



## RIFFAT HASAN AND THE QUEST FOR GENDER JUSTICE IN ISLAM

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**Abstract:** This article critically examines the concept of Qur'anic feminism through the lens of Riffat Hasan's views on gender equality. The discussion focuses on three key areas: first, Hasan's methodological approach to interpreting verses related to feminism; second, examples of his interpretation of these verses; and third, a critique of his interpretive methodology. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach rooted in library research, this study draws on various texts, manuscripts, and literature relevant to the topic. The findings reveal that: (1) Riffat Hasan adopts an empirical and idea-normative approach to interpret verses, aiming to challenge conventional readings; (2) Hasan's interpretation of the term *Qanwamun* in Surah al-Nisa' 4:34 suggests that the role of financial provider is not limited to men, thereby promoting a more equitable view of gender roles; and (3) Hasan's interpretations have been critiqued for a lack of traditional exegetical training, leading his approach to sometimes be seen as overly textual and lacking depth in interpretive method. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender equality within Islamic thought by analyzing Hasan's work and its implications for modern interpretations of gender roles in the Qur'an.

**Keywords:** Qur'anic Feminism, Critical Study, Gender Equality, Riffat Hasan, Interpretation Methodology

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**Article History:** Received: October 21, 2025, Revised: December 06, 2025, Accepted: December 11 2025, Published: December 31 2025.

### INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an provides opportunities for humans to discuss the topic of feminine discourse in its verses and letters. such as discussing feminist verses, related to cases of gender equality. Feminism in the popular Indonesian dictionary is a movement related to womanhood, or things related to the role of women.<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an, as Islam's central text, invites deep reflection on diverse human concerns, including the roles and rights of women within the religious and social

<sup>1</sup> Pius A Partanto Dan Dahlan Al- Barry, *Kamus Ilmiah Populer*, (Yogyakarta, Arkola, 2001), 174.

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framework. Feminism, as understood in the Indonesian popular lexicon, emphasizes advocacy for women's rights and equality across various domains, including family, politics, culture, and social structures. This understanding arises from a perceived historical imbalance in the social status of women relative to men.<sup>2</sup> Feminist discourse, particularly within Islamic scholarship, critically examines these imbalances by analyzing both the Qur'anic text and its classical interpretations, which have historically positioned women in subordinate roles.

Riffat Hasan, a prominent feminist theologian, offers a significant critique of traditional Islamic exegesis, arguing that gender inequality in Islamic societies often originates not from the Qur'an itself but from patriarchal interpretations of it. Hasan asserts that many Qur'anic verses, commonly understood as gender-biased, actually reflect sociocultural influences rather than divine intent. He advocates for a feminist reinterpretation of these verses, focusing on themes of justice and equality.<sup>3</sup> According to Hasan, a key source of gender bias lies in the ways classical interpretations have often overlooked or minimized the Qur'an's egalitarian potential.

This issue of gender equality in Islamic interpretations has also been explored by several notable scholars. For example, Amina Wadud's work on Qur'anic hermeneutics suggests that the Qur'an inherently supports a balanced view of gender roles, emphasizing moral and spiritual equality between men and women.<sup>4</sup> Asma Barlas similarly critiques patriarchal readings, advocating for a non-hierarchical understanding of the Qur'an's messages on gender.<sup>5</sup> Collectively, these works highlight the need for gender-sensitive readings of the Qur'an, particularly in contexts where women's rights remain marginalized.

However, despite the growing body of feminist scholarship in Islamic studies, there remains a significant gap in understanding the specifics of Hasan's interpretive approach and how He reconciles traditional Qur'anic interpretations with modern ideals of gender equality. Existing studies tend to highlight Hasan's general feminist perspectives but rarely delve into the specifics of his interpretive methods, such as his application of linguistic precision, philosophical consistency, and ethical criteria. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of comparative analyses that directly contrast Hasan's methodology with that of other prominent feminist scholars, such as Wadud and

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<sup>2</sup> Sri Haningsih, *Pemikiran Riffat Hasan Tentang Feminisme dan Implikasinya Terhadap Transformasi Sosial Islam*, Jurnal Almahward, 2005, 23

<sup>3</sup> Riffat Hasan, "Islamic Theology and the Status of Women: An Inquiry into History and Methodology," *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies* (2003): 57.

<sup>4</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42

<sup>5</sup> Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 15.

Barlas. Such an analysis would provide a more nuanced understanding of Hasan's contributions within the broader field of feminist tafsir. To fulfill the comparative aspect of our methodology and to critically situate Riffat Hasan's contributions, this section places her hermeneutical approach in dialogue with two other pivotal figures in Islamic feminist exegesis: Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas."

Moreover, Hasan's assertion that patriarchal elements in classical interpretations may stem from non-Islamic, specifically Judeo-Christian, cultural influences has not been thoroughly examined. Investigating this claim is crucial for understanding the historical and theological foundations of patriarchal bias within Islamic exegesis. Additionally, while Hasan's work advocates for gender equality, few studies explore the real-world implications of his feminist interpretations for the daily lives of Muslim women, leaving a gap in understanding how Hasan's feminist theology might influence gender roles in contemporary Islamic contexts.

This study seeks to address these gaps by conducting a comprehensive critique of Riffat Hasan's interpretive methodology. Specifically, it aims to examine Hasan's feminist exegesis approach, focusing on his application of linguistic accuracy, philosophical coherence, and ethical implications. This research is novel in its in-depth critique of Hasan's approach to feminist tafsir, which bridges theoretical exegesis with practical implications for gender equality in Islam. By positioning Hasan's methods alongside other feminist perspectives, this study not only enriches the academic discourse on gender and Qur'anic interpretation but also provides insights into the feasibility of promoting gender justice through reinterpretation of Islamic texts.

## METHOD

This study adopts a library research approach, which is widely used for analyzing theoretical frameworks and interpretive methodologies, especially in humanities and theological studies. Library research, or literature-based research, is ideal for exploring complex academic debates, as it allows researchers to systematically collect, examine, and interpret existing scholarly works on specific topics without requiring empirical data collection.<sup>6</sup> This study is designed as a qualitative and descriptive analysis, which focuses on textual interpretation rather than numerical data, enabling an in-depth exploration of Riffat Hasan's feminist hermeneutics and his contributions to Islamic exegesis on gender equality.<sup>7</sup> According to Margot Badran, qualitative research is

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<sup>6</sup> Linda T. Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 23.

<sup>7</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 48.

particularly suited for feminist theology as it allows for the analysis of the nuanced and often subjective aspects of gender interpretation within religious texts.<sup>8</sup>

Data for this research is derived from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Riffat Hasan's original works, such as his books, journal articles, and any other texts where He elaborates on his interpretive approaches to the Qur'an, particularly his empirical and normative framework. Hasan's methodological approach, which emphasizes linguistic precision, philosophical consistency, and ethical implications, serves as a foundation for understanding his feminist interpretations.<sup>9</sup> His works are analyzed to identify his unique approach to interpreting gender-sensitive verses, especially in comparison with classical interpretations. Secondary sources comprise scholarly books, peer-reviewed articles, and critiques from other Islamic feminist scholars, such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas, who provide alternative feminist perspectives. Wadud, for instance, advocates for a holistic and spiritually centered approach to the Qur'an, while Barlas critiques patriarchal interpretations that often overshadow the Qur'an's egalitarian principles.<sup>10</sup> These secondary perspectives allow the study to situate Hasan's work within a broader field of feminist tafsir, highlighting his contributions and contrasting them with other influential voices.

The analysis process involves content-based and comparative approaches. Content analysis of Hasan's primary texts is conducted to uncover the core components of his feminist methodology, especially his reinterpretation of terms and verses traditionally viewed as reinforcing gender hierarchies.<sup>11</sup> This approach allows for a focused examination of Hasan's textual interpretations, revealing how his emphasis on linguistic precision and contextual considerations aligns with or diverges from traditional exegesis.<sup>12</sup> Comparative analysis is then employed to situate Hasan's methods alongside those of other Islamic feminist scholars, such as Wadud and Barlas. According to Wadud, moral and spiritual equality between men and women is a central Qur'anic principle that has often been overlooked in patriarchal readings, while Barlas emphasizes a non-hierarchical approach, challenging interpretations that impose gender biases.<sup>13</sup> This comparative

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<sup>8</sup> Margot Badran, "Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no. 2 (2008): 123.

<sup>9</sup> Riffat Hasan, "Islamic Theology and the Status of Women: An Inquiry into History and Methodology," *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies* (2003): 57.

<sup>10</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42.

<sup>11</sup> Asma Barlas, "Believing Women" in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>12</sup> David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 74.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 109

perspective aids in illustrating the unique elements of Hasan's methodology, distinguishing his work within the larger framework of feminist tafsir.

Lastly, a critical evaluation of Hasan's methodology is undertaken to assess his claim that patriarchal elements in Islamic exegesis may have been influenced by Judeo-Christian cultural assumptions.<sup>14</sup> This aspect is critical for understanding Hasan's perspective on the historical and cultural dynamics that shaped traditional interpretations of the Qur'an. Scholars such as Asma Afsaruddin argue that patriarchal assumptions in Qur'anic exegesis are often culturally rather than theologically based, an assertion that supports Hasan's view of the need for a gender-sensitive interpretation framework.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, this study explores the practical implications of Hasan's feminist interpretations, particularly how his reinterpreted verses might influence contemporary gender roles in Islamic societies.<sup>16</sup> By focusing on the socio-cultural impact of Hasan's work, the study provides insights into the applicability of feminist theology in addressing gender issues within Islam today. Although this study is limited to theoretical analysis, validity is ensured through a rigorous cross-referencing process, incorporating multiple scholarly perspectives to create a balanced and well-rounded critique of Hasan's feminist hermeneutics.<sup>17</sup> This approach ultimately aims to position Hasan's work within the broader scholarly discourse on gender and Qur'anic interpretation, contributing to a nuanced understanding of feminist exegesis within Islamic thought.

## FINDING AND DISCUSS

### Riffat Hasan's Basic Thoughts

Bagian Riffat Hasan's feminist reinterpretation of the Qur'an is deeply shaped by his social and psychological background, as well as by the patriarchal environments She experienced firsthand. SSShe argues that the traditional subjugation of women in Islamic contexts is not rooted in the Qur'an itself but rather in patriarchal interpretations influenced by cultural assumptions.<sup>18</sup> Influenced by the critical theories of feminist thinkers, Hasan's approach represents a unique blend of theology and activism, aiming to liberate women from interpretations that have historically

<sup>14</sup> Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 112.

<sup>15</sup> Riffat Hasan, "The Issue of Woman-Man Equality in the Islamic Tradition," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 3, no. 2 (1987): 68.

<sup>16</sup> Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 629.

<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Walliman, *Research Methods: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 131. *Journal of Women's Studies* (2003): 57

<sup>18</sup> Riffat Hasan, "Islamic Theology and the Status of Women: An Inquiry into History and Methodology," *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies* (2003): 57

limited their roles in society.<sup>19</sup> Her personal experiences with patriarchal family structures, where He saw women placed under male authority, played a significant role in his motivation to reinterpret the Qur'an through a feminist lens.<sup>20</sup> Scholars like Asma Barlas share this viewpoint, asserting that patriarchal biases in Islamic texts often reflect the cultural context rather than the divine intent, thereby opening the way for reinterpretation in favor of gender equality.<sup>21</sup>

In her work, Hasan frequently points out that injustices against women are often based on cultural misinterpretations and non-Islamic influences, especially from Judeo-Christian traditions. According to Hasan, these biases infiltrated Islamic interpretation, resulting in restrictive readings that contradict the Qur'an's spirit of equality and justice.<sup>22</sup> He insists that developing a feminist theology in Islam is critical to addressing these biases, echoing the arguments of scholars like Margot Badran, who emphasize the role of historical context in shaping gendered interpretations of religious texts.<sup>23</sup> Hasan views his feminist theology as a form of *ijtihad fī sabīlillāh* (independent reasoning in the path of God), an obligation for Muslims to reform interpretations that contradict Qur'anic values of justice.<sup>24</sup> This approach aligns with the liberation theology advocated by figures such as Amina Wadud, who asserts that gender equality is embedded within the Qur'an's teachings when examined free from cultural distortions.<sup>25</sup>

### Doctrines in Hasan's Feminist Theology

Hasan has three doctrines related to feminist theology. The first is Doctrine of Monotheism and Equality Before God: Hasan's feminist theology is rooted in the principle of *tawhīd* (the oneness of God), which See interprets as a foundation for human equality. In his view, God's oneness implies that all humans, regardless of gender, are equal before God, a principle also supported by contemporary Muslim feminist thinkers like Ziba Mir-Hosseini, who argues that true monotheism eradicates hierarchical distinctions between genders.<sup>26</sup> Hasan contends that belief in God's oneness

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<sup>19</sup> Margot Badran, *Feminism Beyond East and West: New Gender Talk and Practice in Global Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 62.

<sup>20</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42.

<sup>21</sup> Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform* (London: Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 1999), 37.

<sup>23</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 47.

<sup>24</sup> Nur Cholis Madjid, *Islam, Kemodernan, dan Keindonesiaan* (Jakarta: Mizan, 1995), 109.

<sup>25</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 64.

<sup>26</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 109.

requires Muslims to reject any interpretations that reduce women's status, viewing equality as intrinsic to the concept of monotheism.<sup>27</sup> This view aligns with Nur Cholis Madjid's assertion that the Qur'an itself advocates for liberation from beliefs that restrict human dignity, a perspective that provides a theological basis for gender equality in Islam.<sup>28</sup> Hasan also argues that monotheism should liberate Muslims from *taqlid* (blind adherence) to patriarchal interpretations, particularly those that disregard the Qur'an's teachings on women's rights.<sup>29</sup>

Second is Doctrine of Social Justice: Hasan emphasizes that social injustice, including gender discrimination, is not divinely ordained but rather the product of human society and cultural biases.<sup>30</sup> She asserts that gender inequalities arise from hierarchical social structures that unfairly prioritize one gender over another, a viewpoint shared by other scholars such as Fatima Mernissi, who critically analyzes the historical context of misogynistic practices within Islamic societies.<sup>31</sup> For Hasan, God's justice necessitates that all people, regardless of gender, should be treated with dignity, an interpretation echoed by feminist philosopher Leila Ahmed, who also contends that social justice is integral to Islamic ethics.<sup>15</sup> <sup>32</sup>Hasan criticizes selective readings of the Qur'an that favor male privilege, arguing that such interpretations lack thorough engagement with the text's ethical dimensions.<sup>33</sup>

The last is Doctrine of Liberation: Central to Hasan's feminist theology is the concept of liberation, which She defines as freedom from oppressive interpretations and cultural constraints. She contends that Islam's emphasis on peace and justice extends to gender equality, advocating for an understanding of the Qur'an that recognizes both men and women as equal contributors to society.<sup>34</sup> Hasan's call for liberation parallels the work of scholars like Asma Afsaruddin, who argue that oppressive interpretations should be reexamined in light of the Qur'an's core values.<sup>35</sup> According to Hasan, restrictions placed on women, such as confinement to domestic roles, are not religious mandates but rather cultural practices that distort Islamic teachings.<sup>36</sup> This perspective

<sup>27</sup> Hasan Hanafi, *Muqaddimah fi 'Ilm al-Istighrab* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1991), 74.

<sup>28</sup> Amin al-Khuli, *al-Manhaj al-Adabi fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1968), 23.

<sup>29</sup> Muhammad In'am Esha, "Construction of Feminist Theology Methodology," *Journal of Islamic Thought* 5, no. 1 (2008): 45.

<sup>30</sup> Marnia Lazreg, "Feminist Interpretations of Islam," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 16, no. 2 (2005): 110.

<sup>31</sup> David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 74.

<sup>32</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Islamic Feminism and Beyond* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 58.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Walliman, *Research Methods: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2010), 131.

<sup>34</sup> Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform* (London: Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 1999), 37.

<sup>35</sup> Asma Afsaruddin, "Hermeneutics and Honor: Negotiating Female 'Public' Space in Islamic/ate Societies," in *Gender, Politics, and Islam*, ed. Therese Saliba, Carolyn Allen, and Judith A. Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 58.

<sup>36</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 47.

aligns with Judith Butler's theories on gender liberation, which propose dismantling socially constructed roles that limit individual agency.<sup>37</sup>

### Riffat Hasan's Interpretation Method

Riffat Hasan's interpretative methodology combines empirical analysis with idea-normative frameworks, drawing on the insights of Islamic scholars such as Hasan Hanafi and Amin al-Khuli. Hasan utilizes Hanafi's concept of *asbab al-nuzul* (occasions of revelation), which contextualizes Qur'anic interpretation within its socio-historical framework.<sup>38</sup> This approach allows Hasan to ground his feminist interpretations in a historically accurate understanding, connecting the text's original meanings to modern gender discourse. Similarly, al-Khuli's attention to the Qur'an's literary and cultural depth has influenced Hasan's rigorous analysis of Arabic terms, enabling him to address both the text's divine essence and historical underpinnings.<sup>39</sup>

This approach is both innovative and challenging, highlighting Hasan's commitment to reinterpreting the Qur'an in a manner that aligns with contemporary notions of gender justice. By situating his interpretations within the Qur'an's linguistic and cultural context, Hasan strengthens his argument for a more gender-equitable reading of the text. The researcher acknowledges the significance of this linguistic precision, which counters centuries of potentially patriarchal interpretations. However, as noted by El Fadl, overemphasis on linguistic analysis may risk alienating the Qur'an from the lived realities of modern Muslim women.<sup>40</sup> A balanced feminist reinterpretation, therefore, must account for both the text's historical meanings and its relevance to present-day gender concerns.

Hasan's method relies on three primary interpretive criteria:

1. Linguistic Accuracy: Hasan's close examination of classical Arabic terms is aimed at uncovering the Qur'an's egalitarian essence.<sup>41</sup> This precision addresses the potential misinterpretations that may have historically justified gender inequality. By ensuring linguistic accuracy, Hasan aligns with scholars like Wadud, who also emphasize the importance of language in uncovering the Qur'an's ethical imperatives.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 109.

<sup>38</sup> Hasan Hanafi, *Muqaddimah fi 'Ilm al-Istighrab* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1991), 74.

<sup>39</sup> Amin al-Khuli, *al-Manhaj al-Adabi fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1968), 23.

<sup>40</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 202.

<sup>41</sup> Muhammad In'am Esya, "Construction of Feminist Theology Methodology," *Journal of Islamic Thought* 5, no. 1 (2008): 45.

<sup>42</sup> Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 77.

2. Philosophical Consistency: Hasan's interpretations are structured around the Qur'an's themes of justice, compassion, and equality, aligning with works by Rahman, who advocates for coherence between philosophical values and religious interpretations.<sup>43</sup>
3. Ethical Criterion: Hasan's readings emphasize the Qur'an's ethical mandates, especially regarding social justice and dignified treatment for all, regardless of gender.<sup>44</sup>

A primary example of Hasan's interpretative method is her analysis of Surah al-Nisa' (4:34), often interpreted to imply male authority. The verse reads, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given some of them an advantage over others and because they spend from their wealth." Traditionally, *qawwamun* (protectors or maintainers) has been taken to suggest male superiority. Hasan challenges this by arguing that *qawwamun* refers instead to men's financial duty rather than gender hierarchy, an interpretation inspired by Rahman's emphasis on contextual ethics.<sup>45</sup>

Through his reinterpretation, Hasan frames marriage as a mutual partnership, advocating for roles that are adaptable to changing social conditions. This approach aligns with Mir-Hosseini's assertion that Islamic teachings should be applied flexibly to meet contemporary needs.<sup>46</sup> The researcher recognizes the value of Hasan's approach in uncovering the egalitarian aspects of the Qur'an and acknowledges the significance of his balanced perspective in exploring gender roles that respect both historical and modern contexts.

### Criticism of Riffat Hasan's Thoughts

Despite Hasan's feminist contributions to Islamic thought, his approach has been criticized, particularly by scholars who question his lack of formal *tafsir* (interpretive) training. Critics argue that Hasan's emphasis on linguistic analysis may overlook the theological complexities and depth often found in classical Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, Hasan's assertion that patriarchal elements in Islamic exegesis stem from Judeo-Christian cultural influences has sparked controversy. He posits that these external influences led to restrictive interpretations that misrepresent the Qur'an's egalitarian message.<sup>48</sup> Other scholars, such as Esack, argue that

<sup>43</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 86.

<sup>44</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 164.

<sup>45</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 47.

<sup>46</sup> Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Muslim Women's Quest for Equality: Between Islamic Law and Feminism," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (2006): 629.

<sup>47</sup> Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 15.

<sup>48</sup> Margot Badran, *Feminism Beyond East and West: New Gender Talk and Practice in Global Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2010), 112.

patriarchal views within *tafsir* reflect broader socio-political dynamics rather than direct cultural borrowing.<sup>49</sup>

The researcher understands some criticisms, particularly the potential limitations of Hasan's method without formal *tafsir* training. This gap may indeed limit his engagement with traditional Islamic jurisprudence, though his novel perspective fills an essential gap in feminist theology. Additionally, while Hasan's critique of external influences offers valuable insights into gender biases, the researcher observes that reducing patriarchal interpretations to cultural adoption might oversimplify complex socio-political influences on *tafsir* across Islamic history. As Wadud suggests, a holistic approach that considers internal and external factors in shaping exegesis could yield a more nuanced feminist interpretation.<sup>50</sup> This perspective supports the need for a balanced approach in assessing both the text's original intent and the myriad influences shaping its interpretation.

### Riffat Hasan's Critical Study of Religion and Gender

In his broader study of religion and gender, Hasan uses gender as a critical lens for analyzing religious structures and their social implications. She argues that traditional interpretations that restrict women's roles are not intrinsic to Islam but are instead products of cultural constructions.<sup>51</sup> Hasan advocates for a contextual approach to the Qur'an, distinguishing core Islamic values from inherited cultural practices.<sup>52</sup>

Hasan's views are influenced by elements of Western feminist thought, especially theology of liberation, which emphasizes freedom from oppressive structures. By promoting a model of Islamic feminism aligned with human rights and rooted in Islamic ethics, Hasan envisions an egalitarian framework within Islam, grounded in ethical values rather than cultural distortions.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>53</sup>For him, this integration empowers Muslim women by validating their roles beyond traditional domestic limitations, suggesting that Islam's teachings are compatible with gender equality when liberated from cultural biases.

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<sup>49</sup> Farid Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 133.

<sup>50</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 101.

<sup>51</sup> Fatema Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 92.

<sup>52</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 243.

<sup>53</sup> Asifa Quraishi, "Interpreting Islamic Law for Muslim Women," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 11, no. 1 (1994): 53.

The researcher views Hasan's integration of liberation theology as a crucial contribution to Islamic feminist thought, expanding the discourse beyond traditional frameworks. By using gender as an analytical tool, Hasan uncovers the potential for Islam to support gender equality in a culturally authentic manner, aligning with scholars like Ahmed, who argue that gender reform within Islam is both necessary and possible.<sup>54</sup> However, the researcher also notes the potential friction between Western feminist ideals and Islamic values. As Ali argues, feminist theologies need to maintain cultural sensitivity and avoid imposing frameworks that may conflict with Islamic cultural identities.<sup>55</sup> This reflection highlights the importance of developing feminist approaches that respect both the cultural nuances of Islamic societies and the universal principles of justice and equality.

### Situating Hasan's Feminist Hermeneutics Among Wadud And Barlas

To fulfill the methodological commitment of comparative analysis and to critically locate Riffat Hasan's contribution within the broader landscape of Qur'anic feminist scholarship, this section systematically contrasts her hermeneutical approach with two other seminal thinkers: Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas. While all three scholars share the fundamental objective of retrieving gender-egalitarian principles from the Qur'an, their methodological paths, focal points, and strategies for deconstructing patriarchal readings reveal significant divergences that illuminate the unique contours of Hasan's project.

#### 1. Methodological Focus and Starting Point

Riffat Hasan's approach is characterized by an empirical and idea-normative methodology, heavily reliant on linguistic precision and historical contextualization (*asbab al-nuzul*) to challenge what she identifies as externally imposed, patriarchal distortions.<sup>56</sup> Her work often begins with a critical-historical inquiry, positing that many inequalities sanctioned by classical interpretations stem not from the Qur'an but from the infiltration of Judeo-Christian patriarchal assumptions into Islamic exegesis. Hasan's method is thus a project of textual purification and linguistic reclamation, aiming to restore the Qur'an's original egalitarian intent by stripping away accrued cultural biases.

In contrast, Amina Wadud advocates for a holistic hermeneutic centered on the thematic unity (tauhidic paradigm) and ethical spirit of the Qur'an. Her primary tool is not merely linguistic deconstruction but a gender-inclusive reading of the text's overarching moral principles, particularly justice (*'adl*). Wadud argues for reading the Qur'an as a "divine communication" with

<sup>54</sup> Margot Badran, "Islamic Feminism Revisited," *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 9, no. 4 (2003): 7.

<sup>55</sup> Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), 64.

<sup>56</sup> "Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences," *Choice Reviews Online* 47, no. 09 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.47-4952>.

a consistent ethical worldview, where the socio-historical particulars of 7th-century Arabia are distinguished from its universal moral imperatives.<sup>57</sup> Her starting point is often the lived experience and moral agency of women, using this as a lens to re-evaluate traditional interpretations.

Asma Barlas, meanwhile, grounds her methodology in a theological and epistemological critique of patriarchal readings. Her central concern is to challenge the very conception of a patriarchal God, arguing that such a construct is a human projection onto the divine text.<sup>58</sup> Barlas employs a strategy of “unreading”—systematically deconstructing the assumptions that underlie classical exegesis to demonstrate that the Qur’an’s ontological and theological foundations are inherently anti-patriarchal.<sup>59</sup> barlasHer focus is less on historical *asbab al-nuzul* and more on the coherence of the Qur’an’s discourse on God, revelation, and human equality.

**Table 1: Comparison of Methodology and Interpretation Focus**

| Aspects                | Riffat Hasan                                                                                                     | Amina Wadud                                                                                           | Asthma Barlas                                                                 |
|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Key Approaches         | Empirical-normative and linguistic-historical.                                                                   | Holistically-ethically based on the monotheistic paradigm.                                            | Theological-epistemological and discourse criticism.                          |
| Key Analysis Tools     | Linguistic precision (semantic study) and historical contextualization ( <i>asbab al-nuzul</i> ).                | Thematic interpretation and the principle of justice ( <i>'adl</i> ) as the main lens.                | The strategy of "unreading" patriarchal assumptions.                          |
| Starting Point         | Critical-historical research on the infiltration of foreign cultural bias (Judeo-Christian) into interpretation. | Women's life experiences and moral agency, as well as the unity of the ethical message of the Qur'an. | A challenge to the construction of a "patriarchal God" as a human projection. |
| Hermeneutic Objectives | Purification of the text from cultural distortions                                                               | Reading the Qur'an as a coherent divine communication with patriarchal readings                       | Shows the inconsistency of patriarchal readings                               |

<sup>57</sup> Barlas, “‘Believing Women’ in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an,” *Choice Reviews Online* 40, no. 06 (2003): 40-3680-40-3680, <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.40-3680>.

<sup>58</sup> Ross S. Kraemer and Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, “In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 4 (1985), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260702>.

<sup>59</sup> Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an* (University of Texas Press, 2019).

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|                                   |                                |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| to restore the original universal | moral with the theological     |
| egalitarian intent.               | imperatives. foundation of the |
|                                   | Qur'an.                        |

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## 2. Interpretation of Key Verse: Q. 4:34 (*al-qawwamun*)

A comparative analysis of how these scholars treat Surah al-Nisa' (4:34)—a verse frequently cited to justify male authority—highlights their methodological differences. Hasan's Interpretation: Hasan focuses intensely on the semantic field of the term *qawwamun*. She argues that its primary meaning relates to economic provision and responsibility, not inherent authority or superiority.<sup>60</sup> By anchoring this in a historical-linguistic analysis, she re-frames the verse as describing a functional, socio-economic role conditioned by the context of revelation, rather than prescribing a permanent ontological hierarchy. Her reinterpretation aims to dissolve the verse's hierarchical implication by tying *qiwamah* strictly to the duty of financial maintenance.

Wadud's Interpretation: Wadud approaches the verse through a contextual and thematic lens. She acknowledges the verse's specificity to its historical moment but emphasizes that the "degree" (*darajah*) or "advantage" mentioned is conditional upon men's financial responsibility, not absolute or biologically determined.<sup>61</sup> More importantly, she reads this verse in conjunction with the Qur'an's broader themes of mutuality, reciprocity (*ma'ruf*), and justice in marital relations. For Wadud, the ethical imperative of *ma'ruf* (what is recognized as good) acts as a governing principle that regulates and can redefine the practical application of such context-specific verses.<sup>62</sup>

Barlas's Interpretation: Barlas engages the verse as part of her larger project to challenge readings that posit a hierarchical relationship between the sexes. She questions the interpretive leap from *qawwamun* as "maintainers" to "rulers" or "authorities."<sup>63</sup> Barlas argues that such a leap imports patriarchal assumptions into the text. Her method involves demonstrating the incoherence of a patriarchal reading when placed against the Qur'an's consistent testimony to the equality of human creation and moral capacity. For her, the verse cannot be read as instituting a divinely ordained hierarchy without contradicting the text's own theological foundations.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Barlas.

<sup>61</sup> Zainab Bint Younus, "Women and Gender in the Qur'an," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 40, no. 3–4 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v40i3-4.3173>.

<sup>62</sup> Gisela Webb and Amina Wadud, "Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective," *Journal of Law and Religion* 15, no. 1/2 (2000), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1051560>.

<sup>63</sup> Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Bint Younus, "Women and Gender in the Qur'an."

Table 2: Interpretation of Surah al-Nisa' (4:34) on *al-Qawwamun*

| Aspects                   | Riffat Hasan                                                                                                  | Amina Wadud                                                                                                                                    | Asthma Barlas                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Interpretation<br>Focus   | In-depth semantic analysis of <i>the term qawwamun</i> .                                                      | Contextual and thematic readings that emphasize the principle of reciprocity ( <i>ma'ruf</i> ).                                                | Deconstruct the assumption that this verse establishes an authoritative-hierarchical relationship.                                        |
| Makna<br><i>Qawwamun</i>  | It is specifically related to economic responsibility and provision ( <i>infuq</i> ), not absolute authority. | A role that is conditioned by financial excess at the time of revelation, not biological or ontological excess.                                | A maintenance function that does not necessarily justify a relationship of power or domination.                                           |
| Status<br>Hierarchy       | Rejects permanent hierarchies; emphasizes socio-economic functions that can change according to the context.  | "Excellence" ( <i>faddala</i> ) is conditional and contextual, limited by the principle of justice.                                            | Denying that this verse is the basis of a divinely established hierarchical social order.                                                 |
| Argumentation<br>Strategy | Historical-linguistic studies to separate the original meaning from accumulated patriarchal interpretations.  | Read this verse in the light of the principles of reciprocity and justice mandated by the Qur'an in the relationship between husband and wife. | Showing the incompatibility of the hierarchical interpretation with the Qur'an's testimony of the equality of creation and moral capacity |

### 3. Diagnosis of Patriarchal Bias and Prescriptive Solution

The scholars also differ in their analysis of the root cause of patriarchal interpretations and their proposed solutions. Hasan's Diagnosis & Prescription: Root Cause: External cultural influences, specifically pre-existing Judeo-Christian patriarchal norms that were absorbed into the early Islamic interpretive tradition. Solution: A corrective, empirical re-reading that purifies the

Qur'anic text from these foreign accretions through rigorous linguistic and historical analysis. Her work is a call for intellectual *ijtihad* based on original sources.<sup>65</sup>

Wadud's Diagnosis & Prescription: Root Cause: A failure of holistic and ethical interpretation, where atomistic readings of specific verses override the Qur'an's overarching message of justice and human dignity. It is a problem of hermeneutical method and priority.<sup>66</sup> Solution: The adoption of a "tawhidic paradigm" for interpretation, where every verse is read in light of the principle of God's oneness and justice. This requires centering the experiences and perspectives of women in the hermeneutical process itself.<sup>67</sup>

Barlas's Diagnosis & Prescription: Root Cause: Epistemic and theological error—the projection of human patriarchy onto God, resulting in a misreading of divine ontology and intent. The problem is located in the reader's assumptions, not merely in historical context.<sup>68</sup> Solution: The practice of "unreading" or a theologically-grounded hermeneutic of suspicion towards any interpretation that predicates God's speech on patriarchal norms. The solution is to re-align reading practices with the Qur'an's own description of God as just and non-tyrannical.

**Table 3: Diagnosis of Root Patriarchal Bias and Proposed Solutions**

| Aspects       | Riffat Hasan                                                                                                                      | Amina Wadud                                                                                                                         | Asthma Barlas                                                                                                            |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Root Cause    | External cultural                                                                                                                 | Failure of the                                                                                                                      | Epistemic-theological                                                                                                    |
| Diagnosis     | influences (Judeo-Christian patriarchal assumptions) that infiltrated and contaminated the early Islamic interpretive traditions. | hermeneutic method: atomistic and literal readings of certain verses ignore the universal and holistic moral message of the Qur'an. | fallacy: the patriarchal projection of man onto God, which results in a misunderstanding of ontology and Divine purpose. |
| Problem Locus | In the history of interpretation and accumulation of                                                                              | In the priority and framework of                                                                                                    | In the reader's basic assumptions about                                                                                  |

<sup>65</sup> Ahmed Saeed Ahmed Mochil, "The History of Feminism in the Arab World," *Journal of Social Studies* 28, no. 4 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.20428/jss.v28i4.2042>.

<sup>66</sup> Sophie Richter-Devroe, "Gender, Culture, and Conflict Resolution in Palestine," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 2 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.2979/mew.2008.4.2.30>.

<sup>67</sup> Khanum Shaikh, "Journeys toward Gender Equality in Islam," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 24, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2023.2196122>.

<sup>68</sup> Bint Younus, "Women and Gender in the Qur'an."

|                       |                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                       | meanings that are contaminated by culture.                                                                                                   | interpretation used by the reader.                                                                                                                                    | God and gender relations.                                                                                                                           |
| Solution/Prescription | Empirical-corrective re-reading through rigorous intellectual <i>ijtihad</i> based on linguistic and historical analysis to purify the text. | The application of the tauhidic paradigm in interpretation, where each verse is read in the light of God's oneness and justice, by including the experience of women. | The practice of "unreading" or hermeneutics is theologically based suspicion of any interpretation that bases God's discourse on patriarchal norms. |
| Unique Contributions  | Offers text-based forensic tools to track biased genealogies and dismantle the "inevitability" of traditional interpretations.               | Provides a thorough ethical framework for evaluating and subverting unfair interpretations.                                                                           | Conducting a profound theological deconstruction of the foundations of patriarchal discourse in religious traditions.                               |

## CONCLUSION

Riffat Hasan's interpretative methodology represents a pioneering approach to Islamic feminist thought, combining linguistic precision, contextual analysis, and ethical principles to challenge traditional gender biases in Qur'anic exegesis. By drawing on *asbab al-nuzul* from Hasan Hanafi and al-Khuli's literary-cultural approach, Hasan situates his interpretations within a historically authentic framework while advocating for gender justice. His core interpretive criteria—linguistic accuracy, philosophical consistency, and ethical alignment—provide a foundation for re-examining verses like Surah al-Nisa' (4:34), which has historically been used to endorse male authority but which Hasan reinterprets as emphasizing mutual responsibilities in marriage.

Despite the depth and innovation of Hasan's work, it has faced criticisms. Traditional scholars often question his lack of classical *tafsir* training, arguing that this may limit his engagement with jurisprudential aspects central to traditional Islamic thought. Furthermore, Hasan's attribution of patriarchal interpretations to Judeo-Christian influences has sparked debate, as some scholars suggest that these perspectives reflect broader socio-political contexts within Islamic history rather than cultural borrowing alone. Nonetheless, Hasan's approach remains a valuable contribution to Islamic feminist scholarship, inviting critical re-evaluation of long-standing interpretations and encouraging a more inclusive understanding of gender in Islam.

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