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A Gender-Just Perspective on the Qur'anic Narrative of Adam and Eve: Creation, Relationality, and Descent to Earth

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ABSTRACT

This study reexamines the Qur'anic narrative of the creation, relationship, and descent to earth of Adam and Eve through a gender-just interpretive framework. Classical interpretations have often portrayed women as secondary beings or as the primary cause of humanity's misfortune, views largely shaped by patriarchal assumptions rather than grounded in the Qur'anic text itself. Employing a literature-based qualitative approach and a thematic exegesis (tafsīr maudhu'ī), this study examines key Qur'anic verses including Surah 4:1, 7:11–27, 20:115–122, and 39:6, by comparing traditional exegetical perspectives with contemporary gender-sensitive interpretations. The findings demonstrate that the Qur'an affirms the ontological equality of men and women through the concept of nafs wāhidah (a single shared essence) and does not attribute exclusive responsibility for humanity's earthly descent to Eve. This article contributes to Qur'anic gender studies by reconstructing the Adam–Eve narrative as one that emphasizes collective moral responsibility and mutuality, in accordance with the Qur'an's broader principles of justice, reciprocity, and gender equality.

Penelitian ini menelaah kembali kisah penciptaan, relasi, dan kejatuhan Adam–Hawa dalam Al-Qur'an melalui perspektif keadilan gender. Narasi klasik kerap menggambarkan perempuan sebagai makhluk sekunder atau sebagai pihak yang paling bertanggung jawab atas kejatuhan manusia, suatu pandangan yang lebih banyak dipengaruhi oleh bias patriarki dalam tradisi tafsir. Dengan menggunakan metode studi literatur dan pendekatan tafsir tematik (tafsīr maudhu'ī), penelitian ini menganalisis ayat-ayat kunci seperti QS. An-Nisā' [4]:1, Al-A'rāf [7]:11–27, Tāhā [20]:115–122, dan Az-Zumar [39]:6. Kajian ini membandingkan interpretasi mufasir klasik dengan pembacaan para mufasir kontemporer berperspektif gender. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Al-Qur'an menegaskan kesetaraan ontologis laki-laki dan perempuan melalui konsep nafs wāhidah, serta tidak pernah menempatkan Hawa sebagai penyebab tunggal kejatuhan manusia. Penelitian ini menawarkan kontribusi baru berupa rekonstruksi pembacaan kisah Adam Hawa sebagai narasi tentang tanggung jawab moral kolektif dan kesalingan manusia, sehingga lebih sejalan dengan nilai-nilai keadilan dan etika kesetaraan yang menjadi prinsip dasar Al-Qur'an.

Introduction

The long history of human civilization demonstrates that women have frequently been positioned as second-class beings. During the pre-Islamic Jāhiliyyah period, some communities even practiced female infanticide by burying infant girls alive, as they were perceived as a source of family shame. Patriarchal traditions were also evident in other major civilizations, such as Ancient Rome, where women were believed to lack a soul, or in ancient Chinese traditions that regarded women as bearers of misfortune (Al-Barik, 2004). This condition changed significantly with the advent of Islam, which introduced teachings affirming the spiritual equality of all human beings regardless of gender. In the early Islamic period, women actively participated in social, religious, and political life, indicating that Islam from its inception recognized moral equality between men and women.

However, the legacy of patriarchal culture did not disappear entirely. In some contemporary Muslim societies, women continue to be placed in subordinate positions. Such views are often legitimized through literal readings of the Qur'an and ḥadīth. This situation reflects a hermeneutical gap between the Qur'an's normative message, which emphasizes justice ('adl) and reciprocity (mubādalāh), and interpretive practices shaped by the socio-cultural contexts of the exegetes themselves (Mulia, 2014). Therefore, critiques of gender-biased interpretations should be directed primarily at the methodological level rather than framed solely as moral objections.

One central issue that reveals this bias is the interpretation of the phrase *nafs wāḥidah* in Surah An-Nisā' [4]:1. Some classical exegetes, such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Qurṭubī, interpreted this verse to mean that Eve was created from Adam's rib, a view derived from *isrā'īliyyāt* traditions and literal readings of certain prophetic reports. Theologically, this interpretation positions women as secondary beings. In contrast, modern exegetes such as Abū Muslim al-Aṣḥānī, Rashīd Riḍā, and Muḥammad 'Abduh reject this view, arguing that *minhā* means "of the same kind" rather than "from Adam's body." This interpretation has been further developed by Muslim feminist scholars such as Amina Wadud and Zaitunah Subhan, who understand *nafs* as a gender-neutral concept, thereby affirming the ontological equality of human beings.

Beyond the aspect of creation, the narrative of Adam and Eve's descent to earthly life has also been widely misunderstood. Classical exegetical traditions often depict Eve as the cause of the first transgression, even though the Qur'an employs a dual grammatical structure (*fa-azallahumā*) that clearly indicates both Adam and Eve were equally tempted and equally responsible for the violation (Surah Al-A'rāf [7]:20–23; Tāhā [20]:121–122). Thus, the Qur'anic narrative fundamentally conveys moral responsibility as shared equally between men and women.

Previous studies have addressed this topic from various perspectives. Miskiyah (2022) examines the concept of *nafs wāḥidah* in Zaitunah Subhan's exegetical work; Nurani (2023) analyses the views of eight Muslim feminists on the creation of women; and Hanafī (2016) traces the development of exegetical methodologies from classical to modern periods. Scholars such as Wadud (1999), Hassan (1996), and Barlas (2002) have developed feminist hermeneutical frameworks to uncover patriarchal bias in Qur'anic interpretation. Nevertheless, these studies have not sufficiently integrated three key dimensions: linguistic analysis of *nafs wāḥidah*, reconstruction of the narrative of descent, and the formulation of collective moral responsibility between men and women.

Addressing this research gap, the present study aims to reinterpret the story of Adam and Eve through a thematic exegetical approach (*tafsīr maudhu'ī*) grounded in the principle of gender justice. This study seeks to demonstrate that the Qur'anic narratives of human creation and earthly descent

are not hierarchical accounts, but rather narratives of reciprocity and shared responsibility among human beings as *khalīfah fi al-ard*. In doing so, this research offers a new contribution in the form of a gender-just reconstruction of Qur’anic interpretation that is more consistent with the Qur’an’s universal ethical vision.

Research Methodology

This study employs a literature-based research method within the field of Qur’anic interpretation, using a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach through the model of *tafsīr maudhu’ī* (thematic exegesis). The focus of the analysis includes Qur’anic verses that address the process of Adam and Eve’s creation, their relational dynamics in paradise, and the event of their descent to earth. Primary data are drawn from the Qur’an and classical exegetical works, while secondary data consist of contemporary gender-oriented literature, including works of Qur’anic interpretation, feminist hermeneutical writings, and recent theological studies.

The analytical process is conducted in three stages. First, relevant Qur’anic texts and exegetical sources related to the themes of human creation and descent are systematically identified and compiled. Second, a comparative analysis between classical and modern interpretations is conducted to identify patriarchal bias in exegetical discourse, particularly interpretations that position women as secondary beings, portray them as the cause of sin, or construct them as theologically inferior to men. Third, a hermeneutical synthesis is developed by employing the principles of justice (*‘adl*) and reciprocity (*mubādalah*) in order to produce alternative readings that affirm ontological and moral equality.

In this study, patriarchal bias is identified based on three indicators: (1) interpretations that establish hierarchical relations between men and women without strong linguistic or contextual justification; (2) readings of Qur’anic verses that contradict the Qur’an’s universal principles of justice and human welfare; and (3) reliance on *isrā’iliyyāt* narratives or *ḥadīth* interpreted in a strictly literal manner that diminishes women’s status as moral subjects.

Conversely, indicators of gender justice refer to interpretations that affirm spiritual, moral, and social equality between men and women, in accordance with the concept of *nafs wāḥidah* (Surah An-Nisā’ [4]:1) and the Qur’anic ethical principle that evaluates human worth based on piety rather than gender (Surah Al-Ḥujurāt [49]:13).

The principle of *mubādalah* is applied in the analysis of Qur’anic verses by reading the relationship between Adam and Eve as a reciprocal relationship between mutual subjects, rather than as a hierarchical one. For instance, the verse containing the expression *fa-azallahumā* (“Satan caused both of them to slip”) is interpreted as an affirmation of equal moral responsibility between men and women in the context of sin and repentance. Each exegetical interpretation is further examined against the framework of *āyāt muḥkamāt*, namely verses that explicitly emphasize justice, equality, and shared responsibility as core Qur’anic ethical principles.

Therefore, this study adopts a critically normative position: normative in its commitment to the Qur’an as the primary source of values, yet critical of exegetical constructions shaped by patriarchal social contexts. This approach enables a contextual reconstruction of textual meaning without undermining the authority of revelation, thus producing interpretations that are both justice-oriented and grounded in universal human values.

Results and Discussion

1. The Debate on the Creation of Adam and Eve

The Qur'an itself does not provide an explicit explanation regarding the name of Adam's wife or the specific manner of her creation. Rather, the Holy Qur'an emphasizes that human beings were created from earth/clay. Nevertheless, several classical exegetes, such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Qurtūbī, interpret the phrase "wa khalaqa minhā zawjahā" (Surah An-Nisā' [4]:1) as indicating that Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs. This interpretation is largely influenced by isrā'īliyyāt narratives and by prophetic traditions that are understood in a literal manner.

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

"O humankind! Be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the two spread many men and women. Be mindful of Allah, in whose name you ask one another, and of the bonds of kinship. Indeed, Allah is ever watchful over you."

According to Ibn Kathīr, Allah Almighty opens Surah An-Nisā' by addressing all of humanity and calling them to worship Allah alone without associating partners with Him, as a reminder of His power and oneness. Through the verse:

In the verse: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ ("O humankind! Be mindful of your Lord, who created you from a single soul"), Ibn Kathīr understands the phrase *nafs wāhidah* as referring to the single origin of humanity, namely their father Adam (Ad-Dimisyqi, 774 H). The phrase {وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا} is interpreted as an explanation that Allah created a spouse for Adam, namely Eve (Ḥawwā'), peace be upon her. Several narrations state that Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs (the left rib from the back) while Adam was asleep. When Adam awoke and saw Eve, he felt attraction toward her, and Eve likewise felt attraction toward Adam.

Ibn Abī Ḥātim cites a narration in which his father reports from Muḥammad ibn Muqātil, from Wakī', from Abū Hilāl, from Qatādah, from Ibn 'Abbās. This narration states: "Woman was created from man; therefore, a woman's inclination is toward man. Man was created from earth/clay; therefore, his inclination is toward the earth/clay. Thus, guard your women."

In a sound (ṣaḥīḥ) ḥadīth, it is stated:

إِنَّ الْمَرْأَةَ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلْعٍ، وَإِنَّ أَعْوَجَ شَيْءٍ فِي الضِّلْعِ أَعْلَاهُ، فَإِنْ ذَهَبَتْ تَقِيمُهُ كَسَرَتْهُ، وَإِنْ اسْتَمْتَعَتْ بِهَا اسْتَمْتَعَتْ بِهَا وَفِيهَا عَوَجٌ

"Indeed, woman was created from a rib, and the most curved part of the rib is its upper portion. If one attempts to straighten it forcefully, it will break; but if one lives with her and finds comfort in her, one will benefit from her despite that curvature." (Ad-Dimisyqi, 774 H)

This interpretation has been widely adopted by the majority (jumhūr) of classical scholars and exegetes in understanding the phrase *مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ* as referring to Adam himself, while *وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا* is interpreted as referring to Eve. Among the scholars who agreed with this view are al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Ālūsī, and al-Qurtūbī (Mahmudah, 2018).

According to al-Marāghī, the phrase {وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا} means that Allah subsequently created for that soul (manifested in the person of the Prophet Adam) a companion who originated from the same essence, namely Eve. In the tradition of the People of the Book (Ahl al-Kitāb), it is stated that Eve was created from one of Adam's ribs on the left side while he was asleep, as recorded in the Book of Genesis, chapter two. Al-Marāghī also cites a narration reported by al-Bukhārī that conveys a similar description, consistent with Ibn Kathīr's explanation.

After presenting these narrations, al-Marāghī emphasizes that Allah multiplied humankind through a single soul (Adam, who was created from earth/clay) and that from the same soul Allah

brought forth his companion, Eve. Notably, however, al-Marāghī does not categorically assert that Eve originated from Adam’s rib. Instead, he proceeds to cite the view of Abū Muslim al-Aṣfahānī, who interprets the term *minhā* as meaning “from the same species or kind,” rather than in a physical sense that Eve was created from Adam’s body. This interpretation is also consistent with similar usages of the term found in other Qur’anic verses:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

“And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, so that you may find tranquility in them; and He has placed between you affection and mercy. Indeed, in that are signs for people who reflect.” (Surah Ar-Rūm:21)

لَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مِّنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ عَزِيزٌ عَلَيْهِ مَا عَنِتُّمْ حَرِيصٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ

“There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves; grievous to him is what you suffer; he is deeply concerned for you, and to the believers he is kind and merciful.” (Surah At-Tawbah:128)

لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ ۗ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ

“Certainly did Allah confer [great] favor upon the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves, reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error.” (Surah Āli ‘Imrān 3:164)

These verses do not differ in meaning from other Qur’anic passages that employ similar linguistic constructions; broadly speaking, the message conveyed remains consistent. Therefore, the claim that Eve was created from Adam’s rib cannot be considered a direct interpretation derived from this verse. Imposing such a meaning would instead deviate from the general interpretive pattern found in other comparable verses. This explanation was suggested by al-Aṣfahānī, as cited in Tafsīr al-Marāghī (1992).

Meanwhile, according to al-Zamakhsharī, the term *nafs wāhidah* is understood to refer to Adam, while the phrase *zaujahā* denotes Eve, whom Allah created from one of Adam’s ribs. This view aligns with al-Ālūsī’s interpretation in *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, where he further specifies that the rib in question was Adam’s left rib. Unlike al-Zamakhsharī, who does not provide a specific supporting basis, al-Ālūsī grounds his interpretation in a hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

اسْتَوْصُوا بِالنِّسَاءِ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّهُنَّ الْمَرْأَةُ خُلِقَتْ مِنْ ضِلْعٍ وَإِنَّ أَعْوَجَ شَيْءٍ مِنَ الضِّلْعِ أَغْلَاهُ فَإِنْ دَنَبْتَ تَقْيِمُهُ كَسَرْتَهُ وَإِنْ تَرَكْتَهُ لَمْ يَزَلْ أَعْوَجَ

“Treat women kindly, for they were created from a rib, and the most curved part of the rib is its upper part. If you attempt to straighten it forcefully, you will break it; but if you leave it as it is, it will remain curved.” (Reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim)

In addition, al-Ālūsī presents the view of Abū Muslim regarding the origin of Eve’s creation, along with his critique. Abū Muslim argues that Eve was not created from Adam’s rib, but rather was created directly from the earth/clay, just as Adam was. He questions why Allah would need to take a part of Adam’s body as the source of Eve’s creation, given that Allah is fully capable of creating her directly from the earth/clay. Based on this understanding, Abū Muslim interprets the phrase *wa khalāqa minhā zaujahā* as indicating that Allah created Eve from the same kind or species as Adam—namely, humanity—similar to the expression *min anfusikum azwājan* in Surah Ar-Rūm 30:21, which means “He created for you spouses from among yourselves.”

Al-Ālūsī rejects this interpretation. He argues that if Eve were truly created from the earth/clay as an entity separate from Adam, then the origin of humankind could no longer be attributed to “a

single soul” (min nafsin wāḥidah), but rather to two distinct origins (min nafsayn). According to al-Ālūsī, this contradicts both the wording of the Qur’anic verse and the authentic prophetic traditions. Regarding the wisdom behind Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib, al-Ālūsī explains that beyond the divine wisdom that lies beyond human comprehension, this mode of creation also serves as evidence of Allah’s power to create living beings from other living beings without the process of reproduction (tawallud), just as Allah is capable of bringing life from lifeless matter.

If Allah’s power to create from earth/clay were used as an argument to claim that creation from other than earth is “unnecessary,” then logically all creatures would have been created directly from earth/clay without any intermediary process. Yet, in reality, Allah has ordained human continuity through reproduction, even though He possesses the absolute power to create humans directly from earth/clay, as He did with Adam (Ilyas, 1997).

Hamka, in Tafsīr al-Azhar, explains that scholars generally understand the phrase “a single soul” as referring to Adam, and that from him Allah created his life partner. The majority of exegetes interpret this partner as Eve, Adam’s wife. Reports transmitted by Ibn Abī Shaybah, ‘Abd bin Ḥumayd, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim indicate that Mujāhid held the same interpretation: that “a single soul” refers to Adam, and that his partner, created “from him,” was Eve, who (according to these narrations) originated from one of Adam’s ribs. Ibn al-Mundhir and ‘Abd bin Ḥumayd further specify that the rib in question was the lowest rib on Adam’s left side (Hamka, 2015).

Another report narrated by Abū Shaykh from Ibn ‘Abbās also points to a similar interpretation. Consequently, it is unsurprising that many later exegetes followed the views of earlier scholars. Within classical tafsir literature, alternative interpretations diverging from this understanding are rarely found.

However, when one refers directly to the wording of the verse that serves as the object of interpretation, there is no explicit explanation affirming that the “single soul” refers to Adam, nor that the partner created “from it” is Eve. The verse likewise provides no indication whatsoever regarding the origin of Eve’s creation from a rib. All of these details are derived from supplementary reports (āthār), rather than from the textual formulation of the verse itself (Hamka, 2015).

Hamka emphasizes that since the scope of ijtihād in Islam has never been entirely closed, questioning the foundations of classical interpretations of this verse is both legitimate and natural. He then identifies two primary sources upon which early exegetes relied: first, authentic hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim; and second, Hebrew tradition, particularly the Jewish narrative found in the Book of Genesis (Chapter II, verses 21–22), one of the five books believed by Jews to constitute the original Torah. Nevertheless, a number of modern scholars have questioned the authenticity of this text as genuine revelation conveyed to the Prophet Moses, instead regarding it as a document composed by later generations.

Hamka interprets the phrase “He created you from a single soul” as an affirmation that all human beings (both men and women) regardless of their place of residence or differences in skin color, originate from the same essence. Every human being is endowed with intellect, an inclination toward goodness, and a natural aversion to evil. Humans are also, by their innate disposition (fiṭrah), inclined toward what is beautiful and repelled by what is harmful or corrupt. For this reason, one ought to regard others as part of oneself. In this context, it becomes evident that Hamka does not establish a single definitive position regarding the origin of Eve’s creation, as Islam itself allows room for ijtihād in interpreting this verse (Hamka, 2015).

Other scholars have proposed alternative interpretations, such as Shaykh Rashīd Riḍā and Muḥammad ‘Abduh in *Tafsīr al-Manār*. They argue that there is no clear indication that the term *nafs wāḥidah* in the verse refers specifically to Adam, except for those who hold the belief that all humans are literally descendants of Adam. For those who assume that each race has its own ancestral origin, *nafs wāḥidah* is understood as the original ancestor of a particular group.

‘Abduh explains that the use of the indefinite (*nakirah*) forms *rijālan* and *nisā’an* in the phrase *wa bathṣa minhumā rijālan kathīran wa nisā’ā* indicates that these terms do not refer to specific individuals. If the verse were truly intended to identify Adam as a particular, definite figure (*ma‘rifah*), then these nouns would likewise have appeared in the definite form, for example, through a construction such as *wa bathṣa minhumā jam‘a ar-rijāl wa an-nisā’*. Moreover, since the verse is addressed to all of humanity, ‘Abduh argues that it would be unreasonable to interpret *nafs wāḥidah* as a single individual (namely Adam) given that many communities across the world are unfamiliar with, or have never even heard of, the names Adam and Eve (Ilyas, 1997).

‘Abduh further asserts that the belief identifying Adam as the first human being ultimately derives from the Torah. However, he maintains that the Torah cannot serve as a definitive point of reference, as its authenticity is not guaranteed. Matters of a metaphysical nature, he argues, can only be accepted through revelation without addition or subtraction. Since the Qur’an itself does not explicitly state that *nafs wāḥidah* refers to Adam, the issue is left unresolved, neither affirmed as Adam nor denied outright (Ilyas, 1997).

Rashīd Riḍā similarly emphasizes that the widespread interpretation among many exegetes identifying *nafs wāḥidah* with Adam is not directly grounded in the Qur’anic text, but rather developed from general beliefs long embedded within human society (*‘āmm al-bashar*). In line with Muḥammad ‘Abduh’s position, Riḍā adopts an attitude of *tawaqquf* toward this issue. For him, regardless of conclusions concerning the first human being, the central message of the verse is that all humans share a common human origin. Accordingly, all people are brothers and sisters, irrespective of skin color, linguistic differences, or divergent views regarding human origins. The verse, he concludes, was not intended to narrate the beginning of human creation (Ilyas, 1997).

In *Tafsīr al-Manār*, it is also stated that if the story of the creation of Adam and Eve were not found in the Old Testament, the idea that Eve was created from Adam’s rib would not occur to a Muslim reading the Qur’an (‘Abduh, 1993).

Meanwhile, Amina Wadud, a Muslim feminist scholar, offers a detailed explanation of several key terms. First, the particle *min* can function not only as a preposition but also as an expression indicating sameness or similarity. When *min* is interpreted strictly as a preposition, the resulting exegetical response suggests that the first created being was a perfect and superior male, followed by a female who is ontologically inferior. However, when *min* is understood as denoting sameness, it is associated with the terms *nafs* and *azwāj*, yielding the following meaning:

“And among His signs is that He created for you spouses from among yourselves, so that you may find tranquility in them” (Surah Ar-Rūm [30]: 21).

The term *nafs* in this verse is gender-neutral and does not exhibit any inclination toward a specific sex, whether male or female. The word *zauj*, on the other hand, is commonly understood as referring to a woman (Eve), since in the Qur’an the terms *zauj* or *azwāj* are used to denote pairing in a broad sense, whether as partners, spouses, wives, or even groups. This concept of pairing is also evident in Surah Ar-Raḥmān [55]: 52, where it is used to describe the paired nature of plants (Hassan, 1996).

According to Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, when this verse is examined through the frameworks of muḥkam–mutashābih and qaṭ‘ī–ẓannī, there is no indication that women originate from men or that Eve was created from Adam. The term an-nās in the verse carries a general meaning that encompasses all human beings, both men and women. Similarly, the pronoun kum, which is universal in nature, reinforces that the act of creation applies to humanity as a whole, not exclusively to Adam or to men alone (Kodir, 2023).

The word nafs signifies the self, soul, or essence, while zawjahā denotes pairing or spousal relationship. From this literal semantic analysis, there is no discussion of Adam being created first and Eve subsequently being created from him. Faqihuddin explains that the moral message of the verse affirms the equality of human beings in creation, regardless of gender (Kodir, 2023).

Nasaruddin Umar explains that the first step in understanding the concept of gender is to examine the origin of human creation. Human beings, as biological entities according to Qur’anic verses, originate from a specific type of soil. This indicates that both men and women share the same elemental composition. No substantial or structural differences are found between them. Consequently, the final conclusion drawn is that there is no inherent difference between men and women.

Regarding the origin of woman’s creation, Nasaruddin Umar cites Surah An-Nisā’ [4]: 1 as the only verse that suggests to it. Drawing on al-Isfahānī’s analysis of the term nafs, which appears 295 times in the Qur’an, none of these instances indicate the meaning of Adam.

The expression al-nafs al-wāḥidah in the context of origins does not necessarily signify Adam; it may also refer to the origins of animals, as found in Surah Ash-Shūrā [42]: 11. Grammatically, nafs wāḥidah is an indefinite (nakirah) construction rather than a definite (ma‘rifah) one, and wāḥidah functions as a feminine adjective (mu’annath), indicating type or kind rather than a specific individual. If the verse were referring to a primary substance (namely Adam as the origin), it would have employed the masculine form wāḥid. The use of wāḥidah falls into a category of proper nouns in which the adjective may differ in form from the modified noun in order to emphasize the essence being described. An example appears in Surah Al-A‘rāf [7]: 57, where the term qarīb in fact qualifies al-iḥsān rather than raḥmah.

Musdah Mulia observes the social implications arising from interpretations of the term nafs wāḥidah. However, the verse itself does not explicitly address the creation of Eve. In fact, the name “Eve” (Ḥawwā’) does not appear anywhere in the Qur’an. Reports describing woman as being created from a rib (such as those narrated by at-Tirmidhī) occur in contexts that do not directly discuss Eve.

The notion that women were created from a rib represents a scholarly ijtihād that remains open to challenge, as it neither aligns with the explicit wording of the Qur’anic verse nor conforms to rational considerations.

In a hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī, women are described as having been created from a rib, which, if forcibly straightened, will break, and if left as it is, will remain bent. In reality, a literal interpretation of this narration is problematic, since all human beings are created through biological reproduction. Therefore, the reference to the rib in this hadith is better understood metaphorically (majāz).

The rib serves as a metaphor for negative traits that may obstruct bonds of affection between husband and wife. It may also symbolize situations in which a woman is perceived as stubborn, thus requiring wisdom and strategy in relational communication.

In Tafsīr Bahr al-Muḥīt, it is stated that the interpretation of nafs wāḥidah based on hadiths describing women as being created from a curved rib is rejected. According to this view, just as Adam was created from turāb (clay), Eve was likewise created from clay. The hadith should therefore be interpreted metaphorically rather than literally (ḥaqīqī).

In Surah An-Nisā' [4]: 1, it is argued that an omitted muḍāf occurs in the phrase minhā, such that the intended expression is wa khalaqa min jinsihā zawjahā (“and from its kind He created its spouse”). The term jins refers to the basic material of creation, namely clay (turāb or ṭīn). Accordingly, the pronoun hā in this phrase refers to ṭīn, not to nafs.

The resulting meaning is: “And from the clay that constituted the substance of Adam’s creation, Allah created his spouse.” The particle min in the phrase min nafsīn wāḥidah functions as ibtidā’ al-ghāyah (the point of origin). Allah is capable of creating the first human being, Adam, from earth/clay, and likewise capable of creating Eve from the same type of earth/clay.

Zaitunah Subhan, in her work, presents several controversial perspectives on the creation of women. She identifies two main views: first, that Adam was the first human and Eve was created afterward, even from his own being; and second, that Eve was created from the same type of substance as Adam.

The second view presented by Subhan is considered more rational, as the term Adam in Hebrew means “earth/clay” and derives from the word Adamah. It functions as a general term for humanity rather than as a gender-specific designation. This understanding is supported by other Qur’anic verses, such as Surah Al-Isrā’ [17]: 70 (Zulaiha, 2024).

Zaitunah Subhan’s position reinforces the view that the term Adam in Hebrew (Adamah) refers to earth/clay/soil rather than to a male name, functioning instead as a generic designation for human beings. Accordingly, Adam does not represent the male gender but symbolizes humanity itself.

In contrast to classical exegetes who understood Eve as having been created from Adam’s rib, modern feminist exegetes such as Amina Wadud, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, and others interpret the phrase as meaning “from the same kind” rather than “from his body.” Consequently, the concept of nafs wāḥidah signifies ontological equality between men and women: both originate from the same essence, and there is no indication of a hierarchical order of creation.

2. The Relationship between Adam and Eve from a Gender-Just Perspective: The Descent to Earth and Moral Responsibility

The relationship between Adam and Eve is portrayed as harmonious, balanced, and egalitarian, as reflected in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 35–38 and Surah Al-A‘rāf [7]: 19–25:

وَقُلْنَا يَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ وَكُلَا مِنْهَا رَغَدًا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ فَأَزَلَّهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ عَنْهَا فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ وَقُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ فَتَلَقَىٰ آدَمَ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا ۖ فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

“And We said, ‘O Adam, live—you and your spouse—in Paradise, and eat freely from wherever you wish, but do not approach this tree, lest you become among the wrongdoers.’ Then Satan caused them both to slip from it and expelled them from what they had been in. And We said, ‘Descend, some of you enemies to others, and for you on the earth is a place of settlement and enjoyment for a time.’ Then Adam received words from his Lord, and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, He is the Most Accepting of Repentance, the Merciful. We said, ‘Descend from it, all of you.

Then when guidance comes to you from Me, whoever follows My guidance—there will be no fear concerning them, nor will they grieve.”

Similarly, Surah Al-A‘rāf [7]: 19–25 states:

وَيَادُّمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ فَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ فَوَسَّوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوَاتِيهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَتَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ وَقَاسَمَهُمَا إِنِّي لَكُمَا لَمِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ فَدَلَبَهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْءُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفْنَ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ وَّرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ ۗ وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكَ الشَّجَرَةِ وَأَقُلْتُ لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ قَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ قَالِ اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ قَالِ فِيهَا تَحْيَوْنَ وَفِيهَا تَمُوتُونَ وَمِنْهَا تُخْرَجُونَ

“O Adam, live—you and your spouse—in Paradise and eat from wherever you wish, but do not approach this tree, or else you will be wrongdoers.” Then Satan whispered to them to expose to them what had been concealed of their nakedness. He said, ‘Your Lord has forbidden this tree to you only to prevent you from becoming angels or immortals.’ And he swore to them, ‘Indeed, I am truly your sincere advisor.’ Thus, he brought about their fall through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their nakedness was exposed to them, prompting them to cover themselves with leaves from Paradise. Then their Lord called out to them, ‘Did I not forbid you from approaching that tree and did I not tell you that Satan is your sworn enemy?’ They replied, ‘Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers.’ He said, ‘Descend, some of you enemies to others. And for you on the earth is an abode and provision for a time.’ He said, ‘Therein you will live, and therein you will die, and from it you will be resurrected.”

Iblis, who had resolved to mislead the descendants of Adam, implanted deception into the hearts of both Adam and Eve. He swore by Allah that he was a sincere advisor and convinced them that the prohibition against approaching the tree was intended only to prevent them from becoming angels or attaining immortality (Surah Al-A‘rāf [7]: 20–21; Surah Tāhā [20]: 120). Through this persuasion, Iblis ultimately succeeded in deceiving them. After consuming the forbidden fruit, their nakedness became visible, symbolizing the exposure of their error, and in haste they covered themselves with the leaves of Paradise (Surah Al-A‘rāf [7]: 22; Surah Tāhā [20]: 121).

Allah then addressed both of them, saying, “Did I not forbid you from approaching that tree and did I not tell you that Satan is your sworn enemy?” (Surah Al-A‘rāf [7]: 22). Realizing their mistake, Adam and his spouse immediately expressed their repentance through a supplication taught by Allah: “Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers” (Surah Al-A‘rāf [7]: 23).

Following this event, Allah spoke directly to both of them, as indicated by the expression “their Lord called to them both.” This formulation demonstrates that Eve is positioned as a moral subject equal to Adam; she is neither an entity under Adam’s ownership nor a party judged through him as an intermediary. Eve is recognized as an individual possessing the same ethical and spiritual responsibility. Hassan (1996) emphasizes that the discourse of “Eve’s sin” or the assumption that women are the source of temptation is a patriarchal construct that does not originate from the Qur’an.

Allah, in His attribute as the Most Accepting of Repentance, accepted the forgiveness from both of them. Nevertheless, as a consequence of their transgression, they were commanded to leave Paradise and settle on earth. Allah declared, “Descend, some of you enemies to others. And for you on the earth is an abode and provision for a time” (Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 36; Surah Al-A‘rāf [7]: 24–25).

The words of repentance were uttered jointly by Adam and Eve. Both acknowledged their wrongdoing, both sought forgiveness, and both implored for mercy. Allah subsequently forgave them and accepted their repentance (Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 37). There is no hierarchy either in sin nor in forgiveness. This process affirms that access to Allah’s mercy and forgiveness is equally available to men and women.

In the Qur’anic narrative of Paradise, Eve is never portrayed as the one who tempted Adam. Surah Al-A‘rāf [7]: 20–23 and Ṭāhā [20]: 120–121 describe both of them as being tempted by Iblis and both expressing repentance and seeking forgiveness. Feminist exegesis underscores that the fall of humanity is a matter of collective responsibility rather than the fault of women alone. The Qur’an employs dual grammatical forms—such as *fa azallahumā* (“He caused them both to slip”)—to emphasize equality in spiritual responsibility.

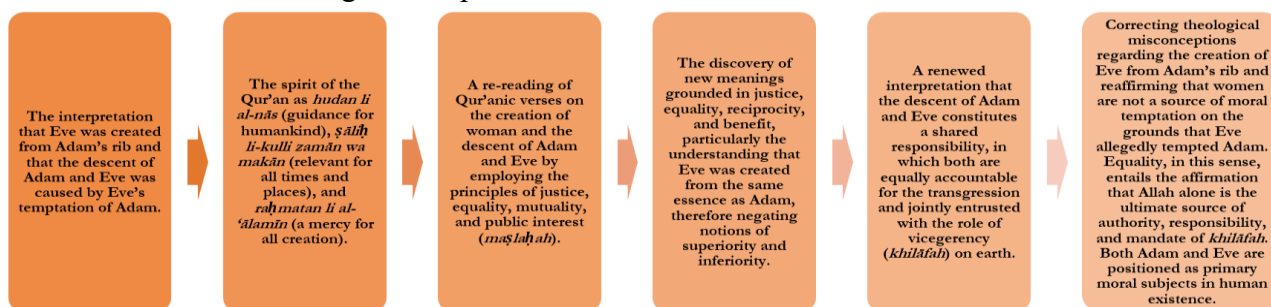
The concept of Adam and Eve’s descent from Paradise has often been burdened with gender-biased interpretations in which Eve is positioned as the primary culprit or as the source of an inherited original sin. A gender-just reading of the Qur’an rejects this narrative and offers an interpretation that is more equitable, balanced, and ethically constructive.

Within the Qur’anic narrative, the descent of Adam and Eve to earth (Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 36–38) is not merely a punishment, but rather part of the broader mission of human vicegerency (*khilāfah*). From a gender-just perspective, this event symbolizes the shared responsibility of men and women to cultivate the earth and fulfill the divine trust. It marks the beginning of human history as a joint moral and spiritual endeavor.

3. Reconstructing a Gender-Just Interpretation of the Verses on the Creation of Adam and Eve

For centuries, interpretations of the creation narrative of Adam and Eve within the Islamic exegetical tradition have been strongly influenced by patriarchal social constructions. Classical commentaries such as those of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī frequently interpret the phrase “*wa khalaqa minhā zawjahā*” (Surah An-Nisā’ [4]:1) as indicating that Eve was created from Adam’s rib. This interpretation is reinforced by *isrā’iliyyāt* narratives and by hadith reports understood in a literal manner, which subsequently gave rise to a theological narrative positioning women as a secondary creation following men.

However, such an approach raises epistemological and moral problems, as it places women in an inferior position that contradicts the Qur’anic principle of *musāwah* (equality). Therefore, a reconstruction of the interpretive paradigm is necessary, one that affirms the values of justice and mutuality (*mubādalah*) embedded in the Qur’anic text. This study seeks to examine the interpretive strategies employed by feminist exegetes in reconstructing gender-biased interpretations. The framework of feminist exegesis adopted in this discussion is outlined as follows.



The reconstruction of a gender-just interpretation begins with the conviction that the Qur'an is both transcendent and contextual: its divine message is universal, yet its understanding is always shaped by the social context of the reader. This principle is emphasized by modern Muslim scholars such as Amina Wadud and Nasaruddin Umar, who argue that the Holy Qur'an itself is not gender-biased; rather, it is human interpretation that produces bias.

According to Amina Wadud, verses related to creation (such as Surah An-Nisā' [4]:1 and Surah Ar-Rūm [30]:21) should be read through linguistic and thematic analysis rather than literalism. The term *nafs wāḥidah* (a single soul) signifies the ontological unity of humankind without gender differentiation. Likewise, the term *zawj* refers to a partner who is equal, not subordinate. Accordingly, the Qur'anic account of creation should be understood as symbolizing mutual relationality rather than biological hierarchy.

A gender-just reconstruction of interpretation requires a shift in perspective from a hierarchical paradigm toward a complementary one, in which men and women are seen as mutually completing each other. Ontologically, both Adam and Eve are created from the same substance, namely *turāb* (earth/clay). There is no Qur'anic text stating that Eve was created from Adam's rib; this notion appears only in exegetical literature influenced by narratives borrowed from the Old Testament tradition.

From an ethical perspective, the descent of Adam and Eve from Paradise (Surah Al-A'rāf [7]:20–23; Surah Ṭāhā [20]:121–122) is described as a shared mistake. This is evident in the use of dual pronouns in the verses, such as *fa azallahumā al-shayṭān* ("Satan caused them both to slip"). This formulation rejects the idea that women are the source of human sin. Instead, it affirms equal moral responsibility for both men and women before Allah.

The effort to reconstruct a gender-just interpretation does not merely involve reinterpreting specific verses but also introduces a new hermeneutical paradigm known as *mubādalāh* (reciprocity or mutuality), as developed by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir. This approach is grounded in the values of *'adl* (justice) and *raḥmah* (compassion), which are understood as reciprocal between men and women.

In the context of the Adam and Eve narrative, the principle of *mubādalāh* teaches that both figures are active subjects who complement one another, rather than dominant and subordinate entities. This equality is further reinforced by the Qur'anic concept of *zawjiyyah*, which depicts all of Allah's creation as existing in pairs that contribute mutually to one another (Surah Adh-Dhāriyāt [51]:49).

A gender-just reconstruction of the Adam and Eve narrative carries significant implications for contemporary religious and social life. First, it corrects theological misunderstandings that have long been used to legitimize gender inequality on religious grounds. Second, it opens space for women to emerge as active subjects in the public sphere without compromising their spiritual values. Third, it reaffirms the universal Islamic teaching that human dignity is measured not by gender, but by piety (*inna akramakum 'inda Allāhi atqākum*; Surah Al-Ḥujurāt [49]:13). Fourth, this narrative demonstrates equality in shared duties and responsibilities between men and women as partners entrusted with the role of *khalīfah fī al-arḍ* from the very beginning of human creation.

Thus, the reconstruction of a gender-just interpretation is not an attempt to oppose the classical exegetical tradition, but rather an effort to actualize the moral message of the Qur'an in accordance with the demands of the present age. This perspective restores the story of Adam and Eve to its original meaning: a narrative of human origins, shared responsibility, and spiritual equality before Allah.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes that the Qur'anic narrative of the creation, relationality, and descent of Adam and Eve does not support a hierarchical construct that positions men as superior and women as inferior. A re-examination of the relevant verses demonstrates that the ontological equality of men and women is affirmed through the concept of *nafs wāḥidah*, understood as a shared and non-hierarchical source of creation. Interpretations claiming that Eve was created from Adam's rib are not grounded in the Qur'anic text, but rather emerge from the influence of *isrā'īliyyāt* traditions and literal readings of certain hadith. Such interpretations have produced negative stereotypes that disadvantage women and contradict the values of divine justice.

An analysis of the verses concerning the descent of Adam and Eve further confirms that both figures are positioned as equal moral subjects. The Qur'an consistently employs dual grammatical forms (such as *fa-azallahumā*, *qālā*, and *tābā*) indicating that both committed the transgression, both sought forgiveness, and both received Allah's mercy. Therefore, attributing sin exclusively to Eve has no textual basis in the Qur'an and should instead be understood as a patriarchal construction inherited from earlier exegetical traditions.

This study offers a novel contribution by reconstructing the Adam–Eve narrative as a story of collective moral responsibility. Men and women are not merely understood as biological partners, but as equal collaborators in fulfilling the trust of *khilāfah* on earth. By integrating linguistic analysis, engagement with classical and contemporary exegetical works, and the perspective of *mubādalāh* (reciprocity), this research affirms that the foundational values of the Qur'an are mutuality, justice, and spiritual equality between men and women.

Ultimately, a gender-just reading of the Adam and Eve narrative is not an arbitrary reinterpretation of the text, but an effort to restore the Qur'anic message to its universal principles. Contextual, inclusive, and justice-oriented interpretations are essential for ensuring that Qur'anic values of human equality are realized in social practice. Men and women, as partners in humanity, share equal duties and responsibilities in cultivating the earth and in building a more ethical and just civilization.

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