



Women's Family Roles Strengthen Contemporary Islamic Education

Peran Keluarga Perempuan Memperkuat Pendidikan Islam Kontemporer

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General Background: Women's roles in Islam are framed through Qur'anic teachings that affirm dignity, rights, responsibility, and participation in family, social, and spiritual life. **Specific Background:** This study examines women's roles in family education through Ibn Kathir's Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, especially as wives, mothers, daughters, and educators. **Knowledge Gap:** Existing discussions on women in Islamic education require a clearer thematic reading of Ibn Kathir's interpretation and its relevance to contemporary Islamic education. **Aims:** This study aims to examine Ibn Kathir's scholarly background, his interpretive approach, women's roles in family education, and the relevance of these roles to contemporary Islamic education. **Results:** The findings show that Ibn Kathir applied tafsir bi al-ma'thur with a tahlili approach by interpreting Qur'anic verses through other verses, prophetic traditions, Companions' views, and Successors' opinions. His interpretation presents women as wives who foster household harmony, mothers who bear major biological, moral, emotional, and spiritual responsibilities, daughters who contribute responsibly to family life, and educators who guide faith, morality, piety, and character formation. **Novelty:** The study recontextualizes Ibn Kathir's classical exegesis by connecting women's family roles with contemporary Islamic education, gender justice, women's empowerment, and character formation. **Implications:** The findings indicate that Ibn Kathir's interpretation remains relevant for strengthening family-based Islamic education while requiring contextualization to address modern social dynamics and broader roles of women.

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Highlights

- Ibn Kathir presents women as wives, mothers, daughters, and educators.
- Mothers hold central responsibility in faith, morality, and character formation.
- Classical Qur'anic exegesis remains relevant when contextualized for modern society.

Keywords

Ibn Kathir; Women Roles; Family Education; Islamic Education; Qur'anic Exegesis

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INTRODUCTION

Women in the Islamic perspective are not only understood through normative teachings that affirm their dignity and recognition of their rights, but are also influenced by the emergence of efforts to reinterpret religious texts (Humaira et al., 2023, p. 65). Theologically, the Qur'an presents Islam as a doctrine that abolishes practices demeaning to women's dignity and affirms their status as an integral part of social and family structures. However, in practice, understandings of women's roles are often shaped by cultural constructs and interpretive frameworks that have evolved within society (Sholikhah, 2025).

In terms of humanity, Islam views men and women as equal; all possess the same right to be servants of Allah Subhanahu wa Ta'ala (Holil et al., 2023, p. 344). Women in the Qur'an are not merely positioned as objects receiving decrees but also as subjects playing active roles in various aspects of life.

Within the family sphere, women bear dual roles: as mothers responsible for educating and nurturing children, as well as wives who serve as companions (Rahmah, 2021, p. 40), and as household managers who determine the quality of family life (QS. Luqman: 14; QS. Ar-Rum: 21). In the social sphere, the Qur'an affirms that women have the right to participate and contribute to society, as emphasized in QS. At-Taubah: 71 regarding the roles of men and women in mutually supporting one another in enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil. As for the spiritual aspect, women are equal to men in terms of religious responsibilities, rewards, and the recompense for righteous deeds, as stated in QS. An-Nisa: 124 and QS. Al-Ahzab: 35. Thus, the Qur'an positions women as subjects with responsibilities, rights, and treats them as partners in the struggle—evidence that women must not be marginalized or deprived of their rights (Zaini et al., 1999, pp. 1–2).

The relevance of this research to contemporary Islamic education is evident in the effort to present an educational paradigm oriented toward gender equality and women's empowerment. Contemporary Islamic education cannot be separated from issues of gender justice, increasing women's participation, and fulfilling women's rights to equal opportunities in pursuing knowledge and contributing to social life.

In the context of contemporary Muslim family education, Ibn Kathir's view on the role of the mother can be understood as a crucial foundation in shaping a child's character, not as a restriction on women's social roles. Ibn Kathir's view of women is that they guide children in developing faith, morals, and manners. This places women in a crucial role as value- and moral-oriented educators for children within the family and society, especially from the very beginning, which is crucial.

There is growing interest in a more dynamic and contextual approach to the study of women in Islam. Recent studies emphasize the importance of analyzing the Qur'an in its historical context to demonstrate the provisions on equal social status for women and men, as well as the social and historical context of contemporary issues in the spirit of social justice and the right to participate in the community. Initiatives to

revisit the issues of women, justice, and rights are not considered marginal, but are important and should be appreciated, demonstrating the full scope of Islam in providing social justice and highlighting the overall imperative of Islamic social justice.

So far, ongoing reforms in Islamic education are evident in the works of Ibn Kathir. Among contemporary reforms in Islamic education concerning women, Ibn Kathir's work on the role of women in developing a quality generation is noted. In recent works, classical works are combined with contemporary ones to address current challenges.

This study aims to produce a perspective that promotes the establishment of an inclusive and progressive educational system in accordance with universal Islamic principles through a critical examination of Ibn Kathir's tafsir. Thus, the legacy of classical tafsir can serve as a source of inspiration for intellectual renewal that is more responsive to the needs of the times.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a Qur'anic exegesis research approach using the *maudhu'i* (thematic) method. The operational steps of this study include the following stages: First, determining the research theme. In this stage, the researcher focused the study on the concept of women's roles from the Qur'anic perspective based on Ibn Kathir's exegesis, particularly regarding women's roles in family education. This theme was established by reviewing various relevant literature, including studies on exegesis, gender in Islam, and contemporary Islamic education. Second, Qur'anic verses related to the role of women were inventoried. At this level, the researcher compiled verses containing terms for women such as *imra'ah*, *nisā*, *'umm*, *zauj*, and verses that include references to women's stories in the Qur'anic narrative. These verses were then directed to the family level. This includes the roles played by women as mothers, wives, daughters, and educators. Third, the lines were put into groups based on the topics they talked about. The verses gathered at this level were organized based on the roles of women as mothers, wives, and companions to their husbands, as well as as teachers of the family. This classification was designed for thematic analysis. Fourth, the verses were examined according to the chronological sequence of revelation and the investigation of the *asbab al-nuzul*. At this level, the researcher sought to elucidate the backdrop of the revelation of these verses in order to comprehend their historical and social context and to attain a thorough understanding of the pedagogical concepts embedded within them. Fifth, the classified verses were examined through the lens of Ibn Kathir's interpretation. At this level, researchers try to figure out what Ibn Kathir meant when he wrote the *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azīm*. Researchers attempt to grasp the role of women in these verses, as well as appreciate the hadith, testimonies of the Companions, and the opinions of scholars that Ibn Kathir used to support his interpretation. Sixth, synthesis and integration of the verses' meanings. In this stage, the researcher combines various interpretations that share common meanings and reconciles verses that are general and specific, absolute and qualified, as well as those that, on the surface, appear to present differing roles for women from Ibn Kathir's interpretive

Seventh, analysis of relevance to contemporary Islamic education. This stage involves linking the findings of Ibn Kathir's exegesis with contemporary concepts and practices of Islamic education, particularly within the context of family education. This analysis focuses on educational values that can be internalized, such as the cultivation of moral character, spiritual development, setting a good example, and strengthening the role of women in shaping the character of future generations.

The research focuses on the role of women in the family as described in Ibn Kathir's Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim. Primary data in this study were obtained from the book *Tafsir al-Qur'anil 'Azim* by Imam al-Hafiz 'Imaduddin Abu al-Fida' Isma'il bin 'Umar bin Katsir ad-Dimasyq. Secondary data comprise diverse literature pertinent to the research theme. For this study, the Maktabah Syamilah app was the main way to get to classical tafsir texts and collect data. In this study, the primary instrument is the researcher, responsible for interpreting, classifying, and analyzing the data, supplemented by auxiliary instruments including a thematic verse classification sheet, an analysis guide for Ibn Kaṣīr's interpretation (encompassing the meaning of the words, context, history, and scholarly arguments), and a data synthesis format for formulating thematic conclusions; the Maktabah Syamilah application serves solely as a data access tool, not as a research instrument. The object of the research is focused on the role of women in the family in Ibn Kaṣīr's Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, with primary data from the book and secondary data from relevant literature. The data acquisition method used to collect data is library research, which means researching various written sources, especially books that are related to and support the research focus. These sources are studied in depth, both related to the theoretical basis, main ideas, and various expert opinions related to the research problem.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Women in the Family from the Perspective of Ibn Kathir

A. Women as Wives

The first figure representing the role of a wife from the perspective of the Qur'an and exegesis is Ḥawā', the wife of Prophet Ādam 'alaihi-salām. Although Ḥawā' is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an, exegesis and Islamic tradition understand her to be a wife (Ibn Kathir, 1971, p. 76). In Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, Ibn Kathir explains the story of Adam and his partner by referring to various traditions in classical exegetical literature, including an account of the process of Hawwa's creation. His clarification underscores that the husband-wife relationship is perceived as complementary,

wherein the presence of a partner facilitates the attainment of harmony and excellence found in human creation. The Qur'an does not directly mention the name Ḥawā', but it does use the word *zauj* in Surah al-Baqarah: 35 to show that she was Prophet Adam's partner. Exegetes, such as Ibn Kathir, say that this verse makes it clear that the partner of Adam is Ḥawā', as explained in classical exegetical traditions.

And We said, 'O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in Paradise, and eat from it as you please. But do not approach this tree, lest you become one of the wrongdoers
And We said, "O Adam, you and your wife may dwell in this Garden, and eat freely of its abundant and good provisions wherever you please, but do not approach this tree, lest you become among the wrongdoers" (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023).
In Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, Ibn Kathir explains this verse as follows:

Adam was asleep and had not yet awakened from his sleep when God created his wife, Eve, from his rib and fashioned her into a woman for him to live with. When the veil was taken off him and he woke up, he saw her next to him and said, as they say, "She is my flesh and blood and my wife," and he lived with her.

Meaning: The prophet Adam fell asleep and didn't wake up until Allah made Eve, his wife, from one of his ribs and turned her into a woman so that Adam could find peace in her. When he woke up from his nap, he saw Eve next to him and said, as they say, and God knows everything: "My flesh, my blood, and my wife." So he found peace in her (Ibn Kathir, 1971, p. 76). Ibn Kathir's interpretation demonstrates that the creation of Ḥawā' from Adam's rib (Allah created from his rib his wife Ḥawā') is understood within the framework of complementary creation. The statement "so that Adam might find peace with her (lisakina ilayha)" indicates that the primary function of the wife in this narrative is as a source of tranquility (sakinah). Therefore, the portrayal of the wife's role in Ibn Kathir's exegesis at this early stage emphasizes emotional connection and closeness, rather than power or a subordinate position. Based on the above explanation, it can be understood that the creation of Eve Adam's wife is part of Allah's will in establishing a human life system based on partnership (zawjiyyah).

B. Women as Mothers

The role of women as mothers essentially begins at conception—that is, when a sperm cell meets an egg, which then develops into a fetus and is eventually born as a baby (Miftah Faridh, 2004, p. 39). The first woman to be a mother in human history was Eve. In Islam, Eve is understood as the mother of all humanity (Roihan Nasution, 2019, p. 1), because it was from her and Prophet Adam, peace be upon him, that the human race on earth developed. The Qur'an places great emphasis on the role of women as mothers, both through normative teachings and exemplary narratives. The mother is positioned as a central figure in the formation of character, faith, and the continuity of the human race. Allah, the Exalted and Glorified, states in Surah Al-Ahqaf [46:15]

.And We have enjoined upon man kindness toward his parents His mother bore him in hardship and gave birth to him in hardship. His gestation and thirty months. Until, when he reached maturity and was forty years old, he said, "My Lord grant me the ability to be grateful the favor You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and that I may do righteous deeds that please You, and make my descendants righteous. Indeed, I turn to You in repentance, and I am among the Muslims

Meaning: We have told people to be nice to their parents because his mother had a hard time giving birth to him. When he turns forty, he prays: "The time from conception to

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weaning is thirty months." "O my Lord, help me to be thankful for the good

things You have given me and my parents, and help me to do good things that please You; and give me Your blessings through my children and grandchildren. Indeed, I repent to You, and indeed, (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023)I am among those who submit to You". Ibn Kathir explains in his exegesis that this verse explains

And He, the Exalted and Glorious, says here: "And We have enjoined upon man to be kind to his parents," meaning We have commanded him to be kind and compassionate toward them

Meaning: And Allah, the Almighty, says here, "And We have commanded mankind to be kind to their parents," meaning We have commanded them to be kind and compassionate toward them (Ibn Kathir, 1971, p. 134). Ibn Kathir's interpretation of this verse indicates that he employed the method of tafsir bi al-ma'tsur, which involves interpreting the verse based on the narrations and understanding of the early generations of Islam. He emphasizes the meaning of the command to be kind to one's parents— in accordance with the explanations of the earlier scholars. Although the verse commands kindness toward both parents, the mention of the hardships a mother endures during pregnancy and childbirth indicates that the Qur'an places special emphasis on a mother's sacrifice. Based on the above exegetical explanation, it provides us with guidance that the magnitude of a mother's toil serves as the primary foundation for the command to be dutiful toward her. A mother's role, both biologically and emotionally, makes an immense and irreplaceable contribution.

Furthermore, the command to be dutiful to one's mother and parents is also emphasized in Surah *al-Isrā'* verse 23, which instructs humanity to treat them well, especially as they grow older, by maintaining respectful and gentle attitudes, speech, and behavior.

Allah specifically emphasizes the role of the mother due to the immense contributions and sacrifices—often unseen—in a child's life, from the period of pregnancy, through childbirth, until the child reaches adulthood. The mother bears the greatest sacrifices during these phases, earnestly enduring the processes of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding.

The Qur'an also presents the figure of the mother in exemplary stories. Surah *Al-Qashash* [28]:7–13 depicts the mother of Prophet Moses as a mother of faith, steadfastness, and total submission to Allah when she set her infant adrift on the Nile. According to Ibn Kathir's understanding, the mother plays a vital role in creating a child's faith and character, rather than being only responsible for household responsibilities. By guardian of faith, a mother is understood as the first educator (*al-murabbiyah al-ūlā*) and is responsible for educating her children, for example by teaching them the areas of monotheism, patience, and obedience to Allah.

Furthermore, it can also be understood that a mother's primary role lies in her responsibility to educate her children, as the first education a child receives takes place within the family environment (Ibrahim Amini, 1996, p. 61). Family education is the initial environment that influences a child's development. Thus, the Qur'an and exegesis place women as mothers in a position of great honor. This role encompasses biological, psychological, moral, and spiritual dimensions that are mutually integrated. Recognition of the mother's role in the

foundation for the respect, protection and empowerment of women's roles within the family and in Islamic education.

C. Women as Children

In several Qur'anic narratives interpreted by Ibn Kathir, women in the role of daughters are depicted as having distinct roles within the dynamics of family life. This portrayal is evident, for example, in the stories of the sister of Prophet Moses and the daughter of Prophet Shu'aib, each of whom demonstrates active involvement in helping and supporting their families. One significant portrayal of women as daughters is found in the story of the sister of Prophet Moses. In Surah *Al-Qasas* [28:11]

وَقَالَتْ لِأُخْتَيْ قُصَيَّةَ فَبَصُرْتَ بِيْ عَنْ جُنْبٍ وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ

Meaning: And Moses' mother said to his sister: "Follow him." So she saw him from afar, while they were unaware (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023). The verse above tells the story of Moses' sister, who was instructed by her mother to follow the trail of Moses, who had been cast into the Nile River. She carried out this task with great caution and ingenuity until she succeeded in reuniting Moses with his mother as his wet nurse.

And she said to his sister, "Follow his trail"—that is, she commanded her daughter, who was older and understood—"what was said to her, so she said to her: "Follow his trail that is, follow his tracks, gather information about him, and inquire about his whereabouts throughout the land. So she went out for that purpose and saw him from afar

Meaning: She said to her sister, "Follow him," meaning she commanded her daughter, who was old enough to understand what was being said to her. So she said to her, "Follow him," meaning follow his trail, find out about him, and inquire about his whereabouts from all corners of the land. So she went out for that purpose and saw him from a distance (Ibn Kathir, 1971, p. 342).

Based on Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Surah *Al-Qasas* [28:11], the sister of Prophet Moses is portrayed as a child who was old enough to understand her mother's command (وكانت كبيرة تعي ما يقال لها). She carried out the task of following Moses's footsteps with great care until she finally learned of his condition. This description indicates that in Ibn Kathir's exegesis, the young girl in this story is portrayed as a figure capable of fulfilling her family's trust with awareness and diligence. The portrayal of women as children is also evident in the story of the two daughters of Prophet Shu'ayb in Surah *Al-Qasas* [28]:23–25. Both women are described as children of noble character, preserving their dignity, and taking responsibility to assist their father in tending the livestock due to his advanced age and physical limitations. In his commentary, Ibn Kathir describes the two daughters of Prophet Shu'ayb with modesty and the ability to maintain and preserve self-respect, as demonstrated in "تمشي على استحياء." He

also mentions that the daughters in the story helped their elderly father with his livestock. This interpretation implies that the daughters in the story of Prophet Shu'ayb helped their family while maintaining humility and self-respect.

D. Women as Educators

Children's education is a mandate given by God to

parents (guardians) so that they grow up to be good children and avoid going astray. In Surah *At-Tahrim* (66:6),

Allah says about the responsibility of parents to protect their children from the fire of hell, stating:

O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the fire of hell whose fuel is people and stones. Its guardians are rough and tough angels. They did not disobey Allah for what He commanded them and always did what they were ordered to do. Meaning: O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the Fire of Hell, whose fuel is people and stones; its guards are angels who are stern and severe, and they do not disobey Allah in what He has commanded them, and they always carry out what they are commanded (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2023).

In interpreting the verse of Allah, "Protect yourselves and your families from the Fire," Ibn Kathir cites several opinions from exegetes. He narrates an explanation from Mujahid stating that the meaning of the verse is: protect yourselves and your families from the fire of Hell by being pious toward Allah and commanding your families to be pious toward Him. Additionally, Qatadah explains that what is meant is to command one's family to obey Allah, forbid

them from committing sins, and uphold Allah's commands in their lives.

In his commentary, Ibn Kathir also cites the opinion of Sufyan al-Thawri, based on a narration by Mansur from a man, from Ali ibn Abi Talib, which is also quoted in al-Tabari's commentary (al-Tabari, 2001, p. 103). The phrase is interpreted with the expression *أدبهم وعلّمهم*, which means: educate them and teach them. Based on this exegetical explanation, it can be understood that Mujahid's opinion emphasizes the importance of piety, namely by fostering a sense of fear of Allah within oneself and one's family. Qatadah says that this verse is also about trying to get the family to follow Allah's commands, stay away from sin, and do what He says in everyday life. In general, this means that the family can be kept safe from the torments of Hell by teaching, guiding, and encouraging good habits in the home.

Ibn Kathir's explanation of the verses about the family says that women, especially mothers, are responsible for keeping religion, morality, and piety alive in the family. This role is clear in the order to keep the family safe from Hell's fire, in their role as community members with sacred duties, and in the story of Mary, the mother of whose raised her daughter in a loving environment.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of Ibn Kathir's interpretation, the Quran depicts women's roles in the family through several primary positions: wife, mother, daughter, and educator. As a wife, a woman is understood as a partner who complements her husband in fostering household harmony and is judged based on her steadfast faith and moral character. As a mother, a woman holds a noble position due to her sacrifices in conceiving, giving birth, breastfeeding, and raising children, while also playing a vital role in shaping the faith and character of future generations.

Furthermore, women are depicted as daughters capable

of contributing to the family with full responsibility.

Ibn Kathir's interpretation of the role of women in the Quran is highly relevant to contemporary Islamic education, particularly in

the context of family education. Women are depicted as playing crucial roles as wives, mothers, daughters, and educators, instilling values of faith, morality, and spiritual responsibility within the family. Despite contextual differences between the classical era and modern society, fundamental

values such as family harmony, patience, sacrifice, and the role of education within the family remain universal and relevant for shaping future generations in contemporary Islamic education.

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