

Leadership and Gender Justice in the Household: Rasyid Ridha's Interpretation of QS. An-Nisa' 34

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Abstract

Classical interpretations of QS. An-Nisa' 34 often reinforce patriarchal bias and construct gender relations in hierarchical terms. This study re-examines the verse through the reformist perspective of Rasyid Ridha in Tafsir al-Manar to offer a more just and contextual reading. Employing a library-based qualitative design with a descriptive-analytical approach enriched by content analysis and contextual-historical interpretation, the study uses Tafsir al-Manar as the primary source supported by academically relevant secondary literature. The findings reveal that Ridha understands qawwamah not as a justification for male domination, but as a moral mandate of leadership grounded in justice, compassion, and family responsibility. He asserts that role differences between men and women do not indicate superiority but reflect proportional functional division. These findings highlight Ridha's significant contribution to developing a more humanistic and egalitarian contextual interpretation relevant to contemporary discussions on gender justice in Islam.

Keywords: Rasyid Ridha, QS. An-Nisa: 34, Leadership, Gender Justice, Tafsir al-Manar

Abstrak

Interpretasi QS. An-Nisa' 34 dalam banyak karya tafsir klasik sering memperkuat bias patriarkal dan menempatkan relasi gender secara hierarkis. Studi ini meninjau kembali ayat tersebut melalui perspektif reformis Rasyid Ridha dalam Tafsir al-Manar untuk menawarkan pembacaan yang lebih adil dan kontekstual. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis yang diperkaya analisis isi dan pembacaan kontekstual-historis. Sumber utama penelitian adalah Tafsir al-Manar, sementara sumber sekunder dipilih berdasarkan relevansi akademik dalam kajian tafsir, gender, dan modernisme Islam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ridha memahami qawwamah bukan sebagai legitimasi dominasi laki-laki, tetapi sebagai amanat kepemimpinan berbasis keadilan, kasih sayang, dan tanggung jawab keluarga. Ia menegaskan bahwa perbedaan peran tidak menunjukkan superioritas, melainkan pembagian tugas yang proporsional. Temuan ini menegaskan kontribusi Ridha dalam mengembangkan tafsir kontekstual yang lebih humanistik, egaliter, dan relevan bagi wacana keadilan gender dalam Islam.

Kata Kunci: Rasyid Ridha, QS. An-Nisa: 34, Kepemimpinan, Keadilan Gender, Tafsir al-Manar

INTRODUCTION

Discourse on leadership and gender justice in the household continues to be an important issue in contemporary Islamic studies. This debate arises mainly because of a number of classical interpretations of QS. An-Nisa' verse 34 is often used as the basis for justifying the hierarchical relationship between men and women. Misunderstandings of the concept of *qawwamah* often give birth to the legitimacy of patriarchal culture that is not always in harmony with the principles of moral justice and relational ethics in the Qur'an. In the modern context, gender relations are understood as partnerships based on dignity, shared responsibility, and reciprocity, so it is necessary to re-read verses that have the potential to be interpreted in a biased manner (Nadiya, 2024).

Theoretically, this study combines three interpretive approaches: (1) a reformist approach, which emphasizes that interpretation must adapt to social change; (2) a contextualist approach, which reads the verse through the historical and social realities that surround it; and (3) an ethical hermeneutic approach, which prioritizes the value of justice, benefit, and the moral purpose of the Qur'an (*maqāṣid al-syārī'ah*). This interpretive model is used to reassess how the interpretation of Rashid Ridha can correct the bias of patriarchal interpretation and present a more proportionate understanding of *qawwamah* (Alfawzan et al., 2024).

QS. An-Nisa' verse 34 has been understood differently by classical scholars. Ibn Kathir emphasized the aspect of men's sustenance and physical strength as the basis for leadership, while Al-Qurtubi attributed it to the role of protection and jihad. In contrast, Ibn 'Assyria proposes a more egalitarian reading by understanding *qawwamūna* as a "protector", not an absolute superiority. This diversity shows that interpretation is greatly influenced by the social context and methods used (Aldhehayan & Tamvada, 2023).

In the development of modern interpretation, scholars such as Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Fazlur Rahman encouraged a more holistic and justice-oriented reading of the Qur'an. They assert that verses on gender relations should be interpreted with universal ethical values and social change in mind. This view reinforces the urgency of reviewing the interpretation of reformist figures such as Rasyid Ridha, who is known to emphasize rationality, morality, and social relevance in *Tafsir al-Manar* (Javid et al., 2024).

A number of previous studies have alluded to QS. An-Nisa' verse 34 in various perspectives, such as the study of Aziz et al., (2024) which highlights the degradation of women's character, Faida et al., (2023) which examines the kiai's views on gender equality, and Khoiroh et al., (2022) who compare Al-Qurtubi with Zaitunah Subhan regarding women's leadership. Kentmen-Cin et al., (2024) examine the Turkish gender gap in higher education, while Rusu, (2024) discusses the gender patterns of urban women in Romania. However, there has been no study that specifically analyzes the interpretation of Rasyid Ridha with a focus on aspects of leadership and gender justice, and there has been no study that examines how Ridha contextualizes the concept of *qawwamah* to answer the problem of patriarchal bias.

Thus, this study explicitly fills the gap by presenting a contextual analysis of *qawwamah* based on the perspective of the reformist Rasyid Ridha. This research aims to analyze Ridha's interpretation of leadership and gender justice in the social ethics of the Qur'an, while contributing to the development of modern interpretations that are more responsive to gender and humanitarian issues.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative library research design, focusing on textual analysis as the primary mode of inquiry. The approach is grounded in interpretive methodology, allowing the researcher to explore the exegetical framework of Rasyid Ridha in *Tafsir al-Manar* and its relevance to contemporary discussions on leadership and gender justice in the household. This design is appropriate because the study aims to understand conceptual meanings, interpretive patterns, and ethical orientations embedded in Qur'anic exegesis rather than to generalize empirical findings.

Data Sources

The research utilizes two categories of data. The primary data source is *Tafsir al-Manar*, which serves as the core reference for examining Ridha's interpretation of QS. An-Nisa' 34. Secondary data sources consist of academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and scholarly publications related to Qur'anic interpretation, gender studies, and Islamic modernism. These secondary sources were selected through specific criteria, including thematic relevance, scholarly credibility, and direct contribution to the discourse on gender and *tafsir*. This structured selection ensures that the literature used reflects authoritative and up-to-date perspectives.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out through a systematic process of identifying, extracting, and categorizing textual units from Ridha's *tafsir* and related scholarly works. The researcher first mapped all sections in *Tafsir al-Manar* that discuss *qawwamah*, household leadership, ethical responsibilities, and gender relations. This was followed by an in-depth extraction of Ridha's key arguments, linguistic explanations, socio-ethical interpretations, and reasoning patterns. Secondary sources were then consulted to contextualize, support, or critically evaluate Ridha's interpretive stance.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis employed an integrated descriptive-analytical technique combined with content analysis and a contextual-historical reading. The descriptive-analytical component was used to present Ridha's views systematically and to interpret the logical structure of his exegetical arguments. Content analysis was applied to identify recurring themes, conceptual formulations, and semantic choices within the text. Meanwhile, the

contextual-historical approach situates Ridha's interpretation within the intellectual currents of early twentieth-century Islamic reform, allowing a deeper understanding of how socio-political dynamics influenced his hermeneutical orientation.

Analytical Validation

To enhance the rigor and credibility of the findings, analytical validation was conducted through limited comparative reading with both classical exegetes and modern scholars. This comparison strengthens the interpretation by ensuring that Ridha's position is accurately placed within the broader continuum of Qur'anic exegesis. Triangulation across primary and secondary texts further ensures interpretive consistency, reduces subjective bias, and enhances methodological transparency.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the study is limited to Ridha's interpretation of QS. An-Nisa' 34 and selected supporting discussions within *Tafsir al-Manar* that relate to gender, leadership, and social ethics. While the study incorporates comparative insights, it does not aim to present a full comparative *tafsir* analysis. This limitation ensures that the research maintains depth and focus while still offering meaningful contributions to the discourse on gender justice in Islamic exegesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Muhammad Rasyid Ridha

Muhammad Rashid Ridha (1865–1935) was one of the most influential Islamic reformers of the modern era. Coming from a religious family in Lebanon, he stood out in religious studies from a young age until he was deeply influenced by the thoughts of Jamaluddin al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh. His move to Cairo to learn directly from Abduh gave birth to *Tafsir al-Manar*, a monumental work that introduces a rational, contextual, and relevant approach to the social problems of the ummah (Armawati et al., 2025).

Through *al-Manar* and the magazine *al-Manar* that he founded, Ridha emphasized the need to return to the authentic Qur'an and Sunnah, purify religion from baseless practices, use reason as the main instrument of understanding revelation, and read verses in a socio-cultural context. He sees the decline of the ummah as a result of attachment to rigid fiqh traditions, so methodological reform is needed to answer the challenges of modernity (Suhada MR & Hanum, 2025).

In the issue of leadership and gender justice, especially related to QS. An-Nisa' 34 Ridha interprets *qawwamah* as a function-based moral responsibility, not male domination. Household leadership, according to her, must be built on deliberation, justice, and compassion, while women are seen as equal partners in building families. It rejects views that demean women and seeks to balance sharia values with changing social dynamics (Yus et al., 2025)

The socio-political influence of the era of modernizing education, changes in family structure, and colonialism encouraged Ridha to reread the legal text, including the verse on gender relations. Therefore, his reformist approach is not only theological, but an ethical response to societal change. His biography is key to understanding his hermeneutics: he sits at the intersection of classical tradition and modernity, thus producing a dynamic, critical, and social-justice-oriented method of interpretation. Her thinking then became an important foundation for the development of modern interpretations that are more humanistic and responsive to contemporary gender issues (Daud Pisba & Rahmanto, 2025).

Context of Interpretation of Surah An-Nisa: 34 by Rashid Ridha

Conteks linguistics

Ridha begins with a terminological analysis of the word *qawwāmīna*, which according to him cannot be interpreted as "absolute leader" or "one who has natural superiority". He asserts that the morphological structure of *qawwām* comes from the root word *qāma* which carries the basic meaning of "to uphold", "maintain", or "to take care of". From this, Ridha argues that qawwamah is a concept of function and responsibility, not an ontological status or gender hierarchy. Qawwamah refers to the "responsibility-bearer", especially in the context of family maintenance, security, and moral stability. Ridha also emphasized that the phrase *bimā faddalallāhu ba 'dahum 'alā ba 'din* does not mean the absolute superiority of men over women, but the advantages of a situational nature, namely physical and economic abilities at the time of the descent of the verse. Thus, if social conditions change, for example, women are able to become the main breadwinner, the functional meaning of qawwamah can also be transformed (Rohali & Sitorus, 2025).

Historical Context

Ridha placed QS. An-Nisā' 34 in a highly patriarchal structure of pre-Islamic Arab society, where women had no access to education, property, or social space (Din et al., 2024). He asserts that this verse comes down as a gradual reform, not a legitimacy of the patriarchal structure:

At that time, men were indeed the parties who factually held economic control and physical protection, so the verse stipulated a framework of responsibility that was more humane, not domination. Ridha views that the Qur'an carries out a gradual process of "balancing": recognizing the social reality of the time, but at the same time pushing towards moral equality and fair treatment for women. He even called this verse a mechanism to reorganize domestic relationships with new ethical standards that demand leadership based on gentleness, trust, and respect, not power.

Soio-Political Context

Ridha's life was in a period of transition in the Islamic world: the emergence of modern education, the increasing participation of women in the public sphere, the

family law reform movement, and the challenges of colonialism. This condition makes Ridha see qawwamah as an elastic and adaptive concept (Alhinai & Ringer, 2025).

He acknowledged that many women are beginning to have intellectual, economic, and professional capacities that put them on a par with men in the ability to manage households. Therefore, he rejects readings that make qawwamah the superiority of men "given permanently". According to him, leadership in the household is a moral mandate that must be adjusted to social reality, actual abilities, and relational justice. Ridha also criticized the practice of abusing qawwamah as a justification for domestic violence, showing his vision of a family ethics that is much more humane and just.

Muhammad Rasyid Ridha's interpretation of QS. An-Nisa: 34 is closely related to the social, cultural context and dynamics of Islamic thought at the time of his lifetime. This verse is often the highlight of debates about male leadership and women's position in the family. Through Tafsir al-Manar, Ridha presents a more moderate and contextual approach than some classical commentators, by focusing the understanding of this verse on the principles of justice, moral responsibility and balance of roles in Islamic teachings (Afandi & Arifin, 2025).

الرَّجُلُ قَوْمُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَالصِّلْحَةُ قِبْلَتُ
حُفِظَتْ لِلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفَظَ اللَّهُ وَالَّتِي تَحْافُونَ شُوَّرْهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَاهْجُرُوْهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَأَسْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنُكُمْ فَلَا
تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْهِ كِبِيرًا

"Men are the leaders of women, because Allah has given some of them (men) more than others (women), and because they (men) have provided a portion of their wealth. Therefore, a righteous woman is one who is obedient to Allah and takes care of herself when her husband is not around, because Allah has taken care of (them). The woman who nusyuz you are worried about, then counsels them and separates them in their beds, and beats them. So if they obey you, then do not seek a way to disturb them. Indeed, Allah is Exalted and Exalted".

Muhammad Rashid Ridha interpreted the phrase "ar-rijālu qawwāmūna 'alā an-nisā'" as an affirmation of men's responsibility in leading and protecting women, not as a form of superiority or domination. According to him, male leadership is based on two main reasons as mentioned in the verse, namely "bimā fadhdhalla hu ba'dahum 'alā ba'd" (because Allah prefers some of them to others) and "bimā anfaqū min amwālihim" (because they spend part of their wealth). Ridha interprets this "advantage" not as an absolute advantage of men, but rather a functional advantage in terms of economic responsibility and physical abilities needed to support domestic life (Ridwanuloh et al., 2025).

In classic commentaries such as al-Jalālain, Muqātil, Rūh al-Bayān, al-Baghawī, al-Ālūsī, Fath al-Qadīr, Zād al-Masīr, al-Biqā'ī, and Samarqandī, it is explained that the basis of male leadership over women lies in their physical strength, level of education, and responsibility in fulfilling the obligations set by Allah. Meanwhile, al-Rāzī in Tafsir al-Rāzī and al-Thabathabā'ī in Tafsir al-Mīzān interpret that male leadership is absolute, not only limited to the household area, but also encompasses all aspects of social life. Implicitly, Tafsir al-Manār by Rasyid Ridha still has similarities with the views of

general scholars, namely acknowledging that there are certain privileges in humans as a gift of degrees given by Allah SWT (Wakulu & Priyanti, 2025).

The Principle of Gender Justice in the Tafsir of Rasyid Ridha

In this section, Ridha does not only provide a linguistic or historical interpretation of QS. An-Nisā' 34, but also formulates a set of ethical principles that lead to a reunderstanding of the relationship between men and women in the household. These principles were born from reformist hermeneutics that blended the rationality, social context, and moral purpose of the Qur'an (Sagita et al., 2025). To help clarify the analytical synthesis, the principles can be summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Analytical Synthesis

Dimension	Explanation	Gender Implications
Contextual	The verse is read with the social, cultural, and social needs of early Islamic societies in mind.	Gender relations are not permanent; It changes according to social developments.
Rational-Ethical	The meaning of the verse must be in harmony with the principles of justice, benefit, and the moral purpose of revelation.	Qawwamah is understood as morality, not male superiority.
Responsibility	Leadership in the family is based on real functions who are more capable of certain responsibilities.	Leadership can be flexible, not always attached to men.
Anti-Violence	Domestic conflicts must be resolved by peaceful methods; Violence is not in accordance with maqāṣid.	Rejecting the legitimacy of violence and affirming equality of dignity.

This table shows that Ridha's approach is not merely descriptive, but produces a new ethical framework for reading the concept of qawwamah in modern society.

Equality of Men and Women in Marriage

Ridha firmly rejects the notion that the Qur'an places men above women in dignity. For him, the relationship between men and women is a relationship of spiritual and moral partnership. Marriage is not meant as a hierarchical institution, but as a vehicle for achieving *sakīnah*, *mawaddah*, and *rahmah* (Rafita & Juwita, 2025). To reinforce this point, Ridha relies his reading on cross-textual references, an approach that the reviewer highlights as part of a previously lacking analysis: 1) QS. Ar-Rūm 21 emphasizes calmness and compassion as the foundation of the relationship, not unilateral authority; 2) QS. Al-Baqarah 228 states that men and women have equal rights and obligations in many aspects of domestic life (*wa lahunna mithlu alladhi 'alayhinnā*).

Rasyid Raddha's idea of gender justice in interpreting QS. An-Nisa verse 34 reflects a social-rational interpretation approach that seeks to combine sharia values with universal humanitarian principles. In Tafsir al-Manar, Ridha rejects the view that

places men and women in a hierarchical structure or that justifies the dominance of one party. For him, this verse is not a justification for male superiority, but an affirmation of a proportionate division of responsibility in building a household based on justice, love and a balance between rights and obligations (Habibah, 2022).

In addition, Ridha linked the principle of gender justice with moral and spiritual values that should be inherent in every Muslim. He emphasized that the relationship between husband and wife is not a power relationship, but a relationship based on love (mawaddah wa rahmah), as explained in the Qur'an. Ar-Rum verse 21:

وَمِنْ ءَايَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَءَايَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

Meaning: "And among the signs of His power is that He has created for you wives of your own kind, so that you may be inclined and at peace with Him, and He has made love and affection among you. Verily, in such a thing there are signs for the people who think."

According to Rashid Ridha, one of the greatest benefits that Islam brings to women is reflected in the teachings contained in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 228:

وَالْمُطَلَّقُتْ يَتَرَبَّصُ بِأَنفُسِهِنَّ ثُلَّةٌ فُرُوقٌ ۝ وَلَا يَجِدُ لَهُنَّ أَنْ يَكْفُمَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي أَرْحَامِهِنَّ إِنْ كُنَّ يُؤْمِنَ بِاللَّهِ ۝ وَالْأَلْيَوْمُ أُنْ ءَاخِرٌ ۝ وَيُعْوَلُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرِدَاهِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِنْ أَرَادُوا إِصْلَاحًا ۝ وَلَهُنَّ مِثْلُ الَّذِي عَيَّنَهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ ۝ وَلِلرِّجَالِ عَلَيْهِنَّ دَرَجَةٌ ۝ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

"And divorced wives (are obliged) to refrain from (waiting) for the Qur'an three times. It is not permissible for them to hide what Allah has created in their wombs, if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have the right to return to them at that time if they want repairs. And they (women) have the right to be balanced with their obligations in the right way. But husbands have an advantage over them. Allah is Almighty and Wise".

According to M. Rasyid Ridha, until before 1931, women were still dominated by men in various aspects of life, a condition reminiscent of the Arab ignorance period, and in some ways even worse. He emphasized that this was not entirely due to the teachings of Christianity, but rather the result of a new cultural influence that developed in Europe and that it had changed a lot and added to its original teachings. Rasyid Ridha believes that pure Christianity will not justify the oppression of women if it is not contaminated by foreign cultures that have not been touched by religious values (Muhammad & Fitri, 2021).

Ironically, Western societies often accuse Muslims of oppressing women, an accusation born of their ignorance. They think that the persecution of women comes from the teachings of Islam, even though this assumption is wrong. In this case, Rashid Ridha quoted a story told by Muhammad Abduh about a European who visited the al-Azhar mosque. While walking with Abduh inside the mosque, the European saw a girl entering the mosque and was surprised, and asked, "What is this, a girl inside the mosque?" Abduh replied in surprise, "What's so strange about that?" Europeans replied that they believe that Islam considers women as soulless beings who are not obliged to worship (Hasbi et al., 2025).

Some Elements That Can Make Marriage Bring Comfort in the Islamic View

In Ridha's view, household decisions should not be dominated by one party. Shūrā is a practical equality mechanism that eliminates gender superiority and affirms the value of togetherness. He criticized the authoritarian family model for hurting the moral purpose of marriage. The division of tasks should reflect the real abilities of both parties, not social stereotypes. This is a hermeneutic correction to the classical interpretation that often locks the domestic role in women. In Rasyid Ridha's analysis, there are three main elements that are guidelines in domestic life as affirmed by the Qur'an (Park, 2024). These can be found in QS. Ar-Rum verse 21:

وَمِنْ ءَايَاتِهِ أَنَّ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مَنْ أَنْفُسُكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَءَايَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

"And among the signs of His power is that He created for you wives of your own kind, so that you may be inclined and reconciled to them, and He will make love and affection among you. Indeed, in such a case there are signs for the thinking people."

Inner peace between husband and wife is a key aspect created especially for couples in marriage. In order for the relationship between the two to become closer and more loving, the presence of a child is needed to complete this bond. According to Rasyid Ridha, the presence of children is able to erase the anxiety that may be felt by both, because without children, perfect peace of mind is difficult to achieve (Alenezi & Alfaleh, 2024).

Therefore, husband and wife need to set limits for themselves in enjoying sexual relations, namely only in a valid marital bond. Ridha emphasized that this enjoyment is actually a means to get offspring and maintain the sustainability of humanity in a respectable way. After discussing women who are forbidden to marry, Allah then explains further in the Qur'an. An-Nisa' verse 24:

وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الْإِنْسَاءِ إِلَّا مَا مَلَكُتْ أَيْمَنُكُمْ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَأَحَلَّ لَكُمْ مَا وَرَأَءَ ذَلِكُمْ أَنْ تَنْتَهُوا بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ مُحْصِنِينَ عِنْدَ مُسْفِحِينَ قَمَا أَسْتَمْتَعُمُ بِهِ مِنْهُنَّ فَأَتُوْهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةٌ وَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِيمَا تَرْضَيْمُ بِهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ الْفَرِيضَةِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْمًا حَكِيمًا

"And (it is forbidden for you to marry) a married woman, except for the servants whom you have (Allah has ordained) as His decree over you. And it is lawful for you to do so, besides, to find a wife with your wealth to marry, not to commit adultery. So the wives whom you have enjoyed among them, give them dowry (perfectly), as an obligation; and there is no reason for you to give it to each other, having determined the dowry. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise."

Then it is equipped with QS. An-Nisa' verse 25:

وَمَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ مِنْكُمْ طُولًا أَنْ يَنْكِحَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِإِيمَانِكُمْ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ فَإِنَّكُحُوهُنَّ بِإِذْنِ أَهْلِهِنَّ وَأَتُوْهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ مُحْصَنَاتٌ عِنْدَ مُسْفِحَاتٍ وَلَا مُنْخَذَاتٍ أَخْدَانٍ فَإِذَا أَحْسِنَ فَإِنْ أَتَيْنَ بِعِحْشَةٍ فَعَلَيْهِنَّ نِصْفُ مَا عَلَى الْمُحْصَنَاتِ مِنَ الْعِدَابِ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ حَشِيَ الْعَنْتَ مِنْكُمْ وَأَنْ تَصْبِرُوا حَيْثُ لَمْ وَاللَّهُ عَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

"And whoever among you (free people) does not spend enough money to marry a free and believing woman, he may marry a believing woman from among your

servants. God knows your faith; Some of you are of others, therefore marry them with the permission of their masters, and give them their masks as they should, while they are women who take care of themselves, not adulterers and not women who take other men as their pets. And when they have taken care of themselves by marrying, then they commit an abominable act (adultery), then on them half the punishment of a married free woman. It is for those who fear salvation to guard (from adultery) among you, and patience is better for you. God is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

Meanwhile, Allah also says in surah al-Maidah in verse 5:

اللَّيْلَةِ أَحَلَّ لَكُمُ الظَّبَابُ وَطَعَامُ الَّذِينَ أَوْتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَلٌّ لَّكُمْ وَطَعَامُكُمْ حَلٌّ لَّهُمْ وَالْمُحْسَنُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُحْسَنُونَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَوْتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ إِذَا أَتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ مُحْسِنِينَ وَلَا مُنْجَذِنَّ أَحْدَانٍ ۝ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرُ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ خَبَطَ عَمَلُهُ وَهُوَ فِي أَنْتَارَةٍ مِّنَ الْخَيْرِينَ

"On this day it is permissible for you to be good. The food (slaughter) of the people given by the Book is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them. (And it is permissible for a woman who retains honor among the believing women and the women who maintain honor among those to whom the Book was given before you, when you have paid their dowry with the intention of marrying her, not with the intention of committing adultery and not making them concubines. Whosoever after believing (does not accept the law of Islam), then he abolishes his deeds and he will be among the losers on the Day of Resurrection."

According to Rasyid Ridha, the second element in domestic life is love that grows from togetherness, mutual understanding, and mutual help between husband and wife. This element not only belongs to the couple, but is also the basis for the harmony of the family as a whole. Meanwhile, the third element is true affection, which cannot be realized without the mother's and father's instincts of deep feelings of love that will be given to the child (Elfath & Sholeh, 2021).

The Relevance of the Concept of Qawwamah in the Context of Contemporary Households

Leadership For Both Men And Women Must Be Democratic

Epistemologically-theologically, women's leadership is debated among mufassirs. First, they use Q.S. al-Nisā (4:34) as the basis of haram law. Second, they use Q.S. al-Taubah (9): 71 as the basis of their abilities by contextualizing the emphasis on male leadership over women, especially in the household (Lazuardi & Shamsu, 2024). Third, they make Q.S. al-Nisā (4:34) an affirmation of male leadership over women, especially in the household. Fourth, they make the hadith of the Prophet (saw) as a prohibition on female leadership, especially being the head of state. Fifth, they reinterpret the hadith according to its context. that the leadership of men over women is based on the reflection of their physical strength, education, and obligation to fulfill all the obligations set by Allah. This is also the reason for the superiority of men over women, such as obligations which are interpreted *وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ* as which is reflected in paying dowry, alimony and kifayah. Similar views are also found in the tafsir al-

Jalālain, Muqātil, Rūh al-Bayān, al-Baghawī, al-Alūsi, Fath al-Qādīr, Zad al-Misr, al-Biqāi and Samarqandī (Ahyani et al., 2024)

In other words, the hadith is not an absolute rejection of women's leadership, but rather a response to the corrupt socio-political conditions of the time. Had the Persian system of government at that time been democratic and respectful of the value of justice, it is likely that the Prophet's response would have been different. History has also proven that many women are capable of becoming great leaders who are successful in various parts of the world (Zaidah & Abdullah, 2024). This is in line with the principles of justice and responsibility contained in the word of Allah in QS. An-Nisa: 29:

أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَأْكُلُوا أَمْوَالَكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ بِالْبَطْلَى إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَ تَجْرِيَةً عَنْ تَرَاضٍ مَّنْكُمْ وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِكُمْ رَّحِيمًا

"O you who believe, do not eat each other's property in an unlawful way, except in the way of business that is carried on happily between you. And don't commit suicide; Indeed, Allah is Most Merciful to you."

In addition, Ridha also emphasized that the characteristics of a true believer are those who are always deliberate in the affairs of life, as affirmed by Allah in the Qur'an (Abu-Saad & Haj Ali, 2024). Ash-Shura verse 38 states that cooperation, patience, and mutual respect are the main foundations of domestic harmony.

أَبُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا الْصَّلَاةَ وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ وَلَا الَّذِينَ أَسْتَعِنُ

"And as for those who accept the call of their Lord and establish prayer, their affairs are decided by counsel among them; and they provide a portion of the sustenance that We give them."

The Prophet Muhammad (saw) said in a hadith narrated by Imam al-Bukhari from Abu Hurairah ra: "A woman is like a rib; If you try to straighten it by force, you'll break it. But if you let him, you will still be able to live with him despite the crookedness in him." The meaning of this hadith, according to Rashid Ridha, illustrates that the nature and character of women have a soft character but are also stubborn or different from men such as crooked ribs. Crookedness is not a defect, but a wisdom that Allah has ordained so that married life is colored with tenderness and mutual understanding. Therefore, men should not force women to "straighten" by force, but advise them with wisdom, patience, and respect for their nature. Good education and guidance will help women to abandon bad habits without pressure (Sridepi et al., 2025).

Islamic Message to Men and Women in Marriage

Ridha rejected the interpretation that placed men as rulers. For him, the ideal relationship in the Islamic family is *ri'āyah musytarakah* "mutual care". The husband takes care of the wife economically and morally, the wife takes care of the household emotionally and spiritually, both protect each other's dignity, honor, and well-being. This is an important reinterpretation, as many classical interpretations understand this verse in terms of vertical relations. Ridha actually reads it in the framework of

horizontal relations, which places husband and wife as moral partners (Halimatusa'diyah & Triana, 2024).

With high accuracy, Rasyid Ridha also follows news and discourse developments from abroad as a material for comparison and enrichment of thoughts (Adyatama et al., 2023). From his research process, Rasyid Ridha then wrote various works that discussed women's and household issues. One of the most important was his publication in the magazine al-Manar, as well as his work entitled *Nida' Li al-Jins al-Lathif*. In her work, Ridha also called on universities in Egypt to provide equal opportunities and rights for women and men. However, due to his progressive views, he was considered dangerous and accused of opposing the truth (Soamole, 2024).

Counter-Arguments from Conservative Scholars

In an effort to maintain academic balance in the discussion of Rashid Ridha's socio-ethical interpretation, it is important to present the opposing views of conservative scholars who are based on traditional methodologies, both in fiqh, ulum al-Qur'an, and hadith studies. This group tends to maintain a textual reading of QS. An-Nisā' 34, including the concept of *qawwāmāh* and the phrase *wadribūhunna*. Their criticism of Ridha is not just a difference in *ijtihad*, but concerns more fundamental epistemological and methodological issues (Dwi & Kadir, 2024).

Hadith scholars and traditional scholars affirm that the structure of *qawwāmāh* is not a product of culture, but a decree of sharia based on the evidence: 1) Nash explicit (text of a verse that expressly assigns leadership positions to men); 2) Normative sunnah that describes men as the party responsible for maintenance and protection; 3) Classic *ijma'*, which is the consensus of scholars since the first generation that domestic leadership is in the hands of husbands.

From their perspective, *qawwāmāh* is *ta'abbudī* (based on divine decree), not *ta'līlī* (based on changeable social reasons). Therefore, Ridha's idea of interpreting *qawwāmāh* functionally rather than essential superiority is seen as a *tafsir* that moves too far from tradition (Wahid, 2024). In the treasures of classical fiqh, many scholars rely on *qawwāmāh* on anthropological assumptions: 1) Men are considered to have greater physical strength, so they are better able to provide protection in tribal communities; 2) Men bear the full financial burden, including alimony, dowry, and family economic protection; 3) The obligation of jihad and other public roles is considered as evidence of the superiority of male responsibility.

For conservative groups, Ridha's approach is considered dangerous because it opens up opportunities for revision of sharia law when social realities change, even though many laws are in their opinion to be permanent. Although these conservative criticisms are important to note as a balancing discourse, they methodologically do not abort Ridha's position (Hingson et al., 2023). There are three main reasons; 1) Ridha uses *maqāṣid al-syārī'ah*, he interprets the verse based on the moral objectives of Islam: maintaining human dignity, preventing violence, maintaining family harmony, and upholding *rahmah* as the principle of gender relations; 2) The broader ethics of the

Qur'an, Ridha points out that many other verses reject violence, affirm deliberation, and emphasize reciprocity (*mu'āsyarah bil-ma'rūf*). Thus, literal reading should not stand alone without paying attention to the ethical message of the Qur'an; 3) Contemporary socio-cultural data, Ridha reads verses according to the new social reality: women's education, social mobility, and changes in family structure. Thus, it does not change sharia, but *revives the relevance of sharia* in modern society.

Ridha's Attitude About "Wadribūhunna" and Its Difference from Literalist Interpretation

Linguistic Frames: Non-Violent Meanings in Word Derivation

Ridha begins with an analysis of classical Arabic and the use of the word *daraba* in the Qur'an. He asserts that this word has *more than 10 meanings*, and that "hitting" is not the only or main meaning in many Qur'anic contexts.

Ridha's alternative meaning: "to stay away" or "to take a distance" (*daraba fulānan*: to go away), "to give a symbolic rebuke", not a physical action, "a non-violent act of an ethical warning"

Ridha argues that this verse should be read in the framework of the meaning that is most in harmony with *maqāṣid al-rahmah* and should not be understood as physical violence because: the Qur'an uses *daraba* also to "travel" (QS. Al-Muzzammil 20). The literal meaning of hurting is not in accordance with the *spirit of the father* (the spirit of the verse) and the moral mission of Islam. Thus, linguistically, Ridha encourages a shift in meaning from the physical to the symbolic (Ali et al., 2024).

Contextual Frame: A Critique of Pre-Islamic Patriarchy

Ridha attributes the descent of this verse to the context of a highly patriarchal Arab society: violence against wives is a common practice, men have almost absolute social authority, women are often treated as part of family property.

According to Ridha, Islam came not to perpetuate these norms of violence, but to *reduce, regulate, and control* the existing practice of violence. Thus, *wadribūhunna* is understood as a mechanism of social control, not the legalization of beatings. Ridha considers that this verse is a form of gradual intervention (*tadarruj*) to remove violence, not strengthen it (Talous et al., 2023).

Proportional Frame (Tadarruj): Violence Is Not a Solution in the Household

Ridha rejected the idea that this verse commands physical action. He emphasized the three stages of conflict resolution counsel (*fa'izhūhunna*), cooling down (*wahjūrūhunna*), *wadribūhunna*: *symbolic warning*, not violence

He emphasized that the third stage should not hurt, even embarrass, and should not cause fear. Ridha concluded, "There is no place for physical violence in the household that is built on mawaddah and rahmah." Marriages filled with violence are considered contrary to the moral mission of Islam (Al-Shibli, 2025).

The Difference Between Ridha And Literalist Interpretation: Comparative Analysis

The classical mufasirs such as Ibn Kathir, Al-Qurtubi, and Al-Tabari generally: accept the literal meaning of *daraba*, but limit it to "light beating", and set conditions: not hurting, not injuring the face, not leaving a mark. This model of interpretation is often called literalist-patriarchal interpretation, because it adheres to textual meanings that have minimal social interpretation.

Ridha believes that taking literal meaning is contrary to the principle of justice, opens the door to domestic violence, and tarnishes the purpose of the Qur'an to glorify women. He stated that this position made Ridha much more progressive than many classical scholars and was the first step in anti-violent hermeneutics in modern interpretation (Al-Shibli et al., 2023).

The Limitations of Ridha Reformism

Maintaining A Man's Livelihood

Ridha dismantles many aspects of patriarchy in classical interpretation, but still maintains the assumption that the husband is the primary breadwinner, and the economic role of the wife is secondary. By maintaining a gender-based livelihood structure, Ridha does not fully offer a full equality model. In a contemporary reality where women also contribute economically, this construction seems to limit the flexibility of modern household relationships (al-Agha, 2023).

Not Completely Dismantling Patriarchal Power Structures

Ridha's analysis focuses on moral and ethical corrections to the behavior of husbands, but does not touch on the systemic roots of patriarchy, such as unequal power relations in the family, double standards of morality for men and women, and social structures that place men in the position of main decision-makers. Ridha reformulated *qawwāmah* as *a moral responsibility*, but still accepted the male leadership structure. This makes his reformism corrective, not structural (Shahir et al., 2025).

The Approach Is Gradual (Tadarruj), Not Radical Transformational

When compared to contemporary Muslim feminists such as Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas, and Fatima Mernissi, Ridha does not radically reinterpret verses, she does not make epistemological criticisms of the authority of classical interpretation, she does not challenge hierarchical gender relations frontally. Ridha reformism moves from within tradition, using the language of *ushul fiqh* and *maqāṣid*. Therefore, it is closer to gradual *islah* than a total reconstruction of gender relations (Akbari & True, 2022).

His Interpretation Was Influenced By The Socio-Political Context Of His Time

Ridha lived in the early days of colonial modernity, when the dominant issues were the moral decadence of the ummah, educational reform, and the social order of the Muslim family. As a result, some of his views were a response to the problems of 19th-

and early-20th-century society. In today's social situation when women are fully involved in higher education, professional work, and public spaces, some of the Ridha framework may need to be reinterpreted, new social data-based adjustments, or the development of more gender-sensitive interpretive methodologies (Althalathini et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study employs a qualitative library research design with a structured and measurable methodological framework. The primary source is *Tafsir al-Manar* by Rasyid Ridha, which forms the central basis for analyzing his interpretation of QS. An-Nisa' 34. Secondary sources consist of scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and academic works selected through predetermined criteria of relevance, credibility, and direct contribution to the themes of Qur'anic exegesis, gender studies, and Islamic modernism. Data collection was carried out through systematic identification, classification, and extraction of textual units related to leadership (qawwamah), household ethics, and gender justice. The data were analyzed using a combined descriptive-analytical approach, content analysis, and contextual-historical interpretation. The descriptive-analytical method enabled the researcher to map Ridha's exegetical arguments, while content analysis was used to identify key concepts, patterns of reasoning, and semantic emphases within his *tafsir*. The contextual-historical approach was employed to situate Ridha's views within the socio-intellectual climate of early 20th-century Islamic reform. Analytical validation was strengthened through limited comparative analysis with classical and contemporary exegetes to ensure interpretive accuracy and scholarly rigor. Through this multi-layered methodological arrangement, the study aims to produce a comprehensive, academically robust understanding of Ridha's perspectives on leadership and gender justice in the household.

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