

# Shihab's Perspective on Working Women Issue: An Analysis in His Book, Tafsīr, al-Misbāh

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**Abstract**—This article aims to analyze the methodology used by Prof. Dr. Muhammad Quraish Shihab, a contemporary Islamic scholar from Indonesia and also the writer of Tafsīr al-Misbāh in discussing working women from the Islamic perspective. Content analysis was implemented in the analyzing Shihab's work. The principal (*al-ma'thur*), and the opinion (*al-ra'y*) methodology of exegesis were used to describe the analysis. All the data have been coded based on ideas and categorized according topic and concept. Lastly, the theme has been identified to define the 'meaning' of the data. The study has found that Shihab employed an exceptional method in commentating the topic. He also succeeded in combining both method of Quranic exegesis, the principal (*al-ma'thur*) and the opinion (*al-ra'y*). Lastly, it has been found that Shihab's debate was delivered solidly and systematically supported by well-organized facts.

**Index Terms**— Al-misbāh, working women, methodology of quranic exegesis.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Muhammad Quraish Shihab

Muhammad Quraish Shihab was born on February 16<sup>th</sup> 1944 in Rappang, South Sulawesi. He was the son of a prominent Islamic scholar (*ulama'*) in the field of exegesis, Prof. KH Abdurrahman Shihab. His formal education started in an elementary school in Ujung Pandang, Indonesia. In year 1958, when he was 14 years old, his father sent him to al-Azhar, Egypt to study Islam and finished his studies in 1982 with a doctorate degree, first class honors. Muhammad Quraish Shihab held the post of Indonesia Religious Minister in 1998. He was then appointed as the Chief Ambassador to Egypt in 1999 by Indonesian Government. He was a prolific writer who produced various works. His works cover academic writing, article in magazines and books covering issues regarding life and problems in life in the context of contemporary Indonesian community (Zuhad, 2010).

Tafsīr al-Misbāh is Shihab's magnum opus. It is considered as one the biggest contribution in the Islamic exegesis world although it was written in Indonesian Malay language. According to Miftahuddin (2008) Tafsīr al-Misbāh

emerged as prominent work in the contemporary Malay World because it is a recent complete exegesis of the al-Quran and written in 15 volumes. It was written from 1999 to 2002. In addition, Miftahuddin also mentioned that Tafsīr al-Misbāh employs the Opinion (*al-Ra'y*) method that has commendable reference and source, the Analysis Verse by Verse (*al-Tahlīlī*) method in its delivery and it is inclined to use Language Literacy (*al-Adāb al-Lughawi*) and Social Literacy (*al-Adāb al-Ijtima'ī*) commentary. The distinctive quality of this exegesis is in its debate regarding appropriate verse (*ayāt*) and chapter (*sūrah*) arrangement system (*munāsabah*) and its debate regarding language. Tafsīr al-Misbāh discusses various issues faced by Muslim nowadays, providing criticism, explanation, suggestions and guidance in the facing issues. For instance, Shihab expresses his opinion on women, debt in society, human rights and others. The issue being put forward in this article is working women on exegesis The Confederates (*al-Ahzāb*) verse number 33 which highlighted an exceptionally unique methodology.

### B. Working Women

Islamic jurisprudence has sanctioned that women can work within the confines of Shariah value outlined in verse 71, chapter The Repentance (*al-Tawbah*) which means: "*The Believers, men and women, are protectors one of another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity and obey Allah and His Messenger: On them will Allah pour His mercy for Allah is Exalted in power, Wise*". The context of "*protectors one of another*" can be said to be appropriate to the current social change where education opportunity and economics have led women supporting their husbands in building a happy and comfortable family by venturing outside the household. Nevertheless, time management is important so that no parties in the family constitution will be neglected (Azmi Ahmad, Kamaludin Tomiran, Mohamad Sulaiman, Mohd Yazid Awalludin and Ramli Rashidi. 2006).

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research conducted by Muhd Najib and Miftahuddin in 2008 have found that al-Misbāh has a lot of noteworthy points. The most outstanding one is that the writer combines principal methodology (*al-ma'thur*) and opinion methodology (*al-ra'y*) of exegesis in his writing. In addition, they have also found one of al-Misbāh's specialties is in its emphasis of the etymology of Arabic words found in the Quran.

Based on those facts, this article investigates how Shihab

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merged the principal (*al-ma'thur*) and opinion (*al-ra'y*) methodology of exegesis. Secondly, this article also investigates how he emphasizes the Arabic language etymology while commentating women working issue in chapter The Confederates (*al-Ahzāb*) verse number 33.

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis incorporates a library research method which is considered as a type of qualitative research methodology (Ahmad Sunawari, 2005). Content analysis method has been implemented in analyzing the methodology used by Shihab's in explaining the *al-Ahzāb* (The Confederates) verse number 3. The principal (*al-ma'thur*), and opinion (*al-ra'y*) methodology of exegesis have been used to describe the analysis. The source of the data comes mainly from *al-Misbāh* volume 11, page 262 to 267. All the data has been coded based on the ideas and categorized according topic and concept. Lastly, the theme is identified in order to define the 'meaning' of the data. All the fact is evaluated and the findings are compared with another exegesis writer's findings. Lastly the conclusion is made based on the finding.

### IV. ANALYSIS OF TEXT AND THE FINDINGS

The focus of this section is to study Muhammad Quraish Shihab's method in understanding and commentating chapter The Confederates (*al-Ahzāb*) verse number 33:



“And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance”

The analysis of the above text is as below:

#### A. Gathering Meaning of verse from Art of Reciting Knowledge

Shihab mentioned in his commentary that: Say (قَرْنَ) – as read by ‘Āsim and Abū Jāfar – is derived from the word (اِقْرَنَّ) *iqranna* which means *stay and be in a secure place...* (he continued). Many Islamic scholars read the verse above with a *kasrah* at the *qaf* alphabet which reads *qirna*. This is derived from the word (قَرَار) *qarār* which means *be in a place...* and the word *qirna* is derived the word (وَقَار) *waqār* which means *reputable and respectable*” (Shihab, 2002:263).

It can be seen that in the explanation of the word (وَقَرْنَ), Shihab discusses the meaning using the reading method (*qirāāt*) which is different from the reading method by Imām Nafi’, ‘Asim and the majority (*Jumhūr*) (al-Qurthubi, 1988 in Siti Fatimah & Mohd Zulkifli, 2010). The implication of such reading is that it gives two meanings as stated by al-Habāshy in Siti Fatimah & Mohd Zulkifli (2010). Firstly, it means that women are ordained to stay at home peacefully in a modest manner. Secondly, it means that women are forbidden from going out of the house unless it is an emergency.

It can be inferred from the above explanation that the difference in shariah value regarding a certain jurisprudence

problem can be accounted for, among others, by the difference in reading. Consequently, a variety of shariah value determinations has emerged. Other than that, the difference in reading also serves as an elaboration to Quranic verses that are difficult to understand (Siti Fatimah & Mohd Zulkifli, 2010). It can also be seen here how careful and meticulous Shihab is in scrutinizing the verse in the *al-Quran*. The elaborate explanation in the different art of reciting (*qirāāt*) demonstrates the depth of his Quranic knowledge in his application of the principal technique.

#### B. Incorporating Scholars View

It has been found that Shihab in many instances incorporates opinions of scholars in debating the issue of women are to stay at home and working women. According to Fadlan and Muhd Najib (2004), the main reason for a commentary writer citing other scholar's is to strengthen their argument regarding the interpretation of the Quran. Citing scholars from different expertise is also useful in order to gain a wholesome understanding of the Quran. Shihab's method in incorporating scholar's views in discussing women to stay at home is as follows:

- Taking in the scholar's view from their books by citing Ibn 'Arabi in his book, *Tafsīr of Ayāt-ayāt al-Ahkam* and al-Maudūdi's explanation from his book *al-Hijāb* (Shihab, 2002:266).
- Stating scholar's view by mentioning their names only. The opinion in debating this problem is taken from Al-Qurthubi, Thāhir Ibn 'Āsyūr and the Religious Department of the Republic of Indonesia Tafseer Arrangement team (Shihab, 2002:266).
- On the other hand, in debating the question of working women and the limitations the following method is used:
  - Taking scholar's view from their books namely views from Muhammad Quthub in his book *Ma'rakah at-Taqālid* and *Syubuhāt Haula al-Islām*.
  - Stating the scholars, Sayyid Quthub and Saīd Hawa, views and citing their names (Shihab, 2002:267).

#### C. Emphasis on Understanding Arabic Language

According Fadhlān and Muhd Najib, Ibn Katsīr, in his interpretation, cited Ibn 'Abbas as saying “among the many forms of exegesis is the exegesis known by Arabian who understands Arabic Language” (2004). Therefore, in discussing chapter *al-Ahzāb* (The Confederates) verse 33, it can be seen that Shihab emphasized the etymology of words in assisting readers to understand the Quran actual intentions. Shihab's method is by listing various Islamic scholar's view regarding the etymology of the word (قَرْنَ) *qarna/qirna* is listed below:

- (قَرْنَ) *qarna* is derived from the word (اِقْرَنَّ) *iqranna* which means stay and be in a secure place.
- (قَرْنَ) *qarna* is derived from the word (قَرَّةٌ عَيْنٍ) *qurrat 'ain* which means something that is relieving.
- (قَرْنَ) *qirna* is read with a *kasrah* at the alphabet *qaf* which is derived from the word (قَرَار) *qarār* which means to be in a place.
- (قَرْنَ) *qirna* is extracted from the word (وَقَار) *waqār* which means reputable and respectable (Shihab, 2002:263). Furthermore, according to Fadhlān and Muhd Najib (2004)

this linguistic approach in explaining the meanings of words is to make it easier for people from various education backgrounds to understand the intended meaning of the Quran.

#### D. Jurisprudence Discussion

With regards to jurisprudence implications, Shihab has been found to be open and did not limit the debate to only one view. This is evident when he has been found to list various scholars' views in assessing and determining the Shariah value as stated below:

- Al-Qurthubi and Ibn 'Arabi

Shihab mentioned that according to their opinion, the verse means as an ordain to remain at home. Although the verse is originally meant for the wives of the holy Prophet Muhammad it also canvas all women in Islam. The stipulation of religion is that women remain at home and do not go out unless it is an emergency (Shihab, 2002:266).

- Ibn Katsir and Al-Maududi

Shihab added that according to them, the abovementioned verse is a deterrent for women to go out of the house if there is no need or desire permitted by the religion like performing prayer and others (Shihab, 2002:266).

- Thahir Ibn 'Asyur

Consequently, Shihab mentioned that according to Thahir, the decree that came with this verse is meant for the wives of the holy Prophet Muhammad but, for other women in Islam it serves as a complement. This means that it is not compulsory but highly preferable and superior (Shihab, 2002:266).

#### E. Comparison with Other Malay Writer

TABLE I: COMPARISON SHIHAB WITH OTHER PROMINENT MALAY WRITERS IN COMMENTATING THE ISSUE OF WORKING WOMEN WITH REFERENCE TO CHAPTER THE CONFEDERATES (AL-AHZAB) VERSE 33.

Criteria	Writer		
	Shihab*	Hamka**	El-Muhammady**
Translate and interpret to the Malay language	√	√	√
Gathering meaning of verse from The Art of Reciting Knowledge	√		
Citing scholar opinion when discussing the issue	√		
Discussing the etymology of Arabic words	√		
Open in Jurisprudence discussion and not limit only to one view	√		

\* Shihab, M. Quraish. *Tafsir al-Misbāh: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*. Jakarta: Lantera Hati. 2002. Volume 11. page 262-267.

\*\* Abdul Malik Abdul Karim Amrullah (HAMKA). *Tafsir Al-Azhar*. Surabaya: Yayasan Latimojong. 1982. Juzu' 22. page 38-42.

\*\*\*El-Muhammady, Muhammad Uthman. *Al-Qur'ānu 'L-Karīm: Terjemahan dan Huraian Maksud*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. 1994. Volume 4. page 2121.

#### V. THE BEGINNING OF NEW ERA OF MALAY EXEGESIS

This is the important part of the article that we should realize. Based on the comparison that had been done between Shihab and other prominent Malay writers in commentating the issue of working women with reference to chapter The Confederates (*al-Ahzāb*) verse 33, Shihab clearly advanced in his method of exegesis. All advanced elements show that al-Misbāh is absolutely the sign of the beginning of new era in the writing style conducted by Malays scholar in Quranic exegesis field.

Abdul Malik Abdul Karim Amrullah or known with Hamka, wrote his exegesis book, *Tafsir al-Azhār* in 1980. He only translated and interpreted The Confederates (*al-Ahzāb*) verse 33 when discussing the issue. In another hand, Muhammad Uthman el-Muhammady in year 1994 did the same works like Hamka in his book, *al-Qur'ānu 'L-Karīm: Terjemahan dan Huraian Maksud*.

In 2002, when *Tafsir al-Misbāh: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an* wrote by Shihab published, we identified he exposed several noteworthy approached. First, he has merged the principal and opinion methods in his commentaries. Second, the debate on issues has been found to be systematic and well-organized hence assisting the readers to comprehend the issue at hand. The readers can understand the concept that Islam approves women working as a mean to fulfill imperative living requirements. Third, he combined various fields of study namely the art of recite (*qirāāt*), Arabic Language and jurisprudence in presenting his debate. Fourth, the debates were handled solidly and exhaustively by inserting opinions of prior and contemporary scholar's views. Fifth and lastly, his methodology is unique because unlike the writings of other scholars in the Malay World, his debates include elements of Arabic Language etymology.

All the facts above support the claim that al-Misbāh start the new era in Malay Quranic exegesis writing in 2002. The transformation and innovation in discussing the issue make clearly different with the other and its going depth in beyond the line and change the usual of Malays writing style in exegesis.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, there are many work and research must be done in investigating the specialty of Tafsir al-Misbāh especially the current issues faced by Muslim nowadays. His criticism, explanation, suggestion and guidance in facing those issue must be analyze to build the theoretical frame work. The Shihab's theoretical frame work can help other researchers in transforming the ideas to practical manner and bring its live in the society. The interdisciplinary research also can be done to measure the effectiveness of Shihab's ideas in solving the certain issue that involved in the society.

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