

Social Transformation in Surāh An-Nisā': A Thematic Study of the Qur'an on Challenging the Oppression of the Weak

Research Article

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Abstract. The phenomenon of injustice in social structures, gender bias, and oppression of underprivileged populations occurs continuously. Interpretative studies of Surah An-Nisā' generally focus on legal and normative aspects, while its social and transformative dimensions in rejecting the oppression of the weak have yet to be fully investigated. Surah An-Nisā' verses 2, 3, 11, 34, and 59 are the focus of the study since these verses contain principles of social justice and protection for vulnerable groups that are often overlooked and misunderstood in social practice. The purpose of this research is to reveal how the Qur'an, through the investigated verses, dismantles the patriarchal and authoritarian social structure. This research emphasizes the values of equality and protection for women, orphans, and the underprivileged. The type of this research is qualitative through literature study and thematic analysis methods as well as contextual hermeneutics, combining the study of asbābun nuzūl, classical exegesis, and contemporary interpretation. The research findings reveal that the Qur'an, through the five verses studied, presents a principle of justice that is transformative, rejects oppression, and upholds the balance of social relations. In conclusion, Surah An-Nisā' is not to be reduced to a legitimization of power domination, but should be read as a text that upholds equality and social justice relevant across ages. Academically, this research provides a new contribution by expanding the thematic interpretation approach with an interdisciplinary analysis that combines historical, social, and exegesis perspectives, and offers a practical foundation for the development of Quranic exegesis discourse that is responsive to humanitarian and gender equality issues in the modern era.

Keywords:

Surah An-Nisā'; social justice; thematic interpretation; the weak.

Introduction

In the pre-Islamic era, the Qur'an was revealed in a state of social emergency (Djidin, 2024). Practices that contradict humanitarian values such as exploitation, discrimination, and violence occurred so easily among the society in the country where the revelation descended (Utsany et al., 2022). A grim fact when men can marry women without any limit, as well as polyandry. Worse yet, baby girls are often buried alive under the pretext of social pressure and honor. Society is dominated by men, so the legal system can reinforce the patriarchal system, strongly favoring men in power and leadership (Tasgheer & Ishfaq, 2024). The normalized leadership style tends to be masculine and aggressive, creating a social gap between the leader and those below them. As a result, this structure actually reinforces injustice in leadership (Sim & Bierema, 2025).

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Most of the victims of oppression are orphans, widows, and the common people under leadership. Those who have lost a father or husband seem to lose the strength that is culturally attributed to men. Their vulnerable status leaves the lives uncertain, often causing them to depend on the mercy of others because of weak and lacking power (Usman, 2023). The illustration depicts the importance of having rules and moral values that may ultimately bring about significant change. The Qur'an promptly seeks to reform the social structure that is biased against vulnerable groups such as orphans and women. In this regard, Surah An-Nisā' extensively regulates justice in the inheritance system, leadership, family law, and marital law (Zubaidi et al., 2025). Thru the Qur'an, the rights and dignity of humans, especially the weak among them, began to be taken into account (Shihab, 2025, p.104).

On the opposite side, many acknowledge that the interpretation of the Qur'an is not relevant in modern times. One example is related to the issue of polygamy, where in Islamic law it is permitted without the consent of the other wives, but in reality, it often has negative impacts on the mental and social health of the family (Daud, 2025). Many of these interpretations continue to keep women in a lower position or limit the meaning of protecting orphans to just the aspects of inheritance law and asset management. As a result, the message of the Qur'an, which has been advocating for justice since the time of its revelation, is often considered contrary to interpretations. Those are considered to be using Religion, along with the evidence from the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Messenger, as a pretext by employing scientific principles (Siregar & Harahap, 2024).

Based on this point, the gap in social facts that needs to be studied becomes apparent. The position of this article lies at the intersection of the disciplines of exegesis, Islamic history, and social justice. Although Surah An-Nisā' clearly contains principles of protection and social justice, there are still few exegesis studies that attempt to read it contextually, emphasizing its relevance to the problem of oppression in the contemporary era. However, the reinterpretation of the Qur'an as a living text capable of challenging structures of oppression across eras is urgently needed to address the challenges of justice and protection for vulnerable groups in today's society (Rois et al., 2025)

Several previous studies have attempted to reexamine verses related to male power and authority that impact both children and women. One of the studies found that the understanding of theological texts is beginning to erode, thereby affecting legal implications and justice within the family (Rahmawati, 2020). There is also an article that finds that Islamic feminists believe that the Qur'an is interpreted unethically and contrary to religious teachings due to hatred toward women. There are two ways in which Muslims read patriarchy in the Qur'an. The first is from its verses, and the second is from the Qur'an's different treatment of issues including testimony, marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Shahin, 2020). This is supported by research showing that the inability of religious agents to understand the text by considering its historical context and moral ideals leads to the perpetuation of gender bias, stereotypes, subordination, and violence (Muttaqin, 2020). Based on these findings, religion plays an important

role in legitimizing social justice and that discrimination is a man-made phenomenon, which privileges certain groups over others. Therefore, it is important to implement a social system based on justice and align it with God's decree. Humans should exemplify God's justice and mercy in their thoughts and lives (Al-Khatib, 2023).

Unlike previous studies that tend to focus on the legal and economic aspects of orphans, such as the concept of orphan care (Ariyadri, 2021) and the Islamic way of nurturing vulnerable children (Kutty, 2024), and the meaning of orphan wealth (Vizi Azlina et al., 2023), this research instead emphasizes the social and critiques of structural oppression surrounding the weak. Referring to several classical and contemporary tafsir (Quranic exegesis) books that integrate asbābun nuzūl (occasions of revelation) analysis, this article not only fills existing academic gaps but also offers a more liberating and relevant reinterpretation in the context of contemporary injustices.

This research focuses on five verses in Surah An-Nisā', namely verses 2, 3, 11, 34, and 59, which represent the Qur'an's response to the issues of injustice of its time. These five verses were chosen because they have a strong historical background (asbābun nuzūl) and contextual meanings that remain relevant to this day. The main issue being examined is how social injustice affects the weak and how the Qur'an responds through the revelations that were sent down. In addition, this research also analyzes the relevance of the message to issues of social justice, gender equality, and the rejection of oppression against the weak in the contemporary era. As taught by Islam, Muslims must defend the weak (Hamka, 1982, vol.9, p.7307).

The purpose of this research is to uncover the historical and social context behind the revelation of the above verses based on the asbābun nuzūl narratives, thereby determining the extent to which these principles provide protection and irrevocable sovereignty to the weak. In addition, to obtain the moral and legal messages that the Qur'an intends to convey in responding to injustice and to understand the relevance and implications of these messages for contemporary discourse on social justice.

In the end, the Qur'an as the highest source of civilization for humanity is not a text that is only relevant in the past, but rather a solution in all conditions and situations (Usman, 2023). The author argues that asbābun nuzūl is not merely a historical record, but a signal to understand how the Qur'an responded to injustice at the time of the revelation and how that response can be reinterpreted to address similar issues in the modern era. By placing the verses within a broader socio-historical context, the Qur'an's message about justice is universal and transformative, yet also contextual in its application.

Method

The methodology used is qualitative through a library research approach. The primary materials used are classical and modern tafsir books, as well as recognized asbābun nuzūl literature. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained from academic journals, books, and articles that discuss similar issues from an interdisciplinary

perspective. The analysis is conducted thematically with the following steps: first, collecting and examining the history of *asbābun nuzūl* for each verse; second, analyzing the core message of the verse and its relation to the social context at that time; third, comparing classical and modern interpretations to see the development of understanding; fourth, linking the analysis results with contemporary issues such as children's rights, gender justice, and leadership ethics. The approach used is socio-historical and hermeneutical, allowing researchers to compare perspectives from various interpreters while also contextualizing Qur'anic values in contemporary social realities. This method not only compares but also explains the meaning, historical context, and social relevance of each interpretation. The goal is to understand the development of discourse and the value implications of those verses, not just to compare views.

Results and Discussion

An-Nisā' verse 2 – Protection of the Economic Fundamental Rights of Orphans.

وَأَتُوا الْيَتَامَىٰ أَمْوَالَهُمْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا الْخَبِيثَ بِالطَّيِّبِ وَلَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَهُمْ إِلَىٰ أَمْوَالِكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ حُوبًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٢﴾

Give orphans their wealth 'when they reach maturity', and do not exchange your worthless possessions for their valuables, nor cheat them by mixing their wealth with your own. For this would indeed be a great sin. (Qs. An-Nisā': 2)

It had been a common practice in jahiliyah society that if someone died, there was no guaranty for the children, wife, mother, and sister to receive a share of the deceased's wealth. Financial authority was held solely by the male members of the family. After that, Islam emerged as a protector of the rights of children and women. One of them is Surah An-Nisā' verse 2, which explains that orphans are also entitled to inherit their father's property (HAMKA, 1982, vol.2, p.1061). This also aims to stop the rampant practice of guardians who constantly consume the property of orphans thru various means and deceit (Quthb, 2000, vol.2, p.274). One of them is Surah An-Nisā' verse 2, which contains an explanation that orphans are also entitled to inherit their father's property (HAMKA, 1982). This also aims to stop the rampant practice of guardians who constantly consume the property of orphans thru various means and deceit (Quthb, 2000, (Djidin, 2022).

The reason for the revelation of this verse is related to someone from the tribe of Ghatafan. His name is al-Muqātil al-Kalbī. After his brother's passing, al-Kalbī was entrusted with his brother's wealth and an orphaned child. When the child grew up, he asked his uncle for his rights. However, his uncle did not want to give him the property, and this verse was revealed. Then al-Kalbī returned his nephew's wealth. Then the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever is miserly and then repents (also returns his wealth), he is indeed entitled to his place (in paradise)." After the child received and spent his wealth in the way of Allah, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, "He (the orphan) will receive a reward, but his sin remains." The companions asked, "How is that possible, O Messenger of Allah?" "This child receives a reward, but his sin remains with his father," because his father died in a state of disbelief (Al-Qurtubi, n.d.).

The situation described above has provided the instruction that justice for orphans must be upheld, even if their deceased father was not a Muslim. The principle emphasized in this verse has a significant impact on the social and economic context. The guardian who manages the orphan's wealth must uphold the value of wisdom, which includes good wealth management, spending it transparently and according to the child's abilities and needs ([Vizi Azlina et al., 2023](#)). Only after the child reaches a sufficient age is the property returned to them and witnessed properly.

Not unrelated to the context of *asbābun nuzūl*, classical tafsir literature has emphasized aspects of inheritance and guardianship law. The focus is to ensure that the management of inheritance assets is in accordance with sharia provisions. At that time, there were already laws in place and officers overseeing, but in practice, it was not effective. The revelation of this verse serves as an effective warning because it intended to violate and feel watched by Allah and are betraying Allah. Piety has proven capable of preventing embezzlement by guardians managing orphans' wealth. One of the forms of embezzlement that occurs is exchanging high-value assets for low-value ones. For example, by exchanging a child's fertile garden with a barren personal garden. Likewise with capital, shares, livestock, money, or something else of value. Likewise with capital, shares, livestock, money, or something else of value ([Quthb, 2000, vol.2, p.274](#)).

The transition from the era of ignorance to the modern era, the understanding of verses about the care of orphans has undergone adjustments in line with the progress of the times. The problems faced today tend to be broader and more complex. Attention in the care of orphans is not limited to inheritance rights alone. Self-care, educational and moral development, financial investment, as well as other rights that encompass nurturing religious, spiritual, intellectual, and lineage rights, among others, are also forms of responsibility ([Ariyadri, 2021](#)). Equally important, education will also become capital for the future of orphans. The guardian is advised to spend the child's wealth wisely for their future needs and interests ([Hannan Arrifai, 2021](#)).

From the integration of both classical and modern literature perspectives, it is evident that the discourse on child protection advocated by the Qur'an has made a positive and significant contribution. Based on *asbābun nuzūl*, it serves as a correction to the oppressive practices of the *jahiliyyah* era. Meanwhile, from the perspective of the complexities of modern era issues, it offers a value-based foundation for advocating children's rights within the framework of global social, legal, and economic contexts. This is in accordance with the applicable regulations in Indonesia ([Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 35 of 2014 on Amendments to Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, 2014](#)). In the end, the protection of orphans as emphasized in the Qur'an is a principle of social justice that must be continuously fought for in every era.

An-Nisā' Verse 3 – Between Polygamy and Marrying Orphans

وَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تُقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبْعَ ۖ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَذْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا ۝٣

If you fear you might fail to give orphan women their 'due' rights 'if you were to marry them', then marry other women of your choice—two, three, or four. But if you are afraid you will fail to maintain justice, then 'content yourselves with' one or those 'bondwomen' in your possession. This way you are less likely to commit injustice.

The verse regarding polygamy was revealed in connection with the incident of 'Urwah bin al-Zubair asking 'Ā'ishah about this verse. Then 'Ā'isyah replied: "O my nephew, this verse is related to an orphaned girl under guardianship, where the child's wealth has mixed with the guardian's wealth." The wealth and beauty of the girl had captivated her guardian's heart, and he intended to marry her without paying her dowry, unlike the fair dowry he would pay to other women. For that reason, he is prohibited from marrying the girl unless he pays her dowry fairly, just like the dowry for other women. If he cannot be just, he is advised to marry another woman instead.

So, the verse is placed immediately after the verse that prohibits injustice against the property of orphans. Then this verse continues with the establishment of justice and the prohibition of oppression against the person of orphans (Q. Shihab, 2002, vol.2, p.378). Then this verse continues with the establishment of justice and the prohibition of oppression against orphans (Q. Shihab, 2002). It is also narrated that the verse was revealed concerning a man from the Quraysh tribe who married ten women or even more. Then, when his wealth was no longer sufficient to support his wives, he took the wealth of orphans to support his wives. Then he married the orphan girl to avoid the sin of consuming the wealth of orphans.

In the tafsir book by ath-Thabari, it is explained that the meaning of this verse from Allah is that there is a word that is not mentioned directly, but its meaning is clear from the context of the verse. Allah wants to emphasize that if you fear being unable to act justly toward the wealth of orphans, and you strive for justice in that matter, then you should also fear being unable to act justly toward the rights of women that Allah has made obligatory upon you. Therefore, do not practice polygamy except with women whom you are sure you can treat justly. But if you are still worried about not being able to be just, then marry only one wife. And if you are even worried about being unjust to one, then marry the female slaves you own. Ath-Thabari emphasizes that the main condition for polygamy is a man's ability to be just, namely the arrangement of the number of wives and its consequences for justice in the household (Ath-Thabari, 2007, vol.6, p.396). Ath-Thabari emphasizes that the main condition for polygamy is a man's ability to be just, namely the arrangement of the number of wives and its consequences for justice in the household. Although the aspect of protecting orphans is also mentioned, the focus is on the discourse of family law that centers on the legitimacy of polygamy.

As mentioned in the *asbābun nuzūl*, this verse admonishes guardians who wish to marry their orphan wards but are reluctant to give the dowry as prescribed. Moreover, instead of sinning by taking the orphans' wealth to support their wives, marrying the orphans and using their wealth became a win-win solution. In this condition, because they are more afraid of neglecting orphans than treating their wives unfairly, this verse was revealed, which emphasizes that instead of being unable to be just with the wealth of orphans, they should just marry other women they like. However, there is another aspect that needs to be emphasized, they need to fear neglecting your wives just as you fear neglecting orphans. Just marry two, three, or four women. If you are afraid you cannot be just, then just one.

In contrast to Ath-Thabari, a modern-era exegete, Asmā' Barlas (1950) interprets that the main purpose of this verse is not to legitimize polygamy, even tho it is permitted. But rather to provide a space of protection for widows and orphans left behind by their family heads who fell in the Uhud war. Women who are already protected (namely, beside widows and orphans who have family and guardians) are not easily subjected to injustice. On the contrary, orphaned girls who lost their fathers in the battlefield, as well as the devout mothers of these orphans, are more vulnerable to exploitation both personally and financially. Therefore, the solution described is that if a widow is married, then the widow and her orphaned children automatically receive protection (Barlas, 2019).

Asmā' Barlas also argues that the permissibility of polygamy aims to provide sexual access to women, provided that their numbers exceed those of men. The basis of polygamy is not a privilege granted to men, but rather a protection offered to women. If based on *asbābun nuzūl* and then realized in this all-available era, the protection of women and orphans can be achieved thru many alternative ways filled with sympathy and empathy, not just polygamy (Prayudi & Hamid, 2024, p.306-307). One example is by extending a helping hand to several humanitarian organizations or available orphanages. The assistance provided will be more focused and directed toward fulfilling the needs of food, education, security, and health for orphans (Zainon et al., 2020). Without denying the permissibility of polygamy, the purpose of this verse's sharia is to ensure the social distribution of orphans, especially among women, in order to achieve a just and harmonious society.

Based on the above explanation, both perspectives actually stem from the same text, but with viewpoints based on the social conditions and times of their respective contexts. The *asbābun nuzūl* narrative records that some guardians married orphaned girls with the intention of seizing their inheritance. Thru its wording, the Qur'an emphasizes that marriage should not be based on motives of exploitation, but rather on the intention of building a healthy and just household. So, the verse was revealed as a defense of orphans as well as women. The Qur'an not only upholds the legal rights of orphans but also instills the awareness that women, being among the most vulnerable, are entitled to justice, protection, and equal dignity.

An-Nisā' Verse 11 – Overhaul of the Legacy Systems

يُوصِيكُمُ اللَّهُ فِي أَوْلَادِكُمْ لِلذَّكَرِ مِثْلُ حَظِّ الْأُنثِيَيْنِ ۖ فَإِنْ كُنَّ نِسَاءً فَوْقَ اثْنَتَيْنِ فَلَهُنَّ ثُلُثَا مَا تَرَكَ ۖ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ وَاحِدَةً فَلَهَا النِّصْفُ ۚ وَلِأَبَوَيْهِ لِكُلِّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا السُّدُسُ مِمَّا تَرَكَ إِنْ كَانَ لَهُ وَلَدٌ ۚ فَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ وَلَدٌ وَوَرِثَتْهُ أَبَوَاهُ فَلِأُمِّهِ الثُّلُثُ ۚ فَإِنْ كَانَ لَهُ إِخْوَةٌ فَلِأُمِّهِ السُّدُسُ ۚ مِنْ بَعْدِ وَصِيَّهِ يُوصِي بِهِ أَوْ دِينٍ ۚ ءَابَاؤُكُمْ وَأَبْنَاؤُكُمْ لَا تَدْرُونَ أَيُّهُمْ أَقْرَبُ لَكُمْ نَفْعًا ۚ فَرِيضَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ ۚ إِنْ اللَّهُ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا ١١

Allah commands you regarding your children: the share of the male will be twice that of the female. If you leave only two 'or more' females, their share is two-thirds of the estate. But if there is only one female, her share will be one-half. Each parent is entitled to one-sixth if you leave offspring. But if you are childless and your parents are the only heirs, then your mother will receive one-third. But if you leave siblings, then your mother will receive one-sixth—after the fulfilment of bequests and debts. 'Be fair to' your parents and children, as you do not 'fully' know who is more beneficial to you. 'This is' an obligation from Allah. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

The verse was disclosed in response to the question of Jàbir bin 'Abdullàh regarding how he should distribute his inheritance to his siblings. Jàbir said, "Walking on foot, the Prophet and Abù Bakr came to visit my house located in the village of Banī Salimah." When he arrived, I was unconscious. He then asked for some water. He performed ablution with that water and sprinkled it on my body until I regained consciousness. I asked, 'What should I do with my wealth, O Messenger of Allah?' then this verse was revealed. There is also another narration that is considered the sabab nuzūl of this verse, namely: Jàbir bin 'Abdullàh said, "The wife of Sa'd bin ar-Rabī', along with his two daughters, came to the Messenger of Allah ṣallā Allāhu 'alaihi wa sallam." He said, "O Messenger of Allah, these are the daughters of Sa'd bin ar-Rabī'." Their father was martyred in the Battle of Uhud with you. Their uncle took all their inheritance and left nothing, even tho they cannot be married off without any wealth. He said, 'Allah will give a verdict regarding this matter.' Then several verses about inheritance were revealed. Rasūlullāh then sent someone to meet their uncle and convey to him the message, 'Give the two daughters of Sa'd two-thirds of Sa'd's inheritance, their mother one-eighth, and the remainder to you.' (Hanafi, 2015, p.171-172).

The justifications for the revelation of this verse indicate that pre-Islamic Arab society implemented a highly patriarchal inheritance system. Women and children, including orphans, did not have a position in the structure of inheritance distribution from their families. Only adult men are counted to be given the right to receive a share. This pattern is rooted in social traditions that view women as the weaker and economically unproductive party, positioning them merely as recipients of sustenance, not as owners of wealth. Because of this background, Allah then revealed His message to the Messenger through Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:1.

Based on the recorded asbābun nuzūl, it is a significant reform, namely the guaranty to children and women that they cannot be excluded in the transfer of inheritance. In accordance with the interpretation written in the book al-Kasyaf, inheritance law is a direct command from Allah that must be obeyed. As mentioned

in the previous chapter, orphans and women are entitled to inheritance rights as a form of abolishing the jahiliyyah tradition that discriminates against orphans and women. The interpretation of this verse outlines that debts and bequests must be settled first before the inheritance is distributed. The distribution is very detailed, with special portions for parents, wives, and children. Boys receive double the inheritance because they have the responsibility to provide for and bear the economic needs of their family. In essence, the size of the inheritance is measured based on the difference in responsibilities borne, not just the nominal amount. The closing of the verse emphasizes that this wisdom is a fair decree from Allah to maintain the integrity of families and society (Al-Zamakhsyari, 2009).

However, in the context of achieving a fair distribution of inheritance, but from the perspective of Amīnah Wadūd, a feminist exegete in the 19th century. According to her, An-Nisā' verses 11-12 should not be understood as narrowly as "the male's share is twice that of the female's." The first point of primary concern is that every relative, whether male or female, must be included and none should be excluded from the distribution. Second, the Qur'an allocates a maximum of one-third of the wealth to parties other than the heirs. Third, regarding contextual justice, the distribution must consider the conditions and benefits for the heirs receiving it. Thus, the emphasis on the concept of naf'an is not just about numbers, but about justice by considering who benefits the most and who needs the benefits from the wealth (Wadud, 1999, p.87-88).

In the same era, there are interpretations that can mediate between both sides of the time. M. Quraish Shihab in Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ emphasizes that the provision "the share of a man is twice that of a woman" should be understood within the framework of men's greater economic responsibility, not as a sign of male superiority. Nor is it a form of discrimination. This means that justice in the Qur'an is proportional, taking into account the social conditions and the burden of responsibility of each party (Q. Shihab, 2002, vol.2, p.437).

Based on the author's analysis, the provisions brought by this verse bring about a significant transformation. In the pre-Islamic era, women and orphans did not receive inheritance because they were considered weak and dependent on others, which led to the revelation of this verse. The current phenomenon shows that many women have achieved a significant level of autonomy and are no longer in a position of dependence. The decree of Allah is an absolute justice because by considering the burdens and benefits that will be received by the heirs, the comparison of inheritance rights also needs to be taken into account without any intention of oppression or feeling superior to certain groups.

The Women (4:34) Qawwāmūn in the husband-wife relationship

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۚ وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْعُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا ۝ ٣٤

Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with. And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them 'first', 'if they persist,' do not share their beds, 'but if they still persist,' then discipline them 'gently'. But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them. Surely Allah is Most High, All-Great.

The verse was revealed in connection with the issue that befell Sa'd bin al-Rabī'. He was one of the leaders of the Anshār tribe. His wife, Ḥabībah bint Zayd bin Abū Hurayrah, also belonged to the Anshār tribe. The issue was that Sa'd's wife was disobedient (Nusyūz) to him, and then Sa'd slapped her. Then the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) decreed that Sa'd should be punished with Qisas. Finally, Habibah and her father went to Sa'd's house to carry out the Qisas punishment, but the Messenger said, "Return." Gabriel has come to me and informed me that Allah has revealed this verse." The Messenger continued his saying, "We desire something, and Allah desires something else. What Allah desires is better." Then the punishment of Qishāṣ in this matter was abrogated (Az-Zuhaili, 2013).

Based on the understanding of asbābun nuzūl and the content of the verse, there are two points that need to be explored regarding gender equality, namely the concepts of qawwāmūna and nusyūz. First, the concept of qawwāmūna, which means leader. It is recorded in the tafsir of Ibn Kathir that men are the leaders of women because men are better and superior to women.

The meaning of a leader here includes three main functions: being a head (authority), being a judge (decision-maker/arbitrator), and being an educator for women, especially when the woman deviates. Second, the concept of Nusyūz in the sense of disobedience. An-Nusyūz is the act of disregarding commands, turning away, and hating one's husband because one feels superior to him. If signs of nusyūz appear, it is recommended to advise and warn about Allah's punishment. It has been decreed by Allah that the husband has advantages, virtues (privileges), and rights that obligate the wife to give obedience. If it doesn't work, then admonish her by not speaking, trying to turn away, or separating the bed, with the aim of reminding without causing divorce. If it still doesn't have any effect, then hit them. The intended strike is one that does not injure the body and leaves no marks whatsoever (Ghoffar E.M, 2003, vol.2, p.298-299). The husband's obligation to provide food and clothing must not be neglected, and the provision must be equivalent to the needs that the husband fulfills for himself. It is strictly forbidden to insult and harm her face because a woman is a companion who must be protected.

A slightly different opinion from the contemporary mufasssirin. Rif'at defines the word qawwāmūna as an economic term, not a biological one. Rather than being

defined as a leader, it would be more accurate to define it as the party responsible for earning a living. More specifically, the expression in the Qur'an that men are *qawwāmūna* over women is because Allah has favored some of them (humans) over others and because they (men) earn a living from some of their wealth, which is not an essential difference but a practical one. Even if a wife is economically independent, whether from inherited wealth or her own business (Prayudi & Hamid, 2024). Kariman interprets that the concept of *qawwāmah* applies only within the family sphere. He argues that a husband must exert his responsibilities to meet the needs, safety, and comfort of his wife and children. Even more than that, men have been granted by God the ability to take on the right role. His duty is to provide sustenance, give the dowry, meet all needs, and ensure a decent life. Of course, within the family context, the figure of a man with all his responsibilities is referred to as *qawwāmah* (Prayudi & Hamid, 2024).

According to Ḥanān, in household management, *qawwāmah* is necessary, but this should not be interpreted as a form of marginalization or even disdain toward women. He interprets *qawwāmah* in a more harmonious sense, such as protector, responsible party, and caregiver, which every family should have as its fundamental and essential basis. *qawwāmah* cannot be dragged into the external realm of the family. Of course, in social and political rights, there is no *qawwāmah*. In this realm, all individuals, both men and women, receive the same treatment and rights. Even the meaning of *qawwāmah* in the household is not a concept of imposing will or decision-making being entirely the husband's responsibility. There are matters that need to be maintained between men and women; a wife can express her opinion to her husband, and then the husband makes a decision for the good of the entire family. Similarly, a woman, in order to obtain her rights, must pay attention and fulfill what is required of her (Prayudi & Hamid, 2024). Thus, by fulfilling the rights and obligations of each party, a good relationship will be established and *nusyūz* will be minimized. A true leader is a leader who always communicates with full wisdom and consistently upholds justice for all parties.

The context of *asbāb an-nuzūl* plays a significant role in shaping the initial understanding of the meanings of *qawwāmūna* and *nusyūz*. Classical exegesis emphasizes the position of men as the absolute leaders in the family, with an emphasis on the rights inherent to the husband to demand the wife's obedience, accompanied by mechanisms of reprimand, bed separation, and even light beating if *nushuz* occurs. This relationship is hierarchical and places men above women, but there remains a moral obligation for husbands to provide for, protect, and treat their wives humanely. On the other hand, contemporary *mufasssirun* such as Rif'at, Ḥanān, and Karīman reinterpret the meaning of *qawwāmūna* no longer as biological dominance or gender superiority, but rather as a function of economic responsibility, protection, and functional care. The husband-wife relationship places more emphasis on the division of roles; the husband is responsible for welfare, but the wife is still involved in the decision-making process.

In the contemporary era, the reinterpretation of the concepts of qawwāmūna and nusyūz is relevant to address the problems of household relations that are often imbalanced due to patriarchal culture. The relevance of this verse in contemporary times emphasizes that the concept of qawwāmūna does not mean eliminating the husband's role, but rather reinterpreting it according to the needs of the era. Thus, qawwāmūna is understood as protection and role, while nusyūz is understood as communication, deliberation, and improving relationships, not merely justifying violence in the name of religion.

An-Nisā' verse 59 – Obedience to Leaders

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِيَ الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ ۚ فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ۚ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا ٥٩

O believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Should you disagree on anything, then refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you 'truly' believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is the best and fairest resolution.

The reason this verse was revealed is because a leader was abusing his power. One day, the Prophet sent a group of troops and appointed someone from the Anṣhār tribe as their leader. Then, for some reason, the leader became angry with his troops and, in the name of Rasūlullāh, said, "Did not Rasūlullāh command you to obey my orders?" asked the leader. They answered, "Yes." The leader said, "Gather firewood, light it, and then enter the fire!" They obeyed him by gathering firewood and lighting the fire. Before entering the fire, they pondered. Some said, "We follow the Prophet's teachings to be free from the fire (hell). Therefore, should we enter this fire?" They debated for a long time until the fire went out and the leader's anger subsided. Upon arriving in Medina, they complained to the Messenger of Allah. He confirmed, "If they were to plunge into the fire, they would never come out of it (the hellfire) for eternity." Indeed, obedience to the leader is only obligatory if he commands good things.' (Hanafi, 2015, p.182-183).

In this verse, there is a principle that when the command to obey Allah and His Messenger is combined with a single mention of the command to obey, the obedience referred to is the obedience commanded directly by Allah thru His word or thru the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah. The command to obey the Messenger of Allah here comes from the decree of Allah SWT, and not because the Messenger of Allah commanded it independently. That is why the command to obey is repeated twice as in this verse; here, the Prophet has the authority and right to be obeyed even if there is no basis from the Qur'an. Therefore, the command to obey *ulil amri* is not accompanied by the command "obey," so they do not have the right to be followed if obedience to them contradicts obedience to Allah or Rasūlullāh. It should be noted that the word *al-amr* is in the form of *ma'rifah*. This has led many scholars to determine that the authority of the ruler is limited to societal issues, not to pure faith or religion. If Allah commands Muslims to obey their leaders, it means that the obedience referred

to is based on religious teachings, namely the command of Allah (Q. Shihab, 2002, vol. 2, p.584-585).

The verse that explains obedience to Allah, the Messenger, and those in authority (QS. An-Nisā': 59) is often used as a basis by rulers to demand absolute obedience from the people. If viewed from the perspective of *asbābun nuzūl*, the Prophet emphasized that the commands of the leader should not be obeyed blindly without considering the welfare and alignment with religious commands. From the perspective of oppression, this verse has the potential to be interpreted in two different ways. On one hand, it is often used by authoritarian rulers to silence criticism and perpetuate their power, as if the people should not resist anything that is commanded. On the other hand, this verse actually serves as an affirmation of the ethical boundaries of power. Obedience to the leader only applies as long as their commands are just and beneficial to the public. If there is a deviation, the reference must be returned to the Qur'an and Sunnah.

In other words, this verse prohibits leaders from exploiting their positions to act arbitrarily and oppress weaker groups. The great power and authority that leaders have over their subordinates should not be abused. People who possess great power also have a significant potential for abusing their authority thru practices of oppression against the weak (Matthews et al., 2024). Therefore, this verse serves as a reminder that power is always bound to moral responsibility. The people must not be made victims in the name of religion, and leaders who exploit this verse to oppress the weak have actually lost their legitimacy according to the Qur'an. The basic principle is that power must be upheld on the foundation of justice and protection, and it must not be used to perpetrate discrimination.

Discussion

This research shows that some of the verses studied are capable of being used in the reconstructing of the paradigm of social justice in early Islamic society and are relevant to modern contexts. Through the study of five verses in Surah An-Nisā' (verses 2, 3, 11, 34, and 59), this research reveals that the Qur'an consistently upholds the principles of justice, equality, and protection for vulnerable groups. The parties categorised as weak are women, orphans, and those under the protection of leadership. In the pre-Islamic era, a wife and children did not receive a share of the inheritance, so verse 11 was revealed to provide a fair determination of inheritance distribution for women and orphans. Verse 2 of Surah An-Nisā' emphasises the guardianship of orphans with proper management of their wealth and includes all of their necessities during their growth period. The protection of this wealth is also mentioned in verse 3 regarding the imprudence of a man as the guardian of an orphaned child who has inherited wealth, with the intention of meddling with the child's property and a warning about the inability to act justly in polygamy. Considering that men hold the status of a good leader for their wives and families, as mentioned in verse 34. This emphasises that leaders should not abuse their power but rather must adhere to the principles of welfare and religious teachings. The integration of *asbābun nuzūl* with classical and contemporary interpretative approaches shows that the Qur'an consistently defends vulnerable groups such as women, orphans, and marginalised communities. Classical interpretation emphasises legal and normative aspects that ensure justice according to its

understanding of the Qur'an, while contemporary interpretation, especially from feminist and socio-ethical perspectives, reads these verses as moral calls for liberation, equality, and the deconstruction of patriarchal structures and injustices. Therefore, the Qur'an should not be reduced to a legitimisation of oppressive power but should be interpreted as an ethical foundation for an inclusive, just, and humanity-oriented social order. Thus, the discussed verse successfully prompts society to uphold justice, ensure equality, and provide protection for the oppressed.

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