

## Women's Empowerment in Gender Verses in the Surah al-Nisā'

Yusuf Baihaqi

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung

Yusuf.baihaqi@radenintan.ac.id

### Abstract:

The content of Surah al-Nisā' in the Qur'an is full of messages regarding the importance of empowering women. However, many Muslim communities still underestimate and marginalize women, rendering them less empowered. This research describes women's empowerment in Islam and moderate interpretations of Qur'anic verses related to women. It analyzes the verses about women empowerment in Surah al-Nisā' of the Quran, referring to several fair interpretations and linking them to field phenomena. The results show that the Qur'an is a holy book that supports women's empowerment, an aspect perceived to have social, economic, health, spiritual, and legal dimensions in Surah al-Nisā'. It is urgent to empower women to live worthy and equal to men. This research is expected to help understand the verses on moderate women's empowerment equally and justly as men in building a civilization on earth.

[Kandungan Surat al-Nisā' dalam al-Qur'an sarat dengan pesan-pesan mengenai pentingnya pemberdayaan perempuan. Namun, masih banyak masyarakat Muslim yang meremehkan dan memarginalkan perempuan, sehingga membuat mereka kurang berdaya. Penelitian ini menjelaskan pemberdayaan perempuan dalam Islam dan penafsiran moderat terhadap ayat-ayat al-Qur'an yang berkaitan dengan perempuan. Penelitian ini menganalisis ayat-ayat tentang pemberdayaan perempuan dalam Surat al-Nisā' di dalam al-Qur'an, mengacu pada beberapa penafsiran yang adil dan menghubungkannya dengan fenomena di lapangan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa al-Qur'an adalah kitab suci yang mendukung pemberdayaan perempuan, sebuah aspek yang dianggap memiliki dimensi sosial, ekonomi, kesehatan, spiritual, dan hukum dalam Surat al-Nisā'. Pemberdayaan perempuan agar dapat hidup layak dan setara dengan laki-laki merupakan hal yang mendesak untuk dilakukan. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat membantu memahami ayat-ayat pemberdayaan perempuan yang moderat secara setara dan adil dengan laki-laki dalam membangun peradaban di muka bumi].

### Keywords :

Gender Equality, Surah al-Nisā', Women's Empowerment



## A. Introduction

Before Islam, women experienced discriminatory treatment that kept them uncompetitive in the community. In ancient Greek, women in the elite classes were placed (imprisoned) in palaces while they were traded for those in the lower classes. Also, married women were under the control of their husbands completely. Similarly, in the ancient Roman community, women were under the control of their fathers and husbands before marriage.<sup>1</sup>

Women in the ignorant Arab community were not treated better than in ancient Greek and Roman communities. For instance, their birth in the ignorant Arab community was considered an insult.<sup>2</sup> Many people buried baby girls when they could not the impact of the insult. Moreover, the dowry paid for married women was the full property of their parents or guardians. They were not given the right to inherit or become part of the inheritance. With their worthlessness in the ignorant Arab community, men were allowed to marry many wives. Moreover, women experienced other discriminatory treatments, making it difficult for them to participate and compete with men.

The Qur'an, as the last holy book and intended for humans until the end of time, do not allow discriminatory practices against women. On the contrary, the moral message repeated in its verses supports women's empowerment. Surah al-Nisā' needs further study to determine how the Qur'an cares about empowering women. The content of this surah is dominated by discussions about women's empowerment.

The negative stigma against Islamic teachings that are unfriendly to women is still often voiced. Also, the behavior of several Muslims contradicts Qur'an's women-friendly teachings. This makes it important to analyze the perspectives of Tafsir scholars on gender verses in Surah al-Nisā' to determine Qur'an's concern about Women's Empowerment. It is important to present this analysis to the public to counter the negative stigma against Islamic teachings. Additionally, this would correct several Muslims' behaviors that contradict the holy book.

This research examines the discussions about women empowerment by Tafsir scholars, especially their interpretation of the gender verses in Surah al-Nisā'. The study problem was formulated concerning the women's

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Qur'an* (Bandung: Mizan, 2007), 391.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Syaltūt, *Al-Fatāwā* (Kairo: Dār al-Qalām, 2001), 230–31.

position in Islam and Tafsir scholars' interpretation of gender verses in Surah al-Nisā', especially regarding woman empowerment. Furthermore, this study analyzed the concrete form offered by the Qur'an, referring to al-Nisā' concerning women's empowerment. This study identifies several gender verses in al-Nisā' related to women's empowerment and analyzes the interpretations of the Tafsir Scholars regarding these verses. Therefore, it presents a general understanding of women's position in the Qur'anic texts and its contribution to women's empowerment. No articles specifically discuss women empowerment from Tafsir Scholars' perspectives based on al-Nisā'. The following are some articles relevant to this title and used as references and comparisons:

First is "*Kedudukan dan Peran Perempuan*" (The Position and Role of Women)." This book discussion is general and does not focus on women's empowerment. Examples of themes are women's leadership and inheritance rights, as well as women and ownership.<sup>3</sup>

The second is "*Al-Qur'an dan Perempuan: Menuju Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an* (The Quran and Women: Towards Gender Equality in Interpretation)." Although one sub-discussion is about the glory of women, this book has not discussed it comprehensively in Surah al-Nisā's perspectives on empowering women. Moreover, the approach presented is closer to the analysis of a gender activist than an interpreter.<sup>4</sup>

The third is "*Gender Glass Ceiling in Indonesia: Manifestation, Root, and Theological Islamic Universities in Indonesia in shifting patriarchal bias*. The intellectuals contribute by increasing theological discourse voiced by women and their vertical mobility in public positions.<sup>5</sup>

The fourth is "*The Transition of Malay Women's Role and Contribution in the Early 20th Century*." This article discusses the rise of Malay women in the early 20th century, which began with their awareness of the need for

---

<sup>3</sup> Kementerian Agama RI, *Kedudukan dan Peran Perempuan* (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf Qur'an, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Zaitunah Subhan, *Qur'an dan Perempuan: Menuju Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Penafsiran* (Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, "Gender Glass Ceiling in Indonesia: Manifestation, Roots, and Theological Breakthrough," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 58, no. 1 (2020).

education. As a result, many have roles and occupy strategic political, economic, and social positions.<sup>6</sup>

The Fifth is “The Roots of Gender Bias: Misogynist Hadiths in Islamic Boarding Schools.” It describes the notion in Islamic boarding schools that women are second-class human beings. This discriminatory assumption is found in the textbooks taught in Islamic boarding schools. Therefore, these books need a critical review using a feminist approach.<sup>7</sup>

The first theoretical foundation in this research is the justice theory. Aristotle defined justice as the act of giving what people are entitled to.<sup>8</sup> The second is the benefit theory. According to Najm al-Din al-Tufi, protecting human benefit is the highest and most solid source of law because it is the main goal of religion.<sup>9</sup> The third theoretical foundation is the equality theory. Asghar Ali Engineer stated that equality between men and women implies acceptance of both in equal measure. Also, both have equal social, economic, and political rights.<sup>10</sup>

This library research is descriptive-analytical with primary, secondary, and tertiary data. Primary data comprised authoritative interpretation works, such as “*Al-Tafsīr al-Wasīth li al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*,” “*Al-Tafsīr al-Munīr Fī al-‘Aqīdah wa al-Syarī‘ah wa al-Manhaj*,” “*Tafsīr al-Qurān al-Hakīm*,” “*Tafsīr al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr*,” and “*Tafsīr al-Mishbāh*.” Their interpretations are about gender verses in Surah al-Nisā’ to be associated with women’s empowerment. Secondary data were related to research on women empowerment, such as Insights from the Qur’an, “*Al-Islām Fī Muwājahati Hamalāt at-Tasyqīq*.” Also, data were obtained from several scientific articles on women’s empowerment and Islamic teachings. Tertiary data were obtained from the dictionary entitled “*Mukhtashar al-Mufradāt Fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān Li al-Ashfahānī*.”

---

<sup>6</sup> Arba’iyah Mohd. Noor, “The Transition of Malay Women’s Role and Contribution in The Early 20th Century,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>7</sup> Marhumah, “The Roots of Gender Bias: Misogynist Hadiths in Pesantrens,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>8</sup> B.J. Nasution, “Kajian Filosofis Konsep Keadilan Dari Pemikiran Klasik Sampai Pemikiran Modern,” *Jurnal Yustisia*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (2014): 120.

<sup>9</sup> M.R. Purwanto, “Kritik Terhadap Konsep Masalah Najm al-Din al-Tufi,” *Jurnal Madania*, Vol. 19, no. 1 (2015): 31.

<sup>10</sup> Agus Hermanto, “Teori Gender Dalam Mewujudkan Kesetaraan: Menggagas Fikih Baru,” *Ahkam*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (2017): 223.

## B. Women's Empowerment in Islam

Etymologically, empowerment means "ability." Therefore, empowerment is the ability of people or organizations to be competitive.<sup>11</sup> Patriarchal culture is old and spread worldwide, potentially creating gender discrimination, injustice, conflict, and violence.<sup>12</sup> This happened in the pre-Islamic Arabian peninsula before Islam came to empower women, raise their status, and eliminate oppression and unfair practices.<sup>13</sup>

The theme of gender equality, including women's rights, status, and creations, leads to Islam's negative assumptions.<sup>14</sup> However, gender equality is voiced by Islam in Surah An-Nisā' [4]: 1 that man and woman are created from oneself, Adam. Due to the unity of origin from the creation side, it is unnatural for a human to insult and demean another.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it is inappropriate for women to be marginalized by men and not empowered by their positive potential. This is because men and women are the same humans from various religious, social, economic, or political perspectives.<sup>16</sup>

The scholars agree that men have to make a living support. Many verses confirm this agreement, including the al-Nisā' [4]: 34. Al-Qurtubi stated that men receive a more inheritance portion due to their inherent obligation to support women, as implied in.<sup>17</sup> Because of these obligations, leaving the

---

<sup>11</sup> Amin Kuncoro dan Kadar, "Pengaruh Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Peningkatan Sumberdaya Ekonomi Keluarga," *Buana Gender: Jurnal Studi Gender dan Anak*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (2016): 47.

<sup>12</sup> Mufidah Cholil, "Complexities in Dealing with Gender Inequality: Muslim Women and Mosque-Based Social Services in East Java Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 11, no. 2 (2017): 459–88.

<sup>13</sup> Mahmud Hamdi Zaqquq, *Al-Islām Fī Muwājahati Hamalāt al-Tasyqīq* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2000), 61.

<sup>14</sup> Ahmad Ali Nuridin, "Scholarly feminist versus internet commentator on women issues in Islam," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (2011): 184.

<sup>15</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2007), 398.

<sup>16</sup> Ridho Al-Hamdi, "Coping with Religious Tolerance and Gender Equality: Comparing Islam and Good Governance Perspectives," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (2015): 189.

<sup>17</sup> Abū Abdillāh al-Qurthubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Hadits, 2010), 153.

house to seek sustenance is a necessity for men. Several verses in the Qur'an could be understood as a command for women to stay home and not leave the house, as stated in Surah al-Ahzāb [33]: 33.

The message of the verse is not rigid on the necessity for women to remain at home. It means that their residence should be the dominant place to spend most of their time and leave only for a necessity justified by the Shari'a. Their exit should be accompanied by a polite attitude to maintain their honor.<sup>18</sup> This moderate interpretation is reasonable because several professions outside the home were performed by women in the era of the prophet and companions. Furthermore, there is no rejection from the prophet or companions, although women are referred to as having supporting roles in earning a living, not the main characters.<sup>19</sup>

Education is the key to women's empowerment to be more productive in the public and domestic spheres.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Islam does not prohibit and limit women from obtaining their right to study. On the contrary, it makes learning an obligation for both men and women. Reading is a window of knowledge and is the first commandment ordered by God through the angel Jibril to the Prophet and their people, including men and women, as stated in Surah al-'Alaq, revealed to the Prophet command humans to read, write, and learn.<sup>21</sup>

Both male and female humans were created as caliphs on this earth and must prosper on it, a mission that cannot be realized without knowledge. Reading, writing, and learning are media for obtaining knowledge. Humans are worthy to carry out the mission of the caliphate on earth due to the superiority of their knowledge over other creatures of God (Qur'an 2:30-34), or in other terms, "*Al-karāmah biqadri al-'Ilmi lā biqadri al-'amali*" means glory based on knowledge, not deeds.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the history of

---

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad Sayid al-Thanthawi, *Al-Tafsīr al-Wasīth Li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Kairo: Dār al-Sa'ādah, 2007), 206.

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Moiz Khan, "Forgotten History of Empowered Women," *International Journal of Women Empowerment*, Vol. 5, no. 1 (2019): 35.

<sup>20</sup> Hasanatul Jannah, "Pemberdayaan Perempuan Dalam Spiritualitas Islam: Suatu Upaya Menjadikan Perempuan Produktif," *Karsa: Jurnal Sosial dan Budaya Keislaman*, Vol. 19, no. 2 (2012): 136–45.

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Ali al-Shabuni, *Shafwat al-Tafsīr* (Kairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1980), 581.

<sup>22</sup> Fachruddin al-Razi, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Kairo: Maktabah al-Taufiqiyah, 2003), 281.

Islamic civilization proves the diversity of science controlled by Muslims and notes that the profession of "Scholar" is the domain of both men and women.

Those prohibitions or limitations on women's political rights often stated that men are their leaders.<sup>23</sup> Also, women's leadership is something beyond their reach and nature.<sup>24</sup> The verse in the Qur'an "*Al-Rijālu Qawwāmūna alā al-Nisā'*" (Qur'an 4:34) is used to justify this perspective. The word *Qawwāmūna* is the plural form of *Qawwām*, the superlative *Qāimūn*. It is stated *qama fulānun 'alā al-syai'i wa huwa qā'imūn 'alaihi wa qawwāmūn 'alaihi*, which means that "he guides, guards, and protects her." The two aspects that make men positioned as guides, guards, and protectors for women are *Wahbiyyūn* (gift) and *Kasbiyyun* (effort). However, the two aspects are not necessarily shared by all men but are limited to what happens in general. It is because some women also have more physical strength, knowledge, ability to face life's difficulties, and economic stability compared to men.<sup>25</sup>

Men are physically more likely to become leaders, but that does not mean that women have no right to become leaders. It is because, at some point in a community, some women could possess several advantages that men lack, enabling them to become leaders. Under certain conditions and situations, leadership does not need extra physical strength possessed by men but requires psychological abilities inherent in most women.

A concrete example where a leader's gentle character is needed more than valor and courage is the story of the queen of Saba's kingdom in the Qur'an. In this story, the Qur'an praises the queen's wise attitude taken. The kingdom authorities advised the queen to fight the kingdom of Prophet Sulayman (Qur'an 27:33).<sup>26</sup> However, the queen preferred the persuasive path by sending messengers with gifts (Qur'an 27:35)<sup>27</sup> to know more about Sulayman. In the story, Sulayman had preached to the queen to leave the

---

<sup>23</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Qur'an*, 414.

<sup>24</sup> Masruhan, "The Unprecedented Contextual Interpretation of Misogynic Hadith at The Reformist PERSIS Pesantren in Bangil," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 13, no. 2 (2019): 493.

<sup>25</sup> al-Thanthawi, *Al-Tafsir al-Wasith Li al-Qur'an al-Karim*, 136–37.

<sup>26</sup> Departemen Agama, *Al Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, vol. 2 (Jakarta: Lajnah Percetakan Al Qur'an Departemen Agama, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

worship of the sun (Qur'an 27:24).<sup>28</sup> This wise attitude ultimately led the queen and people to declare Islam with Prophet Sulayman to God, the Lord of all nature (Qur'an 27:44).<sup>29</sup>

The reasons stated by those prohibitions and restrictions of women from becoming leaders, referring to the verse of "*al-Rijālu Qawwāmūna 'ala al-Nisā'*" (Qur'an 27:34)<sup>30</sup>, are weaker than the arguments and explanations given by those supporting women empowerment. Moreover, several verses permit them to be actively involved in politics and even become leaders. For instance, Surah al-Taubah [9]:71 allows women to cooperate with men in various fields, including politics. Furthermore, history shows that many women are involved in practical political issues. For instance, Umm Hani was justified for their political attitude by the prophet Muhammad when they gave security guarantees to some polytheists.<sup>31</sup>

These explanations imply that Islam does not tolerate discrimination, marginalization, and violence against women. It is a religion that strongly supports positive efforts to empower women in the community, together with men, fairly and according to the nature of their creation. There is a disparity between Islamic teachings and the behavior of people claiming to be followers in treating their women. The women-friendly Islamic teachings are often in stark contrast to their followers' behavior. This difference in attitude may be caused by misunderstandings in Islamic teachings or external religious factors, such as inherited ancestral customs. In this case, Islam cannot be blamed because its followers do not reflect its teachings.

Islamic teachings that allow men to practice polygamy in Surah al-Nisā' [4]:3 are often misused as a justification to vent their biological desires without prudence, benefit, and fairness. This practice creates negative assumptions and doubts about the truth of Islamic teachings that allow polygamy. Furthermore, there is a misinterpretation of several gender verses by conservative groups. It contributes to the emergence of Muslim feminist activists fighting for women's liberation and gender equality.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Qur'an*, 418.

<sup>32</sup> Khalif Muamar A. Harris dan Adibah Muhtar, "The Concept of Gender Equality in Islam and The West," *Afkar*, Vol. 21, no. 2 (2019): 33–74.



### C. Interpretation of Verses Regarding Women Empowerment in Surah al-Nisā'

Women's empowerment is an issue hotly discussed in the modern community due to the community's reality that has been shackled to patriarchal culture, where the role of men is considered more dominant than women. Therefore, women are considered weak inferior beings<sup>33</sup> and experience discrimination and violence. Surah al-Nisā' is full of messages about the importance of empowering women in social, economic, health, spiritual, and legal dimensions. This presents a moderate interpretation to clarify several genders.

#### 1. Social Dimension

There is a relationship between gender and human rights. In this case, gender bias in the community violates human rights.<sup>34</sup> Islam promotes the participation of women and emphasizes that they are equal to men as part of a social community.<sup>35</sup> The difference between men and women in Islam aims to complement each other. Moreover, the command to be kind to others is part of the equality taught by Islam. In that context, the Qur'an in Surah al-Nisā' [4]:1 reminds people about the unity of their origin *Yā ayyuhā al-nāsu ittaqū Rabbakum al-ladī khalaqakum min nafsin wāhidatin wa khalaka minhā zawjahā*.

*Nafsin Wāhidatin* (oneself) means Adam and *Zawjahā* (his partner) is Eve. Regarding the creation story, many commentators of the Qur'an explain that God created and put Adam to sleep and created Eve from Adam's rib. Eve woke up, approached Adam, and they merged because Eve was created from one of his limbs.<sup>36</sup> The story implies that humans should be kind to one another and love each other, as shown by Adam to Eve. Humans share the same origin, Adam, although they differ in languages, colors, tribes, and nations. Therefore, it is good to empower women's social

---

<sup>33</sup> Mayola Andika, "Reinterpretasi Ayat Gender Dalam Memahami Relasi Laki-Laki dan Perempuan: Kajian Kontekstual QS An-Nisa' Ayat 34," *Jurnal Harkat: Media Komunikasi Gender*, Vol. 14, no. 1 (2018): 12–20.

<sup>34</sup> Isabel Pla-Julian dan Jose-Luis Diez, "Gender Equality Perceptions of Future Engineers," *Engineering Studies*, Vol. 11, no. 3 (2019): 243–51.

<sup>35</sup> Umma Farida dan Abdurrahman Kasdi, "The 2017 KUPI Congress and Indonesian Female Ulama," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 12, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>36</sup> al-Thanthawi, *Al-Tafsir al-Wasith Li al-Qur'an al-Karim*, 19–20.

status in the community because it is in line with the instruction of Surah al-Nisā'.

A marriage that disturbs and weakens the women's social status and becomes the gossip of the surrounding community is prohibited in Islam. Examples are marriages with the ex-wife of one's biological father [Qur'an 4:22], close relatives, or those related by blood [Qur'an 4:23]. Particularly, the prohibition against marrying one's biological father's ex-wife is discussed in al-Nisā' [4]:22. It takes precedence over the discussion of several women prohibited from marrying [Qur'an 4:23]. This shows the negative social portrait in the ignorance era.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Islam came to eliminate women's social powerlessness because they are considered an inheritance of children from their biological fathers. The child is the most entitled to marry the widow of their dead biological father compared to other men.<sup>38</sup>

It is narrated that Surah al-Nisā' [4]: 22 was revealed based on several figures. Hish bin Abi Qais married their father's ex-wife named Kubaisyah bint Ma'an. Similarly, Al-Aswad bin Khalaf married their father's ex-wife, Shafwan bin Umayyah bin Khalaf married their father's ex-wife called Fakhinah bint Al-Aswad bin Abd al-Muththallib. Also, Mansour bin Mazin married their father's ex-wife named Awalkah bint Kharijah.<sup>39</sup> Based on the history of the revelation of this verse, where one verse discussed several people in the same case, it was common at that time for a son to marry their biological father's ex-wife in the Arabian Peninsula.

The prohibition against marrying several women with a close kinship is seen in An-Nisā' [4]: 23. There are extraordinary social adverse effects of marriage between relatives as prohibited in this verse. Women are often powerless and the most victimized in this matter. Furthermore, social conflicts between close families could occur due to internal marriage conflicts. Therefore, Islam forbids marriage between close relatives to avoid the negative social impact. Incestuous relationships involving sexual loving by couples with close family ties or kinship arise when parents, children, or

---

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Rasyid Ridha, *Tafsīr al-Qurān al-Hakīm*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 1999), 378.

<sup>38</sup> Muhammad al-Thahir Ibnu 'Asyur, *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr wa al- Tanwīr* (Beirut: Dar Souhnoun, 1997), 291.

<sup>39</sup> Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *Al-Tafsīr al-Munīr Fī al-'Aqīdah wa al-Syarī'ah wa al-Manhaj*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2009), 645.

fellow siblings are prohibited from separating rooms.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to separate the bedroom between children or parents and siblings living together, as taught by Islam, to prevent an incestuous relationship.

The powerlessness of women in the community is seen in polygamy, where they are aggrieved because many of their rights are unfulfilled. Furthermore, their status as wives of a secret polygamy practice secretly is not recognized because it is not officially recorded in state documents. Unofficially registered marriages are against women's rights, including legal and cultural norms widely applicable in the community.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, when their status is known, they become ridiculed by the community because of the stigma of usurpers of other people's men. In many cases of secret polygamy practice, the woman must bear an unclear status between being the wife or a girl. The woman is often alone, visited by the husband secretly to only fulfill biological needs.

This polygamy practice often occurs in the community, resulting in "*siri* marriage." The word "*siri*" comes from Arabic, which means secret. Although this marriage is harmonious and the conditions are fulfilled, it is considered secret because it is deliberately covered up ("*Al-Zawāj al-Sirri*"). The Scholars agreed to forbid it<sup>42</sup> because the basic principle of marriage in Islam is not hidden.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, the Qur'an treats husband and wife as partners, and neither is allowed to enjoy superiority over the other in marriage.<sup>44</sup>

Fairness is a must for those intending to be polygamous. The concern of being unfair between wives is a sufficient excuse not to force oneself into polygamy, as stated in Surah An-Nisā' [4]:3 *Fa in khiftum allā ta'dilū fa wāhidatan*. This verse reminds people that polygamy in Islam is not a sunnah matter, let alone mandatory but permissible for a better benefit. However, it is forbidden by Islam when it involves injustice or occurs because of the

---

<sup>40</sup> Departemen Agama, *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, 2:140–41.

<sup>41</sup> Rajnaara Akhtar, "Modern Traditions In Muslim Marriage Practices, Exploring English Narratives," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 7 (2018).

<sup>42</sup> Muhammad Syaltūt, *Al-Fatāwā*, 268.

<sup>43</sup> Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *101 Soal Perempuan Yang Patut Anda Ketahui* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2010), 178.

<sup>44</sup> Shahnewaj Patwari dan Abu N. M. A. Ali, "Muslim Women's Right to Divorce and Gender Equality Issues in Bangladesh: A Proposal for Review of Current Laws," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 21, no. 6 (t.t.).

women's powerlessness, as stated in al-Nisā' [4]:129 *Falā tamilū kulla al-Mailī fatadzarūhā kal mu'allaqah.*

## 2. Economic Dimension

In Islam, women can be independent and economically empowered without relying on men's help and compassion. The dowry, obligatory on men, is the full property of the women they want to marry. Also, they are entitled to the inheritance left by their parents or relatives and are allowed to develop their wealth by working. In the ignorance (pre-Islamic) era, women were considered goods for their parents or guardians. Subsequently, the dowry paid was entirely the property of the parents or guardians. Islam came to glorify and empower women, allowing them to own dowry. This ownership is full and absolute, and the parents or guardians have no right to the dowry, a condition contrary to before the revelation of al-Nisā' [4]:4. Moreover, the husband may not take or ask for the dowry owned by their wife, except with permission and blessing from the wife (Qur'an 4:4).<sup>45</sup>

Women before Islam were not entitled to inheritance because it was only given to those that fought<sup>46</sup> the men's domain. The portrait of their economic powerlessness is seen in the inheritance revelation verse in the Qur'an. Islam wants to eliminate the hegemony of men and empower women economically by giving them the right to inherit. Although they are not obligated to provide for others, the inheritance obtained could support them. As a result, their existence does not burden other parties.

Ibn Abbas stated that, in the ignorance era, people did not inherit their wealth from women and sons until they became adults. A man from the Ansar named Aus bin Thabit died and left two daughters and one son. Furthermore, the man's uncle's two sons, Khalid and 'Arfathah with the status of *'Ashabah*, took all the inheritance. Therefore, the man's wife (Aus) called Umm Kahlah came to the Prophet Muhammad and reported what had happened. The Prophet did not know what to say, and then a verse came that emphasized the women's right to inheritance<sup>47</sup> *Lir rijāli nashībun min mā taraka al-wālidāni wa al-aqrbūn wa lin nisā' i nashībun min mā taraka al-wālidāni wa al-aqrbūn* (Qur'an 4:7).<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Departemen Agama, *Al Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*.

<sup>46</sup> Al Qurthubi, *Al Jāmi' Li'ahkām Al Qur'an*, 3:45.

<sup>47</sup> Az Zuhaili, *At Tafsir Al Munir Fi Al 'Aqīdah Wa Asy Syari'ah Wa Al Manhaj*, 2:595.

<sup>48</sup> Departemen Agama, *Al Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*.

Islam does not forbid women to work and choose jobs that match their abilities and competencies. No religious text explicitly prohibits women from working.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, the word of God in al-Nisā' [4]:32 indicates that women are allowed to work *Lir rijāli nashībun min mā iktasabū wa lin nisā' i nashībun min mā iktasabna*. Al-Raghib al-Ashfahāni stated that the word *Kasaba* means what someone does for themselves and others. Conversely, *Iktasaba* is used only for what someone does for themselves. Moreover, Al-Raghib al-Ashfahani added that *Kasaba* is used for afterlife-oriented businesses, while *Iktasaba* is used for world-oriented businesses.<sup>50</sup> In line with this explanation, an excerpt from Surah al-Nisā' [4]:32 states that men strive for themselves, and women from worldly affairs return to their work ethic and accuracy in cultivating and maximizing their potential. It shows how Islam empowers women economically by allowing them to inherit and have the capacity to leave property to be inherited (Qur'an 4:12).

### 3. Health Dimension

Women's health deserves consideration because the next generation would be born from their wombs. Furthermore, women nurture, educate, and direct their children from an early age into superior generations. The content of al-Nisā' [4]:23 that prohibits marriage between close relatives is an early measure in Islam to prevent the birth of a disabled and weak generation. This prohibition intends to eliminate negative impacts with social and health dimensions. Scientifically, contemporary research confirms the message of al-Nisā' [4]:23 that marriage between close relatives results in a physically ill and disabled generation, reduces birth rates, and causes infertility. There are many more negative impacts of marriage between close relatives, such as the high transmission rate of congenital diseases in the resulting generation.<sup>51</sup> All the negative impacts scientifically prove the Qur'an's truth.

Stunting is still found in poor communities, described as the failure to grow in the body and brain due to lengthy malnutrition. Therefore, the child looks shorter than normal children their age and has delayed thinking

---

<sup>49</sup> Zaquq, *Al Islām Fī Muwājahati Hamalāt At Tasyqīq*, 71.

<sup>50</sup> Abdul Latif Yusuf, *Mukhtashar al-Mufradāt Fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān Lil Ashfahāni* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1998), 429–30.

<sup>51</sup> Muhammad Kamil Abdul Shamad, *Al-Ijāz al-'Ilmi Fī al-Islām* (Kairo: Dār al-Mishriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1997), 223.

Although the Qur'an is not a health book, it has instructions about health because it is a guide and reference for a living.<sup>52</sup> Medical experts explain several factors that cause stunting in children under five years. Poor nutritional status in pregnant women and infants is the main factor that causes this stunting.<sup>53</sup> The importance of good nutritional intake is discussed in Surah al-Nisā' [4]:9, warning people not to produce a weak generation. One indicator of a weak generation is that they grow up with less nutritional intake and are physically and mentally weak in their development. Physical and mental strength are two important things for a strong, superior, and prosperous generation.

Surah al-Nisā' [4]:9, at the beginning of its revelation, was understood by commentators as an order to care for the heirs. It prohibits being excessive in wills to others because it leaves the heirs in poverty.<sup>54</sup> However, al-Nisā' [4]:9 reminds people not to leave weak children or families, especially about their welfare in the future.<sup>55</sup> Stunting is closely related to living welfare because poverty is the main factor behind this phenomenon in the community.

#### 4. Spiritual Dimension

Suicide, abortion, and adultery are examples occurring in the community and are mostly performed by women. Furthermore, terrorism usually carried out by men now involves women as the main actors.<sup>56</sup> This negative behavior occurs due to the loss or absence of spiritual values, necessitating the importance of empowering spiritual values in women. Islam promotes women on an equal basis with men to reach a high spirituality and even surpass men. This is proven when the Qur'an makes Asiyah bint Muzahim<sup>57</sup> and Maryam bint Imran two female figures deserving imitation by believers through faith and self-purity (Qur'an 66:11-12).

---

<sup>52</sup> Kementerian Agama RI, *Kedudukan dan Peran Perempuan*, 297.

<sup>53</sup> Meva Nareza, "Pahami penyebab Stunting dan Dampaknya Pada Kehidupan Anak," <https://www.alodokter.com/bayi-lahir-stunting-faktor-penyebab-dan-risiko>, 2020.

<sup>54</sup> al-Thanthawi, *Al-Tafsir al-Wasith Li al-Qur'an al-Karim*, 56.

<sup>55</sup> Departemen Agama, *Al Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, vol. 2 (Jakarta: Lajnah Percetakan Al Qur'an Departemen Agama, 2000), 123.

<sup>56</sup> Septi Ilman Gumiandari dan Nafi'a, "The Role of Cirebon Woman Ulama In Countering Religious Radicalism.," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 8, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>57</sup> Kementerian Agama RI, *Kedudukan dan Peran Perempuan*, 82.

Equality between men and women in obtaining the same reward rights<sup>58</sup> is also seen in Surah al-Nisā' [4]:124. This verse shows the spiritual respect and protection given by Islam to women from the unfair treatment in the ignorance era. Also, Islamic Shari'ah refers to this verse to remind women not to be spiritually inferior to men because they receive the same rewards as men for good deeds.<sup>59</sup>

#### 5. Legal Dimension

One of the principles in law enforcement is Equality Before the Law. In the mediation trial (pre-divorce), the husband has the same position and is equal to their wife. Both have the same right to express their perspectives and present arguments before a judge, as stated by Surah al-Nisā' [4]:35. Mediation is prescribed in Islamic teachings to reconcile the litigants and avoid divorce. Furthermore, it sends a message about the importance of equality before the law for others, regardless of gender.

It is significant to equalize women with men before the law and legally protect them. It is because women are often the victims of law violations, such as trafficking, which is the recruitment, transfer, harboring, or receipt of a person. Trafficking involves using threats, force, or coercion to kidnap, fraud, deceive abuse power, or a vulnerable position. Alternatively, it could involve giving or receiving payments or benefits to obtain the consent of a person in power for exploitation.<sup>60</sup>

Exploitation in this context implies using for own benefit and extortion. Exploiting people could mean extorting their power or taking advantage of their property for their benefit. In this case, Islam prohibits exploiting women because their weaknesses should be protected. Furthermore, Surah al-Nisā' [4]:127 forbids exploiting orphaned women through prohibitions and orders.

An excerpt from Surah al-Nisā' [4]:127, "*Allātī lā tu'tūnahunna mā kutiba lahunna wa targhabūna a tankihūhunna*", prohibits male guardian of an orphaned woman from exploiting them by marrying them. Also, the man

---

<sup>58</sup> Subhan, *Qur'an dan Perempuan: Menuju Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Penafsiran*, 39.

<sup>59</sup> al-Thanthawi, *Al-Tafsīr al-Wasīth Li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 322.

<sup>60</sup> Davit Setyawan, "Waspada Bahaya Perdagangan Orang (Trafficking) dan Penyelundupan Manusia (Smuggling)," <https://www.kpai.go.id/berita/artikel/waspada-bahaya-perdagangan-orang-trafficking-dan-penyelundupan-manusia-smuggling>, 2020, 36, <https://www.kpai.go.id/berita/artikel/waspada-bahaya-perdagangan-orang-trafficking-dan-penyelundupan-manusia-smuggling>.

should not prevent others from marrying the woman to control their property. An excerpt of Surah al-Nisā' [4]:127, "*Wa an taqūmū li al-yatāmā bi al-qisthi*," commands people to be fair to orphaned women. This verse does not explain the kind of fair behavior intended for women, though many other verses in the Qur'an provide details.

For instance, it is prohibited to approach the orphan's property except in a more useful way. Additionally, the verses command people to improve the condition of orphans and make them as own brothers, not insult or spend their wealth and support them materially.<sup>61</sup> The object in verse relates to orphans. However, the command not to exploit women also applies to women as a whole. This is because they are mentioned as orphans in particular and in general, as in the editorial of Surah al-Nisā' [4]:127 as an affirmation. It means that when exploiting women outside the orphanage is not allowed, then exploitation of orphaned women is strictly prohibited.

#### D. Conclusions

Patriarchal culture should not justify discrimination against women. It is inappropriate to be practiced by one person against one another because all are brothers created from the same origin. Supporting is obligatory for men in Islam but is not forbidden for women. They are allowed to work outside the home in various professions according to their inclinations and expertise, provided they maintain decency and honor. Furthermore, since education is the key to empowerment, Islam gives women the right to learn and even makes it an obligation. Political leadership is not gender-based but a matter of ability, where the most capable become leaders. It is because no religious text in Islam prohibits women from becoming political leaders.

Surah al-Nisā' discusses women social, economic, health, spiritual, and legal empowerment. Social empowerment is clear in the message that men and women are equal beings. Also, it is seen in the prohibition of marriage between close relatives and unfair and covered-up polygamy. Women's economic empowerment is manifested in dowry payment and inheritance rights. Furthermore, besides based on benefits, women are also given the right to work. The prohibition of marriage between close relatives or those with blood relations shows how Islam empowers women's health.

---

<sup>61</sup> Muhammad al-Amin al-Syanqithi, *Adhwā' al-Bayān Fī Idhāh al-Qur'ān Bi al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), 173.



Additionally, women are commanded to pay attention to good nutrition while pregnant or breastfeeding. They are encouraged not to be spiritually inferior before men.

Women's legal empowerment appears when Islam positions them as equal to men before the law. Moreover, the Qur'anic command to protect women becomes part of empowering women legally. Therefore, it is urgent to disseminate women-friendly Islamic teachings to counter skewed gender-based assumptions. Furthermore, it is important to present a moderate interpretation of the Qur'an text to clarify malpractices committed by certain people on the excuse of misinterpretation. [.]

## References

- Akhtar, Rajnaara. "Modern Traditions in Muslim Marriage Practices, Exploring English Narratives." *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 7 (2018).
- al-Qurthubi, Abu Abdillah. *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*. Vol. 3. Beirut: Dār al-Hadits, 2010.
- Al-Hamdi, Ridho. "Coping With Religious Tolerance and Gender Equality: Comparing Islam and Good Governance Perspectives." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (2015).
- Andika, Mayola. "Reinterpretasi Ayat Gender Dalam Memahami Relasi Laki-Laki dan Perempuan: Kajian Kontekstual QS An-Nisa' Ayat 34." *Jurnal Harkat: Media Komunikasi Gender*, Vol. 14, no. 1 (2018): 12–20.
- al-Razi, Fachruddin. *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Kairo: Maktabah al-Taūfiqiyah, 2003.
- al-Shabuni, Muhammad Ali. *Shafwat al-Tafāsīr*. Kairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1980.
- al-Syanqīthi, Muhammad al-Amin. *Adhwā' al-Bayān Fī Idhāh al-Qur'ān Bi al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003.
- 'Asyur, Muhammad al-Thahir Ibnu. *Tafsīr al-Tahrīr wa al-Tanwīr*. Beirut: Dar Souhnoun, 1997.
- al-Thanthawi, Muhammad Sayid. *Al-Tafsīr al-Wasīth Li al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*. Kairo: Dār al-Sa'ādah, 2007.
- al-Zuhaili, Wahbah. *Al-Tafsīr al-Munīr Fī al-'Aqīdah Wa al-Syarī'ah Wa al-Manhaj*. Vol. 2. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2009.

- Cholil, Mufidah. "Complexities in Dealing With Gender Inequality: Muslim Women and Mosque-Based Social Services in East Java Indonesia." *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 11, no. 2 (2017): 459–88.
- Departemen Agama. *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*. Vol. 2. Jakarta: Lajnah Percetakan Al-Qur'an Departemen Agama, 2000.
- Dzuhayatin, Siti Ruhaini. "Gender Glass Ceiling in Indonesia: Manifestation, Roots, and Theological Breakthrough." *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 58, no. 1 (2020).
- Farida, Umma, dan Abdurrahman Kasdi. "The 2017 KUPI Congress and Indonesian Female Ulama." *Journal Of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 12, no. 2 (2018).
- Harris, Khalif Muamar A., dan Adibah Muhtar. "The Concept of Gender Equality in Islam and The West." *Afkar*, Vol. 21, no. 2 (2019): 33–74.
- Hermanto, Agus. "Teori Gender Dalam Mewujudkan Kesetaraan: Menggagas Fikih Baru." *Ahkam*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (2017).
- Ilman Gumindari, Septi dan Nafi'a. "The Role of Cirebon Woman Ulama In Countering Religious Radicalism." *Qudus International Journal Of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 8, no. 1 (2020).
- Jannah, Hasanatul. "Pemberdayaan Perempuan Dalam Spiritualitas Islam: Suatu Upaya Menjadikan Perempuan Produktif." *Karsa: Jurnal Sosial dan Budaya Keislaman*, Vol. 19, no. 2 (2012): 136–45.
- Kementerian Agama RI. *Kedudukan dan Peran Perempuan*. Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf Qur'an, 2009.
- Khan, Muhammad Moiz. "Forgotten History of Empowered Women." *International Journal of Women Empowerment*, Vol. 5, no. 1 (2019).
- Kuncoro, Amin, dan Kadar. "Pengaruh Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Peningkatan Sumberdaya Ekonomi Keluarga." *Buana Gender: Jurnal Studi Gender dan Anak*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (2016).
- Marhumah. "The Roots of Gender Bias: Misogynist Hadits in Pesantrens." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 5, no. 2 (2015).
- Masruhan. "The Unprecedented Contextual Interpretation of Misogynic Hadith at The Reformist PERSIS Pesantren in Bangil." *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 13, no. 2 (2019).
- Muhammad Syaltūt. *Al-Fatāwā*. Cairo: Dār al-Qalām, 2001.
- Nareza, Meva. "Pahami penyebab Stunting dan Dampaknya Pada Kehidupan Anak." <https://www.alodokter.com/bayi-lahir-stunting->

- faktor-penyebab-dan-risiko*, 2020. <https://www.alodokter.com/bayi-lahir-stunting-faktor-penyebab-dan-risiko>.
- Nasution, B.J. "Kajian Filosofis Konsep Keadilan Dari Pemikiran Klasik Sampai Pemikiran Modern." *Jurnal Yustisia*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (2014).
- Noor, Arba'iyah Mohd. "The Transition of Malay Women's Role and Contribution in The Early 20th Century." *Journal of Al-Tamaddun*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (2020).
- Nuridin, Ahmad Ali. "Scholarly feminist versus internet commentator on women issues in Islam." *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (2011).
- Patwari, Shahnewaj, dan Abu N. M. A. Ali. "Muslim Women's Right to Divorce and Gender Equality Issues in Bangladesh: A Proposal for Review of Current Laws." *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 21, no. 6 (t.t.).
- Pla-Julian, Isabel, dan Jose-Luis Diez. "Gender Equality Perceptions of Future Engineers." *Engineering Studies*, Vol. 11, no. 3 (2019): 243–51.
- Purwanto, M.R. "Kritik Terhadap Konsep Masalah Najm al-Din al-Tufi." *Jurnal Madania*, Vol. 19, no. 1 (2015).
- Ridha, Muhammad Rasyid. *Tafsir al-Qurān al-Hakim*. Vol. 4. Beirut: Dar Al Kutub, 1999.
- Setyawan, Davit. "Waspada Bahaya Perdagangan Orang (Trafficking) dan Penyelundupan Manusia (Smuggling)." <https://www.kpai.go.id/berita/artikel/waspada-bahaya-perdagangan-orang-trafficking-dan-penyelundupan-manusia-smuggling>, 2020. <https://www.kpai.go.id/berita/artikel/waspada-bahaya-perdagangan-orang-trafficking-dan-penyelundupan-manusia-smuggling>.
- Shamad, Muhammad Kamil Abdul. *Al-I'jāz al-'Ilmi Fī al-Islām*. Kairo: Dār al-Mishriyyah al-Lubnāniyyah, 1997.
- Shihab, Muhammad Quraish. *101 Soal Perempuan Yang Patut Anda Ketahui*. Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2010.
- . *Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*. Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2007.
- . *Wawasan Qur'an*. Bandung: Mizan, 2007.
- Subhan, Zaitunah. *Qur'an dan Perempuan: Menuju Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Penafsiran*. Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2015.

Yusuf Baihaqi

Yusuf, Abdul Latif. *Mukhtashar al-Mufradāt Fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān Lil Ashfahānī*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1998.

Zaqquq, Mahmud Hamdi. *Al-Islām Fī Muwājahati Hamalāt al-Tasyqīq*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma’arif, 2000.

**How to cite this article:**

Baihaqi, Yusuf, ‘Women’s Empowerment in Gender Verses in the Surah al-Nisā’, *Kalam*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2023): 1-20

**Publisher:**

Faculty of Ushuluddin and Religious Study Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung in collaboration with Asosiasi Aqidah dan Filsafat Islam