



The Concept of Harmonious Family in the Qur'an: Comparative Study of Interpretation by M. Quraish Shihab and Amina Wadud

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of harmonious family in the Qur'an through a comparative study of the interpretation of M. Quraish Shihab and Amina Wadud. The research focuses on the analysis of family verses that are often debated, especially the concepts of *qiwâmah* and *nusyûz*, which in classical interpretation are often seen as gender-biased. Using the library research method with a thematic interpretation approach (*maudhu'i*) and comparative analysis (*muqârân*), this study shows that the classical interpretation of *ath-Thabarî* and *al-Qurthubî* displays a pattern of hierarchical relations born from patriarchal contexts. In contrast, contemporary interpretations offer a different alternative: Shihab interprets *qiwâmah* as a moral mandate by emphasizing the principles of *sakînah*, *mawaddah*, *wa rahmah* and deliberation, while Wadud deconstructs hierarchical structures and defines *nusyûz* as a mutual disharmony. The research synthesis formulates four main indicators of a harmonious family: egalitarian reciprocal relations, ethical-participatory leadership, deliberation in decision-making, and transcendental spirituality as the foundation.

Keywords: Harmonious Family, Classical Interpretation, M. Quraish Shihab, Amina Wadud, Gender Equality.

Received: January 11, 2026 | Revised: January 24, 2026 | Accepted: February 25, 2026

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of disharmony in contemporary Muslim families is increasing year by year. As the smallest unit in society, the family has an important role in the process of forming and developing society at large (Masri, 2024). The Qur'an underlines the importance of the family as *a mitsâqan galîzban* (strong covenant) and as a source of peace (*sakînah*), love (*mawaddah*), and affection (*rahmah*) as stated in QS. ar-Rûm/30: 21 (Suryani & Kadi, 2020).

But the reality of Muslim family life today often does not reflect this ideal concept. Based on the 2023 Indonesian Statistics report, divorce data in Indonesia reached 463,000 cases, of which 76% were divorce lawsuits filed by the wife. This data shows that the husband-wife relationship is no longer as harmonious as it should be (Sweztika, 2025). In addition, the 2021 KOMNAS Perempuan survey found that cases of Domestic Violence (KDRT) against wives reached 3,221 cases or almost 50% of the total data (Nurfauziah, 2024).



On the other hand, a social phenomenon known as *waithood*, which is the tendency of some women—especially the millennial generation—to postpone marriage, is beginning to be seen in Indonesia. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in the last 10 years the trend of marriage in Indonesia has continued to decline sharply. The lowest national marriage rate was recorded in 2022, which was 1.7 million marriages (Musahwi, 2024). This phenomenon is inseparable from the strong influence of digital media and the feminism movement that questions the institution of marriage in patriarchal culture.

One of the roots of this problem is the classical interpretation of family verses in the Qur'an which is considered to be not on the side of women. Verses such as QS. An-Nisâ'/4:34 about *qawwâmah* (the husband's leadership over his wife) has become the center of criticism because it is often interpreted in the context of male domination. Amina Wadud stated that the inaccuracy of the interpretation of the verse is often used as legitimacy by men for acts of violence against women who are considered to have committed *nusyûz*. Mufasir such as Ibn Katsîr interprets *nusyûz* as a wife who resists, rebels against her husband and leaves the house without her husband's permission (Sidik & Imaduddin, 2023).

In contemporary interpretive discourse, two important figures who present different approaches to family issues in the Qur'an are M. Quraish Shihab and Amina Wadud. Shihab presents a moderate-contextual pattern that seeks to balance between the understanding of the text and the needs of the times. Meanwhile, Wadud represents a feminist-critical approach that emphasizes the importance of reading the Qur'an from a women's perspective and the principle of gender justice. Both offer an alternative reading of family verses that represent two main trends in contemporary interpretation (Fauzan, 2020).

Based on this background, this study aims to examine the interpretation of classical mufasir on family verses in the Qur'an, analyze the interpretation approach of M. Quraish Shihab and Amina Wadud, and formulate a synthesis of the concept of harmonious family based on a comparison of the two thoughts that are fair, equitable, and relevant to the context of contemporary Muslim society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is qualitative with the type of *library research*. Data is collected from written sources in the form of tafsir books, books, scientific journals, and other relevant literature. The research methods used are the *maudhu'i* (thematic) tafsir method and the *muqâran* (comparative) tafsir method. According to Abdul Hayyi Al-Farmawi, *the method of interpreting maudhu'i* is a pattern of interpretation by collecting verses of the Qur'an that have the same purpose in the sense of discussing a theme together and arranging it based on the period of the descent of the verse and paying attention to the background of the causes of its descent (Izzan, t.th).

The *maudhu'i tafsir method* is used to collect and study verses of the Qur'an related to the theme of harmonious family, namely QS. Ar-Rûm/30:21, QS. An-Nisâ'/4: 34, QS. Al-Baqarah/2: 233, and QS. At-Tahrim/66: 6. After that, a comparative method was used to compare the interpretations of two contemporary figures, namely M. Quraish Shihab with a contextual-moderate approach and Amina Wadud with a feminist-critical approach. The

muqâran method according to Abd al-Hayy al-Farmawi is the interpretation of the Qur'an by collecting a number of verses, then studying, researching, and comparing a number of interpretations, both from *the salaf* and *khalaf generations* (Rahman et al., 2024).

The primary data sources in this study include: (1) the classic mufasir tafsir books, namely *Jâmi' al-Bayân* by ath-Thabarî and *al-Jâmi' li Ahkâm Al-Qur'ân* by al-Qurthubî; (2) *Tafsir Al-Misbah* by M. Quraish Shihab; and (3) *Qur'an and Woman* and *Inside The Gender Jihad* by Amina Wadud. Secondary sources include books, journals, theses, and various literature related to the subject of discussion. The data analysis technique used is content analysis with a descriptive-comparative approach, in order to identify the meaning of family verses, compare interpretations, and identify common points and differences in methodological approaches between the two.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Classical Interpretation of Family Verses

In the treasures of classical interpretation, two of his monumental works that are the main references are *Jâmi' al-Bayân fî Tafsîr Al-Qur'ân* by ath-Thabarî (d. 310 H) and *al-Jâmi' li Ahkâm Al-Qur'ân* by al-Qurthubî (d. 671 H). Ath-Thabarî is the largest and most important tafsir and is an important reference for the mufasir *bil-ma'tsûr* who rely on the narration of the companions and *tabi'in* (Shofiyulloh, 2025). While al-Qurthubî is known for its strong approach in the field of jurisprudence and Islamic law, it expounds the diverse views of the imams of the madhhab and includes relevant hadiths (Ismail & Makmur, 2020).

In interpreting QS. Ar-Rûm/30:21 regarding the purpose of marriage, both ath-Thabarî and al-Qurthubî emphasize the value of *sakinah* as peace of soul born from the bond of marriage. However, both place men as the responsible party for providing this calm for women, not reciprocated. In interpreting QS. An-Nisâ'/4: 34, the classical interpretation affirms the leadership of men over women as normative provisions based on advantages (*tafdhîl*) in the form of physical strength, intellectual ability, and financial obligations in the form of alimony and dowry. This construction emphasizes hierarchical relationships in the household with men as leaders and women as the leading parties.

Regarding the concept of *nusyûz*, the ath-Thabarî tafsir states that what is meant by *nusyûz* is the attitude of a wife who is arrogant towards her husband, commits many vices openly, and turns away from her husband. Al-Qurthubî likewise places *nusyûz* specifically on the behavior of wives who show arrogance, refuse obligations, or disobey the husband's authority, in accordance with the hierarchical structure of the family which is considered *sharia*. As for the command of *wadribûhunna* (hitting), both placed it as the last step in dealing with *nusyûz*, emphasizing that the blow must be light, symbolic, and not painful.

A review of classical interpretation shows that this pattern of interpretation was strongly influenced by the socio-historical context of patriarchal medieval Arab society. However, it is necessary to re-examine the assumption that classical interpretation is entirely gender-biased, since the works of mufasir such as ath-Thabarî and al-Qurthubî also reflect the influential scientific heritage of Islam and must be understood in the context of their time.

M. Quraish Shihab's Interpretation of Family Verses

M. Quraish Shihab is an Indonesian tafsir scholar who was born on February 16, 1944 in Rappang, South Sulawesi. He completed his S1 and S2 education at Al-Azhar University in Egypt in the field of interpretation, then earned a doctorate from the same university in 1982 with the title *Mumtâz ma'a Martabat al-Syaraf al-Ulâ* (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). His most monumental work of tafsir is *Tafsir Al-Misbah: Messages, Impressions and Harmony of the Qur'an* which consists of 15 volumes. The methodology of interpretation relies on a contextual-moderate approach that combines linguistic analysis, historical context, and social relevance (Setiawan, 2023).

In interpreting QS. Ar-Rûm/30:21, Shihab emphasizes that this verse applies reciprocity to husband and wife. The word *azwâj* does not only mean 'wives', but includes couples reciprocated. He explained that the word *taskunû* comes from *sakan*, which means calm after a shock, and marriage provides inner peace because couples complement each other physically and psychologically. Meanwhile *mawaddah* describes a deep love that drives one to give one's best to one's partner selflessly, and *rahmah* refers to affection that grows stronger as the household goes on (Shihab, 2005, Vol. 11). Thus, Shihab builds a household paradigm that is not rigid on gender roles, but oriented towards the quality of relationships.

Related to QS. An-Nisâ'/4:34, Shihab affirms that *qawwâmah* is the responsibility of male leadership in the family based on the obligation to provide for certain advantages and advantages relevant to that function. This leadership is not a form of domination that ignores women's rights, but a mandate that must be carried out with compassion, respect, and deliberation (Shihab, 2005, Vol. 2). He also emphasized that *the actions of the wadribûhunna* cannot be used as a basis to justify violence. Even if it is interpreted as 'hitting', it is not in the sense of hurtful violence, but rather a symbol of the last action that is educational and in practice must be avoided. Shihab emphasized the importance of dialogue and compassion in conflict resolution.

In interpreting QS. Al-Baqarah/2: 233 on breastfeeding and maintenance, Shihab interprets the principle of deliberation as a form of applying *the value of syûrâ* within the family sphere. According to him, the involvement of both parties in decision-making is an absolute requirement to create justice and balance. Deliberation is an indicator that can support the formation of *the sakînah* family (Shihab, 2005, Vol. 1). As for interpreting QS. At-Tahrîm/66:6 on family responsibility, Shihab emphasizes that every member of the family is obliged to protect himself and his family from things that undermine the faith, by placing the husband as the leader responsible for the moral education of all family members (Shihab, 2005, Vol. 14).

Amina Wadud's Interpretation of Family Verses

Amina Wadud is an American Muslim-feminist academic born on September 25, 1952. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in Islamic Studies. Her major work, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1992), uses feminist hermeneutics in reading the Qur'an. His methodology of interpretation is based on three critical questions: (1) what is the context in which the text was written?; (2) how does

grammatical composition affect meaning?; and (3) how does *weltanschauung* (worldview) affect interpretation? (Muttaqin, 2020).

In interpreting QS. Ar-Rûm/30:21, Wadud emphasized that the relationship between married couples is very gentle. The term *mawaddatan* which is interpreted as affection also includes mutual love and intimacy. This relationship is not based on competition, violence, conflict, or hierarchical structures at all (Wadud, 2006). He criticized the traditional family model which was generally based on a pattern of domination relations, in which men were always placed as *qawwâmûn* and women were seen as inferior.

Against QS. An-Nisâ'/4:34, Wadud gives a critical reading that rejects hierarchical interpretations. According to him, the word *bi* in the verse serves as a determinant of the conditional meaning: male *qawwâmûna 'alâ* female only applies if two conditions are met, namely the existence of excess and the existence of dependents of alimony. If one of the conditions does not exist, then men cannot be called *qawwâm* over women (Wadud, 2006). He also denied that superiority was absolute, because the arrangement of the verse reads *ba'dubum 'alâ ba'd* which shows the superiority of some over others, not absolutely men over women.

Regarding the concept of *nusyûz*, Wadud interprets it more broadly, not limiting it only to the wife's behavior, but can also occur on the husband's side. In the Qur'an, the word *nusyûz* is used both for women (QS. An-Nisâ'/4: 34) and men (QS. An-Nisâ'/4: 128). For Wadud, *nusyûz* is all forms of disharmony and disharmony in domestic relations that can be sourced from both parties (Anisa, 2025). With this approach, she deconstructs the classical construct of interpretation that places women as the only parties who have the potential to violate family harmony.

Regarding the word *qânitât* in QS. An-Nisâ'/4:34, Wadud interprets it not as the wife's obedience to her husband, but the direct obedience of a woman to Allah swt. The Qur'an uses this word not only for women (QS. 4:34, 33:35, 66:5, 12), but also for men (QS. 2:238, 3:17, 33:35), so its meaning refers to the attitude of submission to Allah, which is the nature of a believer who surrenders, not interpersonal obedience between fellow humans (Wadud, 2006). This interpretation also affirms the principle of spiritual equality of men and women.

Comparative Analysis: Convergence and Differences

A comparison of the interpretation of M. Quraish Shihab and Amina Wadud on family verses shows that there are a number of significant points of convergence. First, both agree that the principle of *mutuality* is the main foundation of a harmonious family. Despite the different emphasis, both Shihab and Wadud reject the family model built on unilateral dominance. Shihab emphasizes reciprocity through *mawaddah wa rahmah* as a reciprocal gift of Allah, while Wadud underlines it through the principle of equal *partnership*.

Second, these two figures both make the principle of deliberation as the main mechanism for conflict resolution and decision-making in the family. In interpreting QS. Al-Baqarah/2: 233, Shihab affirms deliberation as an ethical principle that sustains the *sakînah* family, while Wadud affirms it as a form of recognition of gender equality (Azukma & Harahap, 2023). Third, both reject the legitimacy of domestic violence. Shihab understands

that the actions of the *wadribûhunna* cannot be used as a basis for justifying violence, while the Wadud is more assertive by completely rejecting literal interpretations that legitimize violence and proposing symbolic readings.

On the other hand, there is a fundamental difference between the two. In understanding the concept of *qawwâmah*, Shihab interprets it as an affirmation of male leadership responsibilities in the family that is functional—born from the obligation to provide for and certain advantages. She seeks to maintain the meaning of husband's leadership within the framework of moral and social responsibility. On the contrary, Wadud rejects this hierarchical meaning and argues that *qawwâmah* is not universal and eternal, but historical. Modern family relationships should be built on the basis of equality, not single leadership by the husband (Soamole, 2024).

Differences are also seen in the hermeneutic methodology used. Shihab uses a contextual-moderate approach that maintains the authority of the Islamic scientific tradition while seeking to provide interpretations that are relevant to the modern context. It is still within the framework of classical interpretation, but it is moderated by emphasizing the ethical-humanist aspect. Meanwhile, Wadud uses feminist-critical hermeneutics that actively identifies and deconstructs patriarchal biases in the tradition of interpretation. She places women's perspectives as the starting point for reading the text and makes gender justice an evaluative criterion (Mahfud, 2023).

The third difference is seen in the understanding of the term *qânitât*. Shihab interprets the word *qânitât* as a form of a wife's obedience to Allah swt which is reflected in her loyalty and obedience to her husband. This obedience is understood as a spiritual attitude born from the appreciation of faith. Meanwhile, Wadud interprets *qânitât solely* as obedience to Allah, rejects the dimension of obedience to the husband, and affirms that the wife has an autonomous spiritual relationship with her God. This difference reflects the difference in methodology between the two, where Shihab is on the moderate-reformist spectrum, while Wadud is on the feminist-transformative spectrum.

Synthesis: Indicators of Harmonious Family in the Perspective of the Qur'an

Based on the comparative analysis above, this study formulates four main indicators of harmonious families in the perspective of the Qur'an which are a synthesis of the thoughts of M. Quraish Shihab and Amina Wadud.

First, an egalitarian reciprocal relationship. Both Shihab and Wadud agree that a harmonious family is built on the principle of *mubâdalâh* (reciprocity), namely that husband and wife have equal rights and responsibilities. Shihab articulates this reciprocity through *mawaddah* and *rahmah* as a reciprocal gift of Allah (Shihab, 2005, Vol. 11), while Wadud emphasizes it through the principle of equal partnership that rejects all forms of domination. This indicator results in the implication that family harmony cannot be achieved in conditions of inequality in relationships, both economic, emotional, and spiritual.

Second, ethical-participatory leadership. The concept of *qawwâmah* should not be understood as the legitimacy of domination, but rather as an ethical responsibility to maintain the welfare of the family. Shihab interprets it as a functional mandate that demands justice and

compassion (Shihab, 2005, Vol. 2), while Wadud emphasizes that leadership must be participatory and not ignore women's autonomy. In the context of the contemporary Muslim family, this indicator means that the husband's leadership must be dialogical, responsible, and not eliminate the wife's voice in the household's strategic decision-making.

Third, deliberation in decision-making. QS. Al-Baqarah/2:233 affirms that important decisions in the family, including those concerning the interests of the child, must be taken through deliberation and mutual agreement. Shihab and Wadud both make *syûrâ* a fundamental principle in family governance. This indicator rejects the pattern of unilateral decisions that deny the voice of one party, and requires equal dialogue between husband and wife (Ningsih & Azis, 2022).

Fourth, transcendental spirituality as a foundation. QS. At-Tahrîm/66:6 affirms that the family is a spiritual institution responsible for maintaining the faith of each of its members. Shihab emphasized that *sakînah* is a divine gift that can only be present in a family based on piety to Allah swt (Shihab, 2005, Vol. 14). Wadud also acknowledged the spiritual dimension of marriage as part of the Qur'an's vision of a harmonious family. This foundation of spirituality believes that a harmonious family is not just a social or economic affair, but part of servitude to Allah swt.

This synthesis confirms that feminist claims against the bias of classical interpretation are not entirely false—classical interpretation does contain elements that reflect the patriarchal context of its time. However, classical interpretation still has a normative value that is relevant when read critically and contextually. Shihab and Wadud's thinking come as two complementary alternative paths: Shihab offers a bridge between tradition and modernity, while Wadud provides a structural critique that encourages the transformation of gender relations toward more substantive justice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes three main things. First, the classical interpretation represented by ath-Thabarî and al-Qurthubî displays a pattern of hierarchical relations that reflects the patriarchal context of their time, especially in the interpretation of *qawwâmah* and *nusyûz*. This interpretation places men as the leaders who have full authority over women based on physical, intellectual, and financial advantages. However, classical interpretation cannot be completely concluded to be gender biased because classical mufasir also limit the authority of the husband so as not to go beyond the limit and injure the wife.

Second, M. Quraish Shihab interprets *qiwâmah* as a conditional and non-dominative moral-functional trust, emphasizes the principles of *sakînah*, *mawaddah*, *wa rahmah* as a reciprocal gift of Allah, and makes deliberation and non-violence as the main principles in the husband-wife relationship. Amina Wadud deconstructs hierarchical structures through feminist-critical hermeneutics, defining *qawwâmah* as shared responsibility, *nusyûz* as bilateral disharmony, and *qânitât* as obedience to Allah—not the wife's obedience to her husband. The methodological differences between the two reflect two major currents in contemporary interpretation: moderate-reformist and feminist-transformative.

Third, the synthesis of this research formulates four main indicators of harmonious families in the perspective of the Qur'an: (1) egalitarian reciprocal relations based on *mawaddah wa rahmah*; (2) ethical-participatory leadership that rejects domination and emphasizes moral responsibility; (3) deliberation as a decision-making mechanism that ensures equal involvement; and (4) transcendental spirituality as a foundation that places piety as a source of true serenity. These findings contribute to the development of an interpretive discourse that is more responsive to the issue of gender justice, relevant to the reality of the contemporary Muslim family, and able to respond to the value crisis that plagues the institution of the family in the modern era.

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