Sayyid Qutb’s Views on Women In Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran: An Analysis

Pandangan Sayyid Qutb Tentang Wanita dalam Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran: Satu Analisa

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ABSTRACT
The position of women in Muslim societies is a controversial topic of numerous debates and extensive literature. Matters about hijab, women's position as second class as well as the role of women in the family is among arguments that is thrown by critics to show that Islam degrades the women's position. Similar allegations, however, said to Sayyid Qutb, who has been recognized as the greatest innovator in Islamic thought in the twentieth century as well as a commonly misunderstood Islamic scholar. This article will look at this accusation against Sayyid Qutb objectively through investigating his original works to reveal his real views on the topics. The result shows that Sayyid Qutb views on women are constant throughout his entire literature writings and he can sustain and defend his sympathy to women in this era, and try to better their condition by the way back to the fundamentals of Islam.

Keywords: Women In Islam, Sayyid Qutb, Women in Society,

ABSTRAK

Kata Kunci: Wanita dalam Islam, Sayid Qutb, Wanita dalam Masyarakat.

Introduction
Islam provides women with status and dignity. This is not merely a theory or a blind claim, but it is a fact which has been and still practices, and it is quite apart from any corruption of Islamic thought, or from what Muslim themselves have corrupted in their behavior, which

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has eventually given others a bad impression of Muslims and Islam. Islam maintains that both
gender, Adam and Eve were created from the same soul, and thus they have the same nature.
They share the same responsibilities which are to worship Him and become a caliph or
Khalifah in this world (Al-Majali, 2010). Al-Quran has detailed this spiritual equality
between men and women in Surah Al-Ahzab in the Quran (33:35):

"Verily, men who surrender unto God, and women who surrender, and men who
believe and women who believe, and men who obey and women who obey, and men who
speak the truth and women who speak the truth...and men who give alms and women who
give alms, and men who fast and women who fast, and men who guard their modesty
and women who guard (their modesty), and men who remember God much and women who
remember – God hath prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward”.

The difference is only in a way they play the social roles which are congruent with
both gender's physical, biological and emotional. Al-Quran mentioned in Surah al-Rum
(30:30), "So, set your face to the Faith upright, this (faith) being the nature designed by Allah
on which He has created the humankind. There is no change in Allah’s creation.” Therefore,
Sayyid Hussein Nasr (1982) said that in Islam the role of men and women is seen as
complementary rather than competitive. Before Allah, man and women stand as equals.

The Quran also says that both of them were equally guilty of the sin of obeying Satan
by eating the prohibited tree; they both fell from paradise, and both were forgiven by Allah.
At the time when the Quran was establishing such rights, obligations, and dignity for women,
there existed odd attitudes towards women in other cultures and religions. Some of these
cultures considered her like an animal, devil or treated her as a slave (Mustafa al-Siba‘i,
2010). Therefore, this article will explore ideas of Sayyid Qutb and the establishment of
women's role which is often misunderstood by the western orientalists even among Muslim
scholars themselves, with reference to his main writing, Tafsir fi Zilal al-Quran, and two
other works, Social Justice In Islam and Milestones.

Women In Islam

From the very beginning of Islam's emergence, Islam acknowledged women's equality with
men in a high respects; she is a mother, a daughter, a wife, a sister and she is a human as men
do. Allah states in the Quran: "And among His signs is this, that He created for you wives
from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you
affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for people who reflect" (30:21).
Meanwhile, Prophet Muhammad says: "The best among you (believers) is he who is best in
manners and kindest to his wife" (Al-Tirmizi, No.3895).

Many women in Islamic history played crucial roles. The first to convert to Islam was
Khadijah, the Prophet's first wife. She made every effort to protect the Prophet and to help to
spread Islam, as well as donated most of her money for the sake of Allah. That is why the
Prophet used to talk about her with the greatest respect, even after her death. The Prophet's
other wives were also very helpful and kind to him with all possible means to preserve Islam
and convey the new Message. For instance, Aishah and Ummu Salamah narrated most of the
Prophet's hadith, and actually, she was a respected scholar as well as well-known authority in
medicine, history, and rhetoric.
The same thing can be said to other female companions who accomplished great deeds, and indeed throughout Islamic history, there have been famous and influential female scholars and jurists. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, used to mention the teachers, they were indebted to and among these were women scholars such as Fatimah Binti Jawhar and Fatimah al-Tanukheah (Al-Majali, 2010).

The historical record also shows that Prophet Muhammad consulted women and weighed their opinions seriously. At least one woman, Umm Waraqah, was appointed imam over her household by the Prophet. Women contributed significantly to the canonization of the Quran. A woman is known to have corrected the authoritative ruling of Caliph Umar on dowry. Women prayed in mosques unsegregated from men, were involved in hadith transmission, gave sanctuary to men, engaged in commercial transactions, were encouraged to seek knowledge, and were both instructors and pupils in the early Islamic period. The Quran refers to women who pledged an oath of allegiance to Muhammad independently of their male kin. Some distinguished women converted to Islam prior to their husbands, a demonstration of Islam’s recognition of their capacity for independent action. On the other hand, Caliph Umar appointed women to serve as officials in the market of Medina. Biographies of distinguished women, especially in Muhammad’s household, show that women behaved relatively autonomously in early Islam. In Sufi circles, women were recognized as teachers, adherents, “spiritual mothers,” and even inheritors of the spiritual secrets of their fathers (Al-Ghazali, Muhammad, 1989).

No woman held religious titles in Islam, but many women held political power, some jointly with their husbands, others independently. The best-known women rulers in the premodern era include Khayzuran, who governed the Muslim Empire under three Abbasid caliphs in the eighth century; Malika Asma bint Shihab al-Sulayhiyya and Malika Arwa bint Ahmad al-Sulayhiyya, who both held power in Yemen in the eleventh century; Sitt al-Mulk, a Fatimid queen of Egypt in the eleventh century; the Berber queen Zaynab al-Nafzawiyah (r. 1061 – 1107); two thirteenth-century Mamluk queens, Shajar al-Durr in Cairo and Radiyyah in Delhi; six Mongol queens, including Kutlugh Khatun (thirteenth century) and her daughter Padishah Khatun of the Kutlugh-Khanid dynasty; the fifteenth-century Andalusian queen Aishah al-Hurra, known by the Spaniards as Sultana Madre de Boabdil; Sayyida al-Hurra, governor of Tetouán in Morroco and many more (Al-Ghazali, Muhammad, 1989). Nevertheless, the status of women in premodern Islam in general conformed not to Quranic ideals but to prevailing patriarchal cultural norms. As a result, improvement of the status of women became a major issue in modern, reformist Islam.

Since early twentieth century, there has been a steady growth of literature on the expansive subject of Muslim woman and family. Some of the areas that have received attention are readily identified as; the status of woman in Islam, polygamy, family law reforms, purdah (a misnomer that is universally applied by western writers for the correct Arabic Hijab), motherhood and child care, feminism, sexual behaviour, population control, and western perceptions of gender-specific cultural traits in Muslim societies. An analysis of the source literature would indicate that there is a highly disproportionate amount of studies made with reference to the aforementioned fields (Ahmad Anees, M, 1989).

For instance, apparently in response to the western literature on female emancipation, Muslim authors have produced large number of apologetic works under the rubric of "Women in Islam" or the "Status of Muslim Women" etc. While these works are generally good expose of the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet, they leave much to the
imagination of the reader when it comes to coping with the contemporary challenges of education, work, and economic management.

On the other hand, western extremism has portrayed Muslim woman as an uneducated docile individual spending a secluded life in the harem, and prone to the tyranny of polygamy and economic contingency. Some of the western feminist writers have tried to display a sense of sisterhood with Muslim woman by exhorting them to get rid of purdah, opt for a sexually-liberated lifestyle and stand for their rights. There is little evidence that western feminism has taken roots in Muslim societies and that Muslim women are asserting to be biologically, morally and physically independent of men (Ahmad Anees, M, 1989).

Nonetheless, a breed of Muslim women writers has come into being with only limited membership: Fatima Mernissi, Nawal el-Saadawi, Naila Minai, and Fatna A. Sabbah. have attempted to graft the western model of feminism albeit with little success. Undoubtedly, some of the issues raised in their works are genuine but instantly lose their relevance once they are projected through a western paradigm. Moreover, the practise of misinterpretation of the Quran and Hadis, often verging at the border of heresy, can hardly be condoned, as happened to the Sayid Qutb’s point of views on women.

Who Is Sayyid Qutb?

Sayyid Qutb has been deemed as the greatest innovator in Islamic thought in the twentieth century (Sami Zubaida, 2011). He started his career as an Arabic literature teacher and engaged in the world of education in Egypt for 15 years as well as an active literary author. His invention and paradigm shifted since he has become a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1951, after his return from the United States of America (Al-Khalidi, 1981). He became one of the organization's leading ideologists. As such, Qutb spent most of his life in prison and executed in 1966. He is usually understood as a successor of Islamic modernists such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida (Roxanne L. Euben, et.al, 2009).

As a known figure, various titles and perceptions given to him, for instance, he is the founder that claimed as Qutbiyyun, a movement that opposes salaf methodology and urges to fight against the Islamic government (Al-Masry, 2010). This claim, in fact, rooted from the misunderstood of his idea on hakimiyyah which means the sovereignty of Allah. Otherwise, he did not promote to fight against the Islamic government blindly but to urge society to do islah in wisdom and consistent until Islam is entirely compatible with a community and the nation.

He also cited as a source of extremism thoughts and cause of the occurrence of genocide among extremists. This claim is mostly from orientalist which owns hard approach against Islam, such as Peter L. Bigen and Yaryan (John L. Esposito, 2009). The diversity of claim shows the responses and knowledge they have about Sayyid Qutb. If we want to fight these dangerous ideas such as those Qutb's, the best we can do is examine them in context, and understand their nuances and complexities.
Critics Over Sayyid Qutb's Views On Women

In 2000, Lamia Rustum Shahadah published one article which displays Sayyid Qutb's views on women. Her article looks interesting in topics and arguments on Sayyid Qutb where she discredits him as an ultra-conservative and regressive regarding the status of women. However, when we observe the reference cited in the article, it is not accurate and did not take into account on his main work *Tafsir Fi Zilal al-Quran* and two other works, Social Justice In Islam and Milestones. This approach is the biggest mistake of the author who was ignoring his original contextual argumentation.

Moreover, Alejandro Salamanca said Shahadah's article is full of generalizations and inaccurate statements (Alejandro Salamanca, 2015). At one point, she mentions that Sayyid Qutb never referred to the condition and situation of rural women. But Qutb was of a rural origin, who must be aware of the life in the countryside, as expressed in his book *A Child from the Village*, which revealing the importance of the traditional family in Sayyid Qutb's idea of gender relations (Sayyid Qutb, 2004).

Shahadah also ignores the emphasis that Sayyid Qutb places on mutual responsibility within the family, observing that he is putting limits and restrictions on women. Men are also forced to marry and form a family, and they are obliged to earn a living, and financially support their family. Shahadah also claims that in Sayyid Qutb's views, women are subjugated to their husbands, without realizing that the main argument in most of his work is that women and men are only enslaved to God. At the end of the article, she concluded that Sayyid Qutb was condemning women to stasis, subjugation, and regression (Shahadah. 2000). Therefore, extensive analysis involving his original works should be done to evaluate the accuracy of Syahadah's allegations. This analysis takes into account on his main work *Tafsir Fi Zilal al-Quran* and two other works, Social Justice In Islam and Milestones.

Sayyid Qutb's Views On Women

Between those three main works of Sayyid Qutb, the main focus of the analysis is on Sayyid Qutb's Magnum Opus *Tafsir Fi Zilal al-Quran* or In The Shade of the Quran, mainly because this work is an extensive commentary on the Quran. Sayyid Qutb took almost 14 years to accomplish this works and most of the time it was written during he is in prison (Al-Khalidi. 2012). Before further a due to his views on women in this writing, it is better to look at his methodology in interpreting Quranic verses regarding women in the Quran. Knowing and understanding the writer's underlying purpose and technique will help to understand the context of the writing and to see why the author makes the decisions they did from the largest decisions about what information to present to the smallest details of what words to use.

Al-Rumi (1986) said that Sayyid Qutb has its methodology or approach in interpreting Quranic verses, for instance, he used the method of *taswir al-fanni* or artistic beauty of the Quran which describe something that is easy to be depicted and appreciated the situation, he also leaves the dubious interpretations and so on. However, when we go through the revelations on a woman, there are particular methods and approaches he did in common with those verses.
1. Emphasizing on the relation of the Quranic verses regarding women with the same coherence theme consistently.

The cohesive theme identified when he interpreted those verses is towards the whole establishment of clean and dignified community based on the God's approach which revealed in the Quran. This development consists of individual, family and Islamic society construct. Sayyid Qutb touches a lot about personal construct through the stories in Quran regarding pious woman's character, for instance, the story of 'Imra'ah 'Imran, the story of Maryam Jesus's mother and the story of and the story of 'Imra'ah 'Firaun (Sayyid Qutb, 2004).

Apart from this, he consistently takes full attention towards the establishment of Muslim family because he defines this institution is an intermediate unit that builds individual as well as strengthens the community. Hence, the emphasis is very significant in the discussions and interpretations regarding the verses relating to marriage, family, and its social manners (Sayyid Qutb, 2004). He said that the Muslim community is a community which implementing and practicing Islam in every aspect of life from Islamic theology, worship, systems of life and morals (Sayyid Qutb, 2009).

Incidentally, most of the texts related to women in the Quran have munasabat or interrelation with the context of the previous or next paragraph, which most of the contextual themes revolve around social affairs of Islam. Indeed, the main approach of Sayyid Qutb's interpretation is measuring the unity theme in a chapter and relate it to the situation when a verse or Surah revealed. Qutb states in the introduction to the Surah: "Before we begin explaining the contents of the Sura and its significance, it would be better to look [first] into the nature of the event in which the Sura was revealed so that we can feel [ourselves] living in the environment in which all [the early generation of] Muslims lived and learnt lessons from this revelation of the Qur'an." (Qutb, 2009).

2. Explaining the verses related to women in general and leaves dubious details.

The very clear approach of Sayyid's interpretation of women-related revelations is that he did not comment a verse in detail, even described it in general and be fair to both men and women. Detailed descriptions will only be given if the interpretative aspects relate to the context of the verse. For example, in verse 3:42;

"And when the angels said: "O Maryam, Allah has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of all the worlds."

In this verse, he is not detailing the reason for Maryam selection compared to other women except to state briefly the important characteristics that need to be followed by other women and men.

Similarly, in verse relating to adultery in the Surah al-Nur, Sayyid Qutb did not justify for taqdim or advancing word (الزانية) to the word (الزاني) as what some members of Tafsir did. But he was only stressing out on the current situation when the verse was revealed, as well as stating that the person who commits with adultery disregarding men or women are not of faith when they do that damn act (Sayyid Qutb, 2004, 2844). He was consistent with this approach in interpreting verses on robbery and stealing or saraqah as well. Without justifying advancing (السارق) to the word (السارقة). Sayyid Qutb clearly associates the acts as criminal
elements that need to be kept away in the community through the implementation and enforcement of hudud by a ruler (Sayyid Qutb, 2004, 882). This shows that he was interpreting a verse is based on the relation to the verses before and afterward, and leave details that lead to confusion and unnecessary debates.

3. Using the position of women, their access to work, and the form of families as an attack on the West and as praise to Islam.

*Tafsir Fi Zilal Al-Quran* is recognized as a book of Tafsir in its position and described as a dynamic or *haraki* Tafsir (Solah al-Khalidi, 2000). This character made his commentary thoroughly modern in its approach, in the sense that he attempted to show the relevance of the Quran for all times and circumstances of life. He used West phenomenon and problems in justifying the position and privileges of women in Islam. It is most likely the effect of his personal experience in the United States, which is influenced his views on social problems in Western countries, and should be served as a lesson by Muslims (Solah al-Khalidi, 2000).

For example, he emphasizes the importance of the family institution as the first institutions involved in physical construction, soul, and intellect of the children. He confirms the arguments exposed in Social Justice, claiming that a family is a necessary condition for the education of a healthy child. He bases this statement in his experiences and several studies, which he does not cite (Sayyid Qutb, 2004). About women's work rights, Qutb claims that their access to work, sacrifices the psychological health of society's most precious resources, young children, for nothing other than an increase in the family's income, that for him, it is one of the most reprehensible failures of modern society. Thus, the division of responsibilities between man and woman is a necessary condition for a healthy family and society; the man must assure a regular income, so the woman has time to bring up the children (Sayyid Qutb, 2004, 205-206).

However, women have the right and duty to work in Islam if they do not neglect their responsibilities at home. In the case of divorce, both husband and wife must keep their familiar responsibilities to their children. Thus, his rejection of the women working outside is not based on gender bias, but to regard himself as someone sympathetic to women, and trying to better their condition by the way back to their responsibilities which are more compatible with their nature and feminity (Sayyid Qutb (2004). Simple generalizations such as those used by Shahadah are not useful in understanding the thought of a complex ideologist like Sayyid Qutb.

Similarly, regarding polygamy, Sayyid Qutb emphasizes that polygamy is not merely an absolute right for a man to do as they want. But polygamy is a flexibility or *rukhsah* given to Muslim men with severe conditions, to put the limit numbers based on the situation in the Jahiliyyah where men married a vast number of wives until neglected responsibility for his family. He also affirmed that if the fair as a primary requirement of polygamy is not fulfilled, then the right of marriage is irrevocable (Sayyid Qutb. 2004, 579).

4. Observance to the human nature and women's feelings.

When one reads Tafsir Fi Zilal Al-Quran, he would have found that the element of nature is taken seriously by Sayyid Qutb. The nature of which is not confined to the human nature
alone, but includes fundamental nature and creation, as well as the nature of the society which shows everything related to each other. For example, his description about divorce or talaq in Islam and legal ila, he stated that Islam was revealed to human beings and not angels. Human beings have a soul and spirit and sense of feelings that construct and decide someone's point of views. Thus, action needs to be done as a last resort in solving the problem between husband and wife. Talaq is not to oppress women, but the last troubleshooter after all other measures were taken have failed (Sayyid Qutb, 2004).

Similarly, the phenomenon of working women, according to him, is against the nature of a lady who is an emotional and affectionate person, also contrary to the nature of the child who is in need of real love from her mother and not others. Child care centers also according to him, not being able to take the role of a mother's love (Sayyid Qutb, 2004).

He was also cautious in interpreting verses and did not come out a vague interpretation without any valid and authentic arguments and texts from Quran and hadith, especially when the verse relates to dignity and sanctity of women. For instance on his commentary of Surah Maryam (19:16): "And mention in the Book (the story of) Maryam, when she secluded herself from her people to a place towards East." Some commentators interpret the reasons of why Maryam withdrew himself into the unknown place as she was of menstruation (Al-Zamakhshari, 1987) (Al-Razi, 2000). However, Sayyid Qutb took better roads in his comments to only say that the possibility she withdrew because of specific things related to the girl without stating it in detail, observing to the dignity of Mary. While there was no evidence for the absolute meanings from the context of the verse (Sayyid Qutb, 2004).

On the other hand, in his book Social Justice (2012) he also said almost the same thing as claimed in Tafsir Fi Zilal al-Quran. He argues that the position of women in the West and the communist world as main examples of the discrimination of those societies. He also cites the Quranic verses regarding women and family and openly acknowledges discrimination where it exists by contextualizing this discrimination using examples from the pre-Islamic period. Subsequently, he emphasizes why the Islamic conception of family is the best organization of society using scientific references in his argumentation. He affirmed that the strongest point in Islam is the equality which it guarantees to women in religion, as well as their belongings and gains (Sayyid Qutb, 2012, 68)

For Sayyid Qutb, labor rights do not seem as important as equality in economic and spiritual terms. That's why he believes that the access of women to work has been used by the West to lower the salary of workers and that women in the western world are limited to a particular set of jobs of minor responsibility. Qutb maintains that Islam is more egalitarian than the West, and uses the position of women in modern societies as an attack on the West (Sayyid Qutb, 2012, 87)

In his book Milestones (2012) which is his shorter piece of work, Qutb does not concentrate long paragraphs to express his opinion on family and gender, but in a general view. He emphasizes that the family system and the relationship and connection between the sexes verify the whole character of a society and whether it is backward or civilized, jahili or Islamic (Sayyid Qutb, 2012). The family is the first and only place where human values and morals develop and grow in the new generation (Sayyid Qutb, 2012). He criticizes the immorality of the capitalist and communist systems, which do not regard the sexual activity as a moral issue, as well as all jahili societies, regard fornication as something common and
to be proud of. On the contrary, Islam destines to control the animal characteristics, while providing full opportunities for the development and perfection of human characteristics.

From the previous approach of Sayyid Qutb's writing of *Tafsir Fi Zilal al-Quran* and his point of views from these three works, it is concluded that he maintains with the same arguments and justifications regarding women and their roles in generating family and generation. Both men and women play a significant role in developing generation, but in diverse ways parallel with their unique nature.

*Qiwamah or Trusteeship of Men Over Women*

This is an aspect worth considering and to find an answer as Shahadah claimed that Qutb using the trusteeship to restrict women when she said: "Sayyid Qutb has admitted the presence of women in the world is only for happiness and service to the man" (Syahadah, 2000, 9). To answer this suspicion is best viewed on what he said through his interpretation of Quranic verses about trusteeship and matters related to this issue.

Sayyid Qutb stated that trusteeship is a regulatory function within the family, and it is not an abolition of the woman's presence and personality in a family or community, hence, to manage this critical unit, with proper maintenance and protection. He also said that logically, the existence of man as the head of a family does not deny or ignore the role of other family members. However, each has its role and responsibilities that must be carried out by their respective capabilities. If humans can accept the concept of a company having a head, why can not accept the fact that the primary unit that is a family needs the same thing? (Sayyid Qutb, 2004).

Therefore, trusteeship is not honor or privilege, but it is a big responsibility. Hence, al-Sya'rawi said in the interpretation of the verse in Surah al-Nisa (4:34), "and to understand what is the meaning of *qiwamah*, it is rooted from the word *qawwam* which means strengths of doing things. Strengths lead to tiredness, and that never relaxes." (Al-Sya'rawi, 1997, 2193). Therefore, the significance of being responsible is tiredness, and God is justice, when the man gave the *qiwamah* for the particular responsible, the same thing goes for women. Women have the characteristics which are considered as an honor, for instance, kindness, lovely, affection, urgent response to the demands of childhood and. These capabilities are not superficial or pretending, but it tends to something that has been embedded in the emotional and psychological of women and not owned by men (Muhd Qutb, 1965, 214).

But this does not mean absolute separation between man and women, but the issue should be put on whether all these acts, ignoring one's prime responsibility or not? Therefore, Muhammad Qutb saw that humanity with full of equality is directly related to the integration of men and women, though the difference in individual rights and duties (Muhd Qutb, 2000).

**Conclusion**

After detail analysis of Sayyid Qutb's work objectively through his original works, from approaches to its content, to reveal his real views on the topics, the result shows that Sayyid Qutb views on women are constant throughout his entire literature writings. Islam acknowledges the spiritual equality between men and women as detailed in Surah Al-Alzhab.
in the Quran (33:35). The difference is only in a way they play the social roles which are congruent with both gender's physical, biological and emotional. He is also able to sustain and defend his sympathy to women in this era and trying to better their condition by the way back to the fundamentals of Islam.

Bibliography


