

Gender Equality Perspective in Surah An-Nisa': 34 (A Comparative Study of Tafsir At-Thabari and Tafsir Al-Azhar)

Roihan Muhammad Iqbal^{1*}, Ainur Rhain²

^{1,2} Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Surakarta, Indonesia

Abstract

Religion is often marked by gender inequality. Gender equality has always been controversial, especially in explaining, interpreting, and determining the law between women and men. At-Thabari and Buya Hamka have similarities and differences in interpreting Surah an-Nisa': 34. This study aims to determine the interpretation of Surah an-Nisa': 34 according to classical and contemporary interpreters At-Thabari and Buya Hamka to find similarities and differences in the interpretations of At-Thabari and Buya Hamka, and to determine the relevance of gender equality in the perspective of Surah an-Nisa': 34. This type of research uses library research. Then, the data was analyzed using a comparative descriptive method, carried out using analysis techniques and comparisons, and the validity of the data was checked to obtain research results following the objectives. The results of this study indicate that At-Thabari and Buya Hamka's thoughts on gender equality have similarities in interpreting Surah an-Nisa': 34 regarding the authority of men over women, and there are differences in thinking based on Surah An-Nisa: 34 regarding the interpretation view. Differences in time, conditions, situations, and civilizations that influence it. Based on this study, it can also be concluded that the surah an-Nisa': 34 emphasizes that Islam, on several occasions, elevates the position of men over women. Gender equality is part of Islamic values that apply universally.

Keywords: Equality, Gender, At-Thabari, Hamka

Introduction

Gender equality is a deep and ongoing issue that creates debate in the context of religion, including in Islam. The Qur'an, as the primary source of law in the lives of Muslims, is the centre of attention for understanding and absorbing the values of equality between men and women. The study of gender equality in the Qur'an is an attempt at interpretation and a search for the essence of inclusive Islamic teachings that encourage gender justice. Therefore, it is important to conduct an in-depth and critical study of the verses of the Qur'an related to gender to achieve a more holistic and contextual understanding. Tafsir At-Thabari, known for its accuracy in interpreting the Qur'an, is one of the primary references in understanding Islam. However, At-Thabari's understanding of gender equality must be detailed and studied further. To what extent does Tafsir At-Thabari emphasize the rights and roles of women in Islamic society? Meanwhile, Tafsir Al-Azhar, which reflects the tradition of moderate Islamic thought, provides space for contemporary reflection and interpretation. To what extent does Tafsir Al-Azhar respond to the challenges of the times regarding gender equality? Are there any efforts to interpret the verses of the Qur'an contextually to understand gender roles in the developing social framework?

This introduction details the importance of exploring the concept of gender equality in the Qur'an as a foundation of Islamic teachings. The author will investigate traditional and contemporary views on gender roles in Islam and explore arguments that support or challenge these views. In doing so, this paper seeks to contribute to deepening Muslims' understanding of gender equality and stimulate further discussion on how the values of equality can be implemented in everyday life practices.

Through the analysis of the verses of the Qur'an, we can identify the concept of gender equality that underlies Islamic teachings and understand how it can be interpreted in a contemporary context. In this way, we can move closer to a more just and equal society following the humanitarian teachings conveyed in the Qur'an.

* Corresponding author: g100231148@student.usms.ac.id

Method

The method used in this study is library research that takes primary and secondary data from literature, such as books, the latest research journals, and proceedings. In the next stage, the data is analyzed using data analysis methods. To examine the comparative concept of gender equality from the perspective of at-Thabari's and al-Azhar's interpretations.

Method Result and Discussion

The Concept of Gender Equality

Gender is a word derived from English, namely gender, which means "sex." In Webster's New World Dictionary, gender is defined as "the apparent differences between men and women seen in terms of values and behavior." It is also explained that gender is a cultural concept that seeks to make differences in roles, behavior, mentality, and emotional characteristics between men and women that develop in society.

Gender is a concept that can be used to identify the differences between men and women when viewed from a socio-cultural aspect. Gender, in this sense, explains men and women from a non-biological perspective. Gender Equality means equal rights obtained for men and women as human beings to be able to play an active role in various aspects such as politics, law, economy, socio-culture, education, and national defense and security (hakanmas), as well as equality in enjoying the results of the development. Gender equality also includes eliminating discrimination and structural injustice from both men and women.

The rise of gender issues is due to the facts in the field, which show the increasing cases of social inequality and discrimination due to gender differences. This causes further problems, namely differences in roles and functions for each individual in the context of successful national development. The problem of these differences will then give rise to gender differences. These gender differences are not a problem as long as they do not cause gender injustice, but the social reality in the wider community is that the issue of these gender differences has caused various oppressions and injustices for men and, generally, for women.

Gender Issues in the Qur'an

There is a classic expression that says, "Text is always limited, while the reality is never limited." This expression is considered very appropriate when used in religious texts. Existing religious texts can be minimal because they appear in a particular space and time, while the reality of nature, culture, and society is dynamic. Therefore, peeling off the historical side of religious texts is an absolute must and must be done by Muslims if they do not want to be guessed in their contextual Islam. Likewise, when talking about religious texts related to gender. This requires a broad understanding to place texts born from the past into the niche of contemporary civilization.

History records that the Qur'an was not revealed suddenly but through a long process over time. Some verses of the Qur'an were revealed, as well as social events that occurred in Arab society at that time. Some other verses were revealed without any social background. This means that the Qur'an was revealed only to respond to the social conditions in the Arabian Peninsula at that time. This also applies to the verses that talk about women. Among the many gender issues in the Qur'an, the problems of polygamy, inheritance, divorce, domestic violence, leadership in the household, the veil, and so on are issues that still need space to be discussed.

Biography of Imam At-Thabari

Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir at-Thabari was born in Amul, the largest city in Tabaristan. The name Ja'far is a nickname, however, no background information was found. Historians say Tabaristan was a mountainous region, and its inhabitants were skilled in warfare.

Imam at-Thabari's full name is Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Khalid bin Kasir Abu Ja'far at-Thabari. At-Thabari's birth year has two versions; some say he was born at the end of 224 H/839 AD, but not a few say he was born at the beginning of 225 H/840 AD. Both opinions refer to the testimony of one of Imam at-Thabari's students, al-Qadhi ibn Kamil, who once asked his teacher about this. al-Qadhi ibn Kamil asked, "How can you be doubtful about this matter?" at-Thabari replied, "That is because the people of our country usually set a person's birth date according to a certain event and not by year, so my birth date was also set according to the event that occurred in our country at that time. After I grew up, I wondered about the incident, but people answered it in various ways.

His father's name was Jarir, he was a simple trader, who loved knowledge and scholars. The love for knowledge becomes stronger after dreaming. At-Thabari said, "My father once dreamed that he saw me in front of Rasulullah SAW, and my hand, there was a bag filled with stones, and I threw it in front of him. The table expert then told him (my father) that one day, your son (at-Thabari) would grow up to be a pious person who would serve his religion. Hearing the

explanation of the dream, my father was enthusiastic and encouraged me to study, even though I was still very young at that time."

Little At-Tabari always followed his father's wishes to study earnestly and do it happily. His life in a family environment that paid more attention to knowledge, especially religious knowledge, greatly influenced At-Tabari's personality. At-Tabari was known to have extraordinary intelligence, so his father continued to encourage and provide him with ample opportunities to gain knowledge. At-Tabari can be said to have grown up in the care of his parents.

At-Tabari had memorized the Qur'an and could write hadith at a very young age. This confession was made by Ibn Kamil, a student at Thabari, who his teacher reprimanded for forbidding his nine-year-old son from studying hadith. At-Tabari said, "I had memorized the Qur'an when I was seven years old, became a prayer leader when I was eight, and wrote hadith at nine."

Biography of Buya Hamka

Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amarullah (HAMKA) was born in Sungai Batang, Maninjau (West Sumatra) on Sunday, February 16, 1908, M / 13 Muharram 1326 H, from a religious family. The title Buya was given to him, a title for Minangkabau people which comes from the word *abi* or *abuya*, which in Arabic means my father or someone who is respected.

He had a father named Haji Abdul Karim Amarullah or often called Haji Rasul bin Syekh Muhammad Amarullah (title *Tuanku Kisai*) bin *Tuanku Abdul Saleh*. He was a pioneer in the Islamic youth movement in Minangkabau, and his movement began in 1906 after returning from Mecca. Meanwhile, his mother's name was Siti Shafiyah Tanjung bint Haji Zakaria (d. 1934). This genealogy shows that the generation of Islamic reformers in Minangkabau at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. He was born into the structure of Minangkabau society, which adheres to a matrilineal system. Therefore, in the Minangkabau genealogy he comes from the Tanjung tribe, like his mother's tribe.

Buya Hamka is a person who is widely known by the public as a person with high integrity in the fields of morals and science. He is a leading scholar and cleric in Indonesia. In addition to his thoughts, Buya Hamka is also known as someone capable in science, including interpretation, Sufism, *fiqh*, history, philosophy, and literature.

1914 Abdul Malik began his education by reading the Qur'an at his parents' house when their family moved from Maninjau to Padang Panjang. When he was 6 years old, his father took him to a long field, and at the age of 7 he was put into a village school which was only for about 3 years and at night he still studied the Koran thoroughly.

At 12, his parents divorced, which was a bitter experience for him. It is no wonder that his fatwa is very famous against the Minangkabau tradition of *kum lagi lagi* who marry more than one. Because that can destroy household harmony. His formal education was very simple. From 1916 to 1923, he studied religion at the Diniyah School educational institution in Padang Panjang and Parabek. Although he had sat in class VII, he did not have a diploma. His teachers then included Sheikh Ibrahim Musa Parabek, Engku Mudo Abdul Hamid Hakim, Sutan Marajo, and Sheikh Zainuddin Lebay el-Yunusiy. The implementation of education at that time was still traditional, using the *halaqah* system. In 1916, a new classical system was introduced in Sumatra Thawalib Jembatan Besi. However, at that time, the introduced classical system did not have benches, tables, chalk, or blackboards. The educational material was oriented towards classical books, such as *nahwu*, *sharaf*, *manthiq*, *bayan*, *fiqh*, etc. The educational approach emphasized memorization and was less than optimal in learning to write. As a result, many of his friends were fluent in reading books, but were less able to write well. Even though he was unsatisfied with the system, he followed it carefully. This education system dissatisfied him, and he wanted to continue studying in another region to get something better.

At-Tabari's interpretation in the letter An-Nisa' verse 34

Among the verses that are considered to have gender tendencies according to the feminist group are verses that discuss leadership in the family context. This group believes that in the household environment, there is no hierarchy of superiority between husband and wife; both are considered equal. As for the word of Allah SWT in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 34 is as follows:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ...

"Men are leaders for women, because of Allah SWT. have given more of their share (men) over others (women), and because they (men) have spent part of their wealth..." (QS. an-Nisā' [4]: 34).

In interpreting the verse above, at-Tabari argues that the verse is related to household problems or family relationships between husband and wife. This verse has directly given legalization to men about their higher authority over women. In the household, the husband has the right to educate his wife so that she obeys him and Allah SWT. The submission carried out by a wife is because of the existence of a marriage bond and is a form of her obedience to Allah SWT, namely by obeying her husband.

"Men are leaders for women..."

A husband is someone who is responsible for educating and guiding his wife to obey Allah SWT and also him.

"Because Allah SWT has made some of them (men) excel others (women)...."

The advantage given by Allah SWT to men over women because they are the ones who provide the dowry and will later become the backbone of their families to meet all their wives' needs. This is the priority given by Allah SWT to their

wives. Therefore, they become leaders in the household and carry out the obligations assigned by Allah SWT in their wives' affairs.

Imam at-Tabari in his tafsir book emphasized that the husband is the one who has the right to be the leader in the household because Allah has given advantages to men and because he is the one who provides the dowry and fulfils the needs of clothing, food and shelter. He is the one who is tasked with being the breadwinner to fulfill the economic needs of his family. A husband is also tasked with protecting his wife.

According to at-Tabari, it is not enough to merely fulfill economic needs, but the husband is also responsible as a role model for his wife. He is responsible for educating and guiding his wife in order to obey Allah SWT because he is the one who will be held accountable by Allah SWT for his family. Therefore, when the wife disobeys, then he may punish his wife so that she returns to obeying Allah SWT.

Hamka's interpretation of the letter An-Nisa' verse 34

Based on Buya Hamka's interpretation of Surah An-Nisa' verse 34, he firmly stated that the division of male inheritance is twice the share of females. This illustrates that Hamka's thoughts on gender relations place men's position above women's. This is reinforced by his view that men pay dowries to women, and that men are ordered to treat their wives well, related to this Hamka also justifies the priority of men over women based on the fact that men are allowed to marry up to four people as long as they are able. This verse provides the answer. Because men lead women, not women lead men, they are not equal in position. Although having four wives is a hassle, generally men are better able to control four wives than a wife with four husbands. She will not be able to control the four men. The woman will suffer if, for example, she is allowed to have four husbands.

In the verse, no direct command states that men must be leaders or women must accept leadership. The first thing that is explained is the reality without any explicit command. In reality, men generally lead women. Therefore, if at some point there is a command telling women to lead men, the command cannot be carried out following the reality of human life. Leaders are generally men, not only in the human context but also at the cosmic level, such as in a group of ducks where the male duck leads the other ducks. In the wild, monkeys and macaques in the forest also have leaders, who are generally old male macaques. The first explanation in the verse leads to the fact that Allah gives advantages to some of them, namely men over women, in terms of strength, intelligence, and responsibility. Examples are taken from everyday life, such as in families, where naturally the father becomes the leader even though there is no specific command stating so. Compared to the structure of the human body, where even though all body parts are important, the head is still considered the leader.

Even though the head cannot stand up if the legs are paralyzed or the hands are broken, the hands do not complain about their role as hands, or the feet ask why they are below. As a comparison, like a ship with a skipper (Ship Captain) and a Jurubatu (Machinist), where the machinist's role is crucial; if the machinist is not there, the ship cannot sail. However, the machinist still realizes that the captain still holds the highest position. Therefore, this verse explains that, like it or not, men are generally women's leaders. Sometimes, although rare, there may be situations where men are less wise and women are more intelligent so that the role of leaders is reversed, but this is very uncommon and is not used as a basis or law. The second reason explained is related to the management of property. This means that the responsibility for managing property is also the task of men. In a husband-wife relationship, if property is owned together, as referred to in Minangkabau customs with the term "haroto suarang," the final decision-making right remains with the man.

The instincts of women themselves can be recognized in this context. Even in households, whether in primitive environments, villages, or modern cities, everyday conversations still include women's rights. When there is a fight in the house, discussing rights and obligations, suddenly a threat appears from a bad person who wants to rob the house. Without special orders, men prepare to face the threat, while women and their children are directed to hide. If there are adult sons, they are instructed by their father to help defend themselves in the face of the threat.

In Islam, men must pay a dowry to their prospective wives. The dowry is considered a form of unwritten law that contains responsibility, indicating that since the dowry payment, the wife gives her husband the authority of leadership over herself. On the other hand, the tradition in some Western countries shows that women pay the dowry to men. This system also includes an unwritten rule stating that since the man receives the dowry from his wife, he should protect and lead her, because at that time, he has released the responsibility of the woman's parents.

Whatever household model is applied, the final decision remains in the hands of the man. In a household, it is impossible for two powers to have the same rights and obligations, because a family needs a single leader. According to observations of humans' physical and spiritual aspects, the leader is none other than a man. The more the intelligence of the human mind develops, the more people agree with this principle. Therefore, religious law is based on this principle, which states that men are leaders for women. This is not just news or a mere reality, but has become a command, because it reflects the rhythm of life. The next verse discusses the characteristics of women who are led by men, namely that good women are obedient to Allah and to the rules as women and wives. They have responsibilities in the household related to property, husbands, and children's education. The verse also states that good women keep secrets well, including things hidden in their household, as a form of politeness and ethics of a wife. This is called "the way that Allah preserves," which

indicates that keeping secrets is a divine teaching. Therefore, it is recommended that women also keep secrets, including personal matters with their husbands, so that other people do not know them.

The scholars emphasized that not only the intimate relationship between husband and wife must be kept confidential, but also the husband's wealth and ability to provide for his property. It is advisable not to complain about these shortcomings to others. Therefore, obedient women or wives should carry out their relationship with their male leaders smoothly, and happiness in their relationships can be realized. However, in addition to these good things, there is also the possibility of a wife causing headaches for her husband.

Comparison of At-Thabari and Al-Azhar Tafsir Views Regarding Gender Equality in Surah an-Nisa' verse 34

In a husband's leadership, At-Thabari argues that this verse legitimizes higher authority to men in the household. The husband has the right to educate and guide his wife to obey Allah and him. In addition, At-Thabari links the advantages given by Allah to men with the fact that they provide a dowry and become the backbone of the family. The husband is tasked with being the breadwinner, protecting his wife, and having responsibilities towards his family.

In general, Buya Hamka's view emphasizes that he highlights the differences in the division of inheritance, where men get twice the share of women. This shows Buya Hamka's view of the position of men over women. In addition, Buya Hamka also emphasizes that men are leaders in relationships, and leaders are generally men. His view emphasizes the role of men in various aspects, including wisdom and intelligence.

At-Thabari emphasizes male leadership as a higher authority in the household. In contrast, Buya Hamka emphasizes male superiority in the context of the division of inheritance and the role of leader. Although both mention the advantages of men, At-Thabari's view focuses more on economic responsibility and protection, while Buya Hamka emphasizes leadership and wisdom. At-Thabari associates male leadership with family responsibilities and obligations, while Buya Hamka emphasizes the fact that men generally lead women, without the need for explicit orders.

The author adds that there are differences in the socio-cultural context between the two mufassir figures, namely, at-Thabari lived in the 9th century AD where the conditions at that time were not like today. And his interpretations used more hadiths from the Prophet Shallallahu' alaihi wa sallam.

While Hamka has a socio-cultural background influenced by the New Order era because Hamka lived at that time which was led by President Soeharto where at that time women were very limited in leadership both politically and socially were not given space for freedom. they assume that women are not capable of doing that. With the conclusion that Hamka believes that a woman is enough to stay at home to manage the household as a wife and housewife.

Conclusion

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that both interpretations state that men have a position or advantage that gives them a role as a leader in the household. Both argue that God's decree regulates the relationship between husband and wife, where men have higher authority. Both also agree that the husband has a responsibility towards his wife regarding religious education and fulfilling economic needs. The husband is expected to protect and guide his wife and provide for property.

Both at-Thabari and Buya Hamka convey messages about maintaining the secrecy of husband-wife relationships. They highlight the importance of keeping household matters secret from others. Both interpretations also touch on giving a dowry as one aspect that signifies male superiority. Men are considered to have advantages because they provide a dowry and are the backbone of the family.

Although both align with some basic concepts, it should be noted that these interpretations may reflect the cultural views and interpretations of particular Islamic figures, and these views may vary among Muslims and other commentators.

Acknowledgement

A big thank you for Mr. Ainun Rhain's help and dedication in the process of making this article. The contributions and views given are very meaningful for the progress and completeness of this article. Hopefully this good cooperation can continue in the future. Thank you once again for all your efforts and time.

References

- Abd Haris. (2010). Etika Hamka. Yogyakarta: LkiS.
- Abi Abdullah Ya'qut bin Abdullah. (n.d.). Mu'jam al-Udaba (Vol. 5).
- Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir at-Thabari. (1984). Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Al-Qur'an (2nd ed.). Cairo: Maktabah Ibnu Taimiyah.
- Adriana, I. (2009). Kurikulum berbasis gender. Tadris, 4(1).
- al-Arnaut, S. (1992). Syiar A'lam al-Nubala (Vol. 14). Beirut: Muasasah al-Risalah.
- Amhazun, M. (1999). Fitnah Kubro: Tragedi pada masa sahabat-kalifikasi sikap serta analisis historis dalam perspektif ahli hadits dan Imam al-Thabary (Daud Rasyid, Trans.). Jakarta: LP2SI Al-Haramain.
- Amhazun, M. (n.d.). Fitnah Kubro.
- Askan, A. (Ed.). (2011). Tafsir At-Thabari/Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir at-Thabari (Vol. I). (Hidayat Amin & Mukhlis B. Mukti, Trans.). Jakarta: Pustaka Azam.
- Baidatul Raziqin. (2009). 101 Jejak Tokoh Islam Indonesia. Yogyakarta: e-Nusantara.
- Daeng, O. (2022). Kesetaraan gender dalam kitab Jami' Al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Al-Qur'an karya Muhammad Ibnu Jarir At-Thabari.
- Hamka, P. D. (n.d.). Tafsir Al-Azhar.
- Hamka. (1974). Kenang-kenangan hidup (Vol. IV). Jakarta: Bulan Bintang.
- Husein, M. (2019). Fiqh perempuan. Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD.
- Ismā'il, M. B. (1991). Ibnu Jarir wa Manhājuhu fi al-Tafsir. Cairo: Dār al-Manār.
- Latifah, A., & Shobaruddin, D. (2022). Kesetaraan gender dalam perspektif Al-Qur'an (Studi komparatif Tafsir At-Thabari dan Al-Mishbah). TAFAHUS: Jurnal Pengkajian Islam, 2(1).
- Mujahidah, F. (2022). Relasi gender dalam Surah An-Nisa' ayat 34 (Studi Komparatif Tafsir Al-Azhar dan Tafsir Al-Misbah) (Skripsi, UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq Jember).
- N, Q., Taufik, W., & Rusmana, D. (2023). Kajian semiotik: Perspektif kesetaraan gender dalam kepemimpinan pada Tafsir Al-Misbah dan Al-Azhar. Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin, 1(6).
- Nizar, S. (2008). Memperbincangkan dinamika intelektual dan pemikiran Hamka tentang pendidikan Islam. Jakarta: Kencana.
- Rosenthal, F. (1989). The history of at-Thabari (Vol. 1). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Sumarlin. (2021). Studi komparatif pemikiran Sayyid Quthb dan Amina Wadud tentang kesetaraan gender dalam Al-Qur'an (Skripsi, UIN Mataram).
- Umar, N. (2001). Argumen kesetaraan gender perspektif Al-Qur'an. Jakarta Selatan: PT. Sapdodadi.
- Yusuf, Y. (1990). Corak pemikiran Kalam Tafsir Al-Azhar. Jakarta: Panji Mas.