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Riffat Hassan's Thoughts on Gender Issues in the Qur'an

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Abstract

One Muslim feminist figure who is not so sure about the interpretations of traditional interpreter is Riffat Hasan. In her works, she tries to reconstruct verses that have been interpreted with patriarchal bias, especially verses related to women. In her interpretation, Riffat Hasan offers four important points of her ideas. First, the theory of creation (An-Nisa: 1), (Al-'Araf: 189), (Az-Zumar: 6). This theme, according to her, is important to be reconstructed because the concept of equality and inequality comes from the concept of creation. Second, the position of women (An-Nisa':34). According to her, in relation to position, the Qur'an does not distinguish between men and women. Third, regarding purdah (al-Ahzab verse 59). In interpreting these verses, Riffat Hassan takes three steps, namely (1) a normative-idealist and historical-empirical approach by reinterpreting the verses of the Qur'an, (2) deconstructing religious thought that (according to her) is gender biased, and (3) reconstructing religious thought that is not gender biased.

Keywords: *Deconstruction; Gender Issues; Riffat Hasan; Tafsir Al-Qur'an.*

Abstrak

Salah satu tokoh feminis Muslim yang tidak begitu yakin dengan penafsiran para mufassir tradisional adalah Riffat Hasan. Dalam karya-karyanya, ia mencoba merekonstruksi ayat-ayat yang selama ini ditafsirkan dengan bias patriarki, terutama ayat-ayat yang berkaitan dengan perempuan. Dalam penafsirannya, Riffat Hasan menawarkan empat poin penting gagasannya. Pertama, teori penciptaan (An-Nisa: 1), (Al-'Araf: 189), (Az-Zumar:6). Tema ini menurutnya penting untuk direkonstruksi karena konsep kesetaraan dan ketidaksetaraan berasal dari konsep penciptaan. Kedua, posisi perempuan (An-Nisa':34). Menurutnya, dalam kaitannya dengan kedudukan, al-Qur'an tidak membedakan antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Ketiga, mengenai purdah (al-Ahzab ayat 59). Dalam menafsirkan ayat-ayat tersebut, Riffat Hassan melakukan tiga langkah, yaitu (1) pendekatan normatif-idealisme dan historis-empiris dengan cara melakukan penafsiran ulang atas ayat-ayat al-Qur'an, (2) melakukan dekonstruksi terhadap pemikiran keagamaan yang (menurutnya) bias gender, dan (3) melakukan rekonstruksi terhadap pemikiran keagamaan yang tidak bias gender.

Kata Kunci: *Dekonstruksi; Isu Gender; Riffat Hassan; Tafsir Al-Qur'an.*

A. Introduction

In pre-Islamic times, the position of women was very low and unappreciated. They had a very small social, economic and especially political role, with men being dominant in many ways. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the Arabian Peninsula at that time, husbands who found out their wives were pregnant and about to give birth, they had prepared pits to bury their daughters alive if the baby was a girl.

The position of women has no control over themselves as their rights are taken away. This was the case before Islam came. They could be treated like slaves, sold and bought. They could bequeath but had no inheritance rights. Some of them were even treated like dead things, simply ignored when they died because they were considered different from men.

History records the existence of many great civilizations around the world, including the Greeks, Romans and Indians. Before Islam was brought by Prophet Muhammad, major religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and Zoroaster had flourished. However, none of these civilizations or religions championed or elevated the status of women.¹

Islam, through the Qur'an as a guide to life, teaches equality between men and women regardless of origin or nation. All are equal before Allah, with the distinction made based on their obedience to Him, as stated in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13. Allah honors all His servants, both men and women, as mentioned in Surah An-Nahl verse 97, and Islam places both in the same position.

The Holy Qur'an contains various possibilities in its interpretation, and each person who will interpret has a different style and methodology in understanding the content and message of the verses of God. This is a phenomenon that can happen because the Qur'an does contain many meanings, depending on which side they understand it. Various styles and methodologies of interpretation eventually emerged along with the times and times wherever the interpreter was.

The Qur'an and tafsir are different worlds, the Qur'an is a text that is a revelation from God that will never change until whenever, while tafsir, can change at any time, because it is a product of human thought. Interpretation activities will always change and develop as long as the text of the Qur'an is consumed by mankind.

Patriarchal theological interpretations in the heavenly religions portray women as "half" human beings, which results in gender injustice and the denial of women's rights as beings of equal dignity before God. To overcome this, feminists are actively involved in reinterpreting the verses of the Qur'an, using a different methodological approach from interpretations that are dominated by and tend to benefit men. The approach used by feminists in

¹ Muhammad Anas Qasim Ja'far, *Mengembalikan Hak-hak Politik Perempuan; Sebuah Perspektif Islam*, Translator: Mujtaba Hamdi, (Jakarta: Azam, 2001), 1

interpreting will produce interpretations that pay more attention to gender perspectives.²

When feminism, as a response to the injustices experienced by women, began to enter the Islamic world, Muslim feminist figures emerged. Based on their Islamic beliefs, they sought to challenge interpretations that were considered unprogressive for women.³

One of the Muslim feminist figures who is not so sure about the interpretations of traditional interpreter, because according to him the classical mufasirs always marginalize women in all respects is Riffat Hasan from Lahore Pakistan. In her works, she tries to reconstruct verses that have always been interpreted with a patriarchal bias, especially verses related to women. According to her, this is all a result of the factors of Islamic society which adheres to the patriarchal system and internally the majority of interpreter are men.

In her interpretation, Riffat Hasan offers four key points of her ideas. First, the theory of creation. According to her, this theme is important to be reconstructed because the concept of equality and inequality comes from the concept of creation. Second, the position of women. According to her, in relation to position, the Qur'an does not discriminate between men and women. Third, regarding purdah.⁴

What is interesting about Riffat Hasan is her different interpretation of religious texts compared to other feminists. While other feminists still respect the interpretations of classical scholars, Riffat Hasan has a different view. She does not believe in the interpretation of classical scholars for several reasons, one of which is because she thinks classical interpreter do not fight for women's rights, especially in interpreting verses related to women. This

² Maftuhotosolihah, *Akar Ketimpangan Gender (Pemikiran Feminis Riffat Hassan)*, Jurnal Millah, No. 1., Vol., II., (Yogyakarta, 2002), 117.

³ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴ Riffat Hasan, *Isu Kesetaraan Laki-laki dan Perempuan dalam Tradisi Islam (Setara Di Hadapan Allah)*, Translator: Tim LSPPA, (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Prakarsa, 2000), 46.

becomes the researcher's goal to dig deeper into Riffat Hasan's gender thinking.⁵

In this study, the focus of the problems to be examined are: How is the Application of Riffat Hassan's Interpretation Methodology related to gender issues in the Qur'an?

This research uses a qualitative approach with the method of interpretive analysis. The main focus of the research is the application of Riffat Hassan's interpretation methodology related to gender issues in the Qur'an. The main data sources in this research are Riffat Hassan's works related to the interpretation of al-Qur'an and gender issues. In addition, the Qur'an as the main text will be analyzed using the methodology proposed by Hassan. Meanwhile, the data collection comes from literature study by collecting and reviewing relevant literature, including the works of Riffat Hassan, the text of the Qur'an, and supporting literature on gender issues in Islam. Then the documentation study by collecting related documents, both in the form of books, journal articles, and electronic sources that are relevant to the research topic. After the data is collected, it is analyzed by conducting an in-depth critical analysis of the Qur'anic texts that are considered relevant to gender issues, using the interpretation methodology proposed by Riffat Hassan.

The application of this research method is designed to provide an in-depth and critical analysis of the application of Riffat Hassan's interpretation methodology related to gender issues in the Qur'an. With this approach, the research is expected to make a significant contribution to the understanding and development of gender studies in Islam.

B. Biography of Riffat Hassan

As mentioned above, there are several Muslim thinkers who are concerned with the issue of feminism in Islam. One of them is Riffat Hassan. It is Riffat Hassan's thoughts on women's liberation that we will try to study and use in this research. However, it is

⁵ M. Noor Harisuddin, "Pemikiran Feminis Muslim Di Indonesia Tentang Fiqh Perempuan," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 15, no. 2 (2015): 237, <https://doi.org/10.21154/al-tahrir.v15i2.265>.

better before further discussing her thoughts, we will first present a little information about this figure.

Riffat Hasan is a Muslim feminist who was born in Lahore, Pakistan. Although there is no exact information about her date of birth, it is known that she comes from an upper-class Sayyid family. Riffat is one of nine siblings, consisting of five boys and three girls. Her father, affectionately called "Begum Shahiba," was a highly respected patriarchal figure who held traditional views. Meanwhile, her mother was the daughter of a prominent poet and scientist, Hakim Ahmad Shuja.⁶

Riffat grew up in a very traditional and patriarchal family environment, which believed that a girl should marry at the age of 16 with the choice of her parents. However, her mother dissented and opposed her father's traditional views. Her parents' differing views caused Riffat to feel restless and isolated from her family, so she often retreated to her room to read and write poetry.⁷

Riffat challenged her father, a patriarchal traditionalist. All her efforts to challenge her father were fueled by her mother's support to challenge her father's patriarchal system. For Riffat Hasan, her mother had a major influence on her success in her studies, as she encouraged her to be herself. Despite this, Riffat never felt her mother's love as she should have, as her mother only favored her success and did not pay attention to her as an individual.⁸

From her childhood experiences, she was encouraged to study gender injustice issues academically. The education she received greatly supported her interest in this research. As an academic, she had the opportunity to see first-hand the conditions of gender injustice in Islamic societies around the world. This concern has followed Riffat from childhood to adulthood, especially when she went to study in the UK. There, she felt

⁶ Moh. Muhtador, "Gagasan Riffat Hasan Tentang Kritik Gender Atas Hadis Misoginis," *Rausyan Fikr: Jurnal Studi Ilmu Ushuluddin Dan Filsafat* 13, no. 1 (2018): 73–95, <https://doi.org/10.24239/rsy.v13i1.91>.

⁷ Muhtador.

⁸ Abdul Mustaqim, *Paradigma Tafsir Feminis, Membaca Al-Quran Dengan Optik Perempuan: Studi Pemikiran Riffat Hassan Tentang Isu Gender Dalam Islam* (Yogyakarta: Logung Pustaka, n.d.).

academic and theological angst as she witnessed Muslim women losing their human and Islamic rights. This happened in line with the dominance of patriarchal culture in Islamic societies. It was experiences like these that shaped Riffat's thinking when she decided to marry a man who was also a victim of patriarchal culture. However, her marriage to Dawar had to end after they were blessed with a daughter named Mona. Riffat's disappointment grew when she remarried Mahmoud, an Arab Muslim man who also adhered to the patriarchal system and always mentioned God's name in everything he did. This second marriage did not last long.⁹

The debut of her interest in feminism came in 1983-1984 when she was involved in a research project in Pakistan. It was during the Zia government and Islamization was beginning. The question that arose in her mind at that time was, why is it that when a country or government begins to Islamize, the first action taken is to force women back into the house, cover their entire bodies, impose regulations and laws that regulate the behavior of individuals, especially women? She then studied the text of the Qur'an seriously and deeply and eventually saw the need for reinterpretation.¹⁰

From Riffat's life journey like that. She was driven to help Muslim women who were under patriarchal rule. Riffat feels happy because her desire to get women out of the confinement of men by trying to interpret the Qur'an in a systematic and non-patriarchal perspective can be encouraged by members of the Pakistani Commission on the Status of Women by peeling one by one to prove to the people of Pakistan that women are not always secondary, subordinate and inferior to men.

Riffat believes that men are created equal by God. In the future, they cannot become unequal, and vice versa, the Quran does not see the position of women as lower than men, both have the same position. Discrimination and all the injustices that befall women in the Muslim environment according to her stem from a misunderstanding of the main source of Islamic teachings, namely

⁹ Dadang S. Anshori. *Membincangkan Feminisme*. (Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 1997), 89.

¹⁰Riffat Hassan, "Feminisme dan al-Qur'an", *Jurnal Ulumul Qur'an* No. 09, Vol. II, 1991, 86.

the Qur'an. Since 1974, she has carefully studied the Quran, particularly in interpreting verses relating to women. Her contribution to the women's movement in Pakistan has been significant.¹¹

Riffat pursued higher education in the UK at St. Mary's College, University of Durham. She completed her studies in English literature and philosophy in three years and graduated cum laude. Riffat earned her doctorate with her dissertation on the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal, a modern Pakistani thinker whom she respects greatly, at the relatively young age of 24.¹² Riffat's intellectual career began to take off after she settled in the United States in 1976. There, she served as Chair of the Religious Studies Program at the University of Louisville, Kentucky. In addition, she was also a visiting lecturer at Harvard Divinity School. During this time, while a guest lecturer, she completed her acclaimed work, "Equal Before Allah", which was based on her one-year research (1986-1987). Riffat also served as an advisor to the senior professor of the Muslim Student Association at the University of Oklahoma, Stillwater.¹³

Riffat Hasan is a very prolific intellectual, most of whose work deals with gender issues. Because of this work, Riffat Hasan is recognized by many as a feminist thinker who has contributed greatly to the feminism movement in Pakistan. Some of her works are: *The Role and Responsibilities of Women in the Legal Ritual Tradition of Islam/ Shari'ah* (1980). *Equal Before Allah? Woman-Men in The Islamic Tradition* (1987). *Muslim Woman and Post-Patriarchal Islam. The Issue of Woman-Men Equality in Islamic Tradition* (1991). *Muslim Woman and Post Patriarchal Islam* (1991). *Jihad fi Sabilillah: A Muslim Woman's faith Journey from Struggle to Struggle. Women's and Men's Liberation.*

¹¹ Yunahar Ilyas, *Feminisme dalam Kajian Tafsir Al-Quran klasik dan kontemporer*. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1997), 58.

¹² Fatima Mernisi and Riffat Hassan, *Ibid*, 25.

¹³ Mia Nurmala, Umi Sumbulah, and Yayan Nurbayan, "Ideal-Normative and Socio-Historical Approaches to Gender Equality Verses: A Study of Riffat Hassan's Thought," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 22, no. 1 (2023): 235–58, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol22.iss1.art9>.

From the scientific works she wrote and the journey of her intellectual career, it shows that Riffat Hassan is a creative, progressive and productive female thinker. It is not an exaggeration if then Riffat Hassan is also referred to as a reformer of Islamic thought in the field of gender issues.

C. Riffat Hassan's Interpretation Model on Gender Issues

1. The concept of leadership (*qawwam*)

Riffat criticizes the interpretation of verses about women, including the concept of *qawwam* as stated in Surah An-Nisa' verse 34. She does not accept it because she considers that the interpretation of scholars contains gender bias. Her criticism is why the word *qawwamun* is interpreted as leader or ruler; not support, protector or breadwinner?

Riffat Hassan states that if the word *qawwamun* is interpreted as support, it means that men are the protectors or supporters of women. According to her, the word *qawwamun* is more accurately interpreted as breadwinners or those who provide means of life support.¹⁴ From this interpretation, Riffat Hassan assumes that *qawwamah* cannot be obtained automatically and absolutely, but is conditional. The requirement to be *qawwam* is to be a support, protector, or breadwinner.¹⁵

Therefore, for Riffat Hassan, verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa' should not be fully used as legitimization and justification that women are subordinate to men. But it is more of a normative statement concerning the Islamic concept of the division of labor in a family and community structure. That is, ideally men should be the breadwinners, responsible for the family's livelihood, given the heavy burden that women have to carry, because they must give birth to children, breastfeed, care for and raise them. Therefore, women should not be burdened with earning a living at the same time.¹⁶

¹⁴ Riffat Hassan, *Women's Right and Islam from The ICPD to Beijing*, h. 79

¹⁵ Agustina Damanik, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pandangan Islam," *Jurnal Al-Maqasid* 4, no. 1 (2018): 71–83.

¹⁶ Az-Zamahsyari, *Al-Kasyasyaf 'an haqaaq at-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-'Aqawil*, (Beirut: Daar Al-Fikr, 1988), Volume I, 523.

The word *qawwamun* itself, according to Riffat, is a Qur'anic statement that indicates the division of labor between men and women. The division aims to create and maintain balance in the life of the community. In this division, men are in charge of earning a living because they are not obliged to bear children. In short, men function productively while women are reproductive. These two functions are separate but complement each other to create harmony. Thus, according to Riffat Hassan, there is also no higher or lower between the two.¹⁷

This illustrates that Riffat Hassan is against the idea of leadership in the family structure. For her, the existence of the concept of leadership would place men as leaders and women as the led. She rejects this conception as it demeans the status of women and signifies gender inequality between men and women.

Riffat Hassan's view is contrary to the interpreter who have been recognized for their credibility. Take for example Az-Zamahshari in *Al-Kasasyaf 'an haqaiq at-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-'Aqawil*,¹⁸ Ibn Kathir in *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Adzim*¹⁹, and Al-Alusi in *Ruhul Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al- Adzim was-Sab'il matsani*²⁰ who interpreted that the word *qawwam* in An-Nisa' verse 34 means leader, just as *wali/khalifah* is a leader for his people.

So, it can be concluded that the husband (man) is the leader of his wife. This leadership of the husband becomes clearer when looking at the end of the verse under discussion, which uses the word obey: *Then if they obey you, then do not look for ways to distress them.* The use of the word "obey" indicates that the relationship between husband and wife is structural. If it were not

¹⁷ Riffat Hassan, "Rights of Women: Muslim Practice Versus Normative Islam, Makalah Yang Disampaikan Dalam Workshop Dengan Tema 'Women in Islam,'" in *Disponsori Oleh the International Planned Parenthood Federation Yang Diselenggarakan Di Tunis Pada*, n.d., 92.

¹⁸ Abu al-Fida' Isma'il bin Umar bin Katsir al-Qursyi ad Dimasyqi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Adzim*, (t.t.p: Daarun thoyyibah 1999 M/ 1420 H), Volume II, 292

¹⁹ Syihabuddin Mahmud ibn Abdillah al-Husaini al-Alusi, *Ruhul Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al- Adzim was-Sab'il matsani*, (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, t.t), 41.

²⁰ Nurjannah Ismail, *Perempuan dalam Pasungan*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2003), 276

structural, the word used would not be obey, but agree, accept your opinion, and the like.²¹

2. Concept of *Hijab*

In Riffat's view, the issue of *hijab* (*purdah*) is actually a quite complex problem. According to her, the emergence of the concept of *hijab* stems from the existence of a system of division of two areas in Islamic society, the private area, namely the home and the public area, namely the workplace. Women are in the private area, while men are in the public area. According to the general assumption of Islamic society, as long as each party remains in its place, everything will be in order and safe. This implies a segregation system. According to the general view of Islamic society, the two sexes should be separated and this arrangement is considered the most appropriate and best.²²

After Riffat Hassan explains the general assumptions of Islamic society, she then tries to see how the Quran views it. According to her, the moral ideal desired by the Quran is actually the principle of modesty. The Quran strongly emphasizes that women should be modest, not only in dressing but also in speaking, walking, behaving, and so on. This principle, according to her, is also recommended to men, although it is mostly addressed to women.²³ If in practice the principle of modesty is only emphasized on women, it is not desired by Riffat Hassan because it will become gender biased. Because this view still seems discriminatory. It is as if women are cornered in this issue and their bodies are seen as a source of slander for men.

According to him, in a patriarchal society woman are always sex objects. So, the Qur'an then ordered women not to dress and behave like sex objects, so that people would not accuse her of wanting to be treated as a sex object. In this context, she said, the Prophet was told to order his wives and believing women, when leaving the house, to wear the *hijab*, so that they would be considered pious women and not be harassed.

²¹ Riffat Hassan, *Women, Religion, and Sexuality, Study of Impact of Religious Teaching on Women* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, t.th.), 121

²² Riffat Hassan, *Feminisme dan al-Quran: percakapan dengan Riffat Hassan*, *Jurnal Ulumul Quran* Vol II, tahun 1990, 87

²³ Riffat Hassan, *Feminisme dan al-Quran*, 89

In this case, Riffat Hassan contextualizes the concept of jilbab stated in the Qur'an letter al-Ahzab verse 59, by taking its moral ideal side, and does not want to be trapped in its legal form. According to her, the moral ideal of wearing the *hijab* is so that women are not disturbed and honored. Therefore, according to him, the jilbab can be interpreted as clothing that is according to local appropriateness and makes women respected for their humanity.

This way of interpretation would be wild, because if jilbab is interpreted as clothing according to local propriety, then there will be differences in each form of clothing. In fact, even if women expose their bodies in public if it is in accordance with the sense of appropriateness in a place can be allowed. Of course, this will make Islamic law change, from *haram* to *halal*.

The system of *hijab*, or *purdah*, has historically been a Muslim institution for about a thousand years. It evolved gradually during the first three centuries of early Islam and was fully established during the 10th and 11th centuries AD with the support of the interpretations of theologians and fuqaha during the 'Abbasid caliphate. Since then, the *purdah* system became an integral part of medieval Muslim society and culture. Eventually, it came to be regarded as an integral part of Muslim life, to the extent that non-Muslim women could be regarded as Muslim women simply because they wore the veil (*purdah*).²⁴

In Riffat's view, the issue of *purdah* (veil) is actually a complex issue. The concept of *purdah* (veil) is indeed one of the hot topics of discourse among feminists. According to Riffat, the emergence of the concept of *purdah* stems from the existence of a system of division of two areas in Islamic society, the private area, namely the home, and the public area, namely work. Women are in the private sphere, while men are in the public sphere. According to the general assumption of Islamic society, as long as each party is in its place, everything will be fine and safe. According to the general view of Islamic society, the two sexes should be separated and this arrangement is considered the most appropriate and best.

²⁴ Riffat Hassan, "Women's Interpretation of Islam," in *Women and Islam in Muslim Society*, ed. Hans Thijssen (Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.), 116.

If a woman is forced to enter the public sphere (men's sphere) for economic reasons so that she has to work or other urgent reasons, then she should be given a cover or *pardah*, so that although she exists, it is as if she does not exist. She exists without a face, a voice without an identity. In other words, the concept of *pardah* is a segregation system.

After Riffat Hassan explains the general assumptions of Islamic society, she then tries to see how the Quran views it. According to her, the moral ideal desired by the Quran is actually the principle of modesty. The Quran strongly emphasizes that women should be modest, not only in dress, but also in speech, walking, behavior, and so on. This principle is also recommended to men, although it is mostly addressed to women. In this case it becomes gender biased, if in practice the principle of modesty is only emphasized for women. This is certainly not what Riffat Hassan wants. Because this view still seems "discriminatory". It is as if women are cornered in this issue and their bodies are seen as a source of slander for men.²⁵

Riffat Hassan's view of the hijab as a concept that emphasizes modest dress for women cannot be separated from history, whether modern or earlier. For centuries, the female body has been the object of advertisement. Perhaps this is because the female body was created so beautifully that it lends itself to this or perhaps because in patriarchal societies women have always been sex objects. So, the Qur'an instructs women not to dress and act like sex objects, lest people accuse her of wanting to be treated as one.²⁶

It was in this context, according to Riffat, that the Prophet Saw. was told to order his wives and believing women, when leaving the house to wear *pardah* (*hijab*), so that they would be considered pious women and not be harassed. This is as stated in al-Ahzab [33]: 59: Meaning: "*O Prophet, say to your wives, your daughters, and the wives of the believers, 'Let them spread their*

²⁵ Nurmala, Sumbulah, and Nurbayan, "Ideal-Normative and Socio-Historical Approaches to Gender Equality Verses: A Study of Riffat Hassan's Thought."

²⁶ Abdul Mustaqim. *Dinamika Sejarah Tafsir al-Quran*. (Yogyakarta: Adab Perss. 2012), v.

veils over their whole bodies," so that they may be more easily recognized, so that they may not be harassed. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." (QS: al-Ahzab [33]: 59)

The implication of the verse is that the Quran does not prohibit women from going out or working outside the home. The Quran still allows women to leave the house or work outside the home, but they must dress in such a way that they will be seen and treated well and not disturbed.

From this explanation, it seems that Riffat wants to straighten out the general assumption about the veil that implies the principle of segregation, so that women are not allowed to leave the house or work outside the home. Riffat's explanation still seems sexist, as she herself admits. But according to her, it is natural and reasonable. Riffat's thinking departs from the fact that there are areas in Pakistan, if a woman wears a mini skirt, she will be harassed, stared at as well as groped and even raped. Therefore, according to Riffat, it is better for a woman to dress according to a sense of appropriateness (reasonable) that makes women respected for their humanity.²⁷

According to Riffat, women do not have to cover their faces with a veil when they leave the house, because if it is obligatory to cover the face, why in the Qur'an men meeting women are told to lower their gaze? Thus, Riffat interprets *hijab* (including the veil, jilbab, or purdah) as not necessarily a garment that covers a woman's entire body including the face and palms, but rather a garment that is appropriate.

This view may be very contextual, so that the meaning of *hijab* in the Qur'an becomes relative and conditional, because the sense of propriety of one region with another will be different, between the western and eastern worlds are also different. Similarly, if it is drawn to the Indonesian context. Can't it be seen that the style and variety of Muslim women who wear the *hijab* are very varied. The style and model of an artist wearing *hijab* is certainly different from a Muslim woman in the village. That

²⁷ Riffat Hassan, *The Issue of Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition, Dalam Women's and Men's Liberation* (New York: Greenwood Press, n.d.).

means that an interpretation is actually contested and it is strongly influenced by the socio-cultural context of the interpreter.²⁸

It seems that Riffat in interpreting the Quran is more inclined to see the ideal moral dimension than the formal legal. This kind of thinking model is similar to the thinking of Fazlur Rahman, one of the neo Modernism figures from Pakistan.

3. The Harmony of Women and Men in Islam

In promoting the concept of gender equality, like other feminists, Riffat Hassan looks to the West. She views that gender equality must be the same, both domestic and public. In fact, if equality means that everything must be the same, then there will be verses of the Qur'an that will be interpreted as discriminatory against women. That is why she and other feminists do not accept that there are interpretations of some verses of the Qur'an that tend to consider men and women unequal, even though the interpreters are interpreter who have been recognized for their credibility.²⁹ Moreover, the gender equality voiced by Riffat Hassan and other feminists is a Marxist ideology, which places women as oppressed and men as oppressors. With such an ideology, Muslim feminists will constantly try to explore the foundations of Islam not with Islamic ideals, but ideals built on the interests of feminists themselves.³⁰

The correct term for the relationship between men and women is gender harmony, not gender equality. This means that although there are differences between men and women, these differences are the nature of each, which emphasizes that between one and the other there is interrelationship and complementarity. This harmony is built on shari'a, based on the principle of complementarity, not resistance, and cooperation that does not contain competition.

4. The concept of creation and women's equality

²⁸ Hassan, "Rights of Women: Muslim Practice Versus Normative Islam, Makalah Yang Disampaikan Dalam Workshop Dengan Tema 'Women in Islam.'"

²⁹ Ratna Megawangi, *Membiarkan Berbeda: Sudut Pandang Baru tentang Relasi Gender*. (Bandung: Mizan. 1999), 150-157

³⁰ Megawangi, 227

In the discourse of feminism, the most significant thing about equality between men and women is the process of creation. The reason for the discrimination and gender inequality that befalls women is within the scope of Islam stems from the interpretation of the mufasirs regarding the process of creation.

According to Riffat Hassan, if men and women are created by God equal, then in the future this equality will not change to become unequal. Vice versa, if men are created by God unequal to women, then in the future this will not change. This is what makes Riffat Hassan try to reconstruct the interpretations of the mufasirs regarding the verses of creation. Is it true that women were created from Adam's ribs? Because if it is true that women were created from Adam's rib, then ontologically-philosophically and biologically they are only derivations and complements. That is, women are not substantially equal to men.

The verses about the creation of Eve by God do not mention clearly and in detail the mechanism of her creation. Among these verses are: (QS. An-Nisa: 1), (QS. Al-'Araf: 189), (Az-Zumar:6).

Although there are many verses that mention the creation of Eve, in this discussion we will discuss QS. An-nisa:1. Because in this verse the creation of Eve is clearly revealed. Moreover, in the discourse of feminist interpretation, it is the interpretation of QS. An-nisa:1.

This verse does not explicitly mention the names of Adam and Eve, but in the verse, it is only expressed with the words *nafs wahidah* and *zaujaha*. However, by looking at other verses and hadiths related to the verse, most interpreter interpret the two words as Adam and Eve. For example, Ibn Kathir, Al-Qurtubi, and Muhammad bin Jarir at-Tabari equated the word *nafs* with Adam.

The real controversy is not on who was first created, but on the creation of Eve which in the verse is expressed by the phrase *wa khalaqa minha zaujaha*. The issue is whether Eve was created from the ground just like the creation of Adam or was created from Adam's rib. The keyword for this controversial interpretation lies in the word *minha*. Does the sentence indicate that a wife was created for Adam from the same species as himself or was created

from Adam himself? This issue is at the heart of the differences between the interpreter and Muslim feminists.³¹

Riffat Hassan strongly rejects the view that Eve was created from Adam's rib, but also questions why the word *nafs wahidah* is certainly *Adam* and the word *zaujaha* is *Eve*. Whereas in Arabic, the word *nafs* does not refer to male or female, but is more neutral, it can be male or female. Likewise, the word *zauj*, cannot automatically mean wife. Because this word is also neutral, meaning that the partner can be male or female. Besides the word *zauj*, the feminine form of the word *zauj* is also known as *zaujah*

D. Conclusion

From the explanation above, it appears that in building a theology of gender equality, Riffat Hassan takes three steps in interpreting the Qur'an, namely (1) a normative-idealist and historical-empirical approach by reinterpreting Quranic verses, (2) deconstructing religious thought which (according to her) is gender biased, and (3) reconstructing religious thought which (according to her) is not gender biased. However, in this effort to construct a theology of gender equality, Riffat Hassan is also trapped and tends to be gender biased, even though she accuses the interpreter of gender bias. As a result of the application of her interpretation method, there are several implications that arise from this as illustrated in the discussion section of this article, namely the rejection of saheeh hadith and the implications of sharia that change Islamic law. As a final conclusion to this discussion, Riffat Hasan concludes that in Islam, the correct relationship between men and women is gender harmony, not gender equality. That is, although there are differences between men and women, these differences are the nature of each, which confirms that each other has an interrelated and complementary relationship. This harmony is built on sharia, based on the principles of complementarity (not opposition) and cooperation that does not contain competition.

³¹ Riffat Hassan, "Feminisme Dan Al-Qur'an", Dalam Jurnal Ulumul Qur'an," n.d.

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