

Muslim Exegeses Perspective on Creation of the First Woman: A Brief Discussion

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Abstract: This article attempts to examine Muslim-exegeses discussion regarding first woman creation. In doing so, the view of classical Muslim-exegeses in this issue are compared with contemporary Muslim-exegeses'. Basically, this issue raised from the interpretation of *nafs wahidah* (single person) that derived from Quran, al-Nisa' (4): 1. According to majority of classical Muslim-exegeses, that phrase refers to the creation of first woman (Eve) from Adam's rib. This view has strongly supported by hadith which literally and directly endorsed the creation of first woman. While the second view, tend to asserted that the hadith can't be interpreted in its literal meaning, but they choose to interpret it metaphorically. The third view, refuse the first opinion and they argue that it is based on patriarchy framework which has cause the degradation of women's position in Muslim society. Hence, the finding shows that the second view is more feasible and parallel with Shariah teaching that promotes equality of human being especially in creation of man and woman. There's no superior above inferior except who is most pious and righteous (*taqwa*).

Key words: Islamic jurisprudence • Muslim-exegeses • Misogyny • Gender • Patriarchy

INTRODUCTION

Islamic law primarily based on divine text which is the Qur'an and followed by the hadith as the authentic source of guidance afterward. The position of hadith as second source is common and undeniable among Muslim. However, nowadays, there are movements lead by feminist that start questioning the authority of hadith as the source of Islamic law and encourage reconsideration of some hadith interpretations that is negatively labelled as misogyny (anti-woman) [1]. This label are parallel with what they called as patriarchalism theological oriented. In other word, it also refer to male-dominated religious epistemology [2].

This is due to the belief that the hadith had been previously interpreted in a patriarchal based cultures and traditions [3]. Since then, it is definitely difficult to refute the possibility of the interpretations are bias towards men, especially in the alleged misogyny hadith such as the creation of woman from man's rib, the different way of purification of urine between male and female babies, wife obedience to her husband, the prohibition to a wife from asking for divorce, angel's intervention during sexual intercourse and the leadership of women in prayer and social activities. The bias and patriarchal interpretations of those Shariah sources as well as other divine text are then claimed as the cause of gender discrimination on women within the Muslim society [4].

MATERIAL AND METHODS

As a response to this phenomena, this article will review the Muslim-exegeses discussions on one of the alleged misogyny hadith to investigate the verification of the feminists' claim. Hadith regarding the women's creation is choosed because it has become a polemic brought to fore by the feminists as the starting point of the woman discrimination episodes which is then followed by the cosmic drama (the overthrowing of Adam and Eve from heaven) or the "*original sin*". Furthermore, it is also reported in other revealed religions' scriptures namely Judaism and Christianity in a relatively similar form of narration. Conjoint reading of these sriptures lead to a thought as if women are the source of all problems. Strengthened by the *Isra'iliyyat* (non-biblical explanatory stories and traditions that gives extra information or interpretation about events or individuals recorded in the Hebrew scriptures) sources, women are believed as a subordinate to man and the second creation due to their creation from the man's rib. Women are also then regarded as the leading cause for Adam to be dispelled from heaven [5].

Alternatively, the contemporary Muslim scholars has proposed new methods in Islamic study discipline including hermeneutic exegesis [6], double investigation [7] and suspicious exegesis [8] etc in order to challenge the prevalent interpretations and discussions of the classical Muslim-exegeses especially related to gender issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Basically, Muslim-exegeses discussion on first woman creation are based on two primary authentic sources which is the Qur'an and Hadith. Pertaining to this issue, the Qur'an as the central religious text in Islam verifies that the creation of mankind started within a single person (*nafs wahidah*). It is explicitly stated on the verses as follows:

"O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person (Adam) and from him (Adam) He created his wife [Hawwa (Eve)] and from them both He created many men and women." (al-Nisa' (4): 1)

"It is He (Allah) Who has created you from a single person (Adam) and (then) He has created from him his wife [Hawwa (Eve)], in order that he might enjoy the pleasure of living with her." (al-A'raf (7): 189)

"He created you (all) from a single person (Adam); then made from him his wife [Hawwa' (Eve)]." (al-Zumar (39): 6)

The comprehension and interpretation of Muslim-exegeses regarding the term *nafs wahidah* is then supported by several hadiths which come with various *sanad* (the chain of narration) and *matn* (the text of the hadith). In a hadith, Prophet Muhammad PBUH said:

"Make a tribute to women. Indeed women are created from a crooked man's rib and the rib that is most bent is the one top most, if you need to straighten it, you are going to break it and if you let it unattended, the rib will remain crooked, therefore, testify to all ladies with virtues." (Sahih al-Bukhari, hadith no.: 5185)

Further, in another hadith Prophet Muhammad PBUH said:

"Women are created from man's rib." (Sahih al-Bukhari, hadith no.: 5184)

"Indeed women are like a man's rib." (Sahih Muslim, hadith no: 1468)

All these several verses and hadiths as the main references pertaining to the first woman creation in Islam had been deeply discussed by Muslim-exegeses. A thorough perusal on their discussion reveals contradiction to the feminist comprehension on this issue. Instead, the explicit and implicit messages derived from Muslim-exegeses' discussion regarding first woman creation based on those sources are as follows:

The Emphasis of Muslim-exegeses Discussions Are the Interpretation of *Nafs Wahidah*: Basically, discussions among Muslim-exegeses on the first woman creation issue is heavily focusing on the interpretation of *nafs wahidah*. Regardless of their various interpretations, their discussions verify the monogenesis theory which posits a single origin of humanity rather than focusing on the status or dignity of women as compared to men. Their views are divided into two major school of thoughts either women are truly created from man's rib or instead from a similar substances or elements.

Based on the above stated hadiths as the source of interpretation (*tafsir bi al-ma'thur*), the majority of classical Muslim-exegeses strongly believe that *nafs wahidah* signify that women originates from single person namely Adam. Among them are al-Dahhak [9], al-Tabari [10], al-Zamakhshari [11], al-Maraghi [12], Ibn Kathir [13], al-Alusi [14], al-Qurtubi [15], al-Suyuti [16], al-Tha'labi [17], al-Razi [18]. Derived from a strong Islamic method of exegesis, this view is also supported by several contemporary Muslim exegeses such as al-Buti [19] and Hamka [20].

However, on the contrary, minority group of the classical and contemporary Muslim exegeses hold the view that the first woman is not created from Adam's rib, instead from a substance or similar elements. Among them are Abu Muslim [21], 'Abduh and Rida [22], Tantawi [23], Ash-Shiddieqy [24] and Shihab [25]. They based their view with the argument that the meaning of the hadiths should be understood not literally but metaphorically. They further their argument that the former view are influenced by the Bible narration and *Isra'iliyyat* sources especially in the interpretations presented by al-Tabari and al-Razi. The Old Testament in Book Genesis II verse 21-23 which claimed to be one of the sources that influenced the former view states:

²¹"So the LORD God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. He took one of adam's ribs and closed up the place from which he had taken it.

²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib and brought her to Adam.

²³"At last!" Adam exclaimed. "She is part of my own flesh and bone! She will be called 'woman' because she was taken out of a man [26].

This latter view is preferred by the feminist as it is in line with their belief that the first woman is not created from Adam's rib [27, 28]. Nevertheless, they differ the minority Muslim exegeses' view in terms of argumentation as they go beyond the consensus of all the Muslim scholars by arguing the hadiths which were recorded by al-Bukhary and Muslim by refuting the authenticity of those hadiths [29]. Obviously, their tendency in argumentation seems to be influenced by the western feminists who have been accustomed to the polygenesis theory (a theory of human origin positing that the human races are of different lineages opposite to the idea of monogenesis).

Islam Is Not the Cause of Women Degradation: From the above stated verses and hadiths, it is evident that Islam neither diminish woman's dignity implicitly nor explicitly. Muslim-exegeses discussion concerning first woman creation issue also, do not disparage and degrade women, but they acknowledge them equally with menfolk. Despite the differences between men and women, both are same in terms of dignity in Islam. This is clearly understood from the Quranic verses:

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most

righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)." (al-Hujurat (49): 13)

Besides, there was a collection of hadiths that recognize women with honour and place them in an elevated position compared to other religions. Thus, it is really unfair and immoral to relate Islam with the women discriminations that occur in Muslim community since it is proven to be obviously in contradiction to the Islamic teachings. Rather, it is Muslim community itself which is being far from Islam should be blamed for doing so [30].

The degradation of woman's dignity in fact, originated from the west [31, 32] which then trigger the movement that argues the Bible narration which regarded as the cause of the humiliation. Since the Bible is deemed not as the God's words, but man's words that influenced by the patriarchy customs and traditions, the western feminists claim it should be reconstruct using the hermeneutic and other appropriate approaches to demolish the patriarchy dominance [33].

CONCLUSION

The above discussions show Muslim-exegeses discussions on first woman creation has no significant relation with degradation of women's status not to mention women discrimination. In fact, their discussions emphasis on the interpretation and analysis of the '*nafsa wahidah*' (single person) terminology as stated explicitly in the Quranic verses regarding the creation of humankind. It is a disappointment that some Muslim feminists are influenced by the western feminists to the extent of arguing the authenticity of the hadith and labeling it as misogyny. In consequence, they wrongly blame classical Muslim-exegeses views for the discrimination of women mistakenly done by the Muslim community as a result of obeying Islamic teaching which evidently recognize the women's status.

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