

QURAIISH SHIHAB'S INTERPRETATION OF GENDER EQUALITY IN TAFSIR AL-MISBAH

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/humanisme.v6i1>

<i>Submission : March 17, 2022</i>	<i>Revised : June 24, 2022</i>	<i>Published : June 30, 2022</i>
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Abstract

This study explores Quraish Shihab's interpretation of gender equality issues, such as equality in creation, marriage, prophethood, the role of women in the public world, and others. This research uses the library research method, and the first and primary source is Tafsir al-Misbah. Operationally, the researchers read various literature written by scholars, both East and West, on the concept of gender from the perspective of feminism. Then, the researchers read the Tafsir al-Misbah on the same theme. Does feminist thought influence Quraish Shihab's interpretation or not? This research finds that according to Quraish Shihab, the issue of gender equality in the Qur'an must be understood proportionally, unlike gender practitioners who interpret the Qur'an excessively and seem to impose their will. Quraish Shihab argues that men and women are naturally different both physically and psychologically. Both also have equality in terms of humanity and rights. Women have advantages that men do not have and vice versa. Both need each other.

Keywords : *Equality in creation, Equality Inprophethood, Gender Equality, Tafsir al-Misbah, Feminism Theory.*

Abstrak

Kajian ini mengeksplorasi interpretasi Quraish Shihab terhadap isu-isu kesetaraan gender, seperti kesetaraan dalam penciptaan, perkawinan, kenabian, peran perempuan di dunia publik, dan lain-lain. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan, dan sumber pertama dan utama adalah Tafsir al-Misbah. Secara operasional, peneliti membaca berbagai literatur yang ditulis oleh para sarjana, baik Timur maupun Barat, tentang konsep gender dari perspektif feminisme. Kemudian peneliti membacakan Tafsir al-Misbah dengan tema yang sama. Apakah pemikiran feminis mempengaruhi penafsiran Quraish Shihab atau tidak? Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa menurut Quraish Shihab, persoalan kesetaraan gender dalam Al-Qur'an harus dipahami secara proporsional, tidak seperti praktisi gender yang menafsirkan Al-Qur'an secara berlebihan dan terkesan memaksakan kehendaknya. Quraish Shihab berpendapat bahwa laki-laki dan perempuan secara alamiah berbeda baik secara fisik maupun psikis. Keduanya juga memiliki kesetaraan dalam hal kemanusiaan dan hak. Wanita memiliki kelebihan yang tidak dimiliki pria dan sebaliknya. Keduanya saling membutuhkan.

Kata kunci : *Kesetaraan dalam penciptaan, Kesetaraan dalam Kenabian, Kesetaraan Gender, Tafsir al-Misbah, Teori Feminisme.*

Introduction

Gender issues are often discussed and debated, especially in the scientific communities.¹ Their studies focus on more subjects, such as women's rights over men, women's leadership,² women trafficking,³ domestic violence (KDRT), etc. Various problems in gender studies are caused by the gap between the roles of men and women,⁴ in which men have the advantage over women in all aspects of life. The public position is held more by men than by women. Meanwhile, women contribute to the household, both as wives and homemakers. Therefore, the dominance of men over women in public roles is still considered natural and has become *sunnatullah*. This view needs to be reinterpreted.

According to feminism, there is a fundamental difference between sex and gender.⁵ Sex refers more to the biological status of humans, such as women having reproductive organs, such as a uterus, vagina, and breast. In contrast, men have penises and genitals and

cannot give birth. All of these are *sunnatullah* and are not interchangeable.

Meanwhile, related to the functions, roles, rights, and obligations is the area of gender. For example, women have a gentle nature and are more emotional, motherly, and beautiful. At the same time, the men are strong, rational, manly, and powerful. The characteristics that exist in both women and men are not permanent. Those characteristics can move and are interchangeable from one to the other. Thus, gender is the inherent nature of men and women who are socially and culturally constructed and are associated with non-biological aspects of the other.⁶

In reviewing this concept, they use the paradigm of equality between men and women. Humans do not discriminate against gender, skin color, or other differences. All have the same status in the sight of Allah. The only difference between a man and a woman is *taqwa* (QS. 49: 13).

Equality of men and women can definitively be seen in QS. 33:35. Literally, in this verse, both men and Muslim women, the believers, have the same status in the sight of Allah. They will receive forgiveness and reward from their Lord if they do good deeds. Forgiveness and reward are not given to them because of their sexual status.

There are many verses in the Quran about gender equality, but there are also verses from the Quran that seem to discriminate against women. For example, in the context of creation, man (Adam) was created from clay, while a woman (Eve) was created from Adam's rib. All prophets were male, and there were no female prophets. Men can be priests of worship, and women can't be priests of prayer. In marriage, men who are getting married do not need a guardian, while women need a guardian, and there are many other problems. The texts of the Qur'an, which

¹Geeta Rao Gupta et al., "Gender Equality and Gender Norms: Framing the Opportunities for Health," *The Lancet* (Lancet Publishing Group, June 22, 2019), [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30651-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30651-8); Ronald Inglehart et al., "Gender Equality and Democracy," n.d.

²R. Dhatt et al., "The Role of Women's Leadership and Gender Equity in Leadership and Health System Strengthening," *Global Health, Epidemiology and Genomics* 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1017/gh.2016.22>; Robin Selzer, Amy Howton, and Felicia Wallace, "Rethinking Women's Leadership Development: Voices from the Trenches," *Administrative Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci7020018>.

³Liliana Hasibuan, "Woman Trafficking Dan Konseling Psikososial Sebagai Penolong," *Al-Iryad: Jurnal Bimbingan Konseling Islam* 3, no. 1 (2021).

⁴Linda J. Sax and Casandra E. Harper, "Origins of the Gender Gap: Pre-College and College Influences on Differences between Men and Women," *Research in Higher Education* 48, no. 6 (September 9, 2007): 669–94, <https://doi.org/10.1007/S11162-006-9046-Z/TABLES/7>.

⁵See, Ann Oakley, "The Difference between Sex and Gender," in *The Ann Oakley Reader*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1t88xpn.7>.

⁶Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Jender Perspektif Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999).

seem discriminatory, must be reinterpreted so that there is no gender bias because the basic principle of the Qur'an is to uphold justice, including gender justice.

Some contemporary Muslim scholars, such as Asghar Ali Engineer, an Indian Muslim feminist, have attempted to interpret the gender-biased verses of the Qur'an. According to Asghar, equality between men and women contains at least two things. *First*, in a general sense, it means accepting the dignity of both sexes in equal measure. *Second*, society must know that men and women have the same social, economic and political rights.⁷ Both must have the same right to marry, own property, choose a profession, and also have the same rights and obligations.

Apart from Asghar, we know other feminist figures who are critical of promoting gender equality ideas, such as Fatima Memisi, Riffat Hassan, Amina Wadud Muhsin, and others. All of the figures the researchers mention above have the same goal, namely to deconstruct the gender-biased verses of the Qur'an and want to position women as equal to men, especially in the socio-cultural area.

Of course, this study does not repeat what Muslim feminists have written. This study discusses Quraish Shihab's interpretation of al-Misbah on gender verses which seem very discriminatory. Why should Quraish Shihab be the main character in this research? I assume that every commentator is influenced by their socio-cultural background. Therefore, the resulting product must also be different. Likewise, Quraish Shihab has a further understanding when discussing the concept of equality between men and women.

Results and Discussion

Gender and Sex: The Meaning of Interpretation Problem

⁷Asghar Ali Engineer, *Hak-Hak Perempuan Dalam Islam*, ed. Farid Wajdi dan Cici Farkha Assegaf (Yogyakarta: Benteng Budaya, 1994), 57.

Most people often misinterpret the terms gender and sex. Linguistically, both refer to the meaning of sex but have very diametric differences. The term sex is used more to describe something innate from birth. Therefore, it cannot be changed. In contrast, the term gender is used for the meaning attached to men and women due to social and cultural construction. Therefore, it can be changed based on these characteristics.⁸

Four theories can explain the issue of gender equality between men and women. The first theory is the psychoanalytic/identification theory. This theory was introduced by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939 AD). This theory states that the development of sexuality determines the behavior/personality of men and women from the start. He also explains that a person's character is determined by interacting with three structures: the id, ego, and superego. The second theory is the structural-functionalist theory.⁹ This theory assumes that society consists of various parts that influence each other. The integrity of the community is strongly influenced by the functional relationship between men and women. Talcott Parson and Bales support this theory. According to them, the division of roles of men and women is not based on competition. Still, it is based on harmonious relations between society, where men and women carry out their duties to each other.

⁸Oakley, "The Difference between Sex and Gender"; Mansour Fakh, *Analisis Gender Dan Transformasi Sosial* (Yogyakarta: INSISTPress, 2008).

⁹Narasudin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Perspektif Alqur'an*, Paramadina (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999), 51. According to some experts, such as Hilary M. Lips and SA Shield, that between the structuralist and functionalist theory are two different theories. The first theory is more directed to sociological issues, while the functionalist theory refers to the psychological problems. However, according to Linda L. Linsey, both theories at the same conclusion in assessing the existence of patterns of gender relations.

The third theory is conflict theory.¹⁰ This theory is equated with Marx's idea regarding gender issues. The influence of Karl Marx's class theory is decisive in this context. According to him, several classes are vying for influence and power in a society. Who owns and controls the sources of production and distribution, those who have the opportunity to play an essential role in it. Therefore, this theory asserts that gender differences between men and women are not due to biological differences but part of the oppression of the strong to the weak-marital relationships such as proletarian and bourgeois relations, servant and master, extortionist and the extorted. Thus, the role of gender inequality in society is not due to biological factors or gifts from God (divine creation), but it is a construction of society.

The fourth theory is socio-biological theory.¹¹ This theory is called "biosocial" because it involves biological and social factors in explaining gender relations. This theory explains that physical and social factors influence the relationship between men and women. Both of these factors make men consider themselves superior to women. According to this theory, the existing reproductive function in women is regarded as a barrier to compensating for men's strength. This theory was developed by Pierre Van Den Berghe, Lionel Tiger, and Robin Fox.

Feminism Theory as a Model for Reading the Concept of Gender

In the context of feminism, the concept of gender equality has spawned several theories or groups with their respective ideologies, such as:

1. Liberal Feminism¹²

Liberal feminism stems from liberal political theory. Individuals uphold the values of

autonomy, equality, and moral values that should not be forced or brainwashed, and have free self-assessment. Liberal feminism is an example of liberal political theory, such as equal suffrage, divorce, and property. Then, this group began to conduct studies to explore patterns of human activity in society and find ways to eliminate the root causes of oppression against women. This group claims that all people, both men and women, are created with equal rights. Therefore, this group wants to deny men's superiority over women by firmly destroying the patriarchal system. Men and women must build a society based on equality.¹³

According to this group, there are two ways to construct the idea of gender equality. First, a psychological approach to raise awareness of the individual includes discussions about women's experiences in a society that men dominate. Second, demanding legal reforms are not favorable to women, so it is a need to transform them into new law regulations that treat women equally to men.¹⁴

In principle, this group wants women to be given equal opportunities in both economic and political structures. It is reflected in their expression as liberal feminism, which says:

"That the capacity to reason is part of human essence shared by both men and women. Differences between the sexes result from sexist attitudes more than unequal social structure or real differences between men and women. Liberal feminism thus tends to accept exiting economy and political structure and argue for equality of opportunity for women within them".¹⁵

¹⁰Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Jender Perspektif Al-Qur'an*, 61.

¹¹Umar, 68.

¹²Eyayu Enyew Bimer and Getaneh Mihrete Alemeneh, "Liberal Feminism: Assessing Its Compatibility and Applicability in Ethiopia Context," *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 10, no. 6 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.5897/ijasa2018.0769>.

¹³Arif Budiman, *Pembagian Kerja Secara Seksual, Sebuah Pembahasan Sosiologis Tentang Peran Wanita Di Dalam Masyarakat* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1981), 3–31.

¹⁴Budiman, 41.

¹⁵Julia Surya Kusuma, "Pasca Modernis medan Feminisme" in *Horison*, No. 02/XXVIII/Pebruari 1994, h. 7-8

From a liberal feminist perspective, women's issues are considered as a problem of modern economics or part of political participation. The backwardness of women is a result of ignorance and irrational attitudes and tightly bound to traditional values. Industrialization and modernization are the way to improve the status of women, as they will reduce the strength of the biological consequence of inequality between men and women and the other effort is to increase women's education.

2. Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism¹⁶ is a reaction to liberal feminism. According to this ideology, the inequality experienced by women is not caused by individual actions but by social, political, and economic structures closely related to the capitalist system. There will be no equality if there is still a class system.

Great Britain supports this group. Meanwhile, Karl Marx, the founding father of Marxism, did not explain the position of women in social change in his theory. Engelslah, in his work 'The Origin of Private and State-Owned Families', stated that the subordination of women occurred after women defeated the capitalist system. Thus, ending the subordination of women must end capitalism and eliminate sex differences in labor issues.

In the perspective of Marxist feminism, before capitalism developed, the family was the production unit. All family members, including women, perform all the basic human needs to survive. However, since the capitalist ideology developed, industry and the family are no longer a production unit. Production and human needs have shifted from homes to factories. Women no longer participate in production activities. Then, the division of labor based on gender comes, in

which men who work in the public and productive sectors have economic value. At the same time, women who work in the household have no economic value. Because material ownership greatly determines the value of one's existence, as a result, women in the domestic and non-productive sectors are valued lower than men in the public and productive sectors.

Thus, one way to free women from oppression is to involve women in the public sector and generate economic value. Therefore, the concept of housework for women must be eliminated. If necessary, the institution of the family should be abolished and form a collective family where household work is carried out collectively, including child care and education.

3. Radical Feminism¹⁷

Radical feminism ideology is a women's movement that struggles against sexual reality and not on other facts. Therefore, the campaign aims to destroy the patriarchal system that has been institutionalized in society.¹⁸

According to this group, the main factor that causes the sexual division of labor is the patriarchal system in which men control women with power. Furthermore, there are sources of weakness in the biological structure of women, such as women having to get menstruation, menopause, and various other diseases. The differences in natural reproductive functions result in the sexual division of labor, leading to class differences in society. The physical weakness of women must be solved using technological advances.

Thus, the fundamental structure of radical feminist ideology does not distinguish between personal and political goals. In order words, biology and sex are forms of sexual politics. The power of men is enforced through institutions

¹⁶Ann Rose Davis, "Marxist Feminism: An Analysis on Class Structure and Position of Women in Malayalam Movie -'Chemmeen,'" *The Creative Launcher* 6, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2021.6.1.10>; T.O. Ithromi, *Kajian Wanita Dalam Pembangunan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1995).

¹⁷Finn Mackay, "Radical Feminism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 32, no. 8 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276415616682>.

¹⁸Budiman, *Pembagian Kerja Secara Seksual, Sebuah Pembahasan Sosiologis Tentang Peran Wanita Di Dalam Masyarakat*, 43–46.

such as private production functions, household work, marriage, and so on, as a tool of men's power over women, which has never been recognized and considered the main form of oppression against women.¹⁹

4. Socialist feminism²⁰

This movement appears as a mix between Marxist feminism and radical feminism. The ideology of socialist feminism says that living in a capitalistic society is not the only major cause of the backwardness of women. For Marxist feminism, oppression of women can occur anywhere in the various classes. This group rejects Marxist feminism and does not consider economic exploitation as something more essential than gender oppression.²¹

Socialist feminism focuses on women's awareness of their position that is oppressed. According to this group, many women are unaware that they are a group oppressed by the patriarchal system. To change the society, the women need the participation of men, for example, participating in the maintenance of the child as part of most natural and fundamental life. The purpose of the socialist feminist movement is to form social relationships and become more humane relationships.

Biography of Quraish Shihab: Socio-Cultural Background as an Interpretive Ideology

His full name is Muhammad Quraish Shihab. He was born in Rampang, South Sulawesi, on February 16, 1944.²² He comes from an educated family of Arab descent. His father, Prof. KH. Abdurrahman Shihab, was a scholar and great teacher of Tafsir. Abdurrahman Shihab was an educator with a good reputation in

the people of South Sulawesi. He contributed to education as a mentor at two universities in Ujung Pandang, the Indonesian Muslim University of Makassar (UMI of Makassar), the largest private university in eastern Indonesia, and IAIN Alauddin Makassar. He was also the rector of both universities: UMI in 1959 - 1965 and IAIN in 1972-1977.

As the son of a professor, Quraish Shihab studied the Koran from his father. His father taught and explained the Qur'an through the stories contained in the Qur'an. Here, the seeds of Quraish Shihab's love for the Qur'an began to grow.

His formal education started from elementary school in Makassar. Afterwards, he went to a junior high school in Malang while "nyantri" (being a student) at Darul Hadith al-Falaqiyah Boarding School in the same city. To deepen his study of Islam, Quraish Shihab was sent by his father to Al-Azhar, Cairo, in 1958 and received in the second grade of Tsanawiyah. Then, he continued his studies at Al-Azhar University, precisely Department of Islamic Theology, Tafsir, and Hadith. In 1967, he obtained an LC (undergraduate level/ S1). Two years later (in 1969), Quraish Shihab received an MA in the same department with a thesis entitled "Al-I'jaz at-Tashri'ili Al-Qur'an Al-Karim".

In 1973, he was called back to Makassar by his father. At that time, his father served as Rector of IAIN Alauddin. Quraish Shihab was asked by his father to manage the education in IAIN Alauddin. He became Vice-Rector for academic and student affairs until 1980. In this institution, Quraish Shihab was assigned various roles, such as coordinator of Private Higher Education Region VII in eastern Indonesia, a co-leader of the Indonesian police in the east area of mental construction, and other off-campus positions. He accomplished some research tasks between his busy schedule, such as "Pelaksanaan Kerukunan kehidupan Beragama di Indonesia

¹⁹Dr. Mansour Fakih, "Posisi Kaum Perempuan Dalam Tradisi Islam," *Tarjih* 1, no. Desember (1996): 40.

²⁰Johanna Brenner, "21st Century Socialist-Feminism," *Socialist Studies/Études Socialistes* 10, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.18740/s4rp43>.

²¹Ihromi, *Kajian Wanita Dalam Pembangunan*, 104-5.

²²M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an: Fungsi Dan Peran Wahyu Dalam Al-Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 1992), 6.

Timur” (1975) and “Masalah Wakaf Sulawesi Selatan” (1978).

In 1984, Quraish Shihab became the lecturer at the Ushuluddin Faculty of IAIN Jakarta. He taught Tafsir and Ulum Al-Quran at the undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels (S1, S2, and S3 levels) until 1998. Besides being a lecturer, he was also trusted to serve as the rector of IAIN Jakarta for two periods (in 1992-1996 and in 1997-1998). Then, he served as Minister of Religion for two months in early 1998 until he was appointed as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Republic of Indonesia for Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Republic of Djibouti which based in Cairo.

Quraish Shihab is not the only Qur'an expert in Indonesia. However, his ability to translate the messages of the Qur'an into a modern context made him better known than other Qur'anic scholars. In the field of interpretation, he uses the *maudhu'i* (thematic) interpretation method, namely interpreting the Qur'an by collecting several verses of the Qur'an that have the same theme. According to him, this method can answer various problems in people's lives. In other words, the Qur'an is always in line with the development of science and technology as well as the progress of civilization.

Quraish Shihab is a commentator who has the soul of an educator. His expertise in interpretation is dedicated to the field of education. The positions as Vice-Rector, Rector, Minister of Religious Affairs, chairman of MUI, advisor to Minister of Education, Education Advisory Board Member, scientific paper writer, and lecturer are closely related to educational activities. In other words, he is a scholar who utilizes his expertise to educate people. He has the characteristics of a good teacher or educator. He is humble, loving, honest, trustworthy, and assertive. All of those are the characteristics of a teacher.

Gender Equality in the Qur'an: Quraish Shihab's Interpretation in Tafsir al-Misbah

In this section, the study focuses on gender equality, including equality in creation, marriage, leadership in the household, and in prophethood contained in the interpretation of *Tafsir al-Misbah*.

1. Equality In Creation

In general, the Qur'an mentions that the creation of human being can be divided into four different categories, namely (1) human being was created from clay (the case of Adam); (2) human being was created from Adam's rib (the case of Eve). (3); the male was created through a fatherless pregnancy (the case of Isa); (4) human beings are created through the process of reproduction through the biological process between husband and wife (humans in general).

In the three forms of creation mentioned in points 1, 3, and 4, there is no difference of opinion between commentators and feminists. But for the second point, that human being was created through Adam's rib, which in this case, Eve, is still a matter of debate, especially for gender practitioners and feminists. Therefore, the concept of Eve created from Adam's rib has implications for an understanding that is not gender sensitive and has psychological, social, cultural, economic, and even political consequences. The quality of Adam (male) is higher than Eve (female).

There is no verse in the Qur'an that explicitly explains the creation of Eve. The Qur'an only states that Eve was created from oneself (*nafswahidah*). From it, Allah created Eve (*waminbakhalaqazaujaba*). Allah says in QS. 4: 1, as follows:

"O humanity! Be mindful of your Lord, Who created you from a single soul; from it, He created its mate, and through both, He spread countless men and women. And be mindful of Allah—in Whose Name you appeal to one another—and 'honor' family ties.

Surely Allah is ever Watchful over you." (QS. 4: 1).²³

From the verse above, it is understood that God did not mention the process of creation of the first woman in chronological order. Al-Qur'an only says that "from him, He created spouses." In this context, three terms sparked debate among commentators as to understand some of the above paragraphs, the term *nafswahidah* (one single soul); object designated by the word *minha* (from him), and *zaujaha* terms (couples).

Responding to this problem, Quraish Shihab has a different view from other commentators. In this context, Quraish Shihab does not want polemics like other commentators. Shihab intends to position himself as a moderate commentator rather than to strengthen opinions and weaken the views of others. In *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, when explaining the first verse of Surah an-Nisa, he writes as follows:

"Surah al-Hujurat talks about the same origin of the human from a father and a mother, namely the father's sperm and the mother's ovum. Still, the emphasis is on the equality of the human nature of each individual because although everyone has different fathers and mothers, their elements and origin are same. Therefore, it is not natural for someone to insult or demean another person. As for this verse of surah an-Nisa, although it explains the unity and similarity of individuals in terms of the nature of humanity, the context is to describe the number and reproduction of human beings from a father, namely Adam and a mother, namely Eve. This is understood from Allah's statement that Allah created many men and women, and this is, of course, only appropriate if the word (*nafswahidah*) is understood in

the sense of the human father (Adam a.s.) and his partner (Eve) born many men and women."²⁴

From the quote above, it is clear that the Quraish Shihab has his view on the origin of the creation of women. Quraish Shihab interprets the word *nafswahidah* "full human father," Adam and his partner, Eve. Therefore, humans evolved from it, both men and women. His understanding is based on the suitability of meaning in the context of the discourse in these verses. He argues that the origins of the creation of women from Adam's rib are not the cause that gave birth gender-biased.

The hadith that explains the creation of the first woman from Adam's rib must be understood in a figurative way. Otherwise, it will lead to a wrong understanding, and therefore the degree of women seems lower than men.²⁵

Quraish Shihab acknowledges the equality of men and women but also accepts the first model of understanding, which states that *nafswahidah* in QS. 4:1 interpreted as Adam. Quraish Shihab seems to be more inclined to this first opinion. In this context, he interprets it proportionally without having to lower one thought and exalt another.

2. Equality In Marriage

From many equality issues between men and women, it seems that the issue of marriage equality is the most complex, not only in academic circles but also in society. Moreover, the issue of polygamy is the most sensitive. Other problems that lead to gender bias include custody issues, divorce, interfaith marriage, and leadership in the family.

a. Guardianship

Guardianship in the marriage is essential, especially for a woman. It means a woman who

²⁴Muhammad Quraish Shihab, "Tafsir Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an, Vol. II" (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2006), 314–15.

²⁵Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an: Fungsi Dan Peran Wahyu Dalam Al-Qur'an*, 271.

²³Also see, QS. Al-A'raf [7]: 189; dan QS. Al-Zumar [39]: 6

wants to marry must have a guardian. If she is married without a guardian, her marriage is null and void (QS. 24: 32; QS. 2: 221). According to Quraish Shihab, this verse is general, not only intended for guardians and enslaved people but also Muslims. They were all ordered to help their slaves, even for all those who did not have a mate to maintain themselves and their innocence. Thus, it is clear that the command to marry is not limited to only women but includes those worthy of marriage, both women and men.

b. Polygamy

From the past until now, polygamy is still a controversial issue, especially regarding its permissibility status from an Islamic perspective. In general, the views of experts and thinkers on this issue can be classified into three groups, namely: (1) those that allow absolute polygamy; (2) those who allow polygamy with specific terms and conditions; and (3) those who forbid it.

These three groups make QS. 4:3 as a basis to support their opinion. Allah says:

"If you fear you might fail to give orphan women their due rights if you were to marry them, then marry other women of your choice—two, three, or four. But if you are afraid you will fail to maintain justice, then content yourselves with one or those bondwomen in your possession. This way, you are less likely to commit injustice." (QS. 4: 3)

According to Quraish Shihab, QS. 4:3 talks about polygamy. This verse also discusses other issues, such as the obligation to treat orphans fairly and slavery. When translating these verses, Quraish writes as follows:

"And if you fear that you cannot do justice to the women (orphans), then marry that you enjoy from women (other): two, three, or four. Then if you fear you will not be able to do fairly, only one, or a slave

woman you have. That is nearer to prevent you from doing injustice". (QS. 4: 3).²⁶

According to Quraish Shihab, the verse above explains the prohibition of guardians abusing female orphans. This verse concerns an orphan in the care of a guardian, where her wealth is joined to the guardian's property, and the guardian likes the beauty and wealth of the orphan. He wants to marry her without giving her a suitable dowry. Meanwhile, he is reluctant to marry a weak orphan with little wealth and who is not beautiful.²⁷

In the context of polygamy, the verse above is not intended to make regulations regarding polygamy. Therefore, polygamy was known and practiced by adherents of religion and community customs before the revelation of this verse. Thus, this verse should not be understood as a recommendation, let alone the obligation of polygamy. Therefore, the discussion of polygamy should not be seen in terms of ideals or good and evil but must be viewed from the perspective of law enforcement. Thus, according to Quraish Shihab, it is permissible for a man to be polygamous if he faces a severe case or situation and must practice polygamy again.²⁸

c. Leadership in the Household

Leadership in the household seems to be a problem that has attracted the attention of many Islamic scholars. The normative foundation often used as a starting point when discussing this issue is QS. 4:34. Related to this verse, it is understood that the example of leadership in the family is only on the man's side (husband). Women (wives) have no right to be leaders. To get an idea of the matter, I quote God's words:

"Men are in charge of women by (right of) what Allah has given one over the

²⁶Shihab, "Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an, Vol. II," 338.

²⁷Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), 199.

²⁸Shihab, "Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an, Vol. II," 341.

other and what they spend (for maintenance) from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. But those (wives) from whom you fear arrogance – (first) advise them; (then if they persist), forsake them in bed; and (finally), strike them. But if they obey you (once more), seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever the Exalted and Grand.” (QS. 4: 34)

The term "*qawwamun*" is defined as a leader in this verse. Therefore, the phrase "*ar-rijal qawwamun 'ala al-Nisa'*" is often understood as a man being a leader for women. This kind of interpretation sparks criticism, especially for feminists. According to them, this verse is very discriminatory against women. Therefore, the understanding of this verse must be reinterpreted so that it is not gendered biased and has gender justice.

According to Quraish Shihab, this verse speaks about the division of labor between husband and wife. Before discussing Quraish Shihab's views on this issue, I quote the translation of Quraish Shihab on Tafsir Al-Misbah, as follows:

"The man is *qawwamun* over women because Allah has preferred some of them over others and because they (men) spend out of their property. Therefore the righteous women, is the *ta'at*, guard themselves when their husbands are not in place because God has kept them. The women you fear disobedience, advise them and leave them in bed and beat them. And if they obey you, do not be looking for a way to annoy them. Surely Allah is High, Great." (QS. 4: 34).²⁹

²⁹Shihab, 424–25.

Quraish Shihab, in "Insights of the Qur'an (Wawasan al-Qur'an)", interprets the term *al-rijal* in the verse *ar-rijal qawwamun 'alannisa'* as "husband". Quraish Shihab wrote the following:

"As previously stated, the word *ar-rijal* in the verse *ar-rijal qawwamun 'alannisa'* does not mean men in general but is a "husband" because the consideration of the command as emphasized in the continuation of the verse is because they (husbands) spend part of their wealth for their wives. If what is meant by the word "men" is men in general, this is certainly not the case. Moreover, the verse speaks clearly about wives and domestic life."³⁰

In Tafsir al-Misbah, Quraish Shihab corrected his statement. The term *al-rijal* in verse is no longer defined as "husband". Referring to the idea of Muhammad Thahir Ibn Asyur in his commentary, in Arabic, even the Qur'an never interprets the term *al-rijal* with the meaning of "husband". It is very different from *al-nisa'* or *imra'ah*, which usually means "wife".³¹

To understand the meaning of *qawwamun*, which is often interpreted as "leader", Quraish Shihab saw it first from a linguistic or linguistic aspect. Quraish Shihab writes the following:

"The word *qawwamun* is the plural form of *qawwam*, which is taken from the word *qama*. This word is related to it. The prayer command – for example – also uses that root. The command does not mean the command to establish prayer but to carry it out perfectly, fulfilling all the conditions, pillars and sunnah. A person who carries out a task and what is expected of him is called *qa'im*. If he carries out the task as perfectly as possible, continuously and repeatedly, then he is called *qawwamun*. The verse above uses the plural form,

³⁰Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*, 314.

³¹Shihab, "Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an, Vol. II," 424.

qanwamun, in line with the meaning of the word *ar-rijal*, which means many men. Often this word is translated as a leader. But – as read from the meaning above – it seems that the translation has not fully described the intended meaning although it must be admitted that leadership is one aspect it contains. In other words, in the sense of "leadership" includes the fulfilment of needs, attention, maintenance, defense, and coaching."³²

Then who should be the leader? According to Quraish, the right of leadership is borne by men as contained in verse. He further said that at least two main reasons men deserve to be the leaders: first, physical and psychological traits in husbands that can support the success of household leadership compared to wives.³³ Meanwhile, the privilege of women is more supportive of their duties as a giver of peace and calm to men and more supportive of their function in educating and raising their children.

Second, he is obligated to provide for his wife and family members. This understanding can be seen from the word *anfaqu* which uses the past form of the verb, which means "to have spent". Earning a living for women has become the norm for men and has been an ordinary reality in human society since ancient times until now. The mention of this verse about the consideration shows that the old custom is still valid today. In the context of leadership in the family, this second reason is considered quite logical. Isn't there a right behind every obligation? Doesn't the payer get the facility? But in essence, this decision is not only based on material considerations.

3. Equality In Prophethood

In many verses, the dictum of the Qur'an often mentions that the Prophet or Apostle was a man, and no one was a woman. Thus, many

³²Shihab, 424–25.

³³Shihab, 425; Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Maudhu'i Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*, 310.

scholars later defined the prophet as an ordinary man whom Allah chose to receive revelation. As humans, Prophets and Apostles also lived like humans in general (QS. 18: 110).³⁴ Several verses of the Qur'an related to this theme seem gender-biased. The Qur'an always emphasizes that the Prophet or Apostle must be a man. And none of the Prophets or Apostles was the woman? Should these verses be understood in this way, or is there another meaning that the Qur'an wants to carry concerning this matter?

Quraish Shihab translates the term *rijal* in several texts with "men". However, Quraish Shihab does not interpret it textually but rather understands it as "special chosen people, or ordinary humans."³⁵ Regarding this, Quraish Shihab writes:

*"And We did not send before you to mankind at anytime and anywhere, except men, namely the chosen type of human, not the angels whom We gave revelation to them, among others, through the angel Gabriel; So, O those who doubt or do not know, ask the Abl al-Dhikr, that is, those who know if you do not know."*³⁶

According to Quraish Shihab, the term *rijal* in QS. 72:6 and QS. 7: 48 means not only male but also female.³⁷ When interpreting QS. 21:7-8, Quraish Shihab explains as follows:

"The opinion of many scholars (pen: all prophets and apostles are men) can be justified if what is meant by the word *rijal* in this verse is the male gender. But it should be noted that the Qur'an does not

³⁴ Also see, QS. 12: 109; QS. 16: 43; QS. 21: 7;

³⁵Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbab: Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keresasian Al-Qur'an*, Vol. VI (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2006), 535–36; M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbab: Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keresasian Al-Qur'an*, Vol. VII (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2006), 233; M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbab: Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keresasian Al-Qur'an*, Vol. VIII (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2006), 420.

³⁶Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbab: Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keresasian Al-Qur'an*, Vol. VII, 233.

³⁷Shihab, 234.

always use the word *rijal* in the sense of the male gender. The word can also refer to male and female humans as long as they have certain features, character, or characteristics that distinguish them from others’³⁸.

Based on the quote above, it can be understood that although the Quraish Shihab himself does not explicitly state that there was a female prophet, it seems that Quraish Shihab also acknowledges that apart from being a male, there was also a female prophet. It means that not all prophets or apostles were male, but some were female, as long as they had advantages over other humans and must be God's choice. Regarding who the female prophet was, it seems that Quraish Shihab, in this case, also does not explain it.

Conclusion

Based on the explanation in *Tafsir Al-Misbah* regarding the concept of gender equality in the Qur'an, I can conclude as follows:

First, Quraish Shihab, in his commentary, seems to have his views on gender equality. In this regard, Quraish Shihab doesn't want to have polemics like other contemporary commentators or does not want to join in with feminists or gender practitioners. In this case, Quraish Shihab intends to position himself as a more moderate commentator rather than to strengthen and weaken opinions from other views.

Feminists even debate some issues that have been the center of attention. They try to promote the idea of gender equality. Quraish Shihab interprets the text of the Qur'an relating to the issue of gender equality and does not refer to the opinion of feminist experts. Quraish Shihab understands the verse based on the context of the revealed verse. According to Quraish Shihab, in understanding gender verses, we cannot understand them partially. However,

³⁸Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an*, Vol. VIII, 420.

we must understand it comprehensively and pay attention to other related verses (*munasabah al-ayat*).

Second, the socio-cultural background of the commentators is very influential in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, especially the concept of gender. The interpretation and understanding of Quraish Shihab are strongly influenced by socio-cultural background. Quraish Shihab is very intense in the field of performance and is not affected by the ideas of a feminist. His interpretation is very different from feminist views in general. When interpreting verses about gender, we also don't want to force ourselves to be under the growing feminist opinion.

In contrast to feminists, Quraish Shihab admits that men and women are equal in the light of Allah. If we find verses of the Qur'an that seem very discriminatory, do not use them as an excuse to demean women because there is no difference between men and women. Women need male strength, and men crave female tenderness.

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