

## Gender Equality in Islam (Classical and Contemporary Mufassir Perspectives)

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### Abstract

*Gender is the differentiation of roles, functions, and responsibilities between women and men resulting from socio-cultural construction and can change according to the times. Gender can also be understood as social sex. The research method used is qualitative research with a literature study approach. Data collection techniques are sourced from documentation of books, articles, etc. This is then analyzed to conclude from various written documents by systematically and objectively identifying a message or data in its context. This article aims to find out how Islam's view of gender equality is extracted from the opinions of commentators in interpreting the Qur'an, especially in Surah an-Nisa verses 1 and 34. The study results show that Islam is not a misogynistic religion, but in this gender issue, Islam has regulated several different rights and obligations for men and women by giving specificity as a gift from Allah SWT. Men and women are like heads and limbs. So, as an inseparable unit, we must cooperate and respect each other, and there is no need to feel superior and the other inferior.*

### Keywords

gender; islam; tafsir; Al-Qur'an.



### I. Introduction

One of the discourses that are always to be discussed, timeless, and always associated with Islam is gender discourse. Besides the fact that gender issues are often discussed on sensitive issues, gender discourse has provoked many pro and contra responses. The basis most often used in this discourse is the equality of rights (rights equality). Islam is a great religion that its adherents claim as a religion that is rahmatan. Lil 'Alamin must be able to answer every social problem its people face. About equality and equality among humans, the Qur'an explicitly affirms this. There is no dichotomy of rights or degrees between humans; the only difference is the quality of one's piety to God (Surah al-Hujurat: 13).

However, social conditions are not patent without change. Each era has its logic. The Quran says that there is no gap between human beings, especially men and women. However, reality speaks otherwise. Fronted by the feminist movement, the demands for equal rights between men and women are increasingly being carried out. This happens because the religious practice women feel so far seems to place women as the second sex. konco is wingking (friends in the back) and in an inferior position to the men. Communication is the process of delivering messages by someone to other people to tell, change attitudes, opinions or behavior either directly orally or indirectly through the media. In this communication requires a reciprocal relationship between the delivery of messages and recipients namely communicators and communicants (Hasbullah, et al: 2018).

In almost every field and aspect of socio-religious life, there are striking differences in rights between men and women. In the field of leadership, for example, there is a kind of awareness that settles in people's minds that men are worthy and must be leaders. So, women only deserve to be placed in domestic areas, which makes some women feel isolated.

From these problems, the authors are interested in discussing gender equality in Islam from the perspectives of classical and contemporary commentators. Especially in QS an-Nisa Verses 1 and 34, you can understand the meaning of the content of the verse.

## II. Research Method

The research method used is a qualitative research type, namely research that is descriptive and uses analysis (M. Askari Zakariah et al., 2020) as well as using a literature study approach which is a series of activities whose processes are related to library data collection by reading, taking notes and processing research materials (Mestika Zed, 2004). Data collection techniques through documentation, looking for data in books, articles, and so on (Sandu Siyoto, 2015). Next, analyze to conclude various written documents by systematically and objectively identifying a message or data in its context (Muri Yusuf, 2017).

## III. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Definition of Gender

The term gender is familiar to our ears, but many of us still do not understand the term correctly. Gender is often identified with sex (sex), even though gender is different from gender. Gender is often understood as a gift from God or divine nature, even though gender is not solely like that.

Etymologically the word 'gender' comes from the English word 'gender,' which means gender. In *Webster's New World Dictionary*, 1984 Edition, 'gender' is defined as 'the apparent difference between men and women regarding values and behavior. Meanwhile, in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* Edition 1990, the word 'gender' is defined as a grammatical classification of nouns and other words related to them, which are generally related to gender and the absence of gender (or neutrality).

Terminologically, gender by Hilary M. Lips is defined as the cultural expectations of men and women. HT Wilson defines 'gender as a basis for determining the different contributions of men and women to the collective culture and life by which they become male and female. Meanwhile, Elaine Showalter defines 'gender' as more than just a distinction between men and women regarding socio-cultural construction. He emphasizes gender as an analytical concept that can be used to explain something. In the *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender. In men and Women in the World's Cultures*, edited by Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember (2003), gender is defined as "Two or more classes of persons who are believed to be different from each other; society has different roles and expectations for different genders (most societies have two genders-male and female-but others have more than two)." Gender is understood as two or more classes of people believed to be different from each other or the roles and expectations that are the basis for differences between men and women by society.

From some of the definitions above, it can be understood that gender is a trait used as the basis for identifying differences between men and women in terms of social and

cultural conditions or the roles and expectations of society towards them. Gender is different from sex, although etymologically, the meaning is the same, namely gender. In general, sex is used to identify the differences between men and women regarding biological anatomy, while gender concentrates more on social, cultural, and other non-biological aspects. While sex studies emphasize the development of biological aspects and chemical composition in the body of a man and a woman, gender studies emphasize the development of aspects of one's masculinity and femininity (Marzuki, 2018).

Gender is defined as a visible difference between men and women regarding craziness and behavior (Webster's New World Dictionary). The emotional relationship between men and women develops in society (Women's Studies Encyclopedia). Gender is a concept used to identify the differences between men and women regarding socio-cultural influences. Gender is society (social constructions) a form of engineering (Rilla Sovitriana, 2020).

The term 'gender,' which means sex or gender, is also defined as the characteristics and characteristics inherent in both sexes that are socially and culturally constructed. The State Office of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment (KNPP) defines gender as follows:

Gender refers to the roles constructed and assigned to women and men by society. These roles are learned, change over time and vary widely within and between cultures. Unlike sex (the biological difference between women and men), gender refers to learned behaviors and societal expectations that distinguish masculinity and femininity. While genetic and anatomical characteristics determine sex identity, socially learned gender is an acquired identity. Included in the concept of gender are expectations about the characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors of women and men (femininity and masculinity) ( Mufidah, 2009).

Gender differences are used as the basis for giving social roles, which are not only used as the basis for the division of labor, but more than that, they become instruments in social, economic, political recognition, and denial, as well as assessing the roles and fundamental rights of both. The definition of gender is the interpretation or division of two biologically determined human sexes utilizing sure signs, universal and permanent, not interchangeable, and recognizable since humans are born. That is what is called the provisions of God or *nature*. From here gave birth to the term *gender identity*. At the same time, gender is the differentiation of roles, functions, and responsibilities between women and men resulting from socio-cultural construction and can change according to the times. Gender can also be understood as social sex (Mufidah, 2009).

### 3.2 Gender Concept

The word 'gender' was used in America in the 1960s as a form of radical, conservative, secular, and religious struggle to voice women's existence, which then gave birth to gender awareness. According to Prof. Nasaruddin Umar, that gender discourse began to develop in 1977, when the London feminist group abandoned the old issues called *patriarchal* and replaced them with gender issues. Since then, gender has been discussed in various seminars, discussions, and writings on social change and third-world development. The term gender is defined as a mental and cultural interpretation of gender differences, namely male and female ( M. Faisol, 2012).

Gender cannot be separated from its relationship with the patriarchal cultural system. Patriarchal culture tends to prioritize men over women. On the other hand, matriarchal culture favors women over men. In its broadest meaning, Asma Barlas defines patriarchy

as a political gender distinction that favors men by diverting biological sex into a politicized gender, which privileges men and makes women as "other selves" who are different and lower. Cultural aspects that are little patriarchal and biased matriarchy are increasingly irrelevant when faced with the spirit of modern times that are egalitarian, democratic and just. Egalitarian and democratic cultures reward someone based on their abilities and services, not based on gender or gender ( M. Faisol, 2012).

The concept of gender differences is often confused with the concept of gender as social construction by public understanding. Gender differences are indeed different from birth, and it is God's full right to determine the sex of humans. As with gender 'differentiation,' it occurs through a long process by humans (society) through imaging, assigning roles, and ways of treating and respecting both (Mufidah, 2009).

In the view of feminists, the legitimacy of religious interpretations that support gender bias can be re(de)constructed through a review of the interpretation and understanding of sacred religious texts to be more egalitarian, humanist, in line with universal Islamic values, and the application of gender mainstreaming in a line. Mufidah ( 2009) gives the conclusion that there are three categories of thoughts about the concept of gender equality and justice in Islam, which are as follows:

First, is the conservative group. Gender equality is conceptualized by exploring Islamic values regarding the position and roles of men and women in the Koran and hadith as a response to the feminist movement in the West, which contradicts the values developed in Islam. The second is the moderate group. The concept of gender equality is constructed through exploring Islamic values as the religion of *rahmatan Lil Alamin*. The third is the progressive group. The progressive category views gender as not only a social problem but the holy text of the Koran and the Prophet's hadith itself also a problem.

### 3.3 Gender Equality Discourse in Al-Quran

Women were considered second-class citizens when Islam was present in the Jahiliyyah Arab society. Arab society, at the time of the appointment of Muhammad SAW. as the Messenger of Allah, is one of the many societies in the world that marginalize the existence of women. Girls in Arab society at that time were a disgrace, as Allah said in QS al-Nahl [16]: 58-59. Their daughters were also buried alive, as mentioned in QS al-Takwir [81]: 8-9. Then Islam came to bring a glimmer of hope for women. Women are no longer marginalized and demeaned in their dignity and status. In the Qur'an, Allah justifies women to speak the truth and carry out opposition movements against various evils as mentioned in QS al-Taubah [9]: 71. Nasaruddin Umar also, in his dissertation, mentions that in the Qur'an, various verses explain the principle of - the principle of the equal position of men and women, namely both as servants of God. As mentioned in QS al-Hujurat [49]: 13.

In subsequent developments, Islam's spirit to elevate women's status is sometimes hindered by culture and various religious texts that are understood textually and expressly. Injustice and society's general mindset and behavior towards women are often gender-biased. Women's rights to take part outside the home are often negated, and injustice against women is still alive and thriving in Indonesian society. However, Islam has deconstructed the doctrinal understanding and discriminatory attitudes towards women; ironically, until now, the public's view of women, in general, is still wrong. Women tend to be seen as second-class human beings who are not worthy of leading and occupying key positions in various public spaces. Women still tend to be placed in domestic positions, such as taking care of the household, taking care of children, and cooking in the kitchen (Nasrulloh, 2015).

### 3.4 The Myth of the Creation of Eve in QS An-Nisa verse 1

In the Surah An-Nisa verse 1, which means;

O humanity, fear your Lord, who created you from a single person, and from him, Allah created his wife; from them, Allah multiplied many males and females. Moreover, fear Allah who by (using) His name you ask one another and (maintain) friendly relations. Verily, Allah is always watching over you and watching over you (Surah an-Nisa [4]: 1.

Ath-Tabari (2007), through his commentary *on Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Quran*, said that Allah made a second pair (*al-zauj al-tsani*) from one *nafs*. What is meant by the second pair is none other than Eve'. This interpretation is based on the information (*atsar*) narrated by Mujahid, Qatadah, al-Suda, Ibn Abbas, and Ibn Ishaq, as follows:

God placed Adam in heaven. Adam walked alone without a friend (*zauj*) who could calm him down. One time Adam was sleeping. When he woke up from his sleep, he found a woman sitting on his head. God created a woman from Adam's rib. So, Adam asked: "Who are you?", "I am a woman," he answered. Adam asked: "What were you created for?" The woman replied: "So that you may be quiet by his side.

The word *nafs wahidah* ath-Tabari is based on the Arabic language tradition. According to him, although the word *nafs* has a general form, its meaning is none other than Adam. Ibn Ishaq, in understanding the meaning of *nafs wahidah* as mentioned above, is aware of his interpretation's influence on the Torah tradition. The understanding that Eve was created from Adam's rib is the same understanding developed among the Jews. In narrating an *atsar*, Ibn Ishaq states, "as news reached us from the People of the Book who hold the Torah." So do not be surprised if this interpretation is believed to have been influenced by *israiliyat* stories and is not a pure understanding that comes directly from the Prophet Muhammad (M. Faisol, 2012).

Furthermore, there is a similar interpretation to the interpretation of ath-Tabari in the interpretation of Ibn Kathir in his book *Lubaabut Tafsir Min Ibni Katsir* (Ibn Kathir, 2004). Moreover, this kind of interpretation is the interpretation of most scholars. Dr. Nasrulloh, in his study, concluded that the above hadith is the recommendation of the Prophet SAW. to all his people to be kind, gentle, and wise to women and has nothing to do with the initial creation of women (Nasrulloh, 2015).

Such a mainstream view is entirely different from the view of Abu Hayyan. Observing the verse, Abu Hayyan focused on the editorial of the verse *min nafsin wahidatin was khalafa minha zaujaha*. Because the editor of this verse becomes the estuary of meaning for the creation of women. Abu Hayyan put forward two considerations. *First*, in the word *minha*, there is a discarded *much* of, namely the word *jeans*. *Second*, the word *min* as contained in the verse means *ibtida al-ghayah* (the beginning of the goal). These two considerations significantly affect interpreting the verse (M. Faisol, 2012).

Based on the first consideration, the actual verse editorial reads *wa khalafa min jinsiha zaujaha*. So, the meaning becomes "and from her kind Allah created his wife," not "and from Adam, Allah created his wife." Here, the word *species* refers to the type of base material from which Adam was created. The material is clay (*thinah* or *thurab*). Of course, conclusions like this cannot be separated from the second consideration. The word *min* implies the understanding that Adam was the first person, namely the beginning of the goal (*ibtida' al-ghayah*) in the creation of man. Adam was created before Eve. When the initial

creation of humans occurred in Adam, the Qur'an also stated *min nafsin Walidah*. When God created Adam as the first human from clay ( *natural* ), God was also able to create Eve of the same type as Adam (M. Faisol, 2012).

In line with this understanding, Abu Hayyan also provides other alternative considerations. Namely, there is no disposal of *mudhaf* in the editorial of the verse *was khalafa minha zaujaha*. However, the pronoun *he* must be returned to the word *muqaddara* in the form of *al-thinah* (the clay that was the material for Adam's creation), not back to the word *nafs*. So, the meaning of the verse becomes "*and from the clay which was the material for Adam's creation, Allah created his wife.*" In other words, that Eve was created from the material that God made Adam create ( M. Faisol, 2012).

### 3.5 Gender Discourse in QS an-Nisa verse 34

In the Surah an-Nisa verse 34, which means;

The men are the leaders of the women because Allah has made some of them (men) superior to others (women) and because they (men) have spent part of their wealth. Therefore, a righteous woman obeys Allah and takes care of herself when her husband is not around because Allah has taken care of (them). Women whom you are worried about, So advise them, separate them in their beds, and beat them. Then if they obey you, do not look for ways to trouble them. Verily Allah is Most High, Most Great." (Surat an-Nisa' [4]: 34).

The word *qawwam* is an attribute used to emphasize the status of *rijal*. The word *qawwam* describes the word *rijal*. The word *qawwam* becomes *Khabar* and the word *rijal* becomes *mubtada'*. So, the status of *rijal* is explained. Abu Hayyan provides an interesting illustration of the relationship between the status of *qawwam* in the word *rijal*. According to him, a *rijal can have qawwam* status if the *rijal* is not influenced by the criteria of its *rijal* . Therefore, he states that in the structure of the verse there is a *muqadblood* (hidden) number. The sound is *al-rijalu qawwamuna alan nisa' [in kanu rijalan]*. If interpreted, it becomes "*real it is people who are qawwal over nisa if they are rijal.*" The word *rijal*, according to Abu Hayyan, has the meaning of a person who has toughness, which is challenging in managing and carrying out responsibilities (M. Faisol, 2012).

The definition of *rajul*, as described by Abu Hayyan does not seem to be something that is made up. The definition of *rajul* is not synonymous with and refers to a particular gender. Both men and women can be called *rajul* if he has toughness, strength, and excellence. Therefore, people who are firm on foot, both men and women, according to Arabic dictionaries, are called *rajul* or *rajal*. Women who have toughness are also called *rajulah*. Even in an expression, it is stated: "*Ayesha kanat Radhi Allahu anha rajalatu al-ra'yi*". "Aisha is a tough mind" (M. Faisol, 2012).

Physical characteristics do not determine a person's craft. Indeed, in general, men have beards, but beards do not determine male identity. Many people with beards are less capable. Here, Abu Hayyan distinguishes between gender (gender) and biological, physical conditions or characteristics. Beard is a biological, physical characteristic that men generally own, but not every person with a beard can be called a *rajul*. The nature of *kerajulan* can be owned by anyone, whether male or female. In other words, both men and women can enter in the sense of *rajul*. This means, the notion of *rajul* is not an understanding that is permanently attached to one gender ( M. Faisol, 2012).

The definition of *rajul* is different from *al-dzakar*. If *rajul* emphasizes the nature of strength or toughness that anyone, both male and female, can possess, then the notion of *al-dzakar* refers more to the male sex physically and biologically. So, the notion of *rajul*

cannot be equated with *al-dzakar* or vice versa *al-Anisa's* is equated with *al-untsa* or *al-muannats*. This distinction between *rajul* and *dzakar* has been widely acknowledged by commentators in understanding the Qur'an verses explaining the creation of creatures in pairs. Strictly speaking, the Koran distinguishes the meaning of *al-dzakar* and *al-untsa*. Therefore, Allah says in the Qur'an, stating: "*And that it is He Who created the pairs of al-dzakar (male) and al-untsa (female)*. Moreover, "*Then Allah made from him a pair: al-dzakar (male) and al-untsa (female)*." In fact, in the story about the birth of Mary, the Koran clearly states that *al-Dakar* (male) is not like *al-Tunisia* (female) (M. Faisol, 2012).

Moreover, to present the contradictions of Abu Hayyan in his *Tafsir Bahr Al-Muhith*, the researcher adopted the interpretation of Ibn Kathir in his book *Lubaabut Tafsir Min Ibni Katsiir* and the interpretation of Sayyid Qutub in his book *Fii Zhilalil Qur'an*. Ibn Kathir, in interpreting the verse quotes several hadiths and atsars that are not far from the textual of the verse, as follows: ( Ibn Kathir, 2004) :

The men are the leaders of the women." That is, men are women's leaders in the sense of leaders, heads, judges, and educators of women if they deviate. "Because Allah has favored some of them (men) over others (women)." That is because men are more important than women, and men are better than women. Therefore, prophethood is reserved for men. So also the king (president), based on the words of the Prophet Muhammad: "It will never be lucky for a people to appoint women (as leaders) in their affairs." (HR Al-Bukhari). Likewise with the judiciary and others. "And because they have spent part of their wealth, "in the form of dowry, maintenance, and various responsibilities Allah has required of them in the Qur'an and the sunnah of the Prophet SAW. So, men are more important than women in terms of their souls; men have virtue and advantages, so it is suitable to be in charge of women, as Allah says. "But husbands have one level of advantage over their wives" (Surah Al-Baqarah: 228).

'Ali bin Abi Talib told Ibn Abbas about *arrival qowwaamuuna 'alan nisaa'*, namely leaders over women who must be obeyed according to Allah's command to obey him. Moreover, obedience to him is doing good to his family and looking after his wealth. This is the opinion of Muqatil, as-Suddi, and adh-Dhahhak.

Ibn Kathir's opinion is the opinion of the majority of commentators. As stated above, Ibn Kathir's interpretation of the verse is not far from its textual meaning, namely that men are still superior and above men. As the hadith quoted, "*There will never be lucky for a people who appoint women (as leaders) in their affairs.*" (HR Al-Bukhari), so women cannot assume leadership positions. Ibn Kathir also strengthened his argument by interpreting the verse. "*Because Allah has favored some of them (men) over others (women)*" because men have been given advantages both in terms of biology, men are more potent than women. Therefore, men are obliged to provide for their wives; from that point of view, men are more suitable to be leaders.

Furthermore, in line with Ibn Kathir's interpretation, Sayyid Kutub (a contemporary commentator), in his *al-Dhabi al-ijtima'i* style of commentary, the book of *Fii Zhilalil Qur'an*, describes the interpretation of the verse with a very explicit social approach. He said:

Allah has made man and woman in pairs (as husband and wife) based on general rules to building this world (world). Then, making women's duties include getting pregnant, giving birth, breastfeeding, and nurturing the fruit of

their relationship with their husbands. These are big and important tasks, neither light nor easy, which must be accomplished by women with profound physical, psychological and mental preparation. Therefore, it is only fair that the second party (husband) is burdened with meeting his basic needs and protecting his wife so that she can devote her energy and attention to this critical task. The husband is not burdened with the task of conceiving, giving birth, breastfeeding, and raising children. Then the wife works, struggles, and stays up late to care for herself and the baby simultaneously. It is also fair that the man should be given privileges in the form and arrangement of his physical, nervous, mind, and soul in such a way that can help him fulfill these tasks. Women are also given the body, nerves, mind, and spirit shape and structure to help them carry out their duties. That is the truth, and your Lord has not wronged anyone.

These unique qualities make the man more capable of carrying out leadership and more worthy of working in his field. As his job is to provide a living, one of his particular branches makes him more worthy of being a leader. Because managing the life of the family organization with all its members is included in this leadership. Moreover, it gave him the authority to regulate the use of the property more in line with the character of his assignment. The Quranic texts highlight these two elements when determining men's leadership over women in Islamic society. Leadership is caused by creation and nature because of the division of tasks and specialties. Leadership because of justice in the division of this task on the one hand, and because of the assignment of each party to fields that are indeed made easy for him, and his nature supports each. At the same time, the other party (woman) is not prepared for it and is not assigned to take care of it. It is unjust to assume this leadership task for women and burden them with other burdens.

From the quote from Sayyid Qutub's interpretation above, it is clear that the rights and obligations of men and women are indeed different. Moreover, in terms of psychological and biological, men and women differ. So, it is fair if the duties and rights between these two types are also distinguished. This is one form of justice of Allah SWT which has been stated in the noble texts of the Qur'an.

Dr. Qurrotul Ainiyah, M.HI, in his book *Gender Justice in Islam*, states that based on this verse, Allah has prioritized men over women for two reasons. First, because of the gift, Allah gives a signal about giving the perfection of leadership and the husband's power over his wife, just like the power of the head of government to his people. The second is because the work/duties that a husband must do are maintenance, care, and protection. In another explanation, it is stated that Allah has favored men over women is equated with the human body. Men are located as heads, while women are located as members of the body. As part of the body, it is not appropriate if one member feels super compared to the other members of the body because each member of the body has its duties and functions (Qurrotul Ainiyah, 2015).

### **3.6 Rights and Obligations of Gender Insight in the Qur'an**

In assessing and researching misogynistic hadiths, Nasrullah, in his book "Anti-Women's Hadiths" (2015), uses standards derived from the universal principles of the Koran as the essential foundation for the rights and obligations of men and women, including; First, men and women are both servants of Allah SWT. Allah created humans,



and one of the goals is to serve Allah SWT. This commandment applies to all His servants, without distinction between men and women. Second, men and women carry out the mandate as caliphs on Earth. Third, men and women both accept the primordial oath and the fourth, men and women are both actively involved in the cosmic drama. Fifth, men and women both have the potential to achieve achievements.

#### IV. Conclusion

The term 'gender,' which means sex or gender, is also defined as the characteristics and characteristics inherent in both sexes that are socially and culturally constructed. Gender is defined as a visible difference between men and women regarding craziness and behavior (Webster's New World Dictionary). The emotional relationship between men and women develops in society.

There are three categories of thinking about gender equality and justice in (Islam: 1); conservatives argue that gender equality is conceptualized through exploring Islamic values about the position and roles of men and women in the Koran and hadith as a response to the feminist movement. In the West, which contradicts the values developed in Islam. 2) moderate, namely the concept of gender equality is constructed through exploring Islamic values as the religion of *rahmatan Lil Alamin*. and 3) progressive, the progressive category views gender as not only a social problem but the holy text of the Koran and the Prophet's hadith itself is also a problem.

Furthermore, in the discourse on gender equality in the Qur'an, we can understand that in the treasures of interpretation of the Qur'an, there are different interpretations of the pros and cons of this gender topic. Thus, the presenter concludes that Islam is not a misogynistic religion, but in this gender issue, Islam has regulated several different rights and obligations for men and women by giving specificity as a gift from Allah SWT. Men and women are like heads and limbs. So, as a unit that cannot be separated, we must cooperate and respect each other, and there is no need to feel superior and the other inferior.

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