

## **Thematic Exegesis (*Tafsir Mawdu'i*) and Gender Equality: Re-Reading Quranic Verses on Domestic Relations in the 21st Century**

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| <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/>Thematic Exegesis (<i>Tafsir Mawdu'i</i>), Gender Equality, Qur'anic Interpretation, Domestic Relations, Family Ethics, Contemporary Islamic Studies.</p> | <p><b>Abstract:</b><br/>This article explores the relevance of thematic exegesis (<i>tafsir mawdu'i</i>) in reconstructing the understanding of Qur'anic verses concerning domestic relations and gender equality in the twenty-first century. Traditional interpretations of certain Qur'anic texts related to marital leadership, division of roles, and family authority have often been influenced by patriarchal socio-cultural contexts, resulting in gender-biased perspectives. Using a qualitative library research approach, this study applies the thematic exegesis method to analyze and synthesize relevant Qur'anic verses on husband-wife relations, mutual rights and obligations, justice, partnership, and family harmony. The findings reveal that the Qur'an promotes principles of equality, mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility between men and women within the family. Rather than establishing hierarchical domination, the Qur'anic framework emphasizes complementary roles grounded in justice (<i>'adl</i>), compassion (<i>rahmah</i>), and mutual consultation (<i>shura</i>). Furthermore, a contextual rereading of these verses demonstrates that gender equality is not contradictory to Islamic teachings but is deeply rooted in the ethical objectives (<i>maqasid</i>) of the Qur'an. This study contributes to contemporary Qur'anic scholarship by offering a contextual and holistic interpretation that responds to modern social realities while maintaining fidelity to the Qur'an's normative values. The thematic exegesis approach thus serves as an effective methodological tool for promoting a more equitable understanding of domestic relations in contemporary Muslim societies.</p> |
| <p><b>Kata Kunci:</b><br/>Tafsir Tematik (<i>Tafsir Mawdu'i</i>), Kesetaraan Gender, Penafsiran Al-Qur'an, Relasi Domestik, Etika Keluarga, Studi Islam Kontemporer.</p>          | <p><b>Abstrak:</b><br/>Artikel ini mengkaji relevansi tafsir tematik (<i>tafsir mawdu'i</i>) dalam merekonstruksi pemahaman terhadap ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an mengenai hubungan domestik dan kesetaraan gender di abad ke-21. Penafsiran tradisional atas teks-teks Al-Qur'an tertentu yang berkaitan dengan kepemimpinan dalam pernikahan, pembagian peran, dan otoritas keluarga sering kali dipengaruhi oleh konteks sosial-budaya patriarkal, sehingga menghasilkan perspektif yang bias gender. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kepustakaan kualitatif, studi ini menerapkan metode tafsir tematik untuk menganalisis dan menyintesis ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an yang relevan mengenai hubungan suami-istri, hak dan kewajiban bersama, keadilan, kemitraan, serta keharmonisan keluarga. Temuan studi menunjukkan bahwa Al-Qur'an mengedepankan prinsip-prinsip kesetaraan, saling menghormati, kerja sama, dan tanggung jawab bersama antara laki-</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

### **Negotiating Religious Pluralism ...**

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laki dan perempuan dalam keluarga. Alih-alih menetapkan dominasi hierarkis, kerangka Al-Qur'an menekankan peran yang saling melengkapi yang berlandaskan pada keadilan ('adl), kasih sayang (rahmah), dan musyawarah (shūrā). Lebih jauh lagi, pembacaan ulang secara kontekstual terhadap ayat-ayat tersebut menunjukkan bahwa kesetaraan gender tidak bertentangan dengan ajaran Islam, melainkan berakar kuat pada tujuan-tujuan etis (maqāsid) Al-Qur'an. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi bagi kajian Al-Qur'an kontemporer dengan menawarkan penafsiran yang kontekstual dan holistik, yang merespons realitas sosial modern sembari tetap setia pada nilai-nilai normatif Al-Qur'an. Dengan demikian, pendekatan tafsir tematik berfungsi sebagai sarana metodologis yang efektif untuk mendorong pemahaman yang lebih adil mengenai hubungan domestik dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer.

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Gender equality has become one of the most widely discussed issues in contemporary religious and social discourse. The rapid transformation of social structures, educational opportunities, and economic participation has encouraged scholars to reexamine religious texts that are often associated with gender relations. Within Muslim societies, discussions on gender equality frequently focus on the interpretation of Qur'anic verses concerning domestic relations, including leadership within the family, marital responsibilities, inheritance, and the rights and obligations of husbands and wives. These discussions have generated diverse perspectives ranging from traditionalist interpretations to reformist approaches that seek to contextualize Qur'anic teachings in accordance with contemporary realities (Badran, 2009).

The Qur'an is regarded by Muslims as the primary source of guidance in all aspects of life, including family and social relations. Numerous verses address the relationship between men and women, emphasizing principles such as justice, compassion, cooperation, and mutual respect. However, the interpretation of these verses has often been influenced by historical, cultural, and patriarchal contexts that shaped the perspectives of classical exegetes (Wadud, 1999). As a result, some interpretations have been criticized for perpetuating gender inequality and reinforcing male dominance within domestic spheres.

One of the most debated verses is Qur'an 4:34, which describes men as *qawwāmūn* over women. Classical commentators generally interpreted the concept of *qiwāmah* as male authority and leadership within the household (Ibn Kathir, 2003). Contemporary

scholars, however, argue that the verse should be understood within its socio-historical context and interpreted in light of broader Qur'anic principles of justice and mutual responsibility (Engineer, 2008). Such differing interpretations highlight the need for methodological approaches capable of producing more comprehensive and contextual understandings of Qur'anic teachings.

In this regard, thematic exegesis (*tafsir mawḍū'ī*) offers a significant methodological framework. Unlike the traditional verse-by-verse approach, thematic exegesis examines all Qur'anic verses related to a specific topic, analyzes their interconnections, and synthesizes their meanings into a coherent conceptual framework (Al-Farmawi, 1997). This method enables scholars to avoid partial interpretations and to uncover the Qur'an's holistic perspective on particular issues, including gender relations and family life.

The relevance of thematic exegesis has increased in the twenty-first century due to the growing demand for contextual interpretations that address contemporary social challenges. According to Rahman (1982), understanding the Qur'an requires consideration of both the historical circumstances of revelation and the broader moral objectives underlying its teachings. Similarly, Esack (2005) emphasizes that Qur'anic interpretation should remain responsive to changing social realities while preserving the ethical values embedded within the text. Through thematic analysis, interpreters can identify the Qur'an's overarching principles concerning human dignity, justice, and equality rather than relying solely on isolated verses.

Several contemporary studies have explored the relationship between Islam and gender equality. Wadud (1999) argues that the Qur'an fundamentally recognizes the spiritual and moral equality of men and women. Likewise, Barlas (2002) contends that patriarchal readings of the Qur'an stem largely from interpretive traditions rather than the text itself. These studies suggest that many gender inequalities attributed to Islam are products of historical interpretation rather than intrinsic elements of Qur'anic teachings. Nevertheless, there remains a need for further research that systematically employs thematic exegesis to reexamine domestic relations in light of contemporary understandings of gender justice.

This study aims to analyze Qur'anic verses concerning domestic relations through the lens of thematic exegesis and to explore their implications for gender equality in contemporary Muslim societies. By examining themes such as family leadership, mutual rights and responsibilities, marital partnership, and family harmony, this research seeks to demonstrate that the Qur'an promotes a balanced and equitable model of domestic relations. Ultimately, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions on Qur'anic interpretation and provides a framework for understanding gender equality as consistent with the ethical objectives of Islam.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative library research design to examine Qur'anic perspectives on domestic relations and gender equality through the approach of thematic exegesis (*tafsir mawḍū'ī*). The primary data consist of Qur'anic verses related to family leadership, marital partnership, mutual rights and responsibilities, and justice between men and women, while secondary data are drawn from classical and contemporary tafsir literature, books, and scholarly journal articles on gender studies and Qur'anic interpretation. Data were collected through documentation techniques by identifying, selecting, and categorizing relevant literature according to the research objectives (Creswell, 2018).

The data were analyzed using the thematic exegesis method proposed by Al-Farmawi (1997), which involves collecting all relevant Qur'anic verses, examining their linguistic and socio-historical contexts, comparing interpretations from classical and contemporary scholars, and synthesizing them into a comprehensive understanding of the topic. To strengthen the analysis, a socio-historical approach was employed to explore the circumstances of revelation and the broader ethical objectives of the Qur'an (Rahman, 1982). The validity of the findings was enhanced through source triangulation by comparing various scholarly interpretations, enabling a contextual and holistic understanding of domestic relations and gender equality within the Qur'anic framework (Moleong, 2018).

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Concept of Gender Equality in the Qur'anic Perspective**

Gender equality in the Qur'anic perspective is rooted in the fundamental principle that all human beings originate from the same source and share equal dignity before God. This principle is clearly reflected in Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]:1, which states that humanity was created from a single soul (*nafs wāḥidah*) and from it its mate was created. The verse emphasizes the common origin of men and women, indicating that neither gender possesses inherent superiority over the other. Instead, both are part of the same human reality and are entrusted with similar responsibilities as God's vicegerents (*khulafā'*) on earth. According to Rahman (1982), this verse establishes the ontological equality of men and women by affirming their shared humanity and common purpose in creation.

The Qur'an further reinforces gender equality through its recognition of the equal spiritual and moral status of men and women. This principle is most explicitly expressed in Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]:35, where believing men and women are mentioned side by side in relation to faith, obedience, honesty, patience, humility, charity, fasting, chastity, and remembrance of God. The verse concludes by affirming that God has prepared forgiveness and a great reward for both men and women without distinction. Such an enumeration demonstrates that spiritual excellence and religious merit are determined by individual devotion and righteous conduct rather than gender identity. Wadud (1999) argues that this verse represents one of the strongest Qur'anic affirmations of gender equality because it places men and women on equal footing in matters of faith and moral responsibility.

Another important foundation for gender equality is found in the Qur'anic concept of human dignity. Q.S. Al-Ḥujurāt [49]:13 declares that all human beings were created from a male and a female and were made into nations and tribes so that they might know one another. The verse explicitly states that the most honorable among people in the sight of God is the most righteous (*atqākum*), not the one belonging to a particular gender, race, or social status. This teaching shifts the basis of human value from biological differences to ethical and spiritual qualities. Barlas (2002) contends that this verse

challenges hierarchical social structures by emphasizing moral excellence rather than gender privilege as the criterion of distinction before God.

The principle of equality is also reflected in the Qur'an's description of the relationship between men and women as one of partnership and mutual support. Q.S. At-Tawbah [9]:71 states that believing men and believing women are protectors and allies (*awliyā'*) of one another. They are collectively responsible for promoting good, preventing wrongdoing, establishing prayer, and fulfilling social obligations. This verse highlights cooperation rather than competition between genders and portrays both men and women as active participants in the moral and social development of the community. Esack (2005) notes that such verses provide a framework for understanding gender relations as complementary and collaborative rather than hierarchical.

From a thematic exegesis (*tafsir mawḍū'ī*) perspective, the collection of these verses reveals a coherent Qur'anic vision of gender relations based on justice, dignity, and shared responsibility. When interpreted holistically, the Qur'an does not support the notion of inherent male superiority but instead emphasizes equality in creation, spirituality, moral accountability, and social participation. Differences between men and women acknowledged in certain contexts should therefore be understood as functional and contextual rather than indicative of unequal worth. Consequently, the Qur'anic perspective on gender equality aligns with its broader ethical objectives of justice (*'adl*), compassion (*raḥmah*), and human dignity (*karāmah*), making it highly relevant to contemporary discussions on gender relations in the twenty-first century (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002).

### **Thematic Analysis of Qur'anic Verses on Husband–Wife Relations**

The Qur'an presents marriage as a sacred institution designed to establish harmony, stability, and mutual fulfillment between husband and wife. Rather than portraying marital relations as a structure of domination and subordination, the Qur'an emphasizes companionship and cooperation as the foundation of family life. A thematic reading of Qur'anic verses concerning marriage reveals that the relationship between spouses is built upon ethical values that promote emotional well-being, mutual respect, and social responsibility. These values are reflected in several key verses, particularly

Q.S. Ar-Rūm [30]:21 and Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:187, which together provide a comprehensive framework for understanding marital relationships in Islam.

One of the central concepts in Qur'anic teachings on marriage is *sakinah* (tranquility), as mentioned in Q.S. Ar-Rūm [30]:21. The verse states that God created spouses from among human beings so that they may find peace and tranquility in one another. This tranquility refers not only to emotional comfort but also to psychological stability and spiritual fulfillment within the marital relationship. According to Rahman (1982), the concept of *sakinah* highlights the Qur'anic view that marriage is intended to be a source of inner peace where both spouses can develop personally and spiritually. Therefore, the success of a marriage is measured not by authority or control but by the extent to which it nurtures harmony and well-being for both partners.

In addition to *sakinah*, the Qur'an identifies *mawaddah* (affection) and *rahmah* (mercy) as essential elements of marital life. Affection represents deep emotional attachment and sincere love between spouses, while mercy reflects compassion, understanding, and willingness to support one another during difficulties. These values ensure that the marital relationship extends beyond physical or economic considerations and becomes a bond rooted in genuine care and empathy. Esack (2005) argues that the combination of *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* demonstrates the Qur'an's holistic understanding of marriage as a relationship encompassing emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions. Consequently, the family becomes a nurturing environment where both husband and wife can flourish together.

Another significant Qur'anic portrayal of husband–wife relations is found in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:187, which describes spouses as “garments” for one another. This metaphor carries profound implications for understanding marital partnership. Just as clothing provides protection, comfort, beauty, and dignity, spouses are expected to fulfill similar functions for each other. The verse implies reciprocity and equality, as both husband and wife are described in the same manner without assigning superiority to either party. Wadud (1999) emphasizes that this metaphor reflects mutual dependence and shared responsibility, illustrating that a healthy marriage requires cooperation, emotional support, and respect for one another's dignity.

From the perspective of thematic exegesis (*tafsir mawḍūʿī*), the collective message of these verses portrays marriage as a relationship based on partnership rather than hierarchy. The Qur'an consistently emphasizes mutual support, compassion, and cooperation between spouses as the key principles of domestic life. When these verses are interpreted holistically, they reveal that husband and wife are intended to complement each other in fulfilling familial responsibilities and achieving shared goals. This understanding aligns with contemporary discussions on gender equality by demonstrating that the Qur'anic model of marriage prioritizes reciprocity, justice, and mutual care. Thus, the thematic analysis of husband–wife relations confirms that the Qur'an envisions marriage as a balanced partnership founded upon *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* (Esack, 2005).

### Reinterpreting the Concept of *Qiwāmah* in Contemporary Context

The concept of *qiwāmah* as mentioned in Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]:34 remains one of the most debated issues in contemporary discussions of gender relations in Islam. The verse states that men are *qawwāmūn* over women, a phrase that has historically been interpreted in various ways. In classical Islamic scholarship, *qiwāmah* was generally understood as male leadership and authority within the family structure. This interpretation was influenced by the socio-cultural realities of early Muslim societies, where men were typically responsible for economic provision and public affairs, while women were primarily engaged in domestic responsibilities (Ibn Kathir, 2003; Al-Tabari, 2001). Consequently, the concept became associated with a hierarchical model of family relations in which husbands were regarded as heads of households.

Classical commentators often linked *qiwāmah* to two factors explicitly mentioned in the verse: God's granting of certain advantages to men and the obligation of men to provide financial support for their families. Based on these considerations, male leadership was perceived as a natural outcome of economic responsibility and social organization. However, many contemporary scholars argue that such interpretations were shaped by historical circumstances rather than representing a universal and unchanging model of gender relations. They contend that classical exegesis frequently reflected patriarchal social structures that influenced the understanding of Qur'anic texts (Barlas, 2002; Wadud, 1999).

Contemporary interpretations seek to reread the concept of *qiwāmah* within the broader ethical framework of the Qur'an. Rather than understanding it as a form of permanent male superiority, modern scholars view *qiwāmah* as a functional responsibility related to the welfare and stability of the family. According to Engineer (2008), the verse emphasizes responsibility rather than privilege, indicating that leadership in the family is tied to duties of protection, support, and care. In this perspective, *qiwāmah* is not an exclusive right based on gender but a social role that emerges from one's ability to fulfill familial responsibilities effectively. Such an interpretation aligns with contemporary realities in which both men and women may contribute economically and socially to family life.

The thematic exegesis (*tafsir mawḍū'ī*) approach provides an important methodological framework for understanding *qiwāmah* contextually. Instead of interpreting Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]:34 in isolation, thematic analysis examines it alongside other Qur'anic verses that emphasize equality, mutual consultation, justice, and cooperation between spouses. For example, Q.S. At-Tawbah [9]:71 describes believing men and women as allies of one another, while Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:187 portrays spouses as garments for each other. When these verses are considered collectively, they suggest that family relations should be based on reciprocity and partnership rather than domination. Rahman (1982) argues that understanding the Qur'an requires identifying its broader moral objectives, which include justice and human dignity, rather than focusing solely on literal and context-bound interpretations.

From this thematic and contextual perspective, *qiwāmah* can be understood as a dynamic concept that adapts to changing social conditions while preserving the Qur'an's ethical principles. The primary purpose of *qiwāmah* is to ensure family welfare, harmony, and social responsibility rather than to establish gender hierarchy. In the twenty-first century, where women increasingly participate in education, professional careers, and public leadership, a rigid interpretation of *qiwāmah* may no longer reflect the realities of contemporary Muslim families. Therefore, reinterpreting *qiwāmah* through thematic exegesis enables Muslims to uphold the Qur'an's principles of justice, mutual respect, and shared responsibility while addressing the evolving needs of modern society (Rahman, 1982; Engineer, 2008; Wadud, 1999).

### Mutual Rights and Responsibilities in Domestic Life

The Qur'an establishes domestic life on the principle of balance between rights and responsibilities, emphasizing that both husband and wife have obligations toward one another. Rather than presenting family relations as a system of unilateral authority, the Qur'an promotes reciprocity and cooperation as essential components of marital life. This principle is evident in several Qur'anic verses that address mutual treatment, shared responsibilities, and collective participation in maintaining family welfare. Through a thematic exegesis (*tafsir mawḍū'ī*) approach, these verses reveal a comprehensive framework in which marriage functions as a partnership founded on justice, respect, and mutual accountability (Wadud, 1999).

One of the most significant principles governing marital relations is *mu'āsharah bi al-ma'rūf* (living together in kindness and fairness), as stated in Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]:19. This verse instructs husbands to treat their wives with kindness, dignity, and respect, even in situations of disagreement. The concept of *ma'rūf* encompasses socially recognized standards of goodness, fairness, and ethical behavior. Contemporary scholars argue that this principle is not limited to husbands alone but serves as a general ethical guideline for both spouses. According to Esack (2005), *mu'āsharah bi al-ma'rūf* reflects the Qur'anic commitment to human dignity and requires that marital relationships be characterized by compassion, understanding, and mutual respect rather than coercion or domination.

The Qur'an also emphasizes the importance of mutual support and cooperation between husband and wife. Q.S. At-Tawbah [9]:71 describes believing men and women as allies (*awliyā'*) of one another who work together in promoting righteousness and preventing wrongdoing. Although the verse addresses the broader Muslim community, its implications extend to family life, where spouses are expected to support each other emotionally, spiritually, and materially. This understanding challenges patriarchal assumptions that assign all authority to one partner while reducing the other to a passive role. Instead, the Qur'an envisions marriage as a collaborative relationship in which both individuals contribute to the achievement of shared goals and family well-being (Barlas, 2002).

Another important aspect of domestic relations in the Qur'an is the principle of consultation (*shūrā*) in family decision-making. While often associated with governance

and public affairs, consultation is also relevant within the household. Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]:233, for example, encourages mutual consultation between parents regarding matters related to childcare and family responsibilities. This verse demonstrates that significant family decisions should be reached through dialogue and agreement rather than unilateral decision-making. Rahman (1982) argues that consultation reflects the Qur'an's broader commitment to justice and participation, ensuring that both spouses have a voice in matters that affect family life.

From the perspective of thematic exegesis, the collective message of these verses highlights partnership rather than hierarchy as the foundation of domestic relations. The Qur'an consistently promotes fairness, cooperation, consultation, and mutual responsibility between husband and wife. Rights and obligations are not presented as privileges for one party but as complementary duties designed to maintain harmony and stability within the family. Consequently, a holistic reading of the Qur'an supports a model of marriage based on shared commitment and reciprocal respect. Such an interpretation is highly relevant to contemporary discussions on gender equality, as it demonstrates that the Qur'anic vision of family life prioritizes collaboration and justice over domination and unequal power relations (Wadud, 1999;).

### **Gender Equality and the Objectives of the Qur'an (Maqāṣid al-Qur'an)**

The discussion of gender equality in Islam cannot be separated from the broader objectives of the Qur'an and Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*). These objectives aim to promote justice, human welfare, dignity, and social harmony in all aspects of life. Rather than focusing solely on literal interpretations of individual verses, contemporary Islamic scholarship increasingly emphasizes understanding the Qur'an through its overarching ethical goals. From this perspective, gender equality is not merely a modern social demand but can be understood as consistent with the Qur'an's commitment to justice and human flourishing. A thematic exegesis (*tafsir mawḍū'ī*) approach allows scholars to identify these universal values by examining the Qur'an as an integrated and coherent whole (Auda, 2008).

One of the central objectives of the Qur'an is the establishment of justice ( *'adl*), which is repeatedly emphasized throughout the sacred text. Justice serves as a fundamental principle governing relationships between individuals, families, and

communities. In the context of gender relations, justice requires that men and women be treated fairly and be given equal opportunities to fulfill their roles and responsibilities according to their abilities and circumstances. Rahman (1982) argues that Qur'anic teachings should always be interpreted in light of their moral objectives, particularly the promotion of justice and social welfare. Therefore, interpretations that result in discrimination, oppression, or unequal treatment contradict the broader ethical vision of the Qur'an.

Another important objective of the Qur'an is the protection of human dignity (*karāmah*). The Qur'an recognizes the inherent worth of every human being regardless of gender, ethnicity, or social status. This principle is reflected in verses such as Q.S. Al-Ḥujūrāt [49]:13, which identifies righteousness rather than gender as the criterion of honor before God. Through the lens of *maqāṣid al-Qur'an*, the dignity of both men and women must be safeguarded in all social and familial interactions. According to Barlas (2002), patriarchal interpretations that subordinate women often overlook the Qur'an's strong emphasis on human dignity and moral equality. Consequently, a *maqāṣid*-oriented reading encourages interpretations that affirm the value and agency of women alongside men.

The objective of promoting family welfare and social well-being also supports the principle of gender equality. The Qur'an envisions the family as a space characterized by tranquility (*sakinah*), affection (*mawaddah*), and mercy (*rahmah*), values that can only flourish when relationships are based on mutual respect and cooperation. Contemporary realities demonstrate that both men and women contribute significantly to family development through education, economic participation, and social engagement. Auda (2008) emphasizes that the dynamic nature of *maqāṣid* requires Muslims to consider changing social contexts while remaining faithful to Islamic ethical principles. Therefore, gender equality can be viewed as a practical expression of the Qur'an's objective of enhancing family stability and collective welfare.

From a thematic perspective, the Qur'an's teachings on creation, moral responsibility, marital partnership, and social cooperation collectively point toward an egalitarian ethical framework. While certain verses were revealed within specific historical circumstances, their interpretation should not be confined exclusively to the

socio-cultural realities of the past. Instead, the universal objectives of justice, dignity, mercy, and public welfare should guide contemporary understandings of gender relations. Accordingly, gender equality represents not a departure from Islamic teachings but a realization of the Qur'an's broader moral vision. By integrating thematic exegesis with the maqāṣid approach, contemporary Muslim scholarship can develop interpretations that remain faithful to the Qur'an while addressing the challenges and opportunities of modern society (Auda, 2008; Rahman, 1982; Barlas, 2002).

### **Relevance of Thematic Exegesis for Domestic Relations in the 21st Century**

The twenty-first century has witnessed significant transformations in family structures, gender roles, educational opportunities, and economic participation. These developments have generated new challenges and opportunities for Muslim families, requiring interpretations of the Qur'an that are both faithful to Islamic teachings and responsive to contemporary realities. Traditional interpretations developed within specific historical and cultural contexts may not always adequately address the complexities of modern domestic life. Consequently, there is an increasing need for interpretative approaches that can bridge the gap between the timeless values of the Qur'an and the changing circumstances of contemporary society. In this regard, thematic exegesis (*tafsir mawḍū'ī*) provides an effective framework for understanding Qur'anic guidance on family relations in a holistic and contextual manner (Esack, 2005).

One of the major contributions of thematic exegesis is its ability to move beyond fragmented interpretations of individual verses. Rather than focusing on isolated texts, this method examines all relevant Qur'anic passages related to a particular issue and synthesizes them into a coherent conceptual framework. In the context of domestic relations, thematic exegesis reveals that the Qur'an consistently promotes values such as justice, compassion, consultation, cooperation, and mutual responsibility between spouses. By considering the broader message of the Qur'an, interpreters can avoid conclusions that appear to support inequality or domination while overlooking other verses that emphasize partnership and reciprocity (Al-Farmawi, 1997).

The growing participation of women in higher education, professional careers, and public leadership has also influenced contemporary discussions on family roles and responsibilities. In many Muslim societies, women contribute significantly to household

income, decision-making processes, and community development. These social changes challenge interpretations that restrict women's roles exclusively to domestic responsibilities. Through thematic exegesis, Qur'anic teachings can be understood in light of their ethical objectives rather than being confined to historical social arrangements. According to Badran (2009), contextual interpretations of Islamic texts enable Muslims to uphold religious principles while recognizing the evolving realities of gender relations in modern society.

Furthermore, the increasing global awareness of human rights, gender justice, and individual dignity has encouraged Muslim scholars to revisit traditional understandings of family relations. Thematic exegesis provides a valuable methodological tool for engaging with these contemporary concerns because it highlights the Qur'an's universal values rather than merely reproducing historical interpretations. By focusing on principles such as *'adl* (justice), *rahmah* (mercy), and *karāmah* (human dignity), scholars can develop interpretations that remain rooted in Islamic teachings while addressing modern expectations regarding equality and fairness. Esack (2005) argues that contextual interpretation is essential for ensuring that the Qur'an continues to function as a living source of guidance for contemporary Muslim communities.

Ultimately, the relevance of thematic exegesis in the twenty-first century lies in its capacity to harmonize textual fidelity with social relevance. The method enables scholars to identify the overarching moral vision of the Qur'an and apply it to contemporary domestic challenges without compromising its fundamental teachings. Through a thematic reading of verses related to marriage, family leadership, mutual rights, and gender relations, it becomes evident that the Qur'an advocates a model of family life based on justice, cooperation, and mutual respect. Therefore, thematic exegesis serves as a crucial approach for promoting equitable and harmonious domestic relations, ensuring that Qur'anic values continue to guide Muslim families in an era characterized by rapid social change and increasing demands for gender equality (Badran, 2009; Esack, 2005).

#### D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the thematic exegesis (*tafsir mawḍūʿī*) approach provides a comprehensive and contextual framework for understanding Qurʾanic teachings on domestic relations and gender equality. By examining relevant verses collectively rather than individually, the study reveals that the Qurʾan consistently promotes principles of justice (*ʿadl*), compassion (*raḥmah*), mutual cooperation, and human dignity (*karāmah*). The analysis of verses concerning creation, spiritual responsibility, marital partnership, and social interaction indicates that men and women are equal before God in terms of moral worth, religious obligations, and human dignity. Differences mentioned in certain Qurʾanic passages should therefore be understood within their historical and functional contexts rather than as evidence of inherent superiority or inferiority between genders.

Furthermore, the study finds that the Qurʾanic model of domestic relations is based on partnership rather than domination. Concepts such as *sakinah*, *mawaddah*, *raḥmah*, *muʿāsharah bi al-maʿrūf*, and *shūrā* collectively establish a framework of mutual rights and responsibilities between spouses. The reinterpretation of *qiwāmah* through thematic exegesis suggests that it should be understood as a responsibility aimed at ensuring family welfare rather than as a justification for gender hierarchy. This understanding aligns with the broader objectives of the Qurʾan and Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*), which prioritize justice, welfare, and the protection of human dignity.

In the context of the twenty-first century, thematic exegesis remains highly relevant for addressing contemporary challenges related to family life and gender relations. Social transformations, increased educational and economic participation of women, and growing awareness of human rights require interpretations of the Qurʾan that are both faithful to the text and responsive to contemporary realities. Through its holistic and contextual methodology, *tafsir mawḍūʿī* enables Muslims to uncover the universal ethical values of the Qurʾan and apply them to modern domestic life. Therefore, gender equality should not be viewed as contrary to Islamic teachings but rather as a manifestation of the Qurʾan's enduring commitment to justice, mutual respect, and the well-being of all members of society.

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