



Qur'anic perspective of gender equality: Classical and modern *tafsir*

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ABSTRACT

Qur'anic interpretation of gender equality has become an increasingly significant topic in contemporary Islamic studies, especially in the context of changing social dynamics. This article aims to analyse the different interpretations of Qur'anic verses relating to gender equality through a comparative approach between classical and modern tafsir. The study employs qualitative approach with library research method. Through this study, the author explores how classical tafsir, which is often influenced by the cultural and social norms of its time, interacts with modern tafsir that focuses more on the principles of social justice and women's rights. The classical exegeses include Tafsir al-Tabari (Ibnu Jarir al-Tabari), Tafsir al-Qurtubi (by Al-Imam Abu Abdillah Muhammad), and Tafsir Ibnu Kathir (by Imam Ibn Kathir). Meanwhile, modern exegeses include Tafsir al-Misbah (by Quraish Shihab), Tafsir al-Maraghi (by Imam Ahmad Musthafa Al-Maraghi), as well as the works of Asma Barlas and Fazlur Rahman. The article highlights the different approaches in interpreting verses such as Q.S. An-Nisa' and Al-Baqarah relating to gender roles, women's rights in marriage, and social participation. The findings of this study indicate a significant paradigm shift in modern tafsir that is more inclusive and responsive to gender issues in society, without leaving the foundation of Islamic principles. This research also offers a critical reflection on the relevance of Qur'anic interpretation in supporting gender equality in the contemporary era, as well as the challenges faced in trying to bridge classical and modern interpretations.

Keywords: Classical Interpretation; Gender Equality; Modern Interpretation; Qur'anic Interpretation; Women's Rights.

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ABSTRAK

Penafsiran Al-Qur'an tentang kesetaraan gender telah menjadi topik yang semakin penting dalam studi Islam kontemporer, terutama dalam konteks dinamika sosial yang terus berubah. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbedaan penafsiran ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an yang berkaitan dengan kesetaraan gender melalui pendekatan komparatif antara tafsir klasik dan modern. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode penelitian kepustakaan. Melalui penelitian ini, penulis mengeksplorasi bagaimana tafsir klasik, yang seringkali dipengaruhi oleh norma-norma budaya dan sosial pada masanya, berinteraksi dengan tafsir modern yang lebih berfokus pada prinsip-prinsip keadilan sosial dan hak-hak perempuan. Tafsir klasik tersebut antara lain Tafsir al-Tabari (Ibnu Jarir ath-Tabari), Tafsir al-Qurtubi (karya Al-Imam Abu Abdillah Muhammad), dan Tafsir Ibnu Katsir (karya Imam Ibnu Katsir). Sementara itu, tafsir modern meliputi Tafsir al-Misbah (oleh Quraish Shihab), Tafsir al-Maraghi (oleh Imam Ahmad Musthafa al-Maraghi), serta karya-karya Asma Barlas dan Fazlur Rahman. Artikel ini menyoroti pendekatan yang berbeda dalam menafsirkan ayat-ayat seperti Q.S. An-Nisa' dan Al-Baqarah yang berkaitan dengan peran gender, hak-hak perempuan dalam pernikahan, dan partisipasi sosial. Temuan dari penelitian ini menunjukkan adanya pergeseran paradigma yang signifikan dalam tafsir modern yang lebih inklusif dan responsif terhadap isu-isu gender dalam masyarakat, tanpa meninggalkan landasan prinsip-prinsip Islam. Penelitian ini juga menawarkan refleksi kritis terhadap relevansi tafsir Al-Qur'an dalam mendukung kesetaraan gender di era kontemporer, serta tantangan yang dihadapi dalam upaya menjembatani tafsir klasik dan modern.

Kata Kunci: Hak-hak Perempuan; Kesetaraan Gender; Tafsir Al-Qur'an; Tafsir Klasik; Tafsir Modern.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a global issue that continues to draw attention across various fields, including religion, politics, and culture (Fajrussalam et al., 2023). In the context of Islam, the Quran, as the primary source of religious teachings, provides guidance and fundamental principles that underpin the roles and relationships between men and women (H. N. Umar, 2014). However, interpretations of Qur'anic verses concerning gender often vary depending on the social, cultural, and historical contexts of the exegetes (*mufasssir*) at the time (Baidowi, 2023). Classical interpretations, written within the context of medieval patriarchal societies, often reflect views that emphasize gender inequality (Fathurrohman et al., 2024). In contrast, modern exegesis, developed within the discourse of human rights and social equality, tends to emphasize the principles of justice and equality in gender relations (Hasan, 2009).

The debate on how the Quran views the roles of men and women has sparked new studies in Qur'anic exegesis, which aim to recontextualize the Qur'anic verses within contemporary social realities (Ubaidillah, n.d.). Several verses frequently debated involve issues related to women's rights in marriage, the right to work, and participation in social and political life (Fatmawati et al., 2024). Verses such as Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 34 and Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 228 are often the basis for debates on the authority of men and women, which, in classical *tafsir*, are understood as signs of male superiority (Shomad, 2022).

This article aims to explore and compare the classical and modern interpretations of Qur'anic verses related to gender equality. By focusing on a critical analysis of the differing methodologies and approaches in interpreting these verses, this research demonstrated how social and intellectual transformations in the Islamic world have influenced gender interpretations. Ultimately, the article will highlight the relevance of Qur'anic interpretations in supporting gender equality in the contemporary era and the challenges faced in bridging classical and modern thought.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Books and articles related to gender issues and feminism have been widely published and have become a theme of attention and discussion. This includes addressing topics such as the representation of women in Islam or the Qur'an. This section will present various literary studies related to the theme of gender.

2.1. Literature Review of Books

First, a book on women and gender issues in the Qur'an in 1992 written by Amina Wadud Muhsin as a contemporary Islamic thinker who has outlined the main ideas in her book entitled 'Qur'an and Women: Reading Sacred Text From a Women's Perspective'. Amina Wadud, in her book, attempts to reinterpret and examine the concept of women in the verses of the Qur'an, which textually seem to be in a low position when juxtaposed with men. Amina Wadud negotiates the historical background of women in the pre-Islamic region, the Qur'anic response to the reality that surrounds it, and narrates the condition of women today. Then Amina Wadud criticised the classical Mufasssirs, who, according to her, were patriarchal (Wadud, 1992).

Second, a 1996 book written by another contemporary Islamic thinker, Fatima Mernissi, with a book entitled 'Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory'. In her book, Fatima Mernissi attempts to examine the concept of women through history and then provide an explanation to re-establish the position of women who are equal to men, which, according to her, the position of women has not fully obtained the right position. Fatima argues that there is nothing that distinguishes between men and women so that women are considered inferior to men. The difference lies only in gender (Mernissi, 1996).

Third, a 2005 book entitled 'The Qur'an, Women, and Modern Society' was written by Asghar Ali Engineer. In his book, he tries to get women out of the confinement of thoughts that make women lowly creatures. In his book, he examines women who get a low position due to the thought before Islam arrived in the Arabian Peninsula (pre-Islam), which considers women weak in existence. This issue is made more complicated by the interpretation of the Qur'anic verse, which has a patriarchal perspective. So Asghar Ali tries to reinterpret the verses of the Qur'an relating to the position of women so as to produce a modern understanding that makes the position and role of women equal to men (Engineer, 2005).

Fourth, a book written by Indonesian Islamic thinkers, including Yunahar Ilyas, examines the issue of women and gender with the title 'Feminism in the Study of Qur'anic and Contemporary *Tafsir*'. Yunahar Ilyas attempts to reveal the interpretations of various commentaries from classical to contemporary through hermeneutical and theological-philosophical approaches. Then Yunahar compares *tafsir* thinking with the thinking of

feminist groups such as Amina Wadud, et al. In the conclusion of his book, feminist group thinking is an opponent to classical *tafsir* thinking that views women as inferior to men (Ilyas, 1997).

Fifth, the book written by Nasaruddin Umar entitled *Arguments for Gender Equality in the Perspective of the Qur'an* seeks to reveal the gender perspective conveyed in the Qur'an through a linguistic and social analysis approach. In his book, he concludes that the Qur'an recognises the differences between men and women, but differences cannot be used as a means of discrimination that creates advantages for one group and disadvantages for another. This is due to the Qur'an's emphasis on fostering harmonious relationships (Umar, 1999).

Sixth, Quraish Shihab's book entitled 'Women: from Love to Sex, from Nikah Mut'ah to Nikah Sunnah, from Old Bias to New Bias,' which seeks to position women as equal to men through the exploration of verses related to women. Quraish Shihab's aim is to give readers an understanding of the significance of the honourable position of women (Shihab, 2010).

Seventh, Hadia Mubarak's book entitled *Rebellious Wives, Neglectful Husbands: Controversies in Modern Qur'anic Commentaries* (2022). Mubarak discusses how Qur'anic exegesis has been used to justify unequal gender roles within the household. She highlights how verses such as Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 34, which are often interpreted as placing men in a superior position to women, can be understood in a more egalitarian manner. Mubarak critiques classical exegeses that suggest women must submit to their husbands and demonstrates how modern exegetes attempt to provide a fairer interpretation. In another book, entitled *Women's Contemporary Readings of the Qur'an* (2021), Mubarak explores how contemporary Muslim female scholars, such as Aisha Hidayatullah and Kecia Ali, reinterpret gender-related verses in the Qur'an. She focuses on the differences between patriarchal and feminist interpretations, arguing that they arise from distinct sociocultural contexts. Mubarak emphasizes that exegesis is not static but evolves. Furthermore, in the book entitled *Classical Qur'anic Exegesis and Women* (2020), Mubarak compares classical and contemporary Qur'anic exegesis on women in Islam. She highlights how interpretations of gender-related verses can vary depending on the method used. She also illustrates how classical exegetes often interpret verses from a perspective that favors male interests. According to him, not all classical exegeses are necessarily oppressive towards women, but many are still hierarchical. A new approach that considers gender justice is needed to better understand gender-related verses in Islam. Gender interpretation in the Qur'an is always influenced by the cultural and social values of a given society. A more progressive interpretation can create space for gender equality within Islam (Mubarak, 2022).

Eighth, Aisha Hidayatullah's book entitled *Women Trustees of Allah: Feminist Theology in Islam* (2009). Aisha argues that the Qur'an has the potential to support gender equality, but its interpretation is often shaped by patriarchal social contexts. She emphasizes that women can be *khalifah* (leaders) on Earth, just like men. She rejects the notion that Islam inherently supports a hierarchical family structure. According to her, gender interpretations in the Qur'an must be analyzed with consideration of social and historical contexts. Islamic feminism can serve as a tool for a fairer understanding of gender-related verses (Hidayatullah, 2009).

Ninth, Moh. Nailul Muna's book entitled *Tafsir Feminisme Nusantara* (2023). Muna examines how feminist Qur'anic exegesis has developed in Indonesia. He highlights the *qira'ah mubadalah* method, which is used to interpret the Qur'an from a more egalitarian perspective. In his book, he also discusses the views of Kecia Ali and Aisha Hidayatullah, who advocate for a reinterpretation of gender-related verses. Gender exegesis in Islam should consider social justice and not be confined to classical interpretations. Local approaches such as *qira'ah mubadalah* can provide more relevant perspectives for modern Muslim societies (Muna, 2023).

Lastly, the book by Adis Duderija, Alina Isac Alak, and Kristin Hissong is entitled *Islam and Gender: Major Issues and Debates* (2020). This book explores various perspectives on gender in Islam, including Qur'anic and Hadith exegesis. Duderija examines how gender concepts in Islam have evolved from classical thought to more inclusive modern interpretations. He also analyzes Kecia Ali's views on how Islamic law can be reevaluated to ensure greater gender justice. Gender issues in Islam are not only a matter of Qur'anic exegesis but also relate to the broader Islamic legal system. Gender interpretation must consider social and political dynamics within Muslim societies (Duderija et al., 2020).

2.2. Literature Review of Journal

Discussions related to the theme of gender and feminism issues have been widely studied by gender and feminism activists. Some examples include research conducted by Eni Zulaiha, which seeks to explain that the products of classical interpretation often contradict the principles of justice and equality regarding relationships between men and women (Zulaiha, 2016). Then the research conducted by Ahmad Atabik, which provides an overview of gender issues in Qur'anic verses that have the impression of gender bias that influences interpretation (Atabik, 2016). Imelda Wahyuni's research also reveals a gender bias in the Ministry of Religion's Qur'anic translation (Wahyuni, 2016).

Various previous research results have been presented, at first glance having a similar impression with the research to be carried out. However, from the point of view of both material and formal objects, this research has a significant difference from previous studies, namely reviewing and comparing the thoughts of classical mufassirs with modern mufassirs, which are then connected to the reality of today's equality to get a more contemporary understanding.

3. METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a library research method (Albi & Setiawan, 2018) to explore and analyse the differences in interpretation of Qur'anic verses related to gender equality in classical and modern *tafsir*. This method was chosen because the focus of this research is on text analysis and interpretation, which involves written sources from various literatures that specifically address the issue of gender equality. Primary data sources include classical to modern *tafsir* books. Secondary data sources include books, scientific journals, articles, and academic studies relevant to the topic of gender equality from the perspective of the Quran. These secondary sources are used to enrich and deepen the context of analysis.

This analysis includes, first, the identification and categorisation of verses. Secondly, the analysis delves into both classical and modern interpretations. Third, social contextualisation, which examines how social, political, and cultural changes affect the interpretation of classical and modern interpretations, as well as how modern interpretations adjust to the values of gender equality in the contemporary era. Data analysis is conducted through the following stages. First, identify verses relevant to gender issues, such as Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 228, Q.S. An-Nisa [4]: 34, and Q.S. An-Nur [24]: 31. The second step involves comparing the classical and modern interpretations of these verses. Some interpretations are selected following the popularity of interpretations among the public. The third step involves an analysis of the socio-historical context. Fourth, interpretation based on a hermeneutic approach to analyse the hidden meaning behind the text and interpretation of these two periods of *tafsir*. The fifth step involves reflecting on the relevance of *Tafsir* in relation to gender equality issues. Data from classical and modern *tafsir* are compared to show the relevance of both approaches in supporting gender equality in the contemporary era.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to explore and compare the interpretations of classical and modern *tafsir* regarding Qur'anic verses related to gender equality. Below are the results of a critical analysis of the methodological differences and approaches between the two types of *tafsir*.

4.1. Finding

4.1.1. Differences in Approaches Between Classical and Modern *Tafsir*

The following is an analysis of verses relevant to gender issues according to classical and modern *tafsir*. Each verse will be analyzed based on the interpretations from both groups (classical and modern) and then presented in tabular form.

1. Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 34 – Men's Leadership in the Family

a. Classical *Tafsir*:

- 1) *Tafsir* Al-Tabari: This verse emphasizes male leadership over women because men have advantages in terms of physical strength and financial responsibility. It underscores a patriarchal structure that grants authority to men (Ath-Thabari, 2009).
- 2) *Tafsir* Al-Qurtubi: Male leadership is emphasized based on their ability to manage family affairs and protect women. This ability is a right granted by Sharia (Al-Qurthubi, 1971).
- 3) *Tafsir* Ibnu Katsir: Explains that men are given the role of leaders because they bear greater responsibilities in the family, including the obligation to provide for them (I. Katsir, 2007).

b. Modern *Tafsir*:

- 1) *Tafsir* Al-Misbah: Translates male leadership as a functional role, not absolute superiority. This leadership depends on financial context and capability, and does not undermine women's status (Shihab, 2002).
- 2) *Tafsir* Al-Maraghi: Acknowledges male leadership in the family but emphasizes the importance of cooperation and justice between husband and wife. There is no patriarchal influence in terms of human rights (Al-Maraghi, 2006).

- 3) Asma Barlas: Rejects patriarchal interpretations, emphasizing that male leadership in this verse should be viewed in the context of social responsibility, not gender superiority (Barlas, 2019).
 - 4) Fazlur Rahman: Interprets this verse contextually, emphasizing that male leadership does not mean diminishing women, but rather pertains to the division of roles in the family that aligns with the social conditions of that time (Rahman, 2021).
2. Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 228 – The Superiority of Men in the Context of Marriage
- a. Classical *Tafsir*:
 - 1) *Tafsir* Al-Tabari: This verse emphasizes that men have superiority in family matters, including the right to divorce their wives. The role of men in marriage is described as that of a manager and leader (Ath-Thabari, 2009).
 - 2) *Tafsir* Al-Qurtubi: Men are given superiority because they are responsible for the family and provide sustenance. This superiority is viewed in the context of men's roles in a patriarchal society (Al-Qurthubi, 1971).
 - 3) *Tafsir* Ibn Kathir: The superiority of men is related to their right to divorce and their position as the authority in marital relationships, based on their role as providers (I. A. F. I. bin U. bin Katsir, 1990).
 - b. Modern *Tafsir*:
 - 1) *Tafsir* Al-Misbah: Interprets that the superiority of men in this context relates to financial obligations, rather than moral or spiritual superiority. It emphasizes equality of rights between husband and wife (Shihab, 2006).
 - 2) *Tafsir* Al-Maraghi: The superiority of men is more contextual and does not always reflect superiority. This role is associated with social and financial responsibilities (Al-Maraghi, 2006).
 - 3) Asma Barlas: Opposes the idea that men have absolute superiority in marriage, emphasizing that this verse should be read with consideration for gender equality (Barlas, 2019).
 - 4) Fazlur Rahman: Interprets this verse in the context of traditional social roles, but emphasizes that such superiority is functional and must be understood within the framework of equality (Rahman, 2021).
3. Q.S. An-Nur [24]: 31 – Hijab and the Role of Women in Public Spaces
- a. Classical *Tafsir*:
 - 1) *Tafsir* Al-Tabari: This verse requires women to wear hijab as a sign of obedience and to maintain honor in public spaces. There is an emphasis on the role of women in preserving modesty (Ath-Thabari, 2009).
 - 2) *Tafsir* Al-Qurtubi: It emphasizes the importance of hijab as a symbol of purity and regulation of public space for women. Hijab is interpreted as a means to protect women from the gaze of men (Al-Qurthubi, 1971).
 - 3) *Tafsir* Ibn Kathir: Hijab is viewed as a religious command that protects women from temptation and scandal in public spaces, stressing the separation between men and women in the social realm (Katsir, 1990).

b. Modern *Tafsir*:

- 1) *Tafsir* Al-Misbah: Interprets hijab more as a symbol of individual obedience rather than a social divider. Hijab should be understood in the context of maintaining ethics, without diminishing the active role of women in public spaces (Shihab, 2002).
- 2) *Tafsir* Al-Maraghi: Considers hijab as a form of modesty adapted to social norms but emphasizes that it should not restrict women's freedom to contribute in public spaces (Al-Maraghi, 2006).
- 3) Asma Barlas: Critiques interpretations that view hijab as a tool of patriarchy and emphasizes that hijab is a personal choice that should not be used to socially suppress women (Barlas, 2019).
- 4) Fazlur Rahman: Views hijab as a social rule more related to a specific historical context and argues that it needs to be adjusted to social developments and the role of women in public spaces (Rahman, 2021).

Based on the exploration above, the differences in the interpretation of the Qur'an between classical and modern *tafsir* on gender-related verses can be visualized in the table below.

Table 1.

Comparison of Interpretations of Qur'anic Verses Related to Gender Issues.

Verses	Classical <i>Tafsir</i> Group	Modern <i>Tafsir</i> Group
Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 34 – Men's Leadership in the Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Affirmation of male leadership based on physical and financial strength. - Patriarchal structure is reinforced. - Women's roles are viewed as more subordinate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Male leadership is understood functionally, not absolutely. - Emphasis on justice and cooperation within the family. - A more inclusive interpretation of women.
Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 34 – Men's Leadership in the Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The advantages of men are viewed in the context of power and divorce rights. - Men are considered the rulers in marital relationships. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The advantages of men are understood in the context of financial obligations, not moral superiority. - Emphasizing the equality of rights between husband and wife.
Q.S. An-Nur [24]: 31 – Hijab and the Role of Women in Public Spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hijab is seen as a symbol of purity and a means of protection for women. - Women are expected to maintain domestic roles and modesty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hijab is seen as a personal choice and a symbol of obedience. - Hijab does not restrict women's roles in the public sphere. - The focus is on ethics and women's freedom.

This table summarizes how classical and modern interpretations differ in understanding three Qur'anic verses related to gender. Classical interpretations tend to reinforce patriarchal structures, while modern interpretations emphasize equality, justice, and the contextualization of the verses in contemporary social conditions.

This study finds a fundamental difference between the classical and modern approaches in interpreting verses related to gender equality. Classical interpretations, developed during the early periods of Islam, tend to follow a literal and textual approach. Classical exegetes like Imam Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir interpreted verses about gender roles within the patriarchal cultural and social context. For example, the interpretation of the verse about men's role as leaders in the family (Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 34) and men's rights in marriage (Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 228) tends to reinforce the gender hierarchy that dominated society at that time.

On the other hand, modern interpretations adopt a contextual and hermeneutic approach, with exegetes like Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Abduh emphasizing the need to understand Qur'anic texts in the context of social changes occurring in the modern world. Modern interpretations consider principles of social justice and equality, offering more open interpretations regarding women's rights. Some examples of modern interpretations are verses like Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 1, which highlight that men and women are born equal, and this is the basis for gender justice in Islam (Ismail et al., 2024).

Table 2.

Comparison of Classical and Modern *Tafsir* Approaches Regarding Qur'anic Verses on Gender Equality.

Aspects	Classical <i>Tafsir</i>	Modern <i>Tafsir</i>
<i>Tafsir</i> Al-Tabari	Tends to be literal, often emphasizing traditional gender roles. Focuses on male leadership.	More open to contextual interpretation, championing justice and equality.
<i>Tafsir</i> Al-Qurtubi	Emphasis on patriarchy, emphasising women's domestic roles and their obligations to their husbands.	Emphasis on universal Qur'anic values, such as justice and equality.
<i>Tafsir</i> Ibnu Kathir	Adopt a stricter view of gender roles based on the <i>fiqh</i> legal tradition.	Using a historical-contextual approach in understanding gender roles in Islam.
<i>Tafsir</i> Al-Misbah	More contextualised and moderate. Promote equality between men and women in rights and responsibilities.	Looking at Qur'anic verses as an attempt towards gender justice in modern times.
<i>Tafsir</i> Al-Maraghi	Tends to be more flexible than other classical commentaries, but still maintains traditional views on gender roles.	Analyse the verses considering social changes and modern values.
Asma Barlas	Not focusing on classical interpretations but deconstructing patriarchal interpretations and	Offers a feminist perspective in <i>tafsir</i> , arguing that the Quran supports gender

	promoting interpretations that are inclusive of women.	equality.
Fazlur Rahman	Using a contextual hermeneutic approach. Linking social change with interpretations of the Quran that are more open to gender equality.	Focus on dynamic interpretation, not limited to literal understanding but looking at historical and social context.

This table reflects how each mufassir views gender equality based on the methodology they use in interpreting the relevant verses in the Quran. Classical *Tafsir* emphasises literal, textual, and tradition-based interpretations, often reinforcing more conservative gender roles. Modern *Tafsir* offers a more contextualised approach, taking into consideration modern values such as gender equality, social justice, and a more inclusive interpretation of the Quran.

4.1.2. Interpretation Methodology: Textual vs Contextual

In terms of methodology, this study found that classical *tafsir* focuses more on textual interpretation (*bil-ma'tsur*), which uses the narrations of companions and *tabi'in* to understand the meaning of verses. This approach provides a conservative interpretation of gender roles, often limiting women's roles to the domestic sphere. For example, in interpreting Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 34, many classical commentaries emphasise the primacy of men in the role of family leader and breadwinner, with little attention to changing social dynamics.

In contrast, modern commentaries tend to use a contextual and hermeneutic approach, where Qur'anic verses are seen in the context of changing times and the needs of society. Modern interpretations are more flexible in understanding gender roles, emphasising the principles of justice, freedom, and equality that the Quran also teaches. Some mufassirs, like Quraish Shihab, argue that verses about male leadership must be understood in a social context that is no longer relevant to the conditions of modern society that encourage equal rights and obligations between men and women.

Table 3.

A Comparison of Classical and Modern *Tafsir* Methodologies in the Interpretation of Gender Equality Verses in the Quran.

Group	<i>Tafsir</i> Books	Gender Methodologies and Interpretation
Classical <i>Tafsir</i>	<i>Tafsir</i> Al-Tabari	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literal and textual. - Affirms the role of men as leaders. - Tends to maintain traditional gender roles
	<i>Tafsir</i> Al-Qurtubi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Based on <i>fiqh</i> and tradition. - Reinforces patriarchal structures. - Emphasises women's obligations to their husbands and domestic roles.
	<i>Tafsir</i> Ibnu Katsir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literal interpretation. - Focuses on separate gender roles according to tradition.

		- Less attention to modern social dynamics.
	<i>Tafsir Al-Jalalayn</i>	- Concise and literal approach. - A simple interpretation that emphasises traditional gender hierarchies.
Modern <i>Tafsir</i>	<i>Tafsir Al-Misbah</i>	- Contextualised and moderate. - Emphasises equality in the rights and responsibilities of men and women. - Flexible to social change.
	<i>Tafsir Al-Maraghi</i>	- More flexible than classical <i>tafsir</i> , but still mindful of tradition. - Encourages reinterpretation of verses with modern contexts.
	Asma Barlas	- A feminist perspective. - Deconstruction of patriarchal interpretations. - Proposing inclusive interpretations that support gender equality.
	Fazlur Rahman	- Contextual hermeneutics. - Understanding verses by considering historical and social contexts. - Emphasises social justice and gender equality.

This table explains the methodological differences between Classical and Modern *Tafsir* in interpreting verses on gender equality: First, the differences arise in terms of approach and methodology. Classical interpretations tend to be literal, text-focused, and rely on fiqh-based interpretations and traditions that reinforce patriarchal structures. Generally, classical *tafsir* maintains a conservative view of gender roles. Modern interpretations employ contextual and hermeneutical approaches, considering social changes, justice values, and gender equality. Interpretations are more open to women's rights and their roles in modern society. Second, the interpretation of gender roles: Classical interpretations emphasise gender roles that are fixed according to tradition, with men as leaders and women in domestic roles. Modern commentaries advocate for more equal roles between men and women, with interpretations that are more inclusive and relevant to contemporary issues of gender equality. Third, the response to social change. Classical interpretations tend to maintain traditional hierarchies and are less responsive to modern social changes. Modern interpretations, on the other hand, adapt to social transformations, including human rights, women's education, and their participation in various fields of life.

4.1.3. *The Influence of Social and Intellectual Transformation in Gender Interpretation*

This research also shows that social and intellectual transformation in the Islamic world has a significant impact on the way gender verses are interpreted. In the classical period, Islamic society was influenced by a patriarchal social structure, where the role of men as leaders in the family and society was considered an indisputable norm. This assumption is reflected in interpretations that tend to affirm the status quo.

However, the modern era's growing discourse on human rights, women's rights, and gender equality creates a need to reinterpret Qur'anic verses to make them more relevant to current demands. Modern *mufassirs* try to balance the authority of the sacred text with intellectual and social developments that encourage gender justice. The results of this study show that modern *tafsir* can offer a more inclusive interpretation of women's rights, such as in the interpretation of the verse on education (Q.S. Al-'Alaq [96]: 1-5), which is not only relevant for men but also for women in the era of universal education.

4.1.4. *The Challenge of Bridging Classical and Modern Thought*

While modern *tafsir* has made a significant contribution to the understanding of gender equality in Islam, this research also found that there are major challenges in bridging classical and modern thought. Classical *mufassirs* are often regarded as the highest authority in the interpretation of the Quran, so their interpretations are difficult to question. In addition, resistance from some Muslims who still hold strong patriarchal values is an obstacle to the acceptance of modern interpretations that are more inclusive of gender equality.

One of the major challenges found in this research is how to interpret verses about gender without compromising the authority of the sacred text. The hermeneutic approach used by modern *mufassirs* is still often disputed by conservative scholars who cling to classical methods of interpretation. This creates intellectual tensions between those who encourage *tafsir* reform and those who maintain a literal approach.

4.1.5. *Relevance of Qur'anic Interpretation to Gender Equality in the Contemporary Era*

The results show that Qur'anic interpretation has enormous potential to support gender equality if done with a more contextual and progressive approach. Modern interpretation, with its hermeneutic method, allows a more inclusive and fair understanding of gender roles in Islam. Verses on human creation, justice, and moral responsibility that are often used to support patriarchy can be reinterpreted to emphasise the importance of equal rights and obligations between men and women.

This research also highlights that the relevance of Qur'anic interpretation in supporting gender equality is highly dependent on the ability of Muslims to continue to develop interpretive methods that are responsive to global social and intellectual developments. Thus, the interpretation of the Quran that supports gender equality can act as a moral foundation for efforts to fight for women's rights in the Islamic world, as well as part of the global discourse on gender equality.

4.2. *Discussion*

4.2.1. *Gender Equality in Islam*

Gender equality is a concept that asserts that men and women have equal rights, opportunities, and responsibilities in social, economic, political, and cultural life (Puspitawati, 2013). In the context of Islam, discussions on gender equality often involve understanding and interpreting Qur'anic verses that address the role of women in society (Djamaluddin, 2015; Zubeir, 2012).

According to the theory of gender justice, Islam fundamentally teaches equality between men and women (Arbain et al., 2015). Several verses in the Qur'an emphasize that

humans, both men and women, were created from the same essence (Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]:1) and possess equal dignity in the sight of Allah (Kemenag RI, 2019). This concept forms the basis for contemporary interpretations that support gender equality.

The theory of gender justice in Islam also emphasizes that gender injustice is primarily caused by cultural and social factors that interpret religious teachings in line with the dominant patriarchal norms at the time (Muhammad, 2021). Therefore, reinterpreting religious texts in alignment with social justice values is seen as one solution to advancing gender equality (Almeida et al., 2021; Hasan, 2009).

4.2.2. *Theory of Qur'anic Interpretation*

Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsir*) is the process of understanding and explaining the meanings contained in the verses of the Qur'an (Shihab, 2013). Theoretically, *tafsir* can be classified into two main categories: first, classical *tafsir* refers to interpretations made by scholars from the early centuries of Islam up to the medieval period (Kamal, 2016). This type of interpretation is usually textual and literal, following the rules of the Arabic language and the historical context when the verses were revealed (Rozi, 2019). Classical *tafsir* was often influenced by the strong patriarchal culture of the time, which is reflected in their interpretations of verses related to gender (Hasan, 2009). Second, modern *tafsir* emerged in the contemporary era, where interpreters strive to contextualize the Qur'anic verses with the current social realities (Nazhifah, 2021).

This interpretation places more emphasis on contextual and hermeneutic approaches, allowing for interpretations that are more relevant to the developments of the times, including gender equality (Jayana, 2019). Modern interpreters such as Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Abduh, and M. Quraish Shihab attempt to bridge the gap between traditional teachings and modern values such as human rights, gender equality, and social justice (Hamidi et al., 2013; Kharlie, 2018; Shihab, 2002). There are different ways to understand the Qur'an according to the theory of *tafsir*. These include *Tafsir bil-ma'tsur* (understanding based on hadith or stories) (Siregar, 2018), *Tafsir bil-ra'yi* (understanding based on logic and *ijtihad*) (Yana et al., 2020), and Contextual *Tafsir* (understanding that takes into account social, cultural, and historical factors) (Amir & Hamzah, 2019).

4.2.3. *Hermeneutical Approach in Qur'anic Interpretation*

Hermeneutics is a theory and method of interpreting texts, especially religious, literary, and philosophical texts (Hamidi, 2011; Tarlam, 2023). In the context of the Quran, the hermeneutical approach aims to explore more profound meanings of the sacred text by considering the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which the verses were revealed, as well as their application in the contemporary era (Aisyah & Bashori, n.d.). The hermeneutical approach to Qur'anic interpretation offers a more dynamic understanding of the text, where interpretation is not only bound to literal meaning but also to the values contained within the verse (Mufid, 2011).

Table 4.

Some Influential Hermeneutical Theories in the Discussion of Qur'anic Interpretation Include.

Hermeneutika Gadamer	Hermeneutika Fazlur Rahman
Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that understanding a text is always influenced by the reader's "horizon" of understanding (Hanif, 2017). Thus, modern interpretations of the Quran concerning gender can be understood within the framework of evolving gender equality values today.	Fazlur Rahman introduced the concept of "double movement" in Qur'anic interpretation, which involves understanding the historical context in which a verse was revealed and then applying it to the modern context (Sumantri, 2013). Using this method, Rahman suggests that many Qur'anic verses related to gender roles need to be reinterpreted to align with universal principles of social justice.

4.2.4. Patriarchal Theory in Religious Interpretation

Patriarchy theory refers to a social system in which men hold primary power in social, political, economic, and religious institutions (Yusdani & Arfaizar, 2022). In many classical interpretations, this patriarchal view influences the interpretation of Qur'anic verses related to gender roles. Classical scholars often interpreted verses about women in a way that supported male dominance. For example, Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]:34 talks about how men should lead the family, and Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:228 talks about male superiority in the context of marriage.

However, patriarchy theory also highlights that many of these patriarchal interpretations do not fully reflect the actual teachings of the Quran. Instead, these teachings frequently conform to the prevailing social norms of the era. In this context, modern interpretations attempt to reinterpret these verses within a framework that is fairer and more egalitarian, in line with social developments that are more inclusive of women (Huwaida, 2017).

4.2.5. Perspective of Hermeneutic Theory in the Interpretation of the Quran

In the study of interpretation, hermeneutic theory is one of the most relevant approaches in the context of modern interpretation, especially for social issues such as gender equality (Zuhdi, 2012). Gadamer and Ricoeur, two important figures in hermeneutics, emphasise that the understanding of the text depends not only on the text itself but also on the social context, history, and interpretation of the reader (Mufid, 2011; Rahtikawati & Rusmana, 2013). This approach is relevant to the research findings that modern mufasssirs such as Fazlur Rahman and Muhammad Abduh use contextual methods to understand Qur'anic verses in the context of today. Rahman, in his 'double movement' theory, emphasises that Qur'anic verses must be understood through two steps: *first*, understanding the original context in which the verse was revealed; *second*, applying it in the modern context (Sumantri, 2013).

The finding that classical interpretations are more textual while modern interpretations are more contextual is in line with this hermeneutic theory. In classical *tafsir*, literal understanding dominates interpretation, as shown in *tafsirs* such as Ibn Kathir and Al-Tabari's

works (Hadi, 2021). Meanwhile, modern mufassirs prioritise the hermeneutic method, where the social context and modern values of justice are the main considerations (Baidowi, 2023). This allows modern *tafsir* to support gender equality that is relevant to current social demands.

4.2.6. *Experts' Opinions on Gender Interpretation in the Quran*

Many modern exegetes argue that interpretations of the Quran should allow for more egalitarian interpretations of gender roles. Asma Barlas, in her book *Believing Women in Islam*, argues that the Quran actually supports gender equality, but patriarchal interpretations have distorted the meaning of the verses (Mually, n.d.). Barlas' argument is in line with the research findings that modern commentaries, such as those developed by Fazlur Rahman and Quraish Shihab, offer more progressive interpretations of women's roles in Islam. They interpret verses such as Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 1, which emphasises the common origin of men and women, as a theological foundation for gender equality.

In addition, Leila Ahmed also highlights that classical *tafsir* is often influenced by the patriarchal culture of the past, thus reinforcing social structures that favour men (Haitsam, n.d.). In this context, the research finding that classical interpretations tend to reinforce the role of men as leaders of the family and society is in line with Ahmed's view. In contrast, modern interpretations are more responsive to discourses on women's rights and gender equality, which are considered an integral part of social justice in Islam (Arif, 2016).

4.2.7. *The Relevance of Gender Interpretation in Contemporary Islam*

The results show that Qur'anic interpretation has great potential to support gender equality if done with a more contextual and progressive approach. Modern interpretation, with its hermeneutic method, allows for a more inclusive and fair understanding of gender roles in Islam. Verses on human creation, justice, and moral responsibility that are often used as a basis to support patriarchy can be reinterpreted to emphasize the importance of equal rights and obligations between men and women.

This research also highlights that the relevance of Qur'anic interpretation in supporting gender equality is highly dependent on the ability of Muslims to continue to develop interpretive methods that are responsive to global social and intellectual developments. Thus, the interpretation of the Quran that supports gender equality can serve as a moral foundation for efforts to fight for women's rights in the Islamic world, as well as part of the global discourse on gender equality (Alfani & Mukhsin, 2024).

In the study of Qur'anic interpretation, the relevance of modern interpretation to gender equality is very significant, especially in the contemporary era (Luthfia & Chodijah, 2021). Along with increasing global awareness of women's rights, modern interpretations provide an important theological foundation for the gender equality movement in Islam (Baidowi, 2023, 2024). Fazlur Rahman, Asma Barlas, and Quraish Shihab are examples of *mufassirs* who have successfully adapted the interpretation of Qur'anic verses to the principles of social justice that are also taught in Islam.

This research also confirms that modern *tafsir* plays a key role in addressing the social and intellectual challenges facing the Islamic world today, especially regarding gender issues. By using a hermeneutic approach, modern *tafsir* is able to provide interpretations that are

more relevant to the demands of gender equality, without ignoring the core values of the Quran (Zulfa, n.d.). This is in line with the arguments of exegetes such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, who argue that the Quran must be considered a living text that continues to interact with social and historical developments.

Thus, it can be affirmed that the results of research highlighting the differences in methodology and approaches of classical and modern *tafsir* in terms of gender equality are supported by various theories, expert opinions, and previous research. The contextual and hermeneutic approaches used by modern *mufassirs* have contributed significantly to a more inclusive understanding of gender roles in Islam, although challenges from conservative circles remain. The relevance of Qur'anic interpretation in supporting gender equality in the contemporary era shows that the Quran has great potential to answer modern social challenges, provided that it is interpreted by considering fundamental social justice principles.

5. CONCLUSION

This study explores and compares classical and modern interpretations of Qur'anic verses related to gender equality. Based on the analyses conducted, several main conclusions can be drawn as follows: Classical interpretations tend to use textual and literal approaches in interpreting gender-related verses, which often support patriarchal social structures. In contrast, modern *tafsir* prioritizes contextual and hermeneutical methods, which allow for more progressive and inclusive interpretations of gender equality. This approach considers social transformation and values of justice that are more relevant to the conditions of contemporary society. This research shows that social and intellectual changes in the Islamic world have influenced the way modern *mufassirs* understand and interpret Qur'anic verses on gender. Modern *tafsir* offers a more balanced interpretation in terms of women's roles, as well as providing space for greater gender equality in various aspects of life, including education, economics, and social participation.

This research confirms that modern *tafsir* has a strong relevance in supporting gender equality in the contemporary era. *Mufassirs* such as Fazlur Rahman, Asma Barlas, and Quraish Shihab have successfully demonstrated that the Quran supports the principles of social justice, including women's rights. This makes modern *tafsir* an important tool in responding to the demands of the global community for gender equality in Islam. Although modern *tafsir* provides more contextualised and inclusive interpretations, challenges remain in bridging classical and modern thought. Resistance from conservatives who uphold classical interpretations often obstructs the acceptance of more egalitarian views.

Therefore, a constructive dialogue between these two approaches is needed to create a more harmonious understanding of gender issues in Islam. Essentially, this research concludes that Qur'anic interpretations on gender equality can continue to evolve along with social and intellectual changes in the Islamic world. Contextual and hermeneutical interpretations provide an opportunity to create a more inclusive and relevant understanding for contemporary society while still maintaining the core values of the Quran.

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activists of Qur'anic interpretation and activists of gender issues and feminism to further study the same theme or other themes. The author is truly grateful to Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies for providing opportunities for reviewers of gender issues and feminism to express their thoughts in writing.

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