



An Analysis of Faqihudin's Interpretation of the Houri Verses in the Quran

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the interpretations of the verses about heavenly maidens, comparing the perspectives of traditional Islamic scholars with those of feminist interpreters. The objective of this study is to understand the feminist interpreters' perspectives on the verses concerning heavenly maidens in the Quran. This is a qualitative research study that utilizes data from various library sources to provide an analytical description of the verses related to heavenly maidens. Primary sources such as classical Quranic exegesis texts and related works are used as secondary sources. The results of this study reveal several concepts of heavenly maidens in the Quran, with a focus on two specific terms. The first term relates to the phrase "azwaju muthahharoh," mentioned in the Quran to signify spouses for the righteous in paradise. The second term is related to "Hur al-'in," describing the heavenly maidens' physical attributes. These two terms are the primary focus of discussion in this paper because classical Islamic scholars and feminist interpreters offer differing interpretations, leading to varying conclusions regarding the meaning of heavenly maidens. Therefore, through this scholarly paper, we will analyze the feminist interpretation of the Houri verses according to Faqihudin Abdul Kodir.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji interpretasi mengenai ayat-ayat tentang bidadari surga, membandingkan pandangan para ulama tradisional Islam dengan pandangan penafsir feminis. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami pandangan penafsir feminis tentang ayat-ayat yang berkaitan dengan bidadari surga dalam Al-Quran. Ini adalah studi penelitian kualitatif yang menggunakan data dari berbagai sumber perpustakaan untuk memberikan deskripsi analitis tentang ayat-ayat yang terkait dengan bidadari surga. Sumber-sumber utama seperti teks tafsir Al-Quran klasik dan karya terkait digunakan sebagai sumber sekunder. Hasil dari penelitian ini mengungkapkan beberapa konsep tentang bidadari surga dalam Al-Quran, dengan fokus pada dua istilah khusus. Istilah pertama berkaitan dengan frasa "azwaju muthahharoh," yang disebutkan dalam Al-Quran untuk menandakan pasangan bagi orang-orang saleh di surga. Istilah kedua berkaitan dengan "Hur al-'in," yang menggambarkan atribut fisik bidadari surga. Kedua istilah ini menjadi fokus utama pembahasan dalam makalah ini karena ulama Islam klasik dan penafsir feminis memberikan interpretasi yang berbeda, yang mengarah pada kesimpulan yang beragam mengenai makna bidadari surga. Oleh karena itu, melalui tulisan ilmiah ini, kami akan menganalisis interpretasi feminis terhadap ayat-ayat Houri menurut Faqihudin Abdul Kodir.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Heaven and Hell are the places that Allah SWT has prepared as rewards or punishments for human actions in the world. After the end of worldly life, individuals will face the eternal realm, known as the Hereafter, which is a mysterious realm never fully comprehensible to humans. This is often referred to as Eschatology, the study of issues related to life after death. The discussion of the afterlife will persist until the Day of Judgment. Scholars have engaged in extensive discussions to comprehend the nature of the Houris. This can be an intriguing religious doctrine to explore (Sibawaihi, 2004).

Regarding the afterlife, Allah SWT divides humanity into two groups: those who are saved and those who are damned. The saved individuals will enter paradise, and among the pleasures of paradise, heavenly maidens will be provided to serve the inhabitants of paradise. As Allah says in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 25:

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأَنُوتُوا بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا وَهُمْ فِيهَا أزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

“And give good tidings to those who believe and do righteous deeds that they will have gardens [in Paradise] beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are provided with a provision of fruit therefrom, they will say, 'This is what we were provided with before.' And it is given to them in likeness. And they will have therein purified spouses, and they will abide therein eternally.” (Quran, Al-Baqarah: 25)

In classical Quranic exegesis, discussions about paradise often revolve around the notion of an entirely male environment, from the interpretation of the meaning of heavenly maidens, always associated with white, beautiful-eyed women, to the vast number of maidens provided in paradise. For example, it is believed that those who die as martyrs will receive 72 heavenly maidens as their wives in paradise, in addition to their earthly wives (Rozin, 2020). Even in the book “Shifat al-jannah,” there are chapters that explain servants for men, satisfying sexual relations for men, and heavenly maidens serving all of men's desires (Kodir, 2021). One section of the book explains that a believing man entering paradise will be married to 4,000 virgins, 8,000 widows, and 500 concubines who are heavenly maidens (Kodir, 2019).

The descriptions of paradise's pleasures create the impression that paradise is exclusively for men, excluding women as subjects who will enjoy the delights of paradise. If a righteous man receives 72 heavenly maidens or 500 concubines, what about a righteous woman? Will she receive the same or not? This issue, the rights of righteous women in paradise, is not extensively discussed in classical exegesis. Therefore, modern interpretations, particularly feminist interpretations, aim to present equality between men and women and offer interpretations of heavenly maidens that emphasize gender equality. Without the lens of equality, traditional interpretations tend to be skewed towards providing paradise's pleasures exclusively for men, neglecting the role of women (Wadud, 1999).

Based on these concerns, feminist interpreters have attempted to offer alternative interpretations to traditional exegesis. Traditional exegesis has often been criticized for not providing fair treatment to women, which can lead to the marginalization of women. This is attributed to the dominance of male scholars in interpreting the Quran, which results in interpretations accommodating only the perspectives, visions, and missions of men, neglecting women's perspectives and experiences.

Academics have made significant contributions to the discussion of heavenly maidens. Firstly, Amina Wadud Muhsin's *Epistemology of the Meaning of Hur Al-'iyn in Quranic Exegesis: A Gender Analysis*. Saidah, (2013) discusses the meaning of heavenly maidens in the Quran, with a focus on Amina Wadud as a feminist scholar. Her perspective on the meaning of heavenly maidens in the Quran is presented in detail. Secondly, M. Amir's 2017 thesis, “Heavenly Maidens in the Quran (Perspective of Indonesian Exegetes),” examines the concept of heavenly maidens in the Quran. It begins with an exploration of the linguistic and terminological aspects and includes the perspectives of Indonesian exegetes (Amir, 2017). Thirdly, Moh. Rozin's 2014 paper, “Heavenly Maidens in Quranic Exegesis: A Comparison of the Perspectives of Ibn 'Āsyūr and Amina Wadud,” discusses two viewpoints on the interpretation of Hūr Al-'Iyn. The paper explores the meanings of Hūr Al-'Iyn from the perspectives of classical and contemporary scholars (Rozin, 2020).

Building on these existing studies, this paper will explore another perspective: the interpretation of azwaj and hurun ‘in based on the concept of mubadalah (equality) and the issues it raises, according to feminist interpreters. The analysis in this paper aims to provide additional insights into the understanding of eschatology, particularly concerning heavenly maidens.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method employed in this study is a qualitative approach (Sugiyono, 2012). The study aims to explore the interpretations of feminist scholars regarding the verses in the Quran that refer to the heavenly maidens, with a specific focus on two crucial phrases: “azwaju muthahharoh” and “Hur al-in.” The qualitative approach was chosen because this research seeks to comprehend the understanding and interpretations of the Quranic texts from the perspective of feminist interpreters.

The data sources used in this research consist of two main types. Primary data sources include the Quranic texts that contain verses related to the heavenly maidens. Specifically, this study concentrates on the phrases “azwaju muthahharoh” and “Hur al-in.” Secondary data sources encompass classical Quranic exegesis texts that were written by traditional scholars, providing insights into how they interpreted these verses. Additionally, this research also refers to the works of feminist interpreters and related literature that support their viewpoints (Zulaiha & Mutaqin, 2021).

The research procedure involves several critical steps. Firstly, the research identifies the Quranic verses related to the heavenly maidens and conducts an analysis of the relevant Quranic texts. Subsequently, the study analyzes classical Quranic exegesis concerning these verses to understand the perspectives of classical scholars regarding the meaning of the heavenly maidens (Taufiq, 2016).

The next step is to identify and analyze the works of feminist interpreters who provide interpretations of these verses from the perspective of gender equality. The research aims to understand how feminist interpreters perceive the roles and experiences of women in the context of the heavenly maidens (Baidan, 2005).

The data collected will undergo careful analysis, and a comparison will be made between the viewpoints emerging from both perspectives, i.e., the classical exegesis and the feminist interpretations of the meaning of the heavenly maidens. The research will also pay attention to the differences in viewpoints between classical scholars and feminist interpreters regarding the roles and experiences of women in paradise.

The conclusions drawn from this research will encompass a summary of the results of the analysis of differing perspectives between classical exegesis and feminist interpretations concerning the interpretation of the heavenly maidens. Furthermore, the research will discuss the implications of these differences within the context of Quranic understanding and gender equality in Islam (Yunus & Zulaiha, 2020).

This research has its limitations that need to be considered. The study restricts its analysis to two key phrases, “azwaju muthahharoh” and “Hur al-in,” which means there might be other aspects that will not be covered. Additionally, this research will not delve into the interpretations of specific classical scholars or particular feminist interpreters in great detail.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. A Brief History of Feminism and the Biography of Faqihudin Abdul Kodir

Before delving into the feminist interpretations of the verses concerning heavenly maidens, it is essential to discuss the feminist movement. In almost every social interaction within society, patterns of oppression against women persist. The depiction of oppression experienced by women has led to the emergence of various social movements advocating for justice and the liberation of women from such oppression. This movement is known as feminism. While feminism has a long history, it reached its peak in the 20th century, particularly in the 1960s.

The term “feminism” is derived from the Latin word “femina,” which translates to “woman” in English. In general, feminism is often defined as a women's movement that seeks gender equality between women and men. The term “feminism” was first coined by the utopian social activist Charles Fourier (Amin, 2019).

One notable figure in the feminist movement is Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir. Here is a brief biography of Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir: He was born in Cirebon, West Java, on December 31, 1971. Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir is a father of three children: Dhiya Silmi Hasif, Isyqie bin-Nabiy Hanif, and Muhammad Mujtaba Ghiats, all born from his love for Mimin Aminah. His educational journey began with primary school in Kedongdong, followed by secondary education at the State Islamic Junior High School in Arjawinangun, Cirebon. In addition to formal education, he pursued non-formal education at the Dar al Tauhid Islamic Boarding School in Arjawinangun, Cirebon. He graduated in Islamic Preaching from Abu Nur University, Syria (1990-1995) and simultaneously pursued studies in Islamic Jurisprudence at Damascus University in the same country. He earned a Master's degree in Islamic Jurisprudence from the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (1997-1999). He later obtained a Doctorate in Religious Studies from Gadjah Mada University (Pambudi, 2021).

3.2. Discussion of the Meaning of “Azwaj”

Heavenly maidens are one of the delights prepared by Allah for those who believe in Him, and all the pleasures in paradise are beyond human comprehension. Heavenly maidens in paradise are often associated with the term “azwāju mutahharoh” (pure spouses) (Amir, 2017).

The meaning of “azwāju mutahharoh” can be broken down into two parts: “azwāj” and “mutahharat.” The word “zauj” comes from the Arabic verb “zaja-yazuju-zawjan” and linguistically means “pairing and matching.” In its application, “zauj” is commonly interpreted as a spouse or partner, referring to both husbands and wives. The word “mutahharat,” from a linguistic perspective, is derived from the root words “ṭa’,” “ha,” and “ra,” which collectively imply purity and the absence of impurities. In this context, “ṭuhru” (الطهر) is the opposite of impurity, and “ṭatahharu” (التطهر) means to be free from anything filthy or repulsive (Faris & Ahmad, 1979). “Mutahharat” is the noun form, and it signifies the act of purification. In Arabic morphology, this noun form carries the meaning of continuity. On the other hand, “ṭāhīrat” carries the sense of permanence.

In the Quran, the term “zauj” and its various derivatives can be found in 68 verses across 43 surahs. These forms include “zawajnakaha, zawajnahum, yuzawwijuhum, zuwwijāt, zauj, zaujan, zaujaka, zaujuhu zaujaha, zaujani, zaujina, zaujaini, azwaj, azwajan, al-Azwaj, azwajah, azwajika, azwajukum, azwajuhum, azwajahunna, azwajina.” In the interpretation by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, the term “zauj” and all its derivatives are translated into three forms: firstly as a partner, secondly as a wife, and thirdly as someone other than a partner or a wife (Hasanah, 2021).

Among the verses that use the term “azwāju mutahharoh” are:

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رَزَقُوا قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَأُتُوا بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

“...And give good tidings to those who believe and do righteous deeds that they will have gardens [in Paradise] beneath which rivers flow. Every time they are provided with a provision of fruit therefrom, they will say, 'This is what we were provided with before.' And it is given to them in likeness. And they will have therein purified spouses, and they will abide therein eternally.” (Quran, Al-Baqarah: 25)

﴿قُلْ أُو۟نَّبِئُكُمۡ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنۢ ذٰلِكُمْ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا عِنۡدَ رَبِّهِمۡ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنۡ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَأَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللّٰهِ وَاللّٰهُ بِصِيرٍ بِالْعِبَادِ

“Say, 'Shall I inform you of [something] better than that? For those who fear Allah will be gardens in the presence of their Lord beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and purified spouses and approval from Allah. And Allah is Seeing of [His] servants.’” (Quran, Aal-E-Imran: 15)

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَنُدۡخِلُهُمۡ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنۡ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا لَّهُمۡ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَنُدۡخِلُهُمۡ ظِلًّا ظَلِيلًا

“And those who believe and do righteous deeds - We will surely admit them among the righteous [into Paradise]. Some faces that Day will be radiant, looking at their Lord. And some faces, that Day, will be contorted, expecting that there will be [done to them] something backbreaking. No! When the soul has reached the collarbones and it is said, 'Who will cure [him]?' And the dying one is certain that it is the [time of] separation and it is the driving away of the deceased to his Lord. And you are at this time looking on. And the intoxication of death will bring the truth; that is what you were trying to avoid. And the Horn will be blown. That is the Day of [carrying out] the threat. And every soul will come, with it a driver and a witness.” (Quran, Qiyamah: 22-29)

In the tafsir of al-Thabari, this verse provides an illustration of the reward for those who believe, particularly those who have faith in what Allah has revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as His messenger. Beyond faith, these individuals also engage in righteous deeds by obeying all of Allah's commands, avoiding His prohibitions, and refraining from sinful acts. For this group, Allah promises them entry into Paradise. One of the rewards depicted in this verse is the presence of “azwaj muthohharoh,” which is interpreted as women free from any impurities, doubts, menstruation, physical filth, or spittle. This signifies a condition vastly different from that of women in the earthly world (Ath-Thabari, 2010).

In al-Maraghi's tafsir, it is explained that this is a form of reward for the believers who engage in righteous deeds. It involves women who are free from any defects, both in their physical and spiritual aspects. These women are portrayed as beings capable of enhancing happiness and joy (Al-Maraghi, 2015).

According to Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, if we interpret the concept of heavenly maidens without employing the mubadalah method, these verses (referring to heavenly maidens) would only be relevant to men, and “azwaj” would be interpreted as wives. However, when adopting a perspective and the mubadalah method, where women become subjects (inhabitants of paradise) just as men are, these verses apply to all who believe and perform righteous deeds; they will be rewarded with pure partners in paradise. Men will have pure wives in paradise, and similarly, women will have pure husbands in paradise (Kodir, 2021).

Another feminist interpreter, Fatima Mernissi, suggests that the Quran only describes the attributes of heavenly maidens but doesn't specify their quantity (Mernissi, 1982). According to her, the partners given to the believers, along with the heavenly maidens, don't necessarily mean having more than one partner. For her, paradise is a place of comfort for all its inhabitants, especially those who believe. Paradise is a place filled with tranquility, and discussing the number of heavenly maidens would be limiting the broader concept of paradise.

3.3. Discussion of the Meaning of “Hur”

The mention of heavenly maidens in the Quran, aside from the term “azwaj,” is referred to as “hūrun” or “hūrun ‘īn.” This phrase is often interpreted as beautiful women provided by Allah as companions for the inhabitants of Paradise. “Hur” is the plural form of “haura,” which means young, good, beautiful, fair, and having black eyes. Zaid bin Aslam defines “haura” as young women with beautiful, very black eyes, and very white skin. According to Mujahid, “hurun ‘īn” refers to women with beautiful eyes and clear skin to the extent that the marrow of their shinbones can be seen through their clothing (Saidah, 2013).

Some of the Quranic verses that mention heavenly maidens with the term “hūrun” or “hūrun ‘īn” include:

حُورٌ مَّقْصُورَاتٌ فِي الْخِيَامِ

“Fair [are they] in pavilions.” (Quran, Ar-Rahman: 72)

وَحُورٌ عِينٌ

“And there are fair [women] with large, [beautiful] eyes.” (Quran, Al-Waqiah: 22)

كَذَلِكَ وَزَوَّجْنَاهُم بِحُورٍ عِينٍ

“So.” (Quran, Ad-Dukhan: 54)

مُنْكَبِينَ عَلَى سُرُرٍ مَّصْفُوفَةٍ وَزَوَّجْنَاهُم بِحُورٍ عِينٍ

“Reclining on lined couches. And We will marry them to fair women with large, [beautiful] eyes.” (Quran, At-Tur: 20)

The discussion of “hurun” or “hurun ‘īn” according to classical scholars can be seen through various interpretations in classical Quranic exegesis. Some of these interpretations include:

In the Tafsir al-Jalalayn, “hur” is interpreted as very beautiful women, specifically stating, “نِسَاءٌ شَدِيدَاتِ سَوَادٍ” (women who are extremely beautiful, with very dark eyes and fair skin) (Al-Suyuthi & Al-Mahally, n.d.).

Al-Baghawi interprets “Hūrun ‘īn” as “النِّسَاءُ النَّقِيَّاتُ الْبَيَاضُ” (pure women with fair skin). He also explains that “Hūrum Maqshūrātun” refers to women who are protected, secluded, and never leave their homes (Al-Baghawi, 1997).

The discussion presented above reflects classical interpretations that define “hur” as women who are beautiful, modest, obedient, and untouched by anyone, whether human or jinn. This leads to a perceived inequality between men and women, as the concept of paradise is often perceived as primarily serving men, with women's experiences in paradise not being explicitly detailed in classical interpretations.

According to Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, if men in paradise will have beautiful, modest, obedient, and untouched heavenly maidens, then women in paradise should also have handsome, charming, courteous, and obedient heavenly companions. However, this interpretation is merely a linguistic explanation based on the mubadalah method, aimed at ensuring that women are subjects in the verses regarding paradise, just as they are subjects in the verses of faith, piety, and righteous deeds. The specific description of the nature of paradise in the hereafter remains known only to Allah. Nevertheless, some conclusions can be drawn, indicating that paradise is a place of comfort for those who believe and perform righteous deeds, whether they are men or women (Kodir, 2021).

Based on the discussion above, we find differences in interpretation between classical and modern (feminist) exegesis. Therefore, we believe that heavenly maidens are an interpretation of a Quranic word, which is seen by classical commentators who are dedicated to maintaining the linguistic characteristics of interpreting a word according to its grammatical gender. If the word is masculine, it is interpreted as referring to men, and if it is

feminine, it is interpreted as referring to women. However, a different perception is offered by feminist commentators who interpret Quranic words with an approach of equality, eliminating distinctions between men and women in the category of rights as inhabitants of paradise.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir's perspective, "azwāj muthahharah" is interpreted as meaning that not only a righteous man will receive heavenly companions, but this expression also applies to righteous women who enter Paradise. The word "azwāj" signifies partners, and this applies to both men and women. However, classical scholars tended to interpret this expression to mean that only righteous men would receive heavenly companions in Paradise. As for the word "Hūrun 'In," according to Faqihuddin, it doesn't exclusively refer to beautiful women but can also be understood as handsome, charming, and attractive men.

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