



Prophethood of Maryam in the Qur'an: Comparative Study of Tafsir Al-Mizān with Tafsir Al-Mishbāh

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Abstract

This study examines the issue of Mary's prophethood in the Qur'an through a comparative approach between Tafsir Al-Mizān by Sayyid Muhammad Husain Thabāthabā'ī and Tafsir Al-Mishbāh by M. Quraish Shihab. Prophethood is one of the principles in Islam, including the issue of female prophethood that continues to squirm in the world of interpretation. The scholars responded to this issue by producing two different attitudes: some were in favor and some were rejected, each with its own arguments. This research aims to discuss the existence of the issue of women's prophethood in the intellectual tradition of Islamic scholars, then explore how the issue of the prophethood of Maryam is present in the two interpretations, and identify the reasons why this issue is accommodated by the two Indonesian mufassir. The methods used are maudhū'i (thematic) and critical-comparative analysis methods with a philosophical-qualitative approach. The results of the study show that there are two camps in responding to this issue. The camp that rejected Mary's prophethood was represented by Ibn Katsir, Fakhruddin al-Razi, al-Ash'ili, and al-Qusyairi, while those who accepted it were represented by al-Qurthubi, Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, and Abu Bakr al-Tujibi al-Qabri. The issue of Mary's prophethood is contained in Tafsir Al-Mizān and Tafsir Al-Mishbāh, especially when discussing Surah Āli-'Imrān/3: 42. This study confirms that Mary was not a prophet in the conventional sense of nubuwwah, although she had prophetic categories such as revelation, maksuman, and extraordinary privileges.

Keywords: Prophethood of Maryam, Tafsir Al-Mizān, Tafsir Al-Mishbāh, Gender Equality, Revelation, 'Ishmah.

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INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an as a holy book that is a guideline for the life of Muslims contains teachings that have been revealed to answer every challenge of the times faced by its people (Amuli, 2011, p. 131). The main mission of the Qur'an is to eliminate all forms of human oppression, including sexual discrimination, skin color, ethnicity, and other primordial ties (Umar, 2001, p. 13). This is true in the context of women who are often subordinated; When women's honor is no longer maintained, there are many verses that talk about women's honor, even exceeding the expected limit.



The Qur'an as a book of *ḥammālah li al-wujūh* (multi-interpretation) triggered the emergence of the issue of women's prophetic discourse. This is indicated by the emergence of several names of women who are 'allegedly' to be a prophet, such as the wife of the Prophet Abraham, the mother of the Prophet Moses, and Maryam the mother of the Prophet Isa. These names are indicated to have received a command from Allah in the form of revelation. Maryam is one of the important figures mentioned in the Qur'an—even the only woman whose name is explicitly mentioned—as a holy, chosen woman who has superiority over other women.

In Islam, there are 25 Prophets and Messengers of Allah who are all men. The question of whether or not there is a prophet from among women has become an interesting debate among scholars. Some scholars say that Maryam and Pharaoh's wife had prophetic categories because they received direct commands from Allah. Al-Qurthubi for example states, "The correct opinion that Mary is one of the Prophets of Allah, because She has revealed it to her through the intermediary of angels" (Badawi, 2005, pp. 56-57).

The issue of women's prophethood was then responded to by various Islamic scientists, resulting in a pros and cons camp. To borrow the term *Aksin Wijaya*, there are traditionally gender-biased camps, and there are those that are rational-gender-aware (Noorhidayati, 2012, p. xiv). This issue is even accommodated in the world of Indonesian interpretation, especially in *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* by M. Quraish Shihab and *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān* by Thabāthabā'ī.

This research is important to examine the relationship between revelation, 'ishmah and prophethood and its implications for women's prophethood in the case of Maryam. In addition, this research also examines the relationship between miracles and causality which is a point of dispute between mufassir. For this purpose, two contemporary interpretations departing from the Qur'an itself were chosen: *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān* with the approach of the Qur'an bi Al-Qur'an, and *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* with the approach of harmony of the message of the Qur'an.

The selection of *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān* was motivated by Thabāthabā'ī's speciality as a brilliant thinker who, despite being a Shia, was quite open to quoting works from Sunni groups (Anwar, 2004, p. 68). Meanwhile, the choice of *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* is because M. Quraish Shihab is a contemporary mufassir of the archipelago who is very concerned about various fields of Islamic science, is known to have an interest in the fields of theology and divine science, and provides rational, logical and philosophical discussions (Sibramalisi, 2015, p. 28).

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative research approach. As explained by Bodgan and Taylor as quoted by Kaelan (2010, p. 5), qualitative research methods are defined as research procedures that produce descriptive data in the form of words, notes related to meaning, value and understanding. This research model is not limited and isolated by variables, populations, samples and hypotheses, but has a holistic nature, namely the interpretation of data in relation to various aspects that may exist.

Considering that this research focuses on the views of figures and the study of texts, the type of research used is library research or documentation methods. The views of the two mufassir figures will be described as they are, then analyzed, and concluded (Anwar, 2004, p.

24). The views of the two figures on the issue of the relationship between revelation and nubuwwah, 'ishmah and nubuwwah, as well as miracles and causality, are analyzed using a comparative method.

The method of interpretation applied is the maudhū'ī (thematic) method that directs the view to a certain theme, then seeks the view of the Qur'an on that theme by collecting verses that talk about the theme and then analyzing it and finally drawing conclusions from it. This method is combined with critical-comparative analysis to bring together the views of the two interpretations.

The primary literature used in this study is Tafsīr Al-Mīzān by Thabāthabā'ī which totals 20 volumes and Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh by M. Quraish Shihab which totals 15 volumes. Secondary literature includes other works by the two authors as well as other thinkers such as Hamka's Tafsīr Al-Azhar, Tafsīr Ibn Katsīr, Aliah Schleifer's Life History, Abdussalam Muhammad Badawi's The Holy Mary, and various other supporting works.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ulema Debate on Women's Prophethood

The issue of women's prophethood is an issue that has colored the intellectual tradition of Islamic scholars since classical times. This debate produced two major camps: those who rejected and those who accepted the possibility of a prophet from among women. Each camp has strong postulates and arguments from the Qur'an, hadith, and theological logic.

The camp that rejects women's prophethood is represented by a number of great scholars. Abu Muhammad Abdullah bin Ibrahim al-Ash'ili is of the view that Allah never appointed a woman to be a prophet based on His words in Surah an-Nahl/16:43, 'And We did not send before you, except the men to whom We gave revelation.' Fakhruddin al-Razi and Ibn Katsir also rejected with a similar argument that according to the consensus of ijma' the scholars stated that no woman was a prophet. Al-Qusyairi added that Maryam's ability to see angels was no different from the ability of Dihyah al-Kalbi who saw Jibril coming to the Prophet, so this ability did not make a person a prophet.

The camp that accepts women's prophethood is supported by several scholars with strong arguments. Al-Qurthubi—as quoted by Badawi (2005, pp. 56-57)—states unequivocally that Mary was one of the Prophets of Allah because Allah had revealed to her through angels, as He revealed to all prophets. Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi accepted the prophethood of several women including Maryam based on a linguistic analysis of the text of the Qur'an. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, quoting the hadith of the Prophet which states that perfection in women exists only in Maryam and Asiyah, concludes that perfection in that context hints at prophethood.

Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Mawhab al-Tujibi al-Qabri and Qadhi Nashir as-Shirazi, the authors of Tafsīr al-Baidawi, also acknowledged Maryam's prophethood despite al-Qabri's knowledge of the contradictions of other scholars. This debate ultimately centers on the definition of prophethood itself—whether receiving revelation through angels automatically makes a person a prophet, or whether there are other additional criteria.

Profile of Tafsīr Al-Mīzān and Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh

Tafsīr Al-Mīzān was written by Al-'Allāmah Sayyid Muhammad Husain Thabāthabā'ī who was born in Tabriz in 1903 AD and died in November 1981. Thabāthabā'ī was born into a family that for fourteen generations produced prominent Islamic scholars. He completed his education at the Shia University in Najaf and became a figure who mastered the sciences of naqliyah and 'aqliyah. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Thabāthabā'ī has the advantage of being a shaykh in the inner sciences in addition to a prominent traditional Islamic philosopher (Anwar, 2004, p. 8).

Tafsīr Al-Mīzān, whose original title was *Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'an*, was written in Arabic and published in 20 volumes consisting of 7,120 pages. This interpretation uses the approach of the Qur'an bi Al-Qur'an, which is to interpret the verses of the Qur'an with other verses of the Qur'an. The name *Al-Mīzān* was chosen because in this commentary the author is very open to all views from various Shia and Sunni mufassir, both classical and contemporary, and then weighs and analyzes these various opinions. The pattern of Tafsīr Al-Mīzān is multi-patterned, including tafsīr bi al-ma'tsūr, bi al-ra'yi, and isyāriy.

Meanwhile, Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh was written by M. Quraish Shihab who was born in Rappang, South Sulawesi, February 16, 1944. He received his doctorate from Al-Azhar University in Cairo in 1982 with a dissertation entitled *Nazhm al-Durar li al-Biqā'iy, Tahqīq wa Dirāsah*, with a Summa Cum Laude judiciary. M. Quraish Shihab is known to have great attention to various fields of Islamic science, being open, moderate, and providing rational, logical and philosophical discussions.

Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh which consists of 15 volumes uses the approach of harmony with the message of the Qur'an (*munāsabah*). This interpretation combines the views of classical scholars with the contemporary context of Indonesian society, so that it becomes one of the most widely referenced contemporary interpretations of the archipelago. These two interpretations were chosen as primary sources of research because they are known as interpretations that are open, moderate, and accept various opinions from various groups.

Maryam: Her Figure, History, and Privileges

The Qur'an mentions Maryam's name 34 times which is divided into 11 surahs. M. Quraish Shihab states that there is no woman named in the Qur'an except Maryam. According to him, this indicates that no other woman has ever experienced or will experience what she experienced, namely giving birth to a child who became a prophet without having sexual relations with any man (Shihab, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 137).

Maryam was born into a pious 'Imrān family. His father was named 'Imrān and his mother was named Hanna bint Faquz. Hanna, who was previously barren, received the gift of a child after praying to Allah and vowing to offer her child to serve God in the temple. But in reality Allah bestowed daughters, whereas the custom at that time was to only allow boys to serve in the temple. Hanna kept her vow by submitting Mary to the temple, and Allah accepted Maryam with a good reception (Surah Āli 'Imrān/3:37).

After being delivered to the temple, Mary was cared for by Zacharia—her uncle who married her aunt (Zamakhsyari, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 424). Under the care of Zechariah, who was a

prophet of God, Mary grew up to be a godly and obedient woman. Maryam's speciality in the temple is evidenced by her ability to earn sustenance out of season—something that astonished Zacharias and asked, 'O Maryam, where did you get this?' Maryam replied, 'He is from the side of Allah' (Surah Āli 'Imrān/3:37).

The Qur'an expressly mentions Maryam's electability in Surah Āli 'Imrān/3:42, 'And (remember), when the angels said: O Maryam! Indeed, Allah has chosen you, purified you, and chose you above all the women of all the worlds.' Mary was chosen twice and purified once. Scholars differ on the meaning of this double election, but generally agree that the first election is related to Maryam's own virtue and virtue, while the second election indicates the comparative value of Maryam's elevation over other women throughout the universe.

Mary's Chastity and Electability: A Comparative Perspective

Thabāthabā'ī in *Tafsīr Al-Mizān* interprets the purity of Maryam (wa thahhharaki) by referring to several meanings. First, the physical purity that Mary was a holy virgin who had never had sexual intercourse with anyone. Second, Thabāthabā'ī even mentions that Mary was a virgin who did not experience menstruation, arguing that Mary was a servant who was dedicated to serving God in the temple, so that by not menstruating Maryam she was not required to leave the temple (Thabāthabā'ī, 1991, Vol. 3). Third, purity in the meaning of *majāzī* that Mary is a perfect being—protected from sin.

For Thabāthabā'ī, the choice of Maryam means that Mary is received with a good reception in terms of worship of Allah. While Mary's purification shows that Mary held fast to the protection of Allah—protected from the temptations of Satan as explained in Surah Āli 'Imrān/3:36. The only privilege that Mary had over other women—which no one in particular had—was to conceive and give birth to Jesus without the process of sexual intercourse (Thabāthabā'ī, 1991, Vol. 3).

M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* gives an explanation that has similarities as well as differences with Thabāthabā'ī. He explained that Mary was twice chosen by God; The first option does not use the word 'alā which means above, while the second uses it. The first choice implies that the qualities he wears are also possessed by other people whom God has chosen. The second option refers to a special choice among all women—the choice that distinguishes Maryam from the rest, namely to give birth to a child without sexual intercourse (Shihab, 2006, Vol. 1).

In terms of purity, M. Quraish Shihab views Maryam's purity as spiritual and physical. Spiritual purity is that Mary is protected from sin or sin, related to Mary's mother's request that Mary and her descendants be protected from the Satanic interference granted by God. While bodily purity leads to Maryam being a holy woman who is untouched by any man. The difference with Thabāthabā'ī is that M. Quraish Shihab does not explicitly mention the issue of Mary's menstruation, unlike Thabāthabā'ī who mentions it.

Mary's Pregnancy: Miracles and Causality

One of the most decisive issues in Mary's prophetic debate was the question of her pregnancy without sexual intercourse. This pregnancy is expressly mentioned in the Qur'an in

various surahs: Āli 'Imrān/3: 45-47, Maryam/19: 15-26, Al-Anbiyā'/21: 91, and At-Tahrīm/66: 12. The central question is whether the pregnancy can be categorized as a prophetic miracle that proves Mary's prophethood, or whether it is simply a special privilege or privilege that does not have to be associated with prophethood.

Terminologically in the science of Kalam and Tafsir, miracles are terrible acts and phenomena beyond the norm carried out by Allah's messengers to prove the truth of their prophetic claims and divine treatises (Rousyan, 2012). Based on these criteria, Rousyan deduced three basic criteria of miracles: first, it is a thing that goes beyond natural symptoms; second, it is not the result of the teaching-learning process and is not subject to other influences; Third, it is always in line with prophetic claims and accompanied by an element of challenge to create a counterpart.

Looking at these criteria, the phenomenon experienced by Maryam only falls into the first criterion, because the second and third criteria cannot be proven because Maryam's pregnancy was not intended to prove her prophethood or to carry out challenges like other prophets. However, the term miracle is sometimes generalized to include actions that prove a person's success in attaining a special position in the sight of Allah—both prophetic and imamah.

M. Quraish Shihab is of the view that Maryam's pregnancy falls into the category of supra-rational—things that go beyond rationality and cannot be rationalized through the law of cause and effect (Shihab, 2006, Vol. 1). According to him, God does not need anything if He has a will; The law of cause and effect is only part of the legal system that God created, and how can God depend on it if He wants anything. In the context of Maryam's pregnancy, there is no law of cause and effect.

Thabāthabā'ī in Tafsīr Al-Mīzān gives a more philosophical view. He explained that for God nothing is difficult; Amazement is only appropriate when the situation is beyond the control of Allah. But when it comes to the power of Allah, then the power of Allah has no limit (Thabāthabā'ī, 1991, Vol. 3). Thabāthabā'ī emphasizes that in the case of Isa (as), many of the common causes that occur in the process of pregnancy are generally absent or non-existent, so that the existence of Isa occurs through the word 'Be.' For Thabāthabā'ī this does not mean abolishing the law of causality philosophically, for Allah Himself establishes and regulates the whole law.

Revelation and the Prophethood of Mary: A Comparative Perspective

The central issue in Mary's prophetic debate is the question of revelation. Is the revelation that Mary received through angels identical to prophetic revelation (nubuwwah), or does it fall into the more general category of revelation? This is the crucial point that distinguishes those who accept and reject Mary's prophethood.

Thabāthabā'ī in Tafsīr Al-Mīzān discusses this issue in depth when interpreting Surah Āli 'Imrān/3:42. He explained various scholars' opinions regarding Mary's prophethood and paid attention to the arguments of both camps. For Thabāthabā'ī, the angel's coming to Mary and the revelation she received was unusual, but he did not necessarily make it a proof of Mary's prophethood. He disagreed with the view that distinguishes between the prophet and the

messenger, because according to him there is no verse of the Qur'an that clearly speaks of it (Thabāthabā'ī, 1991, vol. 3).

M. Quraish Shihab in *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* takes a different stance in this regard. He did not explain the opinions of scholars regarding Mary's prophethood explicitly as Thabāthabā'ī did. But he makes a clear distinction between prophets and messengers: prophets are chosen people who receive revelation from Allah, while messengers are prophets who are commanded to convey the revelations they receive to mankind. Thus all apostles are prophets, but not all prophets are apostles (Shihab, 2006, Vol. 1).

Through this conceptual framework, M. Quraish Shihab views the revelation received by Maryam as a revelation in a more general sense—not a prophetic revelation that contains sharia to be conveyed to the ummah. Maryam's position in her view was as a *shiddīqah* woman (a woman who was very righteous in her intentions, speech and behavior) who was glorified by Allah above all other women in the universe, not as a prophet in the conventional sense.

The two mufassir actually brought together one important point: both used the same argument in responding to the prophetic issue of Maryam, namely the coming of angels to Mary who conveyed revelation. The difference lies in the way each positions the fact within their theological framework. *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* does not explain the opinions of scholars regarding the issue of Mary's prophethood openly, while *Tafsīr Al-Mizān* presents some of the opinions of scholars who support this discourse.

Reasons for Accommodation of Mary's Prophetic Issue in Both Tafsir

An interesting question that arises from this research is why the issue of Mary's prophethood can be reached and accommodated in the two Indonesian interpretations. This study found two main reasons that are interrelated.

The first reason is the spirit of gender equality carried by the two authors of the commentary. Thabāthabā'ī as a philosophical thinker who was deeply influenced by the Islamic tradition of *irfan* (mysticism) had a holistic view of human beings that transcended gender boundaries. Meanwhile, M. Quraish Shihab as a mufassir who pays great attention to women's issues and gender equality in Islam, is naturally open to discourses that glorify the position of women in the Islamic tradition. The spirit of gender equality is what makes the two not close the door to the issue of women's prophethood, even though both ultimately prefer a cautious position.

The second reason has to do with the genealogical nature of the interpretation itself. In the Islamic intellectual tradition, a discourse that has entered the world of interpretation is very difficult to erase and eliminate. Maryam's prophetic discourse has existed since the time of classical scholars such as al-Qurthubi (d. 671 H/1272 AD), and continues to be practiced from generation to generation through the tradition of *tafsir* that quotes and refers to each other. When Thabāthabā'ī and M. Quraish Shihab wrote down their *tafsir*, this discourse was already part of the treasure trove of *tafsir* that could not be ignored.

This fact shows that Maryam's prophetic discourse is not only a theological issue, but also a question of intellectual genealogy that traces the transmission network of Islamic knowledge from century to century. These two contemporary mufassirs, with their openness and breadth

of scientific horizons, chose not to turn a blind eye to the debates that had lasted for centuries, although both ended up leaning more towards the view that Mary was not a prophet in the conventional sense.

CONCLUSION

This research came to several important conclusions. First, the issue of women's prophethood—especially Mary's prophethood—is an issue that has transcended the barriers of sectarianism and is moving dynamically in the Islamic intellectual tradition. There are two opposing camps: the fortress that rejects female prophethood represented by Ibn Katsir, Fakhruddin al-Razi, al-Ash'ili, and al-Qusyairi; as well as the receiving camp represented by al-Qurthubi, Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, and Abu Bakr al-Tujibi al-Qabri.

Second, the issue of Mary's prophethood is found in *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* and *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān*, especially when discussing Surah Āli-'Imrān/3:42. Both interpretations use the same argument—the angel's coming to Mary to deliver a revelation—but differ in how they are positioned. *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān* expounds the opinions of scholars who openly support Mary's prophethood, while *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* does not explain it explicitly. M. Quraish Shihab distinguishes between prophets and messengers so that he has a more detailed theological framework, while *Thabāthabā'ī* disagrees with this distinction because it is not found in the Qur'an.

Third, there are two reasons why the issue of Mary's prophethood is accommodated in the two interpretations: (a) the spirit of gender equality carried by M. Quraish Shihab and *Thabāthabā'ī*, and (b) the genealogical nature of the interpretation so that the discourse that has entered the world of interpretation is difficult to erase and eliminate.

Fourth, this study confirms that Maryam is not a prophet from among women in the true sense of *nubuwwah*, although she has prophetic categories such as revelation, *maksuman*, and extraordinary privileges. The revelation that Maryam received was a revelation in the general category—not a revelation that contained the sharia to be conveyed to the people. His imperfection includes him as a holy human being who is protected from sin, and his extraordinary pregnancy is a sign of Allah's greatness (*karamah*) which does not automatically require prophetic status.

This research is expected to complement the reference to the figure of Maryam in the Qur'an and provide insight into the comparison of the interpretation of *Tafsīr Al-Mīzān* and *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh*. There are still many dimensions that can be explored further, especially in examining gender and prophetic relations in the Islamic interpretation tradition using more diverse sources.

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