



**QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies**

ISSN (Online): 2828-2779

Received: 11-01-2026, Revised: 02-02-2026

Accepted: 25-03-2026, Published: 02-04-2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v5i2.15375>

## Equality and Complementarity in the Qur'an: A Thematic Exegesis of Gender Relations

Mukhlis Widodo<sup>1</sup>, Aceng Zakaria<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Contemporary discussions on gender in the Qur'an have generated extensive scholarly debate, particularly regarding equality, authority, social roles, and justice. Although previous studies have made important contributions, much of the existing scholarship remains fragmented, often focusing on isolated controversial verses or approaching the issue primarily through legal, ideological, or apologetic frameworks. Consequently, there remains a significant gap in studies that reconstruct the Qur'an's discourse on gender through an integrated thematic exegetical perspective that connects theological, ethical, historical, and social dimensions. This study addresses that **gap** by employing a qualitative library research design using the thematic exegetical (*tafsir mawḍū'ī*) **method**. It analyzes selected Qur'anic verses related to human creation, spiritual accountability, reciprocity, family structure, inheritance, and social responsibility, while engaging both classical *tafsir* and contemporary scholarship on gender in Islam. The **findings** show that the Qur'an upholds the ontological and spiritual equality of men and women while also recognizing certain contextual and functional distinctions in social and familial responsibilities. These distinctions, however, are not framed as a theological basis for absolute hierarchy, but rather as part of a justice-oriented moral order grounded in reciprocity, accountability, and shared human dignity. The significance of this study lies in its **contribution** to contemporary global debates on religion, gender, and scriptural interpretation by offering a balanced Qur'anic framework that may inform discussions on gender justice, Islamic education, ethical family relations, and inclusive religious discourse in both Muslim and plural societies.

**Keywords:** Qur'an; Gender; Thematic Exegesis; Equality; Complementarity; Justice; Islamic Thought

<sup>1</sup> Institut Agama Islam Al-Hidayah Bogor, Jawa Barat, Indonesia, Corresponding Email: [mukhliswido714@gmail.com](mailto:mukhliswido714@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Institut Agama Islam Al-Hidayah Bogor, Jawa Barat, Indonesia, Corresponding Email: [aceng@staiabogor.ac.id](mailto:aceng@staiabogor.ac.id)

## Introduction

Gender remains one of the most debated themes in contemporary Qur'anic studies. Discussions concerning equality, authority, inheritance, leadership, and family relations continue to shape scholarly and public debates on Islam in both Muslim-majority and global academic contexts. In these debates, the Qur'an is frequently invoked as a foundational source for articulating norms concerning the relationship between men and women [1]. Yet the interpretive outcomes of such engagements vary considerably, reflecting not only textual differences but also divergent hermeneutical, legal, and ideological assumptions. Much of the current debate on gender in Islam is marked by polarization [2]. On one side are readings that treat certain gender-related verses as evidence of fixed male authority and enduring hierarchical order [3]. On the other side are interpretations that seek to align the Qur'an entirely with modern egalitarian categories, sometimes without sufficient attention to the text's own conceptual and ethical architecture [4]. Both approaches, despite their differences, often risk reducing the Qur'an's gender discourse to isolated passages or externally imposed binaries.

A substantial body of scholarship has addressed these issues through feminist hermeneutics, Islamic legal theory, and contextual interpretation. Such studies have significantly advanced the field by challenging patriarchal assumptions, distinguishing between text and interpretation, and re-evaluating the relationship between revelation and social reality [5]. Nevertheless, many existing studies remain partial in scope [6]. They frequently center on a limited number of contentious verses while leaving underexplored the broader thematic coherence through which the Qur'an conceptualizes human dignity, moral agency, reciprocity, and justice across male-female relations [7]. This article identifies that gap and responds to it by employing a thematic exegetical (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) approach to the study of gender in the Qur'an [8]. Rather than reading individual verses in isolation, this study reconstructs the Qur'an's discourse on gender through interconnected themes [9], including human creation, spiritual accountability, ethical reciprocity, family responsibility, inheritance, and social participation [10]. In doing so, it seeks to recover the internal coherence of the Qur'anic worldview as it relates to men and women.

The central argument of this article is that the Qur'an affirms the ontological and spiritual equality of men and women while also recognizing certain context-based distinctions in roles and responsibilities [11]. These distinctions are not best understood as markers of essential hierarchy, but as components of a broader moral framework rooted in justice [12], accountability, reciprocity, and social balance. Such a reading allows for a more nuanced

understanding of Qur'anic gender discourse beyond the binary of patriarchy versus sameness [13]. The broader significance of this study lies in its contribution to ongoing international conversations on religion, gender, and scriptural ethics [14]. By offering a balanced and textually grounded reading of gender in the Qur'an [15], this article aims to enrich contemporary debates not only in Qur'anic studies and Islamic thought, but also in wider discussions on how sacred texts can be interpreted in relation to justice, dignity, and plural social life.

Scholarly discussions on gender in the Qur'an have developed through multiple interpretive trajectories, ranging from reformist exegesis and feminist hermeneutics to contextualist and neo-traditional readings [16]. These approaches differ not only in their conclusions regarding women and men, but also in their assumptions about revelation, authority, language, ethics, and the relationship between text and history [17]. As a result, contemporary debates on gender in Islam cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between "traditional" and "modern" readings; rather, they represent a complex field of interpretive negotiation.

Among the most influential voices in contemporary Qur'anic gender discourse is Amina Wadud, whose work emphasizes the ethical and theological unity of the Qur'an and argues that patriarchal readings often stem from male-centered interpretation rather than from the text itself [18]. Her hermeneutical method foregrounds *tawhīd*, textual coherence, and the inclusion of women's lived experiences in interpretation [19]. Wadud's contribution is significant because she shifts the debate from isolated legal verses to the Qur'an's broader moral and theological vision [20]. Recent scholarship continues to identify her as a foundational figure in Islamic feminist hermeneutics and in debates on how universal Qur'anic ethics should inform the reading of gendered verses

A related but distinct contribution comes from Asma Barlas, who argues that the Qur'an itself is not patriarchal, but has often been interpreted through patriarchal epistemologies. Barlas places particular emphasis on divine justice, anti-patriarchal theology, and the need to "unread" inherited assumptions that project male authority into the text [21]. Her work is especially important in challenging the theological naturalization of patriarchy and in distinguishing between the Qur'an and the history of its interpretation. Contemporary studies continue to engage her anti-patriarchal reading, especially in relation to verses on creation, authority, and gender justice

Earlier reformulations of women's status in Islam were also shaped by Riffat Hassan, whose writings challenged theological assumptions about women's inferiority, especially in relation to creation narratives, moral

accountability, and spiritual agency [3]. Hassan's intervention is important because she helped redirect attention from legal questions alone toward deeper theological anthropology. In this respect, she opened an important pathway for later feminist and reformist Qur'anic scholarship by insisting that gender inequality in Muslim societies often reflects interpretive history rather than divine intent.

A more legal-ethical perspective is developed by Kecia Ali, whose scholarship highlights the relationship between scriptural interpretation, legal reasoning, and gendered norms in Muslim thought. Her work is especially useful for understanding how ethical ideals and juridical formulations may diverge, particularly in matters of marriage, sexuality, and authority [22]. Ali's contribution helps demonstrate that Qur'anic interpretation on gender cannot be fully understood without attention to how legal traditions institutionalized particular readings of male-female relations.

Within broader Islamic hermeneutics, Fazlur Rahman provides a major methodological foundation through his emphasis on the moral trajectory of the Qur'an and the need to move from historical particularity to universal ethical principles. Although Rahman did not focus exclusively on gender, his interpretive framework remains highly relevant because it allows gender-related verses to be read within the Qur'an's wider ethical architecture rather than as isolated legal prescriptions [23]. This approach is particularly useful for distinguishing between normative moral objectives and historically contingent social forms.

A similar concern with contextual and ethically responsible interpretation can be found in the work of Abdullah Saeed, who advocates contextualist readings of the Qur'an that remain faithful to revelation while recognizing historical change [24]. Saeed's contribution is important for contemporary Qur'anic studies because he provides methodological tools for interpreting socially embedded verses—including those related to gender—without collapsing either into rigid literalism or unrestricted relativism.

In the Indonesian context, Nasaruddin Umar is among the most important scholars to systematically address gender in the Qur'an. His work is particularly significant for distinguishing between biological difference and socially constructed gender roles, while also demonstrating how many assumptions about women in Muslim societies emerge from historical-cultural interpretation rather than from the Qur'an itself [25]. Nasaruddin Umar's scholarship remains one of the most influential references for gender-sensitive Qur'anic studies in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, M. Quraish Shihab offers a more textually rooted and socially moderate reading of gender in the Qur'an. His interpretations are important because they neither fully replicate rigid patriarchal models nor wholly adopt activist feminist frameworks. Instead, Shihab often emphasizes ethical balance, family harmony, contextual reading, and the distinction between universal principles and social application [26]. His works are especially relevant for scholars seeking a middle path between polemical conservatism and ideologically overdetermined reinterpretation.

Taken together, these scholars demonstrate that gender in the Qur'an is not a settled or monolithic subject, but a field of ongoing interpretive contestation. However, much of the existing scholarship tends to proceed through either feminist critique, legal reconstruction, or contextual hermeneutics without sufficiently integrating the Qur'an's broader thematic coherence across theological, ethical, and social dimensions [27]. This article seeks to contribute to that gap by employing a thematic exegetical (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) approach that reconstructs the Qur'an's discourse on gender through interconnected themes of creation, spirituality, reciprocity, justice, and responsibility.

Beyond these major voices, several other scholars further enrich the academic discussion on gender in Islam and provide important analytical tools for this study. Aisha Abd al-Rahman (*Bint al-Shāṭi'*) represents a significant internal Muslim precedent for women's participation in Qur'anic interpretation [28]. Her scholarship is important not only because of its exegetical value, but also because it demonstrates that women's intellectual engagement with the Qur'an is rooted within the Islamic scholarly tradition itself rather than being merely a contemporary external intervention.

From the perspective of law and gender, Ziba Mir-Hosseini offers an important distinction between the ethical vision of Islam and the patriarchal structures that may emerge in legal codification and social practice. Her work is particularly useful in clarifying that gender inequality in Muslim societies often reflects the historical development of jurisprudence and legal authority rather than the totality of the Qur'an's moral discourse [29]. This distinction is especially relevant when discussing inheritance, marriage, and authority in family life.

Leila Ahmed contributes a crucial historical dimension to the study of gender in Islam. Her scholarship demonstrates that discourses on women in Muslim societies are shaped not only by scriptural interpretation, but also by colonial encounters, modern reformist projects, and shifting socio-political contexts [30]. Her work is valuable in reminding scholars that contemporary gender debates cannot be understood apart from their historical formation.

Meanwhile, Khaled Abou El Fadl provides an important ethical framework for evaluating authority in Islamic interpretation. His critique of authoritarian hermeneutics is especially relevant to gender-related Qur'anic verses, which are often invoked in ways that foreclose interpretive complexity and ethical accountability[31]. His work supports the argument that a responsible reading of the Qur'an must combine fidelity to the text with humility, moral seriousness, and resistance to interpretive domination.

Taken together, these scholars broaden the field of inquiry by showing that the question of gender in the Qur'an is simultaneously exegetical, theological, historical, legal, and ethical . This study builds on these conversations, but seeks to contribute by reconstructing the Qur'an's discourse on gender through a thematic exegetical framework that integrates these dimensions into a more coherent reading of equality, complementarity, and justice.

Discussions on gender in the Qur'an remain among the most contested themes in contemporary Islamic thought. Questions concerning equality, leadership, inheritance, family roles, and public participation continue to generate diverse interpretations among Muslim scholars, exegetes, and contemporary intellectuals. In many cases, the debate is not solely about the Qur'anic text itself, but also about the interpretive frameworks through which the text is approached [32]. As a result, discussions on gender in Islam often oscillate between two extremes: one that reads the Qur'an as endorsing fixed hierarchical relations, and another that treats all distinctions between men and women as necessarily unjust.

Within contemporary scholarship, gender has increasingly been understood not merely as a biological distinction but as a socially and culturally mediated system of roles, expectations, and power relations. This conceptual distinction has significantly influenced Qur'anic studies, especially in debates on whether the Qur'an promotes equality, complementarity, or hierarchy between men and women [33]. Such debates are particularly relevant because many interpretations of gendered Qur'anic verses have historically been shaped by legal, social, and patriarchal contexts rather than by a comprehensive reading of the Qur'an as a unified ethical discourse.

A number of studies have examined gender in the Qur'an through feminist hermeneutics, legal interpretation, and socio-historical analysis. However, many of these discussions tend to focus only on a limited set of controversial verses, such as Q. 4:34 or Q. 2:228, without sufficiently situating them within the Qur'an's broader theological and moral worldview [34]. Other studies discuss gender in Islam in a general way but do not systematically

reconstruct the Qur'an's own conceptual framework regarding men and women [35]. This creates an important scholarly gap: the need for a thematic and integrative exegetical study that reads the relevant verses not in isolation, but as part of a coherent Qur'anic discourse.

The contribution of Aisha Abd al-Rahman is especially important in demonstrating that women's engagement with Qur'anic interpretation is not merely a contemporary activist intervention, but also part of a broader internal tradition of Muslim scholarship. Mir-Hosseini's scholarship is particularly useful for distinguishing the Qur'an's ethical discourse from the patriarchal formulations that may emerge in historical legal traditions [36]. Ahmed's historical analysis is valuable in showing that discourses on women and Islam are shaped not only by scripture, but also by broader historical, political, and colonial encounters. Abou El Fadl's ethical critique of authoritarian interpretation provides an important framework for approaching gender-related verses with both textual seriousness and moral responsibility.

This article seeks to address that gap by examining the concept of gender in the Qur'an through a thematic exegetical (*tafsir mawḍū'i*) approach. It aims to analyze how the Qur'an conceptualizes the relationship between men and women, particularly in relation to equality [37], difference, and social responsibility. By tracing key verses on creation, moral accountability, spiritual reward, family ethics, inheritance, and social cooperation, this article argues that the Qur'an affirms the ontological and spiritual equality of men and women while also recognizing certain distinctions that are contextual, functional, and responsibility-based rather than ontologically hierarchical.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to reposition the discourse on gender in the Qur'an within a framework of justice, reciprocity, and moral accountability. Rather than reducing Qur'anic gender discourse to either rigid patriarchy or absolute sameness, this article proposes that the Qur'an articulates a morally balanced model of human relations grounded in shared dignity and differentiated responsibility.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative library research design with a thematic exegetical (*tafsir mawḍū'i*) approach. The thematic method is chosen because it enables the researcher to collect, organize, and interpret Qur'anic verses related to a particular issue—in this case, gender relations—in a systematic and integrative manner [38]. Rather than examining isolated verses separately, this method seeks to reconstruct the Qur'an's broader conceptual discourse regarding men and women.

The primary source of this study is the Qur'an, particularly verses related to human creation, moral responsibility, worship, family relations, inheritance, leadership, and social participation [39]. These verses are analyzed with reference to selected classical and modern exegetical works, including representative interpretations from both traditional and contemporary scholarship [40]. Classical tafsir sources are used to identify established exegetical understandings, while modern interpretations are employed to explore how Qur'anic gender discourse is reread in contemporary contexts.

Secondary sources consist of scholarly books and journal articles on Qur'anic studies, gender theory, Islamic thought, and hermeneutics. These sources are used not only to provide conceptual clarification but also to situate the study within broader academic debates concerning equality, complementarity, patriarchy, and justice in Islam.

The data analysis proceeds through four stages. First, relevant Qur'anic verses are identified and grouped into thematic clusters. Second, each cluster is interpreted in light of linguistic, contextual, and exegetical considerations. Third, the findings are compared across classical and contemporary interpretive tendencies [41]. Fourth, the results are synthesized to formulate a coherent understanding of gender in the Qur'an. Through this method, the study seeks to move beyond fragmentary readings and instead present a holistic account of the Qur'anic construction of gender relations.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Conceptualizing Gender in Qur'anic Discourse**

Before discussing specific verses, it is important to clarify the conceptual framework of gender employed in this study. In contemporary scholarship, a distinction is commonly made between sex and gender. Sex refers to biological differences between male and female, whereas gender refers to the social meanings, expectations, and roles attached to those biological differences. This distinction is crucial because many assumptions about women and men are often rooted not in biological necessity but in social interpretation.

When applied to Qur'anic studies, the concept of gender should not be understood merely as a modern ideological import, but as an analytical lens for examining how the Qur'an addresses men and women as moral, spiritual, and social beings [42]. In this sense, the central question is not whether the Qur'an uses the modern term "gender," but how it constructs the relationship between male and female human beings within its ethical and theological worldview.

The Qur'an speaks about men and women in multiple registers. In some verses, both are addressed equally as servants of God and moral agents. In other

verses, distinctions appear in relation to biological realities, family responsibilities, and social obligations. Therefore, the Qur'anic discourse on gender cannot be reduced to a single formula [43]. It combines principles of shared human dignity, moral equality, and contextual differentiation.

A thematic reading suggests that the Qur'an does not construct men and women as opposing categories in a struggle for power, but as mutually related beings whose existence is embedded in a broader divine order. Accordingly, any serious analysis of gender in the Qur'an must distinguish between universal ethical principles and context-bound social regulations. Failure to make this distinction often leads either to rigid literalism or to reductionist readings detached from the Qur'an's internal coherence.

### **Ontological and Spiritual Equality of Men and Women**

One of the strongest foundations of gender discourse in the Qur'an is the principle of ontological equality. Men and women are presented as originating from the same human essence and as sharing the same existential status before God. This is reflected in Q. 4:1, which states that humanity was created from a single soul (*nafs wāḥidah*), from which its mate was created. The verse does not establish an ontological hierarchy between male and female, but instead emphasizes their common origin and interrelated humanity.

This ontological equality is further reinforced in Q. 49:13, where the Qur'an declares that all human beings were created from a male and a female and then made into nations and tribes so that they may know one another [44]. The verse concludes by affirming that the most honored before God is the most righteous [45], not the male, the powerful, or the socially privileged. Thus, the criterion of human worth in the Qur'an is *taqwā*, not gender.

The same ethical orientation appears in Q. 16:97, which promises a good life and divine reward to "whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer." This verse is particularly important because it explicitly rejects the assumption that spiritual reward or moral excellence is gendered [46]. Men and women are equally capable of faith, virtue, and salvation.

This pattern demonstrates that the Qur'an's primary anthropological vision is one of shared moral personhood. Men and women are equally addressed as accountable beings who worship, obey, repent, struggle, and seek nearness to God [47]. Therefore, any interpretation that assumes female inferiority as a theological premise is difficult to sustain when read against the Qur'an's broader spiritual anthropology.

In this sense, the Qur'an establishes a foundational principle: gender difference does not negate spiritual equality. The human relationship with God is not mediated by maleness or femaleness, but by faith and moral conduct. This principle becomes the ethical lens through which all other gender-related verses should be interpreted.

### **Reciprocity and Shared Moral Responsibility**

Beyond affirming ontological equality, the Qur'an also presents men and women as participants in a shared moral project. Their relationship is not merely biological or domestic, but also ethical and communal. One of the clearest expressions of this appears in Q. 9:71, which describes believing men and believing women as allies/protectors of one another (*awliyā' ba'dhum li-ba'd*). The verse continues by assigning to both the same ethical duties: enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, establishing prayer, giving alms, and obeying God and His Messenger.

This verse is highly significant because it moves beyond the language of private virtue and places women and men together within the sphere of public moral agency [48]. It suggests that women are not merely passive recipients of religious instruction, but active participants in the ethical life of the community [49]. The Qur'anic vision here is one of moral reciprocity, where both sexes share responsibility for sustaining religious and social order.

The same spirit is evident in Q. 33:35, which lists believing men and women side by side across multiple categories of piety: devotion, honesty, patience, humility, charity, fasting, chastity, and remembrance of God. The repetitive pairing in this verse is not incidental [50]. It rhetorically affirms that virtue is not monopolized by one sex, nor is spiritual excellence gender-exclusive.

Such verses challenge readings that reduce women's Qur'anic identity to marriage, domesticity, or dependence. While the Qur'an certainly speaks about family roles, it also situates women within the broader horizon of ethical agency, communal participation, and direct accountability before God [51]. In this regard, the Qur'an's discourse is far more expansive than many culturally inherited assumptions.

Therefore, the Qur'anic portrayal of men and women should be understood as one of partnership in responsibility, not rivalry in worth. The emphasis is not on competition for superiority, but on cooperation in righteousness and accountability.

## Difference, Complementarity, and Social Role Differentiation

While the Qur'an strongly affirms spiritual and moral equality, it also recognizes that men and women are not always addressed in exactly identical terms. Some verses refer to differentiated roles, responsibilities, and social expectations. These differences, however, should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of inherent superiority or inferiority.

One important verse in this regard is Q. 2:228, which states that women have rights comparable to the obligations placed upon them, according to what is recognized as fair (*bi al-ma'rūf*), while also mentioning that men have a degree (*darajah*) over them [52]. This verse has often been read hierarchically, yet its first clause is equally significant: it establishes reciprocity and balance in rights and obligations [1]. The phrase *darajah* has been interpreted by many exegetes as referring not to absolute ontological superiority, but to specific relational or procedural responsibility within the marital context.

Similarly, Q. 4:32 cautions both men and women not to envy what God has given some over others, while affirming that both men and women are entitled to the fruits of what they earn. This verse recognizes differentiation but simultaneously protects individual agency and moral entitlement. It suggests that difference does not erase personal dignity or responsibility.

A more debated verse is Q. 4:34, particularly the phrase *al-rijāl qawwāmūna 'alā al-nisā'*. Classical interpretations often understand this as male authority or guardianship, usually linked to economic responsibility and social obligation [53]. Contemporary readings, however, increasingly emphasize that *qiwāmah* should be understood functionally rather than ontologically. In other words, the verse may be describing a structure of responsibility within a particular socio-familial context rather than declaring an eternal doctrine of male superiority.

A thematic reading supports this more nuanced approach. If the Qur'an elsewhere consistently affirms common human origin, equal moral accountability, and reciprocal ethical agency, then differentiated roles should be interpreted within that larger framework. Distinction in function does not necessarily imply inequality in worth [4]. The Qur'anic logic appears closer to complementarity under justice than to metaphysical hierarchy.

Thus, the Qur'an may be said to recognize difference without devaluation. It neither erases all distinctions nor permits those distinctions to become a justification for domination. This balance is central to understanding the Qur'anic construction of gender.

## Gender Justice in Family and Social Life

The issue of justice becomes particularly visible in verses related to family law, inheritance, and social order. Modern readers often approach these verses through the lens of numerical equality, expecting that justice must always mean identical treatment. However, the Qur'anic legal and ethical framework suggests a more contextual understanding of justice—one tied to responsibility, obligation, and social structure.

This is evident in inheritance regulations such as Q. 4:11, where in certain cases a male receives a share equivalent to that of two females. On a superficial reading, this may appear unequal. Yet within the broader legal-ethical system of classical Islamic law, inheritance was tied to a network of financial obligations in which men were typically responsible for maintenance, dowry, and family support [2]. Thus, the distribution cannot be read meaningfully in isolation from the larger framework of duty and liability.

This does not mean that such verses are beyond discussion, nor that historical applications should be immune from critique. Rather, it means that the Qur'anic concern is not simply numerical sameness, but justice within a structured moral economy. A thematic reading therefore invites a distinction between the ethical objective of justice and the historical forms through which that justice was operationalized.

The same principle can be applied to family relations more broadly. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes kindness (*mu'āsharah bi al-ma'rūf*), compassion, mutual protection, and moral responsibility between spouses. Family is not framed as a site of domination, but as a moral institution in which rights and duties are to be exercised within the ethics of fairness and care.

From this perspective, Qur'anic gender justice is not adequately captured either by rigid patriarchy or by abstract egalitarianism detached from relational obligations. Rather, it is better understood as a justice of reciprocity, accountability, and ethical balance. Such a framework allows contemporary Muslim scholarship to revisit gendered questions without severing them from the Qur'an's moral architecture.

## Contemporary Relevance of Qur'anic Gender Ethics

The contemporary relevance of Qur'anic gender discourse lies in its ability to offer an ethical framework that is both principled and interpretively dynamic. In many Muslim societies today, debates on women's education, public participation, leadership, domestic roles, and legal rights are often shaped by inherited customs, ideological polarizations, or selective textual readings. In such

contexts, a thematic reading of the Qur'an can help distinguish between what is normatively central and what is historically contingent.

The Qur'an's enduring ethical principles – such as human dignity, justice, moral reciprocity, and accountability – remain highly relevant for contemporary discussions on gender. These principles challenge both oppressive patriarchal structures and reductive readings that collapse all difference into inequality. By returning to the Qur'an's broader moral vision, Muslim intellectual discourse can move beyond reactionary binaries and develop a more constructive framework for understanding the relationship between men and women.

This is especially important in educational, familial, and religious settings, where Qur'anic teachings are often invoked to justify social arrangements. A responsible engagement with the Qur'an requires not only textual citation, but also conceptual coherence and ethical sensitivity. In this regard, the Qur'an should not be approached merely as a source of isolated rulings, but as a text that articulates a comprehensive moral anthropology.

Therefore, the relevance of this study lies not only in clarifying the Qur'an's discourse on gender, but also in contributing to a more balanced and intellectually grounded Muslim conversation on equality, justice, and social responsibility in the modern world

## Conclusion

This study has shown that the Qur'an presents a nuanced and ethically grounded understanding of gender relations. Through a thematic exegetical approach, it becomes clear that the Qur'an affirms the ontological and spiritual equality of men and women, while also recognizing certain distinctions in social and familial responsibilities. These distinctions, however, should not be interpreted as evidence of absolute male superiority or female inferiority.

The Qur'anic discourse on gender is better understood through the interconnected principles of justice, reciprocity, moral accountability, and shared human dignity. Men and women are equally addressed as servants of God, equally capable of righteousness, and equally accountable for their actions. At the same time, the Qur'an acknowledges that some roles may be differentiated in relation to context, obligation, and social function.

Accordingly, this article argues that the Qur'an neither endorses a rigid hierarchical patriarchy nor advocates an undifferentiated sameness between the sexes. Instead, it offers a balanced moral vision in which equality and complementarity coexist within a framework of divine justice. Such a reading is important not only for Qur'anic studies, but also for contemporary Muslim

efforts to articulate gender relations in a way that is both textually rooted and ethically meaningful.

### Author Contributions

**Mukhlis Widodo:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration, Investigation.

### Acknowledgement

The author gratefully acknowledges Institut Agama Islam Al-Hidayah Bogor, West Java, Indonesia, and the anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments and constructive feedback, which significantly enhanced the quality of this paper.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

### Bibliography

- [1] H. Halimatussa'diyah, K. Kusnadi, A. Y. Yuliyanti, D. Ilyas, and E. Zulfikar, "Minangkabaunese matrilineal: The correlation between the Qur'an and gender," *HTS Teol. Stud. / Theol. Stud.*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.8643>.
- [2] Y. V Hentschel, "When the Rūḥ Meets Its Creator: The Qur'ān, Gender, and Visual Culture in Contemporary Iranian Female Sufism," *Religions*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16020132>.
- [3] A. M. Afif and M. Rosyid, "GENDER EQUALITY IN ISLAMIC SHARIA (THE STUDY OF BISRI MUSTOFA'S THOUGHT IN AL-IBRĪZ LI MA'RIFAH TAFSĪR AL-QUR'ĀN AL-'AZĪZ)," *Syariah J. Huk. dan Pemikir.*, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 69–88, 2022, doi: <https://doi.org/10.18592/sjhp.v22i1.6307>.
- [4] H. Halil, "The Testimony of Women in the Quran," *AlBayan*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 18–29, 2016, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-12340029>.
- [5] M. K. Al Faiz, A. K. Hasan, M. Z. Azani, and A. N. AN, "Bibliometric Trends in Research on Islam and Morality: Contextualizing Findings Within Qur'anic Thought," *Iseedu J. Islam. Educ. Thoughts Pract.*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 168–184, Nov. 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/iseedu.v9i2.13913>.

- [6] A. I. Sari and K. Nugroho, "The Qur'an and Political Obedience: Rereading QS. 4: 59 in Light of Contemporary Political Science," *Quranicons*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 481-495, 2025.
- [7] Andri Nirwana and Kuswardani Dyah Ayu Kusumaningrum, "Kurma, Gandum, dan Energi: Sains Gizi dalam Tafsir Ayat-Ayat Al-Qur'an," *Reslaj Relig. Educ. Soc. Laa Roiba J.*, vol. 7, no. 8, Aug. 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.47467/reslaj.v7i8.9465>.
- [8] W. Andeska and A. Nirwana, "Interpretation of Ummatan Wasathan in the Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah Verse 143 (Comparative Study of the Interpretations of Al-Qurthubi and Al-Jasshash)," *Quranicons*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 249-264, 2025.
- [9] H. E. Lumbantobing and A. N. AN, "Nutritional Values of Qur'anic Fruits (A Study on Dates, Grapes, Olives, and Pomegranates)," *Quranicons*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 361-371, 2025.
- [10] A. I. Hartafan, A. Nirwana AN, and A. Rhain, "Reassessing Intellectual Continuities Between Kalimantan Qur'anic Scholars and the Muhammadiyah Interpretive Tradition," *QiST J. Quran Tafseer Stud.*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 945-968, Dec. 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v4i3.14018>.
- [11] N. Hidayatullah, M. A. K. Hasan, A. Rhain, and K. Nugroho, "Political Ideology and Indonesian Translation of the Qur'an," *al-Afkar, J. Islam. Stud.*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 2188-2200, 2026, doi: <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v9i1.3199>.
- [12] E. Fatkhunnajah, K. Nugroho, and A. N. AN, "Analysis of The Meaning of Fasad in The Qur'an as An Ecotheological Critique: An Effort to Reinterpret Islamic Values to The Exploitation of Contemporary Nature," *Proceeding ISETH (International Summit Sci. Technol. Humanit.*, pp. 1029-1039, 2025.
- [13] H. E. Lumbantobing, M. A. K. Hasan, A. Rhain, K. Nugroho, and A. N. AN, "The Dynamics of Quranic Translation in Indonesia: Analyzing the Relationship between Modern Islamic Movements and the Development of Tafsiriyah Translation," *al-Afkar, J. Islam. Stud.*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 2177-2187, 2026, doi: <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v9i1.3200>.
- [14] R. Fariadi, A. Ikasari, and S. Nafiza, "Manhaj Tarjih: Navigating Ijtihad in The Disruption Era," *Indones. J. Islam. Econ. Law*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 29-42, Feb. 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/ijoel.v2i1.7044>.
- [15] A. I. Hartafan, A. Nirwana AN, and C. L. Marheni, "BIBLIOMETRIC

- ANALYSIS THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC PSYCHOLOGY BASED ON QUR'AN IN OVERCOMING ANXIETY AND IMPROVING MENTAL HEALTH AMONG WOMEN," *QiST J. Quran Tafseer Stud.*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 303–326, Mar. 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/qist.v3i2.5042>.
- [16] A. N. An, M. Mahmudulhassan, M. Muthoifin, W. Waston, S. T. Prakoso, and F. N. Salsabila, "TRAINING ON THE METHODOLOGY OF TAFSIR AL-QUR'AN FOR MADRASAH TEACHERS TO STRENGTHEN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION," *BESIRU J. Pengabd. Masy.*, vol. 2, no. 9, pp. 920–932, 2025.
- [17] A. Qibtiyah, W. Andeska, and A. Salsabila, "Islamic Jurisprudence on Women Reproductive Health (Indonesian Review)," *Indones. J. Islam. Econ. Law*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 69–82, Feb. 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/ijoel.v2i1.6957>.
- [18] A. N. AN, K. D. A. Kusumaningrum, T. Susilo, H. E. Lumbantobing, and M. T. Ihsan, "PEMBINAAN IBADAH BAGI KARYAWAN RUMAH SAKIT MUHAMMADIYAH SELOGIRI SESUAI PUTUSAN TARJIH MUHAMMADIYAH PADA KEGIATAN BAITUL ARQAM," *Empower. J.*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 149–158, 2025.
- [19] K. D. A. Kusumaningrum and A. Nirwana, "Exploring Global Trends in Waqf Law: Insights from a Bibliometric Study," in *Proceeding of International Conference on Islamic Boarding School*, 2025.
- [20] M. A. G. Afifi, "Islamic Feminist Interpretation: A Reformulation of the Universal-Particular Binary," *Islam. Stud. Rev.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 39–66, Jul. 2022, doi: <https://doi.org/10.56529/isr.v1i1.3>.
- [21] J. L. Christiansen, "A woman's 'self-wronging': A gender subtheme in the Qur'anic encounter between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba," *Lit. Theol.*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 397–422, 2018, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/fry014>.
- [22] H. Hasan, A. S. Jahar, N. Umar, and I. Abdullah, "Polygamy: Uncovering the effect of patriarchal ideology on gender-biased interpretation," *HTS Teol. Stud. / Theol. Stud.*, vol. 78, no. 4, 2022, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7970>.
- [23] K. Kusmana, "MODERN DISCOURSE OF WOMAN'S IDEAL ROLE IN INDONESIA: Tafsir al-Qur'an of Ibu and Female Agency," *J. Indones. Islam*, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 25, Jun. 2015, doi: <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2015.9.1.25-58>.
- [24] Y. Rahman, "Feminist Kyai, K.H. Husein Muhammad The feminist

- interpretation on gendered verses and the Qur'an-based Activism," *Al-Jami'ah*, vol. 55, no. 2, pp. 293-326, 2017, doi: <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.293-326>.
- [25] L. Rahbari, "Milk Kinship and the Maternal Body in Shi'a Islam," *Open Theol.*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 43-53, 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2020-0006>.
- [26] W. Widodo, Armin Nurhartanto, and Rina Murtyaningsih, "The Concept of Children's Education in Islam Based on Surah Luqman Verses 13-15: A Comparative Analysis of the Tafsir of Sayyid Qutb, M. Quraish Shihab, and Ibn Kathir," *Bull. Islam. Res.*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 387-396, Mar. 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v3i2.339>.
- [27] M. Bakhshizadeh, "A Social Psychological Critique on Islamic Feminism," *Religions*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020202>.
- [28] J. Moreno-Gómez, E. Gómez-Araujo, D. Ferrer-Ortíz, and R. Peña-Ruiz, "Gender perspective of parental role model influence on nascent entrepreneurs: Evidence from Colombia," *Eur. Res. Manag. Bus. Econ.*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2022, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iedeen.2021.100156>.
- [29] M. I. Amal, S. Luthfi, and K. A. Auliya, "Gender Equality in Islamic Education: Promoting Democratic Values and Advancing SDGs 4 & 5," *Multicult. Islam. Educ. Rev.*, pp. 207-222, Oct. 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23917/mier.v3i2.12722>.
- [30] A. Sawja, "Propagating Gender Norms in an Islamic Republic: Three Pakistani Alims and their Online tafsirs," *J. Qur'anic Stud.*, vol. 25, no. 3, pp. 55-88, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2023.0556>.
- [31] M. Irsad, A. Mustaqim, and S. Z. Qudsy, "Paradigm Shifts in Gender Narratives of of Tafsir al-Ibriz through Oral Exegesis on Youtube," *J. Stud. Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp. 141-160, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v25i1.5416>.
- [32] M. Khalfaoui, "Is Child Marriage Lawful in Islam? Modern and Classical Positions in the Mirror of Modern International Human Rights," *Leg. Transform. Muslim Soc.*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 1-13, 2024, [Online]. Available: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85218941250&partnerID=40&md5=e55ed9b8a0b2ef2a00dd58b3fb4a384d>
- [33] M. Göknaar, "Everyday ontologies and Islam for childless women in northwestern Turkey," *Contemp. Levant*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 56-65, 2018, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20581831.2018.1458483>.
- [34] T. Koburtay, T. Abuhussein, and Y. M. Sidani, "Women Leadership,

- Culture, and Islam: Female Voices from Jordan," *J. Bus. Ethics*, vol. 183, no. 2, pp. 347–363, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05041-0>.
- [35] L. G. Eidhamar, "'My Husband is My Key to Paradise.' Attitudes of Muslims in Indonesia and Norway to Spousal Roles and Wife-Beating," *Islam Christ. Relations*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 241–264, 2018, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2017.1405636>.
- [36] B. Ali and S. Lawal, "Mapping the Intersections: History, Religion, Culture, Governance and Economics in Taraba North Senatorial Zone, Nigeria," *Bull. Islam. Res.*, vol. 2, no. 4, pp. 525–556, Jul. 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v2i4.55>.
- [37] N. Jamil, "'You Are My Garment': Muslim Women, Religious Education and Self-Transformation in Contemporary Singapore," *Asian Stud. Rev.*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 545–563, 2016, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2016.1228044>.
- [38] F. N. Salsabila and A. N. AN, "Pendekatan Komtemporer untuk Penafsiran Al-Qur'an," *Insight Mediat.*, vol. 212, 2024.
- [39] M. Boumezrag, "Qualitative methods and mixed methods," in *Translational Interventional Radiology*, Medstar Georgetown University Hospital, Washington, DC, United States: Elsevier, 2023, pp. 233–234. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-823026-8.15001-1>.
- [40] A. Nirwana AN, F. Arfan, F. Dolles Marshal, C. Maulana, and N. Fadli, "Methods of Qur'an Research and Quran Tafseer Research its implications for contemporary Islamic thought," *Bull. Islam. Res.*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 33–42, Jun. 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v2i1.34>.
- [41] M. Shaikjee, S. Mpendukana, and C. Stroud, "Qualitative Methods," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Linguistic Landscapes*, Linguistics Department, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2024, pp. 19–33. [Online]. Available: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85198466131&partnerID=40&md5=6f46c4caeb87e82fa5c5e3758be11266>
- [42] Y. Hanafi, M. Saefi, M. A. Ikhsan, T. N. Diyana, A. R. Hassan, and N. Murtadho, "DEVELOPING A QUESTIONNAIRE ON MEASURING THE LEARNING MOTIVATION IN READING QURAN," *J. Pendidik. Islam*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 17–32, 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v7i1.12468>.
- [43] N. Sieveking, "'MADAME EST AU NIVEAU 2, ET MOI...?' GENDERED DYNAMICS OF QUR'AN READING COURSES IN DAKAROIS FRANCOPHONE EDUCATED MIDDLE-CLASS MILIEUS," *Cah. Etud.*

- Afr.*, vol. 248, no. 4, pp. 771–796, 2022, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafricaines.40262>.
- [44] A. F. N. Fuad, D. Afrianty, and M. H. Basya, “The hermeneutical approach in Indonesia’s contemporary campaign for gender equality by Indonesian progressive Muslim women scholars,” *Contemp. Islam*, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 441–466, 2025, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-025-00587-y>.
- [45] A. N. A.N., M. Mahmudulhassan, F. D. Marshal, M. Muthoifin, and N. Fadli, “Human rights and social justice in Quranic contexts: a global trend,” *Leg. J. Ilm. Huk.*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 453–471, Sep. 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.22219/ljih.v32i2.35088>.
- [46] Z. F. K. Arat and A. Hasan, “Muslim masculinities: what is the prescription of the Qur’an?” *J. Gend. Stud.*, vol. 27, no. 7, pp. 788–801, 2018, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1316246>.
- [47] N. Ahmad, N. M. Ghazali, R. Othman, and N. S. Ismail, “Women’s rights in marriage: Between Qur’ānic Provision and Malpractice,” *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. Humanit.*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 2721–2730, 2019, [Online]. Available: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85076808098&partnerID=40&md5=2d33a40ef0cc18be776c82637236189d>
- [48] M. M. Rohman and S. Muafatun, “Hacking Muhammad Syahrûr’s Hudûd Theory and Its Relevance to the Inheritance of Sangkolan Madurese People,” *J. Ilm. Al-Syir’ah*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 182–199, 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.30984/jis.v19i2.1625>.
- [49] A. Nirwana AN, “Qawaid Tafsir dan Ushul Tafsir Siti Aisyah dalam Kitab Sahih Muslim,” *J. Ilm. Al-Mu’ashirah*, vol. 18, no. 2, p. 152, Nov. 2021, doi: <https://doi.org/10.22373/jim.v18i2.11281>.
- [50] I. Nur, “ISLAMIC LAW ON GENDER BASED SEXUAL VIOLENCE,” *Ahkam J. Ilmu Syariah*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 57–64, 2013, doi: <https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v13i1.951>.
- [51] S. Daukeyeva, “Voicing a path to the afterlife: Rituals for the dead, transnational mobility and the changing soundspace of Islam among Mongolian Kazakhs,” *Perform. Islam*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 5–22, 2023, doi: [https://doi.org/10.1386/pi\\_00023\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/pi_00023_1).
- [52] T. Koburtay, J. Syed, and R. Haloub, “Implications of Religion, Culture, and Legislation for Gender Equality at Work: Qualitative Insights from Jordan,” *J. Bus. Ethics*, vol. 164, no. 3, pp. 421–436, 2020, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-4036-6>.
- [53] A. Geissinger, “NOTES ON THE SIEGE’S AFTERMATH AND

GENDERED RHETORIC IN THE QUR'AN: TOWARDS A RECONSIDERATION OF Q. 33:34," *ReOrient*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 27–49, 2024, doi: <https://doi.org/10.13169/reorient.9.1.0027>.

### Copyright

© 2026 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.