



# The Qur'an's View on the Role of Wives in the Family Life of Modern Feminism

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## **Kata kunci:**

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## **Abstrak:**

This study examines the Qur'an's view of the role of wives in family life in the context of modern feminism. In the contemporary era, women face two main challenges: carrying out domestic roles in the family and actively participating in the public sphere as career women. The modern feminism movement promotes women's equality and independence, while Islamic teachings in the Qur'an establish specific rights and obligations for wives. This research aims to describe the interpretation of the role of the wife in the Qur'an, analyze the continuity of modern feminism with the role of the wife, and criticize the Qur'an's offer of the role of the wife in the view of modern feminism. The method used is qualitative with a library research approach (literature research) and thematic interpretation (maudhu'i). The primary source is Tafsir al-Azhar by Buya Hamka, while the secondary source includes the book Qur'an According to Women by Amina Wadud and various other supporting literature. The results of the study show that the Qur'an does not contradict the domestic and public roles of women in a rigid way. Verses such as Q.S. al-Hujurat: 13, Q.S. Ghafir: 40, Q.S. al-Qashash: 23, Q.S. an-Nisa: 34, and Q.S. Ali Imran: 195 provide the basis that women and men have an equal position before Allah. Islam allows wives to have a career with certain conditions that do not conflict with their nature. The concept of modern feminism that requires wives to be active outside the home is not completely contrary to the Qur'an, as long as it is carried out by maintaining dignity, fulfilling family obligations, and in harmony with Islamic sharia values.

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## **PENDAHULUAN**

The issue of the role of women in the family and society is a discourse that continues to develop in contemporary Islamic studies. Women, especially wives and mothers, play a very crucial role in shaping the character of the family and the next generation of the nation. But in reality, women in the modern era are faced with two demands at once: carrying out



domestic roles in the family and actively participating in the public sphere as part of the aspirations for gender equality carried out by the feminist movement.

Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in February 2022 shows that the participation rate of women in the labor force reached 54.27 percent. This means that out of 100 women aged 15 years and above, around 54 of them are active in the workforce. Meanwhile, the World Bank's report "Women, Business and The Law 2021" noted that 60 percent of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Indonesia are owned by women, a sector that accounted for 60.5 percent of national GDP in 2022. This data emphasizes that the contribution of women to the family and national economy is already very significant and cannot be ignored.

The feminism movement exists as a response to the gender injustice experienced by women throughout history. Liberal feminism promotes equal rights between men and women in all aspects of life, including the right to work, politics, and decision-making. Socialist feminism criticizes the capitalist system that does not recognize the economic value of women's domestic work, thus creating the wife's financial dependence on her husband. In this context, modern feminism requires wives to be active outside the home as a form of independence and equality.

On the other hand, the Qur'an as the main source of Islamic teachings has provided a comprehensive guide on the role of women. Since the beginning of Islam, women have been given noble positions and rights that go far beyond their condition in the Jahiliyyah period. Women figures in Islamic history such as Siti Khadijah who was a successful businesswoman, Aisyah RA. who became a scholar and hadith narrator, and Asma' bint Abu Bakar who was known for her independence and struggle, are clear evidence that career women have existed in the Islamic tradition since the beginning.

The question that then arises is whether the concept of modern feminism that requires wives to be active outside the home is contrary to the Qur'anic view of the role of the wife, or can the two be harmonized? This question is the core of the study in this article. This study examines two interpreters who have different but complementary perspectives, namely Buya Hamka through her Tafsir al-Azhar which is rooted in the study of the Islamic tradition of the archipelago, and Amina Wadud through her work Qur'an and Woman which uses a feminist hermeneutic approach.

Thus, this article aims to: (1) describe the variety and development of interpretations of the role of wives in the Qur'an; (2) describe modern feminism and analyze its continuity with the role of the wife; and (3) criticize the Qur'an's offer of the role of wives in the view of modern feminism and formulate its ideal concept.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Types and Approaches to Research**

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach and library research. As stated by Bogdan and Taylor in Imam Gunawan, qualitative research is a study that produces descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words from individuals, as well as attitudes that can be observed directly. This approach is directed at a comprehensive understanding of the object of study in its social and religious context.

In addition to the qualitative approach, this study also applies the thematic interpretation method (*maudhu'i*), which is a method of interpreting the Qur'an that collects and analyzes verses related to certain themes from various surahs in the Qur'an in a systematic and comprehensive manner. The thematic method was chosen because it is considered able to fully and comprehensively reveal the meaning of a theme in the Qur'an.

### **Data Source**

The data used in this study is divided into two, namely primary data and secondary data. The primary source in this study is Tafsir al-Azhar by Buya Hamka, as the main reference in analyzing Qur'anic verses related to the role of wives and feminism. Secondary sources include the Qur'an According to Women by Amina Wadud, various classical and contemporary interpretations such as Tafsir al-Misbah by M. Quraish Shihab, Tafsir Ibn Katsir, Tafsir al-Maraghi, as well as relevant scientific journals and academic literature.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Techniques**

The data collection technique is carried out by literature study, which is to study relevant literature from various sources in the form of print and digital media. Books, journals, scientific articles, theses, dissertations, and other documents related to the theme of study are the main object of study. The verses of the Qur'an that are the focus of the study include verses that discuss the role of the wife (Q.S. ar-Rum: 21, Q.S. al-Baqarah: 228, Q.S. an-Nisa: 34) and verses related to gender equality and feminism in the Qur'an (Q.S. al-Hujurat: 13, Q.S. Ghafir: 40, Q.S. al-Qashash: 23, Q.S. Ali Imran: 195, Q.S. at-Taubah: 71).

The data analysis in this study includes systematic activities in organizing, classifying, and interpreting the data that has been collected. The steps taken include: (1) data reduction, namely the process of sorting and focusing relevant data; (2) data presentation, namely displaying data in a structured and systematic manner; and (3) drawing conclusions and verification, which is formulating conclusions based on the analysis that has been carried out and verifying it with existing sources.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. The Role of Wives in the Qur'an: A Study of Thematic Interpretation

The term "wife" in Indonesian refers to a married woman as a life partner in a marriage bond. In Arabic, this term is paired with *al-Zawjah*, *al-Qarinah*, and *Imra'ah*. In English, *al-Zawjah* or *al-Qarinah* is equated with wife, spouse, mate, consort, while *Imra'ah* is equivalent to wife or wife. From these understandings, it can be concluded that the wife is a legally and religiously valid woman as the life partner of a husband, as well as a partner in building family life.

The Qur'an surah *ar-Rum* verse 21 is the main theological foundation about the nature of marriage and the role of the wife. Allah SWT said that one of the signs of His greatness is that He created a pair (*zawj*) for humans of their own kind so that they can obtain peace (*sakinah*), and He made love (*mawaddah*) and affection (*rahmah*) between the two. These three concepts — *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* — are the main purpose of marriage in Islam, where the wife plays a central role in making it happen.

The concept of *sakinah* in marriage is dynamic and active, not static. *Sakinah* comes from the root of the word *taskunu/yaskunu* which shows its nature that is constantly being fought for. Thus, a *sakinah* household does not mean that it is free from conflict, but is achieved through sincerity (*mujâhadah*) and continuous renewal from both parties, husband and wife (Kusnidi, 2019). While *mawaddah* is understood as a strong inner drive to always protect a loved one from all evil, and *rahmah* is a gentleness and empathy that motivates a person to do good.

Regarding the role of the wife more specifically, the Qur'an surah *al-Baqarah* verse 228 emphasizes: "*walahunna mitslullazi 'alayhinna bil ma'ruf*" which means that women have rights that are balanced with their obligations in *ma'ruf* (in a good way). This verse is a fundamental foothold that Islam recognizes the balance of rights and obligations between husband and wife, not the absolute subordination of one party. Wives are not only required to carry out obligations, but also have rights that must be fulfilled by husbands.

The main role of the wife in the family can be classified into several important dimensions. First, as a mother and the first educator for children (*madrasatul ula*). This concept emphasizes how strategic the mother's position is in shaping the character and personality of the next generation. Education in the family includes the development of faith, moral, physical, intellectual, psychological, social, and sexual. Second, as a partner and companion of the husband in building a harmonious household. Third, as part of a society that contributes to the progress of the people and the nation.

## **B. Modern Feminism and the Relationship with the Role of Wives**

Modern feminism is a movement that exists to position women on an equal footing with men, as well as encourage independence and cooperation in making life choices. This movement specifically emphasizes the hope that women will have equal access and opportunities in all areas of life. Historically, feminism has developed in several waves, where contemporary or modern feminism encompasses streams that have emerged since the late 20th century to the present.

In the context of family life, there are two most relevant streams of feminism. Liberal feminism seeks to equalize the positions of women and men, encouraging them to be independent and cooperate in making life choices. This school aspires to shake up the patriarchal culture and create an egalitarian family, in which husband and wife have a balanced role both in the public sector and in the household. Socialist feminism, on the other hand, criticizes the capitalist system that does not value women's domestic work economically. According to this view, women's low position in family institutions is closely related to the structure of capitalist society that creates the financial dependence of wives on husbands (Muslikhati, 2004).

The phenomenon of career women in Indonesia shows that dual roles for women have become an unavoidable reality. The data shows that most domestic work is done by women, with a proportion of almost 90 percent of the total. But on the other hand, women's involvement in the public sector continues to increase. This condition creates a double burden for women who have to manage both roles at the same time.

A case study at the BPJS Employment Office Gresik Branch illustrates this reality concretely. Of the 20 female employees, 12 of them are married women and carry out dual roles. For those who live far away from family, time with husband and children is very limited, only on Saturdays and Sundays. This condition shows the complexity of the challenges faced by career women in balancing professional demands and family responsibilities.

The history of Islam itself has recorded the existence of career women since the early days. Siti Khadijah is a successful businesswoman whose trading area includes Yemen, Syria, Busra, Iraq, Jordan, and Bahrain. After marrying the Prophet Muhammad SAW, she acted as a capital owner as well as a joint venture manager. Aisyah R.A. not only played the role of a wife, but also as a scholar and hadith narrator whose knowledge became a reference for companions in matters of religious law, literature, genealogy, and medicine. Juwairiyah bint al-Hariths narrated a hadith directly from the Prophet PBUH and became a source of scientific reference.

### **C. The Qur'an's Response to Modern Feminism: An Analysis of Key Verses**

The Qur'an provides a structured response to the issue of modern feminism through several key verses that affirm the principles of gender equality and justice.

#### **1. Q.S. al-Hujurat Verse 13: Equality Before Allah**

Surah al-Hujurat verse 13 places women on an equal footing with men in the context of servitude and worship. Allah SWT states that the most noble among humans is the most pious, not the one of a certain gender. The main differentiator between humans in the sight of God is the quality of piety, not gender differences. This verse becomes a strong theological foundation for the principle of gender equality in Islam, that the Qur'an does not discriminate against people based on their gender.

According to Ibn Kathir's commentary, this verse is revealed in relation to the social context that glorifies the nasab and descendants. The Qur'an emphasizes that a person's glory is not determined by his origin, race, or gender, but by his level of piety (Siregar & Jamil, 2024). The implications for women are significant: women have the same potential as men to achieve glory before God through their charity and piety.

#### **2. Q.S. Ghafir Verse 40 and Q.S. Ali Imran Verse 195: Charity Justice**

Q.S. Ghafir verse 40 states that women and men will be rewarded or punished based on their deeds, without any gender discrimination. Allah SWT guarantees justice in the repayment of charity for all his servants without discrimination. In line with that, Q.S. Ali Imran verse 195 explicitly states that Allah does not waste the deeds of a person, both male and female, because some of them are part of the other. This verse is clear evidence that the Qur'an recognizes women's contributions and deeds in all fields of life on an equal footing with men (Fauzi et al., 2024).

In Amina Wadud's perspective, these two verses affirm that the Qur'an does not only speak to men, but to all mankind regardless of gender. Women have the same freedom and responsibility as the caliphs of Allah on earth. The interpretation that limits the role of women only to the domestic realm is considered by Wadud as a patriarchal cultural bias projected into the text of the Qur'an (Wadud, 2006).

#### **3. Q.S. al-Qashash Verse 23: Women in the Public Sphere**

Q.S. al-Qashash verse 23 tells the story of two women who worked to herd cattle because their elderly father was unable to do so. This story contains the Qur'anic recognition of the existence of women in the public sphere and their legitimacy to work for a living under certain conditions. This verse is often used as a postulate for women's ability to work outside the home, especially in situations that require their presence.

According to Buya Hamka's commentary in *Tafsir al-Azhar*, the story of these two women (daughters of the Prophet Shu'aib) shows that Islam does not absolutely prohibit women from working outside the home. They work because there is an urgent need and in a

way that preserves self-respect. Hamka emphasized that the most important thing in working for women is to maintain manners, cover the awrah, and not cause slander (Hamka, 1983).

#### **4. Q.S. an-Nisa Verse 34: Leadership and Responsibility**

One of the most debated verses in the context of gender is Q.S. an-Nisa verse 34, which states that "men are the leaders (qawwamun) over women." Conventional interpretations of this verse are often used to limit women's roles outside the home. However, contemporary mufasir offer a more nuanced meaning.

M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsir al-Misbah* interprets the word qawwamun not solely to mean dominance or superiority, but refers to the responsibility of providing sustenance and protection. Husband's leadership is functional in the family context, not ontologically or spiritually superior (Shihab, 2005). Meanwhile, Amina Wadud argues that qawwamun is conditional — men lead only to the extent that they are able to fulfill their financial responsibilities. If this condition changes, for example when women are the breadwinners, then the leadership relationship can also change (Wadud, 2006).

#### **5. Q.S. at-Taubah Verse 71: Partnership of Men and Women**

Q.S. at-Taubah verse 71 affirms that believing men and women are awliya' (helpers/partners) for each other; They tell each other to do good and prevent evil. This verse uses the word awliya' in the plural form that includes both genders equally as partners in amar ma'ruf nahi munkar. This implies that women, including wives, have an active and responsible role not only in the domestic sphere, but also in social life.

### **D. Buya Hamka and Amina Wadud's Perspective on the Role of Wives**

Buya Hamka, his full name is Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, was born on February 17, 1908 in Sungai Batang, Maninjau, West Sumatra. As a great Indonesian scholar and writer, Hamka poured his thoughts into the monumental *Tafsir al-Azhar*. In his work, Hamka provides a contextual interpretation of the culture and social conditions of the Indonesian Muslim community.

According to Hamka, the ideal of women in Islam is those who can balance domestic and public roles without ignoring one of them. In her view, a pious woman is a dream woman, both for herself and for her husband, who is able to make her household eternal and happy. However, Hamka also acknowledged that under certain conditions, especially when economic needs are urgent or no one is making a living, women are allowed to work outside the home on conditions that maintain their honor and dignity (Hamka, 1996).

Amina Wadud, born Maria Taesley in Bethesda, Maryland, United States on September 25, 1952, embraced Islam in 1972. As a prominent Muslim feminist, Wadud is known for her monumental work *Quran and Woman: Rereading The Sacred Text from a*

Woman's Perspective (1999). Wadud uses a feminist hermeneutic approach to re-read the text of the Qur'an, questioning interpretations that she considers patriarchal bias.

In Wadud's view, the Qur'an is basically gender-inclusive and does not distinguish between spiritual capacity and responsibilities between men and women. Interpretations that limit the role of women only to the domestic realm according to her reflect more the socio-cultural construction of a particular period than the universal message of the Qur'an. Wadud emphasized the importance of reading the Qur'an in the context of the overall purpose of the text (*weltanschauung*), not just relying on the lexical meaning of word for word (Wadud, 2006).

Despite differences in approach — Hamka is more traditionalist-contextualist and Wadud is more hermeneutical-feminist — both agree that the Qur'an provides space for women to play an active role, both in the family and in society. The difference lies in the way and the boundaries of the role. Hamka emphasized the importance of maintaining manners and sharia, while Wadud emphasized the importance of equality and structural justice.

### **E. Ideal Concept: Balancing the Role of the Wife between Family and the Public**

Based on the analysis of the verses of the Qur'an that have been studied and the interpretation of the two figures above, an ideal concept of the role of the wife can be formulated that is harmonious between the demands of modern feminism and the values of the Qur'an.

First, the Qur'an does not absolutely prohibit wives from working or pursuing a career outside the home. The story of career women during the time of the Prophet PBUH, such as Siti Khadijah and Aisyah RA, became a strong historical precedent. The existence of Q.S. al-Qashash verse 23 which tells the story of women who work to herd livestock is also a textual legitimacy. Islam allows women to have a career on the condition that the job is in accordance with the nature of women, does not neglect family obligations, maintains self-dignity, and does not contradict Islamic sharia values.

Second, the concepts of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* set forth in the Qur'an as the purpose of marriage require active and mutually supportive involvement between husband and wife. Structural functional theory views the family as a system in which each of its elements supports each other. In this system, the roles of husband and wife are complementary, not competitive. This is in line with the principles of modern feminism that advocates cooperation and equality, not the dominance of one party.

Third, the wife's main obligation as a mother and the first educator for children cannot be ignored. The role of mothers in guiding children, especially in toddlerhood, has a huge impact on the character formation of the next generation. Therefore, career women need to ensure that the upbringing and education of their children are not neglected. In this

case, equal cooperation is needed between husband and wife in raising children and taking care of the household, as advocated by Q.S. at-Taubah verse 71 about the partnership of men and women.

Fourth, the values that modern feminism carries — equality, justice, and freedom of choice — are basically in line with the spirit of the Qur'an which upholds the principle of justice ('is) and does not discriminate against human beings based on their gender. However, modern feminism needs to be filtered and contextualized within the framework of Islamic values, so as not to lead to extremities that are detrimental to women themselves and family harmony.

Fifth, socialist feminist ideas that criticize injustice in the division of domestic labor need serious attention in Muslim family life. Islam itself through the hadiths of the Prophet has given an example that the Prophet PBUH also helped with household chores. Thus, there is no justification in Islam for the assumption that domestic affairs are the sole responsibility of the wife.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the studies that have been carried out on the verses of the Qur'an using the method of thematic interpretation and comparative analysis between the perspectives of Buya Hamka and Amina Wadud, several conclusions can be drawn as follows.

First, the Qur'an provides a comprehensive and balanced view of the role of the wife in family life. The wife has the main role as the husband's partner, mother, and first educator for her children. However, the Qur'an does not limit the role of wives to the domestic realm alone, as reflected in various verses that recognize women's active participation in social, economic, and religious life.

Second, the concept of modern feminism that requires wives to be active outside the home is not completely contrary to the view of the Qur'an. Verses such as Q.S. al-Hujurat: 13, Q.S. Ghafir: 40, Q.S. Ali Imran: 195, Q.S. al-Qashash: 23, and Q.S. at-Taubah: 71 provide the basis that women and men have an equal position before Allah, and women have the right to actively contribute in the public sphere.

Third, ideally the role of the wife in the perspective of the Qur'an which is harmonious with modern feminism is a role that balances family responsibilities and public contributions. A wife who has a career is allowed in Islam with the following conditions: (1) a job that is chosen in accordance with the fitrah and dignity of women; (2) not neglecting obligations to husband and children; (3) obtain the permission and support of the husband; (4) maintaining personal honor and manners; and (5) the work does not contradict the values of Islamic law.

Fourth, the difference in perspective between Buya Hamka, who is a traditionalist-contextualist, and Amina Wadud, who is a hermeneutist-feminist, shows the richness of the treasures of the Qur'an's interpretation of gender. Both agreed that the Qur'an provides space for women to play an active role; The difference is only in the perspective and the boundaries of the role. The integration between these two perspectives can result in a more comprehensive and relevant understanding for contemporary Muslim life.

This research paves the way for further studies that integrate feminist perspectives and interpretations of the Qur'an in greater depth. A constructive dialogue is needed between the classical Islamic scientific tradition and the discourse of contemporary feminism in order to formulate more practical and contextual solutions for Muslim women in facing the challenges of the times.

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