

Rethinking Quranic Interpretation: Insights from Al-Tabari's Classical Tafsir

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Abstract: This research explores the tafsir of Al-Tabari in a deep seat to critically situate his interpretations of Quranic-related verses that deal with gender in the context of early Islamic intellectual and socio-cultural thinking and to open Al-Tabari's exegesis, which fuses pluralistic and contextual approaches, thus capturing the diverse scholarly perspectives on gender in classical Islam. That is, while Al-Tabari's tafsir reflects traditional hierarchies of gender, it also opens up avenues of a pluralistic methodology for reinterpretation today. Hereby, integrating feminist and contemporary hermeneutical frameworks, this study suggests ways in which Quranic gender verses could be read differently in terms of justice. Hence, Al-Tabari echoes in history the early Islamic norms concerning gender at the same time serving as a jumping-off point for renewed engagement with gender justice in the current context of Quranic interpretation, bringing together classical scholarship and modern views.

Keywords: Al-Tabari's Tafsir, Gender and Quranic Interpretation, Islamic Exegesis, Feminist Hermeneutics, Contextual Interpretation

Introduction

Background of the Study

The Quran is the divine, unaltered, and eternal word of God in Islam, which has made it a subject of exegesis (tafsir) for over fourteen centuries. A vast exegetical work to explain the meanings of verses in the Quran regarding various theological, linguistic, legal, and social matters. One of the earliest examples of significant exegetical works would be Tafsir al-Tabari (The Comprehensive Commentary on the Quran) by al-Tabari (838-923 CE)- the work that founded an entire Islamic thinking and scholarship genre. Al-Tabari's tafsir is considered deep and methodical, with reports from different sources, including the Quran, Hadith, and reports from previous Islamic scholars. However, al-Tabari's treatment of gender within his interpretation of the Quran remains comparatively less explored. Therefore, this paper intends to

critically reassess al-Tabari's tafsir in terms of gender-the focus of the inquiry is how his particular interpretation of the gendered verses in the Quran both reflects and molds the gender dynamics of the times, as well as the significance he may hold in the current discussions on gender and Islam.

Gender has become quite an emergent issue in recent studies on Quran interpretation, especially with the ailing-for-better feminist reads of the Quran. Scholars such as Wadud (1999), Barlas (2019), and Aḥmad (1992) have rebutted the interpretation of the Holy Book by discussing that gender disparity in Islamic law and theology is the product of patriarchal readings rather than messages from the Quran itself. The argument appeals to the Quranic message on justice and equality while suggesting that earlier interpretations made by these were perhaps affected by the socio-political structures of their times and eventually camouflaged the Quran's message on equality. The other approach is yet to witness the re-evaluation of Quranic exegesis, which in this case is the classical tafsir under scrutiny, particularly that of al-Tabari. Here, it will be an interesting gazette on the foot progress in gender interpretations in Islamic thought.

Al-Tabari's Tafsir, among the various approaches to reading the Quran, is the most comprehensive and systematic, specifically addressing linguistic analysis, legal traditions, and context of revelation (Asbab Al-Auzul). In this context, his gendered interpretations reflect the patriarchal social structures that dominated the Islamic world in the ninth and tenth centuries. Like many of his contemporaries, al-Tabari's tafsir represents a highly analytic engagement with classical Arabic language and early Islamic tradition. Thus, his interpretations of Quranic verses that concern women's roles in family, society, and law appear to have been influenced by the patriarchal norms of his time. An example of this is how his interpretations of inheritance, marriage, and the roles of women in society retain, if not reinforce, the traditional gender hierarchies of the early Islamic period.

Thus, the name of al-tabari is also a multi-layered understanding that embraces a complex understanding of gender and introduces insight into the flexible and different forms of early Islamic thought. The use of multi-sources by al-Tabari concerning varied opinions from earlier scholars leads to some evidence as to how gender-based interpretation might have been contested

even in classical tafsir. For instance, al-Tabari often states diverse views in the course of controversial matters, with multiple views of a specific verse, so that his tafsir can be characterized both as the one done in and of its time, while also being the result of the intellectual pluralism that typified the early Muslim period. Such nuance might be significant in understanding how gender was understood within classical Islamic thought; firstly, it suggests that early Muslim scholars may not have shared a monolithic view on gender, and secondly, there might have been room for alternative, fairer readings of gendered verses.

It intends that the paper contributes to the general discussion by examining al-Tabari's tafsir from the gender perspective and reinterpretation of his work accordingly with present-day gender-sensitive hermeneutics. Examining al-Tabari's handling of gendered Quranic verses, this study aims to obtain a more complete, dynamic perspective on how gendered interpretations have evolved in Islamic thought and how these will generally be used for wider movements in favor of gender justice within the Muslim world.

Research Objective

To critically examine Al-Tabari's classical Tafsir with a focus on its interpretations of gender, evaluating its relevance and application to contemporary social, political, and religious challenges. The study seeks to identify areas where these classical insights align with or diverge from modern perspectives, contributing to a nuanced understanding of Islamic thought in the present context.

Research Significance

The study of al-Tabari's Tafsir provides a significant opportunity to reexamine the historical development of Quranic exegesis, underscoring its significance in contemporary Islamic perspectives. As a leading classical scholar, al-Tabari laid the foundation for contemporary Quranic interpretations by incorporating a wide range of historical, linguistic, and scriptural viewpoints. His Tafsir places a premium on an essential text for understanding the Quran's meanings, with its structured methodology and capability to incorporate various scholarly opinions providing a framework for interpreting the Quran across various historical and cultural contexts.

This exploration reassesses al-Tabari's exegetical strategies and examines their ongoing contribution to modern scholarship. His pluralistic approach incorporates multiple interpretations of Quranic verses is especially significant in today's intellectually diverse Islamic scholarly landscape. By exploring how these interpretations enrich contemporary discussions, this study seeks to bridge the gap between classical and modern Quranic exegesis. Al-Tabari's approach, highlights inclusivity and tolerance in interpretation, facilitating a more balanced and deeper understanding of the Quran that considers historical contexts and modern concerns. Finally, this exploitation underscores the enduring importance of al-Tabari's Tafsir in shaping the ongoing discourse around the Quran.

Research Questions

- How does Al Tabari's Classical Tafsir interpret gender in Islamic practices?
- In what ways does Al Tabari's classical Tafsir align or diverge from modern perspectives as a nuanced understanding of Islamic thought in the present context?

Research Methodology

This study titled 'Rethinking Quranic Interpretation: Insights from al-Tabari's Classical Tafsir' will bring the ramifications of gender to the forefront regarding al-Tabari's interpretation of the Quran. The analysis of how themes of gender are presented and interpreted in his Tafsir al-Tabari (Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Quran) addresses his scholarly contributions to gender standpoints on Quranic texts.

A comprehensive literature review encompasses previous studies on gender issues in Quranic interpretation, with specific stress on al-Tabari's tafsir as the basis for the text in Islamic exegesis. The chief focus of this study includes feminist interpretations of the Quran, contemporary Quranic hermeneutics, and the changing nature of gender discussions about Islam. This examination aims to place al-Tabari's tafsir within the larger context of current scholarly discussions on gender and Quranic understanding. Afterward, the study undertakes an in-depth qualitative content analysis of al-Tabari's Tafsir al-Tabari. The content analysis in this study is planned to read, understand, and interpret the meaning of data related to gender interpretation in al-Tabari's Tafsir (Cohen et al., 2017) This analysis identifies and analyzes how al-Tabari

approaches gender-related issues, such as male-female roles and their relationships, and gender legal and social jurisdictions issues like inheritance, marriage, and family.

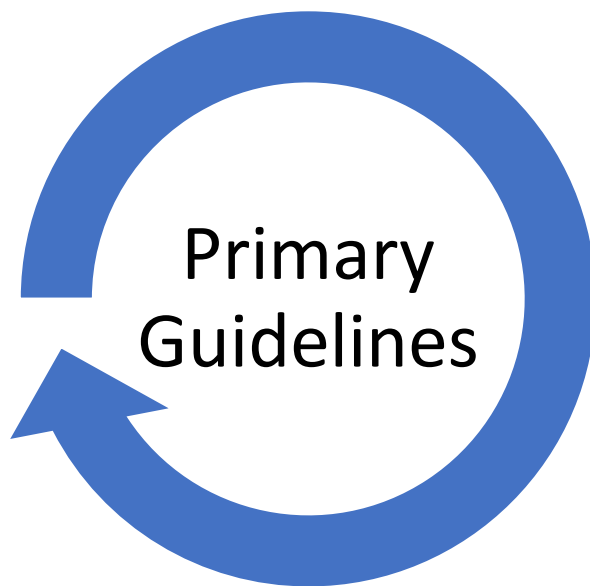
Data collection will chiefly rely on al-Tabari's Tafsir al-Tabari as the primary source, enhanced by scholarly articles, books, and monographs on Quranic studies, Islamic history, and gender studies as secondary sources. Data analysis utilizes qualitative methods, including critical reading and Qualitative content analysis, to identify themes, concepts, and content. Qualitative content analysis studies aim to systematically analyze the data and find its underlying interpretations (Schreier, 2012). The analysis sought to expose how al-Tabari interprets gendered verses, the means by which he interprets them, and the linguistic, theological, and socio-cultural influences behind that exegesis. Particular emphasis is laid on his use of classical Arabic and his engagement with early Islamic narratives (Hadith), past consensus (Ijma'), and the views of earlier scholars.

Literature Review

Historically, in the first century, the Quranic interpretation was subjected to the process of documenting its contents after being memorized. The well-known Islamic holy book at-Tafsir wa al-Mufasssirun al-Dhahabi (في التفسير والمفسرون الذهبي) argued that the second century of Islam carried forth the writings of Tafsir. It was recognized to begin at the end of the regime of the Umayyads (d.41/661-132/749), which is the starting time of the occupation of the empire of Abbasid (132/749) and exists till nowadays. Before this time, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) associates passed along exegesis, and the successors likewise traveled this path of the message (Rahman, 2009a). In addition, in the second century, the exegesis was collected along with the Hadith; some verses were joint with the Hadith and spread by scholars of Hadith like Shu‘bah b. al-Hajjaj (d.160/776), Yazid b. Harun al-Salami (d.117/735), Waki‘ b. al-Jarrah (d.197/812), Sufyan al-Thawri (d.161/777), ‘Ubadah al-Basri (d.205/820), Sufyan b. ‘Uyainah (d.198/813), Adam b. Abi Iyas (d.220/835), Ruh b. ‘Abd b. Humaid (d.249/863), and Abd al-Razzaq al-San‘ani (d.211/826). In al-Itqon, Imam as-Suyuti (d.911/1506) mentioned this viewpoint (Rahman, 2009a).

The Companions were the first experts on Qur'anic interpretation because of their deep knowledge and intimate connection with the Prophet Muhammad (SAW). For instance, Ibn Abbas, also known as the Interpreter of the holy Qur'an (Tarjuman al-Qur'an) (ترجمان القرآن), was especially well-known for his profound understanding and perceptions, which he credited to the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) special intercession (Ibn Kathir, 2003), This initial custom of interpretation laid the foundation for later exegetic works and ensured that the Qur'anic message was conserved with validity and clarity.

According to Zahra, (2024), the Holy Quran is a wealth of knowledge. It is not in the volume of one person to command and have a grasp of all of its characteristics and interpret all its subjects Specifically and Completely. Moreover, it has been permitted to interpret it, but rules have been fixed for its interpretation and one cannot violate these instructions during its interpretation (Zahra, 2024). Many books have been written on the Principles of Quranic interpretation and hundreds of researchers have struggled to interpret it.



- The Holy Quran's Interpretation via Quranic Verses
- Interpretation of the holy Quran based on the remarks of the Prophet Muhammad's companions (SAW)
- The Holy Quran's Interpretation via Hadith
- Interpretation of the Sacred Quran via Knowledgeable Background
- Interpretation of the Sacred Quran via Spiritual Viewpoint
- Interpretation of the Sacred Quran via Knowledgeable Background

For all these types of Holy Quran Interpretations, the Tafsir (exegete) is mandatory to attain the conventional wisdom, including the holy Quran, Hadith, traditions of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), their companions, all the branches of information mentioned,

as obligatory to obtain for an exegete, in the conventional books on ‘Values of the holy Quran Interpretation (Zahra, 2024).

Two groups of Ash'arism and Salafism say that their understanding follows the considerate of the Salaf generation; they are the Sahabah (Companions) and Tabi'in, or those who lived in the first three centuries of Islam. Salafism group claims that their knowledge is on the Salaf generation. The most well-known figure, Shaykh I-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, estimates to Rabi' and Malik, that Istiwa is a known verse, questioning it is not known, trusting in it is compulsory, and questioning how Istiwa is Bid'ah (Dozan, 2020). The anthropomorphism verses in the Salaf, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, require Muslims to acknowledge all of Allah's characteristics without doubt, let alone perform Ta'wil. There are several current academic tendencies for placing the Qur'ānic message in context. The more well-known modernistic approaches to Qur'ānic interpretation include feminist, textualist, contextualist, modernist, socio-political, and scientific methods (Ali, 2018).

Classical tafsir themes, tafsir bi al-ra'y (التفسير بالرأي), and Tafsir bi al-Mathur (tradition-based interpretation) are well-documented in historical standards of Qur'ānic exegesis. Nevertheless, innovation, with its complex socio-economic, political, religious, and cultural advances, presents exclusive challenges to Muffassirun (المفسرون) to contextualize the Qur'ānic message and offer advice to contemporary Muslims and their worldview. Complicated current Islamic thought is a selection of philosophies and ideologies that resulted from the dominant various sociocultural, geopolitical, and financial atmospheres (Ali, 2018).

Classical Tafasir (interpretations) started at the beginning of the fourth century or the tenth century AD. Considering that there are several interpretations included in classical periodization, which include Tafsīr Al-Thabarī, Tafsīr Jalalain, Tafsīr Ibnu Katsīr, Tafsīr Al-Qurthubī, Tafsīr Tafsīr Al-Kabīr, and Al-Kasyāf. This selection was created extra on its extensive influence among Muslims (Zaenuri, 2023). Although the interpretations of al-Tabarī, Ibn Katsīr, and Al-Qurthubī represent the Sunni style. Tafsir Al-Kasyāf represents the Mu'tazilah style, and Tafsir Mafātiḥ al-Ghaib represents the style of interpretation with numerous methods in it.

The classical method of interpreting the sacred Qur'an, which trusted narrations to represent its meaning, later became recognized as the *riwāyah* (الرواية) interpretation. The 'dirāyah science' (الدراية) was then used to describe the study of the narrators' credibility. The boundaries of what qualifies as a historical interpretation are not clear-cut. Other scholars such as Al-Dzhabī had broader restrictions that included the reports of the *tabi'īn* (التابعين) as part of the historical interpretation, even though the *tābi'īns* (التابعين) did not immediately accept the explanation or understanding of the meaning of the holy Qur'an from the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), Al-Zarqānī (in Gusmian) limited it to three sources of explanation: the holy Qur'an, the Prophet's Sunnah, and the (Companions) (Moulaei & Haghdooost, 2023).

Among the opinions of classical interpretation that are examined conservatively, for instance, the view of Ibn Katsīr when interpreting verses of the holy Qur'an Surah al-Baqarah verse 256.

“ There is no compulsion to (enter) religion (Islam); Verily, the true path has become clear from the misguided path. Therefore, whoever disobeys tagūt and believes in Allah, then indeed he has held on to a very strong knot that will not break. And Allah is All-Hearing, Knowing .”(QS. 2: 256)

In describing the above verse, Ibn Katsīr cites the history of Ibn Jarīr al-Thabarī from Ibn Abbās that this verse anxieties a woman who is struggling to have kids. Thus, she promises that if she is fortunate with kids, she will make her a Jew. "We do not preach our children," was the statement made by the Ansar children when the Bani Nādhir were expelled. The above-mentioned verse then appeared in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 256 of the holy Qur'an (Zaenuri, 2023a).

In the same vein, Ibn Katsīr continued by citing the words of other academics who said that the verse had been in the text (deleted) with the war (*qitāl*) verse, then we are appreciative of inviting people to hold straight Islam. This verse defines coercion as the requirement that someone is killed if they reject the invitation and refuse to pay the *Jizyah* (Zaenuri, 2023a).

Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (أَبُو جَعْفَرٍ مُحَمَّدَ بْنَ جَرِيرِ بْنِ يَزِيدِ الطَّبْرِيِّ) (224–225/839–310/923) was among the greatest productive and significant scholars of the initial

Abbasid period, who established his legal method, 'al-Madhab al-Jarīrī', named after his father. The most well-known and frequently consulted of al-Ṭabarī's surviving writings is *Jāmi' al-bayān*, together with his history *Ta' rīkh al-rusul Wa'l-mulūk* (Ṭabarī, 2017).

The most well-known contributions to the fields of Qur'anic exegesis, Hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, and Islamic history are those made by Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, a prominent scholar, historian, and commentator of the holy Qur'an from Persia (Iran), who wrote all of his works in Arabic even after his death (Yaqut Hamawi, 1957). Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, also known as Abu Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir Ibn Yazid Ibn Kathir Ibn Ghalib al-Tabari (Yaqut, n.d.), was born in 'Amul (Islamiyah, n.d.), the provincial capital of Tabaristan in Iran, perhaps around the end of 224 A.H. or the start of 225 A.H (Yaqut Hamawi, 1957).

The works of renowned Muslim philosopher, historian, and Qur'anic exegete Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī had a significant and long-lasting impact on Islamic philosophy. Al-Ṭabarī, who was born in Āmol, in the province of Ṭabaristān, was well-known for his comprehensive understanding of a wide range of Islamic studies, including hadith, history, and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh). Al-Ṭabarī was a principal of the Shafī'i school of jurisprudence and eventually developed his unique interpretation of Islamic law, however, it didn't last for very long after his passing (Rosenthal & Dodge, 1971; Tillschneider, 2008). His knowledgeable legacy is best recognized via two monumental works: The first one is, *Tafsir al-Ṭabarī* (*Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*), and the second one is, *Tārīkh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk* (تاريخ الرسول والملوك). Muslim historiography views al-Tabari's *Tarikh* as a universal or world history, a style of historical writing that al-Tabari himself popularized and that appears to have originated in the Islamic world around the end of the third century (Hodgson, 2022).

The history book of al-Tabari is confidential as a supporter of the Medina school, which pays a lot of consideration to *sirah Nabawiyyah* (سيرة النبوية) and *al-Maghazi* (المغازي) based on sanad. Imam Al-Tabari tried to compile his book of history named *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* (تاريخ الرسول والملوك) based on a series of events that were ordered based on the year of its existence, from Hijrah to 302 H/914 AD. The historical worth of this book lies in the order (periodization) of years, it makes it easier for scholars or readers to see the journey that Muslims

have gone through in the advance of their evolution and politics across time (Frolow, 1997). *Tarikh al Rusul Wa al-Muluk*, which is generally known as *Tarikh al-Tabari*, is the important effort of al-Tabari on Islamic history. Perhaps the best-known story about al-Tabari, and one which exemplifies his energy as a scholar, is that connecting to his writing of this *Tarikh* (Hodgson, 2022).

In Islamic history, Al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsir* is regarded as one of the most thorough and authoritative exegeses of the holy Qur'an. It blends thorough consideration of spread reports {*riwāyah* (رواية)} with logical analysis {*dirāyah* (دراية)}, creating a foundation of classical *tafsir*. His work emphasizes strict source authentication and strongly emphasizes prophetic traditions, the views of the Companions (*Sahabah*) and Successors (*Tabi'un*), and linguistic discoveries. Al-Ṭabarī also offered to resolve explanatory ambiguities and offered widespread commentary on different interpretations of crucial verses. *Tafsir al-Ṭabarī* not only illuminates the Qur'anic manuscript but likewise serves as a dynamic source of primary Islamic exegetical traditions, including now-lost interpretations by previous researchers (Goldziher, 2021; Tillschneider, 2021)

Tafsir al-Ṭabarī (تفسير الطبري), officially named *Jāmi' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (جامع البيان عن تأويل القرآن), is one of the initial and greatest significant Qur'anic exegeses. It systematically discusses each verse of the holy Qur'an in 30 chapters in contemporary editions, providing a variety of interpretations and supporting evidence from reliable sources (Yaqut Hamawi, 1957). Al-Ṭabarī offers contextual and literal meanings, addressing linguistic nuances, legal ramifications, and religious disputes. His method blends comprehensive narrative accounts of historical events mentioned in the sacred Qur'an with clarifications grounded in Islamic doctrine. One of *Tafsir al-Ṭabarī*'s distinguishing characteristics is its methodology; it offers contrasting interpretations from a range of sources before coming to al-Ṭabarī's preferred understanding, which is frequently supported by strong arguments. Later exegetes like Ibn Kathīr and al-Qurṭubī have benefited greatly from his work and regularly cite or expand upon his conclusions (Rahman, 2009b; Tillschneider, 2008).

The stories of the Islamic prophet Muhammad have been cited by Tabari, along with companions (*sahabah*) and *Tabi'in* (التابعين) commentary as needed. In addition to providing the

narration chain for the reports that are part of the commentary, Al-Tabari occasionally elaborates on the reliability of the narrators (Frye, 1975). His rejection of the same historical materials he had previously utilized for his historical works is a noteworthy illustration of how narratives are chosen depending on their veracity.

Al-Thabarī, in interpreting the surah Al-Baqarah verse 256, claims that the interpreters have diverse views about the meaning of the verse. According to others, this verse refers to a group of Ansar people who have Christian or Jewish offspring. When Islam arrived, they attempted to convert him to Islam. The verse then came down, Al-Tabarī likewise describes several 22 narrations in this regard. According to Al-Tabarī, the greatest reasonable opinion is that there is no compulsion to enter Islam for the People of the Zoroastrians and Book who have selected a religion other than Islam. As part of their responsibilities as regional residents, they are still subject to taxes, nonetheless (Moulaei & Haghdoost, 2023).

Al-Tabari, a prominent Islamic historian, exegete, and jurist, passed away on the 28th of Shawwal, 310 A.H. (923 CE) in Baghdad (Hodgson, 1974). His death was controversial despite his enormous contributions to Islamic study, which reflected the long-standing conflicts within the Abbasid Empire's Islamic jurisprudential circles. Al-Tabari is said to have been buried in his own house because of the controversy surrounding his book *Ikhtilaf al-Fuqaha* (Disagreement Among the Jurists), in which he painstakingly recorded the opinions of prominent jurists but purposefully left out Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the founder of the Hanbali school of thought (Melchert, 2024). Al Tabari's failure to acknowledge Ibn Hanbal as a jurist in the technical sense infuriated Hanbali adherents, who saw this as a slight to their esteemed leader (McAuliffe, 2006). The tension intensified to such an amount that public complaints erupted, and Al-Tabari's protection was endangered. This incident illustrates the intense sectarian rivalries and the highly charged environment of scholarly arguments throughout his time. The choice to bury him at home instead of at a public cemetery highlights how these disputes affect society (McAuliffe, 2006). Al Tabari's life and the conditions of his death highlight the challenges handled by scholars in balancing knowledgeable freedom with societal and sectarian pressures (Bhat, 2022).

Imam al-Tabari was a distinguished historian and an exceptional scholar of Islam. Like the majority of scholarly persons in his era, al-Tabari studied a wide range of topics, some of which he wrote about. Al-Tabari appreciated a standing as an authority in fields like Qur'anic interpretation, Fiqh, Hadith, philology, history, syntax, grammar, and poetry, all being independent subjects, and knowledge of which was considered vital before a man. Other subjects, like mathematics, astrology, and medicine, were regarded as essential for a well-rounded instruction. In addition to his outstanding work, *Tarikh al-Tabari*, on Islamic history, which deals with the rise and fall of various Muslim sects, Al-Tabari produced prestigious works on nearly every facet of Islam and Islamic themes. This work has become a crucial source of information for many generations of historians, particularly regarding Islamic history and civilization (Bhat, 2022).

The method interpretations initiated are affected by numerous issues, such as the interpreter's interests, level of comprehension, and cultural background. *Tafsir Al-Tabari* and other literalist interpretations emerged during the classical period, which started in the fourth century when interpretation was primarily passed down orally. But over time, interpretation has changed through a dialectical process with other academic fields, including literature, history, theology, and fiqh. As a result, a scientific method of interpretation has emerged (Zaenuri, 2023a).

Al-Tabari's *Jami' al-Bayan Tafsir*'s techniques and patterns demonstrate his thorough and methodical approach to Quranic interpretation. Al-Tabari established a standard for traditional Quranic exegesis by fusing imparted knowledge with linguistic accuracy, critical thinking, and contextual analysis. *Al-Tabari Tafsir* is still an essential tool for comprehending the holy Quran and is used as a template by academics who want to strike a balance between tradition and critical thinking.

Findings

Gender

Muslims consider the Quran to be the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and is the main holy literature in Islam. On the other hand, the Hadith is a collection of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his companions' sayings and deeds. These texts work together to provide the foundation for understanding the Islamic viewpoint on diversity issues, including gender roles and equality. In Islam, men and women are considered equal in their intrinsic worth and spiritual value before Allah SWT:

"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so - for them, Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward" (33:35).

This verse emphasizes that equally men and women who fulfill their religious obligations will receive equal rewards from Allah (SWT).

On the other hand, Allah (SWT) says, In Surah An-Nisa (4:34), "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has made one of them excel over the other." This verse is frequently quoted while discussing gender issues. The Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) sayings and deeds are collected in the Hadith, which equally offers insights into gender relations. Numerous facets of social life, including marriage, families, and interactions between men and women, are covered in hadiths. Instances include the Prophet Muhammad allegedly saying, *"The best among you are those who are best to their wives"* (Sunan Ibn Majah) (Ismail et al., 2024a).

Islam significantly influences gender-related ideas and practices, particularly through the Holy Quran and Hadith, the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) ((Esposito, 2011). It is essential to highlight, however, that different scholars and individuals may interpret religious texts differently (Esposito, 2011). Muslims consider the Holy Quran to be the word of Allah (SWT) as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and regard it as the primary holy

literature of Islam (Denny, 2015). Even though it does not specify gender roles explicitly, the Holy Quran provides universal guidance on family affairs, societal issues, and interactions between men and women. The Holy Quran strongly emphasizes the value of respect and modesty in interpersonal interactions (Esposito, 2011).

The Holy Qur'an and Hadith may be interpreted differently regarding social and legal issues. Different interpretations and practices can be found which are affected by cultural, socioeconomic, and historical elements. While gender parity is stressed throughout the Holy Quran and Hadith there are social differences in how these concepts are applied and understood. Political contexts, patriarchal structures, cultural and historical contexts, and patriarchal systems can all affect how Islamic teachings on gender equality are interpreted and applied (Ismail *et al.*, 2024a).

The conceptual distinction between sex and gender is one of the most crucial things to comprehend from a gender perspective. Sex is said to be the biological division between men and women (Lehning, 1995), which represents something specified through essential and unchangeable. Therefore, Biological features and the fact that women possess the capacity for childbirth are features of the female gender. Thus, the argument is made that regardless of how a female is socialized, she will transmit these characteristics. Gender, from another perspective, is “a spiritual and social structure, including forbidden, agreed, and recommended activities linking to women or men” (Badran, 2008).

The study of gender characters has been a critical theme in gender and feminist models for centuries. Some feminists claim that the persistence of fixed and individual gender roles is the actual reason for men's authority in humanity. However, others propose, that individual gender roles do not essentially command disparity if cultural norms support a “distinct but equivalent” individuality. From a historical perspective, nevertheless, humanities have been unable to support this value of parity (Young, 2014). Once a particular sex characterizes itself in opposition to the other, it starts to notify the influence system. If one gender asserts its superiority, it should thus describe the other gender as inferior. If one gender asserts its strength, it must accordingly define the other gender as weak.

The male authority (patriarchal) context is significant to reference in examining historical texts, and it is likewise valuable in understanding the power structure of the humanity in which such writings are created. Historically, the male-controlled philosophical structure knows the social interaction between males and females. Although this structure has advanced in several forms, The foundational quality of the defining feature is that men are assigned a central position of power and authority to females. Additional patriarchy “suggests that males hold influence in all the significant organizations of humanity and that females are barred from access to such power.” (Lerner, 1986).

The women's creation is under continuous argument, not only between Islamic researchers. Moreover, within feminist perspectives both from the West and Muslims. This argument originates from the divergent opinions of the previous and current scholars in interpreting the texts from the Quran and the Hadiths on the creation of humans especially Eve as the first female created by Allah SWT. Most of the Mufassirun and scholars of Hadith in the earlier eras led the way in the opinion that the origin of humans, Eve, originated from Adam's A.S rib. The feminists observed this opinion as critical to females. The modern Mufassirun and Muhaddithun are, however, of differing views whereby Eve's formation was equivalent to that of Adam's A.S; thus, the representative that the formation of Eve did not create from Adam A.S (Shamsudin & Baharudin, 2018).

Al-Tabari's Tafsir is one of the greatest complete and powerful works of Qur'anic exegesis. About gender, Al-Tabari offers arguments ingrained in the holy Qur'an and Hadith, presenting insights into the religious, theological, and communal characters of males and females. Al-Tabari's explanations frequently reflect both the fairness-oriented principles of Islam and the patriarchal standards of his ancient framework. Al-Tabari highlights the public origin of males and females in his interpretation of (Surah 4:1):

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَجِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا. [Surat An-Nisa 1].

Meaning:

O men! Fear your Lord Who created you from a single being and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread many men and women.1 Fear Allah in Whose name you plead for rights, and heed the ties of kinship. Surely, Allah is ever watchful over you. (Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 1).

which states that all individuals were formed from a single soul {Nafs Wahida (نفس واحدة)}. Al-Tabari claims that this indicates the characteristic parity of women and men regarding their formation and religious essence. He writes, “Allah SWT formed both genders from the same essence, upholding their interconnection and joint dependency” (Al-Tabari, 1987). This explanation highlights the scriptural parity of males and females despite their different societal roles.

Although highlighting religious equivalence, Al-Tabari likewise recognizes the Qur'anic description of gender roles within a patriarchal context. In Al-Tabari's comment on Surah Al Baqarah 2:228, which debates males as the “guardians and maintainers” of females (Al-Rijal Qawwamuna Ala al-Nisa), Al-Tabari claims that males' power stems from their economic accountabilities and physical strength. He describes, “The Qur'an assigns men the role of guardianship, not as a privilege, but as a responsibility tied to their societal and familial duties” (Al-Tabari, 1987). This indicates a gender-oriented task distribution, ingrained in the historical framework of the initial Islamic society.

In his interpretation of Surah 33:35, which enumerates the attributes of believing men and women, Al-Tabari likewise emphasizes the spiritual equality of males and females. “The rewards that God promises are based on piety and righteous actions, regardless of gender,” (Al-Tabari, 1987). This interpretation conforms with the Qur'anic opinion that religious responsibility and rewards in the hereafter life are not influenced by one's gender but by one's faith and deeds. Al-Tabari commented on Surah 24:31, which debates the obligation for females to dress modestly. He claims, “The knowledge for modesty is not only for females' advantage but likewise for maintaining the moral fabric of the society”.

Surah An-Nisa's verses 1 and 34 have been central to discussions on gender. The verses are below:

(الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّاتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ^طفَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ^لإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا)

[34: النساء].

Meaning:

“Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence, what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand”. [Surah An-Nisa;34].

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَجِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ^طوَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ^لإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا. [1] [Surat An-Nisa]

Meaning:

“O humanity! Be mindful of your Lord, Who created you from a single soul, and it, He created its mate, and through both, He spread countless men and women. And be mindful of Allah in Whose Name you appeal to one another—and ‘honor’ family ties. Surely Allah is ever Watchful over you”.

According to the interpretations of Imam al-Ṭabarī and Imam al-Rāzī, these verses portray females in an inferior role, both in domestic and non-domestic contexts. This interpretation is regarded as partial since it fails to capture the spirit of the holy Qur'an. Consequently, more research is required to uncover the Qur'an's intended perspective on gender in these verses. The al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī's interpretations strengthen man's lead in patriarchal custom, asserting that Eve originated from Adam's rib and that the husband holds ultimate

authority over the wife. Nevertheless, modern scholars claim that the interpretation of "Nafs" (نفس) as representative of the unity of civilization without any association with gender dominance, stresses parity in Islam. The holy Qur'an supports equity in gender dynamics, Replacing traditional interpretations with modern perspectives in today's framework. Regarding verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa, al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī interpreted males as the legitimate leaders over their wives because of the benefits Allah SWT has bestowed upon them, with financial obligation serving as the cornerstone of their power. However, modern tafsir scholars reject this perspective, interpreting Qiwāmah (قوامه) as communal accountability regardless of gender issues, highlighting shared responsibilities within the household and gender equivalence in Islam. This demonstrates attempts to interpret verses from the holy Quran inclusively and contextually, upholding the values of justice and equivalence (Ismail *et al.*, 2024a).

Several observe the argument on gender within the framework of Islam as the earliest problem that has reemerged in modern eras. For justificatory groups, gender problems are often regarded as a Western concept, unsuitable for acceptance in Islam. They claim that Islam had already recognized females' rights and obligations far earlier than the West presented gender equivalence. While this viewpoint might initially appear accurate, historical evidence reveals that Islam is a faith that powerfully discards inequality, particularly towards women. Upon its arrival in the Arabian Peninsula, Islam encountered a society deeply rooted in patriarchy, where females found limited chances for self-realization. Islam then reshaped Arab humanity's societal system to foster greater humanity and justice (Fakih, 2000).

Furthermore, to acknowledge how gender variances play a role in gender inequality, it is significant to explore the different expressions of this inequality that often happen. For instance, marginalization, in cases where particular people or groups are financially excluded; relegation, which proposes that such people or groups are diplomatically unimportant. The creation of assumptions that generate negative observations or gendered classifications, in conjunction with the prevalence of strength and the unequal and prolonged work problems often borne by one gender (Fakih, 2008).

Earlier interpretations of the holy Qur'an by Imam al-Ṭabarī and Imam al-Rāzī incline to strengthen man's dominance. Their explanation (interpretation) of Surah An-Nisa's 1 and 34 verses establishes male superiority over women within the societal hierarchy. These explanations (interpretations) assert that Eve was formed from Adam's rib and declare the definite leadership of males over females. Nevertheless, modern research discloses that the holy Qur'an advocates for justice on gender problems, and gender-discriminatory interpretations are unrelated in today's framework. Interpretation based on the context of spiritual texts must establish the value of tauhid (التوحيد) as the basis, identifying equivalence and Adl (Justice) as universal ethical principles in Islam. Reading spiritual texts through a contextual perspective can discourse contemporary problems, including gender discrimination. Contemporary interpretations should answer to the challenges of the times and acclimate to cultural, societal, and scientific advances (Mustabsyirah et al., 2009).

Discussion

The Interpretation of Surah An-Nisa' Verses 1 and 34 According to al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī
Surah An-Nisa' Verse 1 Regarding the Formation of Eve, Allah SWT says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۗ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ رَقِيبًا [Surat An Nisa 1]

Meaning:

“O humanity! Be mindful of your Lord Who created you from a single soul, and it, He created its mate, and through both, He spread countless men and women. And be mindful of Allah in Whose Name you appeal to one another—and 'honor' family ties. Surely Allah is ever Watchful over you”.

In interpreting the phrase "Min Nafsin Wāhidah" (مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ) means from one soul, Al-Ṭabarī clearly explains, that (والذي خلقكم من نفس واحدة، يعنى: من آدم) Adam to stating as it understands explicitly additional on this interpretation by supporting it with several hadith and poetic terms to reinforce his opinion (Al-Tabari, 1987). The Min Nafs Wahidah (مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ) statement, which the early Mufasssirun understood as an indication of Adam and Eve, and Eve's

creation from Adam opposes the interpretation of contemporary scholars who read its meaning as Eve being created out of the same material as Adam A.S (Shamsudin & Baharudin, 2018).

قال أبو جعفر: يعنى بقول الله سبحانه وتعالى: (وخلق منها زوجها وخلق من النفس الواحدة زوجها) يعنى: و الزوج الثانى لها. وهو فيما قال أهل التاويل، امرأتها حواء.

Imam al-Ṭabarī describes that in Allah's words *Wa Khalaqa Minha Zawjaha*, (وخلق منها) "and from it, He formed its mate", the meaning is that Allah SWT created Eve from the same soul, which is Prophet Adam A.S. The term *Al-Zauj* (الزوج) raises to the second partner of that same soul, in this case, Eve. Several narrations explain that Eve was created from the rib of Prophet Adam A.S. Muhammad bin Amr, through Abu Ashim from Isa, who heard from Ibn Abi Najih through Mujahid, declared that Eve was formed from Adam's rib even though he was asleep after he woke up, Adam mentioned to her as his wife in the Nibti language. Bisyr bin Mu'adz, through Yazid and Sa'id from Qatadah, and Musa bin Harun, through Amr bin Hammad and Asbath from As-Suddi, likewise stated similar reports. Ibn Humaid, through Salamah from Ibn Ishaq and Abdullah bin Abbas, added that Eve was formed from Adam's left rib. Muhammad bin Al Husain, through Ahmad bin Mufaḍḍal and Asbat from As-Suddi, confirmed that Eve was created from Adam's left rib (Al-Ṭabarī, 1999, p. 515) cited in (Ismail et al., 2024).

Regarding this matter, al-Rāzī, in the interpretation, of this verse, upholds that scholars universally agree that the term "one soul" in this framework raises to Prophet Adam (A.S). However, the word "soul" highlights singular nature. A similar use of the word "soul" can be found in another verse, such as Allah's words: *"Did you kill an innocent soul without [a right] cause?"* (Surah Al-Kahfi: 74). To provide evidence for his argument, al-Rāzī includes a poem: *"Your father was a caliph, born of a caliph, and now you are a caliph this completes the ideal lineage"* (Al-Rāzī, 1981, p. 163) which cited in (Ismail et al., 2024).

In the Sahih al-Bukhari, this hadith narrated by Abu Hurayrah is mentioned in three places. in the Kitab al-Ahadith al-Anbiya' found in the chapter of the creation of Adam and his offsprings, and two hadiths in the kitab of al-Nikah in the chapter of doing good towards women.

The Matan of the hadith is as follows:

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: «اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا؛ فَإِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلْعٍ، وَإِنَّ أَعْوَجَ مَا فِي الضِّلْعِ أُعْلَاهُ، فَإِنْ ذَهَبَتْ نُقْمُهُ كَسَرَتْهُ، وَإِنْ تَرَكَتَهُ، لَمْ يَزَلْ أَعْوَجَ، فَاسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ».

Meaning:

Narrated by Abu Hurayrah, Rasulallah صلى الله عليه وسلم said: Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion, so, if you should try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked. So, treat women nicely.

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه قال: قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: «المرأة كالضلع إن أقمتها كسرتنها، وإن استمتعت بها، استمتعت وفيها عوج».

Meaning:

Narrated Abu Hurayrah, Rasulallah صلى الله عليه وسلم said, "The woman is like a rib, if you try to straighten her, she will break. So, if you want to get benefit from her, do so while she still has some crookedness.

Surah An-Nisa's Verse 34 regarding male leadership over Females

Allah says:

(الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَانِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَاللَّاتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۚ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا). [النساء: 34].

Meaning:

"Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence, what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance - [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand". (Q.S. An-Nisa' [4]: 34).

Imam al-Ṭabarī describes that the expression al-Rijālu Qawwamun 'Alā al-Nisā' الرجال قوامون على النساء ("Males are the guardians and upholders of females") means that males are accountable for educating and supervising their wives in gratifying their responsibilities toward Allah SWT and their husbands. This is attributed to the benefits Allah SWT has given males, such as the accountability to offer a dowry, economic backing, and fulfill their wives' needs. Consequently, males are selected as leaders over their wives and are to execute the responsibilities that Allah SWT has ordained (Al-Ṭabarī, 1999b, p. 290) cited in (Ismail et al., 2024).

Al-Rāzī starts his commentary on verse 34 of Surah An-Nisa' by describing how he advances his equalitarian viewpoint (Ismail et al., 2024). He remarks that when Allah says, "*And do not wish for that by which Allah has made some of you exceed others*" (Surah An-Nisa': 32), he mentions females objecting that males obtain a larger part of the inheritance. The verse describes that males' larger inheritance is due to their monetary accountabilities toward females. Allah SWT obligates men to offer dowries and economic provisions for their wives, therefore, the privileges extended to one side are counterbalanced by those given to the other. The word Qawwām means full obligation, such as protecting the interests of the spouse. Ibn Abbas describes that the verse discourses Sa'ad bin al-Rabi', who struck his wife, indicating the control and obligation men hold over women. Prophet Muhammad SAW confirmed that Allah SWT has given males power over females, terminating retaliation as a form of punishment, and giving males important effect in family matters due to the exact abilities Allah SWT has given them (Ismail et al., 2024).

The explanation of verse 1 of Surah An-Nisa' by al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī highlights that Eve was formed from Adam's left rib, with her formation consequential from Adam's rib. This explanation suggests the appearance of a negative stigma that seats males in a greater position related to females, supporting a patriarchal perception that marginalizes females' roles in several features of life. Contemporary Tafsir scholars have handled the effects of this explanation. They use a contextual method to reinterpret the holy Qur'an to achieve greater fairness for females (Ismail et al., 2024).

The explanation (interpretations) of Imam al-Ṭabarī and Imam al-Rāzī, which display a leaning toward gender partiality, continue to have an impact on Islamic scholarly custom, bringing opinions that remain related today. Cultural and intellectual environments, alongside their particular experiences in chasing knowledge, powerfully influenced their method. This is meaningful to the contemporary psychological model of the butterfly consequence (Swallow, 2023), which describes how small deeds can have important influences in the future, both positive and negative. In the framework of spiritual interpretation, this highlights the significance of re-examining interpretations connected to gender, particularly in the context of crucial verses such as An-Nisa's verses 1 and 34.

These two verses affirm equivalence in Islam as esteem for the same human self-respect for equally males and females, however with diverse characters in life. The holy Qur'an inspires joint respect, assistance, and fulfilling obligations with equality and piety to Allah SWT. In Islam, fairness is not about assuming matching characters; nevertheless, regarding recognizing existing differences and giving each separate stable rights and accountabilities in alignment with the knowledge and fairness of the faith (Ismail *et al.*, 2024).

Conclusion

Al-Tabari's tafsir remains a cornerstone of Islamic scholars, reflecting its time's intellectual depth and patriarchal effects. This study critically re-evaluates his interpretations of gender verses, situating them within initial Islamic thought's wider historical, philological, and socio-cultural frameworks. Al-Tabari's nuanced methodology, marked by pluralistic and contextual approaches, underscores the diversity of scholarly opinion on gender in classical Islam, challenging the notion of fixed, monolithic interpretations.

The findings highlight how al-Tabari's exegesis reinforces traditional gender hierarchies while also, offering interpretive pluralism that invites modern re-engagement. By incorporating feminist and contemporary hermeneutical insights, this study opens pathways for alternative, justice-oriented readings of gender Quranic verses. Ultimately, al-Tabari's work serves as both a

reflection of early Islamic gender norms and a resource for ongoing discussions on gender justice in Quranic interpretation, bridging classical scholarship with modern perspectives.

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