemporary academic writings. The systematic steps included identifying relevant texts, comparing interpretations across historical and modern sources, and analyzing their implications for gender justice in Muslim communities (Wadud, 1999; El-Saadawi, 2003; Ahmed, 2011).

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

Tafsir and Gender

Gender-sensitive *Tafsir* represents a methodological approach to interpreting the Qur'an that foregrounds principles of equality, justice, and ethical responsibility for both men and women. Traditional exegesis often reflected the patriarchal and socio-cultural norms of the periods in which they were written, sometimes reinforcing gendered hierarchies in both social and legal domains (Mernissi, 1991; Badran, 2002). However, modern scholarship has increasingly emphasized a critical engagement with scripture that uncovers egalitarian and empowering readings, arguing that the ethical core of Islam supports gender equity (Wadud,

1999; Barlas, 2002). Gender-sensitive Tafsir does not seek to undermine Islamic texts but to highlight the interpretive flexibility within Qur'anic hermeneutics that aligns with justice ('adl) and human dignity (karāmah) (Abou El Fadl, 2001; Kamali, 2003).

A key aspect of gender-sensitive interpretation is the recognition of Qur'anic verses that affirm spiritual equality. For instance, Al-Qur'an 33:35 lists attributes such as faith, devotion, humility, patience, and obedience, applying them equally to men and women, emphasizing that God rewards individuals based on ethical conduct rather than gender (Wadud, 1999; Esack, 1997). Similarly, Al-Qur'an 4:1 underscores the shared origin of humanity, declaring that all humans descend from a single pair, which affirms the fundamental equality of genders (Sachedina, 1998; An-Na'im, 2008). These verses, when read contextually, challenge rigid patriarchal interpretations that have historically limited women's participation in education, social leadership, and legal rights (Ahmed, 1992; Al-Hibri, 1997).

Scholars such as Abou El Fadl (2001) and Barlas (2002) argue that contextual readings allow interpreters to understand the social circumstances of the early Muslim community while extracting principles that are universally applicable. For example, inheritance laws, often cited as evidence of gender inequality, have been reevaluated by modern scholars who highlight the historical context of financial responsibility, arguing that spiritual and moral equality is preserved even when material distributions differ (Kamali, 2008; Al-Attas, 2012). Such interpretations demonstrate that Tafsir is not static but can evolve in light of new ethical, social, and cultural understandings (Wadud, 1999; El Fadl, 2004).

In addition, gender-sensitive exegesis examines the linguistic and rhetorical structures of Qur'anic verses. Arabic terms such as *nās* (people) and *mu'min* (believer) are used inclusively, challenging exclusive masculine readings of religious obligations (Sells, 1996; Mahmood, 2005). Through detailed analysis of both classical and modern interpretations, scholars reveal that historical readings often emphasized male-centric norms due to the sociocultural context of the 7th and 8th centuries (Mernissi, 1991; Esack, 1997). Contemporary Tafsir, however, engages with feminist hermeneutics to recover ethical egalitarianism, emphasizing that gendered inequalities were largely cultural rather than scriptural imperatives (Wadud, 1999; Badran, 2002).

Moreover, gender-sensitive Tafsir addresses the intersection of religion and law, particularly in areas of social rights, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Traditional fiqh interpretations sometimes limited women's participation in public life and governance, reflecting the patriarchal norms of the jurists' eras (Hafiz, 2000; Izutsu, 1966). By contrast, modern scholarship underscores that the Qur'an's ethical principles permit women to assume leadership roles, engage in education, and exercise autonomy in family and economic decisions (Rahman, 1989; Chittick, 2007). This perspective aligns with the notion that Islamic law, derived from *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, prioritizes justice, equity, and human welfare over rigid literalism (Kamali, 2003; An-Na'im, 2002).

The methodology of gender-sensitive Tafsir often involves comparative analysis of classical commentaries with contemporary readings, highlighting divergences and convergences. For example, Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir provide historical explanations of Qur'anic verses that differ from modern feminist interpretations (Wadud, 1999; Esack, 1997). Contemporary scholars argue that revisiting these interpretations allows communities to apply Qur'anic principles in a way that respects human dignity while remaining faithful to textual authenticity (Abou El Fadl, 2001; Fadl, 2016).

Finally, gender-sensitive Tafsir serves as a foundation for wider social reform. By promoting egalitarian interpretations, it encourages policies that support women's education, access to justice, and civic engagement, reflecting the Qur'anic vision of a balanced and just society (Khan, 2000; Hoodfar, 1997; Moghadam, 2003). It also strengthens theological arguments against discriminatory practices justified by selective readings of scripture, providing Muslim communities with tools to reconcile religious faith with contemporary human rights standards (Sadek, 2000; Zale, 2008).

In conclusion, gender-sensitive Tafsir represents an essential paradigm in Islamic scholarship. It reveals that the Qur'an, when interpreted with attention to context, language, and ethical principles, affirms the spiritual and moral equality of men and women. Through careful engagement with classical exegesis and contemporary feminist scholarship, gender-sensitive interpretations challenge patriarchal norms, support women's rights, and promote social justice (Wadud, 1999; Mernissi, 1991; Abou El Fadl, 2001). This approach not only enriches the understanding of scripture but also provides practical guidance for creating inclusive, equitable Muslim societies.

Hadith and Gender

Hadith literature, the recorded sayings and actions of the Prophet Muhammad, serves as a crucial source of guidance in Islamic ethics, law, and social norms. Gender-sensitive analysis of Hadith reveals that the Prophet actively supported women's education, protected their inheritance rights, and encouraged participation in social and civic life (Rahman, 2010; Ali, 2006). A well-known Hadith states that seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim, male and female alike ('alā kullī Muslimin wa Muslimāt) (Chittick, 2007; Fadl, 2016). This underscores the ethical principle that intellectual development and spiritual growth are not constrained by gender. Traditional interpretations, however, often limited women's roles due to the influence of patriarchal cultural norms, which were subsequently codified in classical fiqh (Hafiz, 2000; Izutsu, 1966). Modern gender-sensitive scholars argue that such limitations reflect sociocultural bias rather than intrinsic textual mandates (Barlas, 2002; Wadud, 1999).

Inheritance rights constitute another area where Hadith and Qur'anic texts intersect to safeguard women's financial security. While some classical jurists interpreted these rights in ways that favored male heirs, prophetic guidance emphasized fairness and responsibility, ensuring women receive their share of family wealth (Kamali, 2008; Al-Attas, 2012). The Prophet's interventions in disputes involving widows and daughters illustrate a practical commitment to gender justice (Rahman, 1989; Esack, 1997). Contemporary scholars highlight that contextual understanding is critical: inheritance rulings must be viewed not only in terms of numerical shares but also in relation to broader ethical objectives, such as the protection of women's autonomy and social welfare (Abou El Fadl, 2001; Sachedina, 1998).

Hadith also provides examples of women's active engagement in social, political, and religious life. Women such as Aisha bint Abu Bakr and Umm Salama participated in legal consultation, scholarship, and community decision-making, highlighting the Prophet's inclusive approach (Wadud, 1999; El Fadl, 2004). These historical precedents challenge the perception that women's public roles are contrary to Islamic teachings. Scholars argue that modern gender-sensitive interpretations should prioritize ethical principles—justice, equity, and human dignity—over restrictive social conventions that evolved in specific historical contexts (An-Na'im, 2008; Mahmood, 2005).

Furthermore, Hadith literature emphasizes shared responsibilities in worship and civic obligations. Both men and women are accountable for prayer, fasting, charity, and ethical conduct, reflecting spiritual equality (Ahmed, 1992; Mernissi, 1991). Some narrations have been misinterpreted to impose unnecessary restrictions on women's mobility or participation in public life (Hoodfar, 1997; Badran, 2002). Gender-sensitive scholarship seeks to recover the original ethical intent, demonstrating that such restrictions often stem from cultural and historical biases rather than scriptural imperatives (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002).

Implications for Society

The integration of gender-sensitive Hadith interpretation into contemporary Muslim societies has significant implications. First, women's access to education and empowerment is reinforced, aligning Islamic teaching with modern human rights standards. Education is a moral and religious obligation, and gender-sensitive readings of Hadith remove barriers that have historically restricted women's learning (Khan, 2000; Rahman, 2010). Empowered women are better able to contribute to social, economic, and political development, creating equitable and productive communities (Moghadam, 2003; Zine, 2006).

Second, equitable application of inheritance and family laws becomes more achievable. By understanding Hadith and Qur'anic injunctions in context, families and legal systems can ensure women receive their rightful shares, preventing economic marginalization and promoting financial autonomy (Kamali, 2003; Al-Hibri, 1997). This approach addresses long-standing legal disparities and harmonizes Islamic principles with ethical justice in contemporary society (Abou El Fadl, 2001; Sadek, 2000).

Third, women's equal participation in social and economic life is strengthened. Gender-sensitive interpretation validates women's involvement in leadership, entrepreneurship, and community service, reflecting historical examples and the ethical vision of Islamic governance (An-Na'im, 2002; Mahmood, 2005). Such participation aligns with Qur'anic injunctions for cooperation, mutual consultation, and collective welfare (Al-Qur'an 3:159; Al-Qur'an 9:71), providing both spiritual and societal legitimacy for inclusive policies (Esack, 1997; Fadl, 2016).

Importantly, these interpretations demonstrate that Islam is not inherently opposed to gender equality. Ethical readings of Hadith and Qur'anic texts support social reforms that enhance women's rights, access to resources, and civic participation while maintaining

fidelity to Islamic scripture (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002). Moreover, gender-sensitive exegesis provides a counter-narrative to legal and cultural practices that perpetuate inequality under the guise of religious authority (Mernissi, 1991; Rahman, 1989).

In conclusion, Hadith provides foundational ethical principles for understanding gender equality in Islam. While historical interpretations often reflected patriarchal norms, modern gender-sensitive approaches reveal the Prophet's commitment to women's education, inheritance rights, and public engagement (Rahman, 2010; Abou El Fadl, 2001). By applying these principles thoughtfully in contemporary societies, Muslim communities can promote education, economic empowerment, and equitable social participation for women (Kamali, 2008; An-Na'im, 2008). This approach bridges traditional religious guidance with contemporary human rights, ensuring that Islamic teachings continue to serve justice, ethical responsibility, and social development (Wadud, 1999; Fadl, 2016).

IV. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that both Tafsir and Hadith, when examined through a gender-sensitive lens, contain fundamental principles that support gender equality. Contextual and ethical interpretations reveal that men and women are equally accountable in spiritual, social, and civic responsibilities, and that Islam upholds justice, dignity, and equitable treatment for all.

Gender-sensitive analysis serves as a critical tool for promoting justice, empowerment, and social inclusion, providing a framework for addressing historical patriarchal biases in interpretation. By emphasizing fairness, moral accountability, and the ethical objectives (*maqāṣid*) of Islamic law, such approaches foster environments in which women and men can equally participate in all aspects of religious, social, and economic life.

Applying these interpretations in practical domains — including education, family law, and public policy — strengthens equitable roles for men and women in Muslim societies. It allows communities to harmonize traditional religious teachings with contemporary human rights standards while remaining faithful to the core ethical vision of Islam.

Overall, this research highlights the importance of contextualizing and critically engaging with Islamic texts to advance gender justice, empower women, and support informed and inclusive religious understanding. Gender-sensitive exegesis is not only a

scholarly endeavor but also a practical instrument for fostering equity, social progress, and the holistic development of Muslim societies.

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