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## The Narrative of Support and Opposition Among Social Media Users Towards Polygamy Content: An Exegetical Analysis of QS. An-Nisā' Verse 3

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### Abstract:

This study aims to analyse the meaning and law of polygamy from the perspective of the Qur'an, based on the interpretation of QS. An-Nisa verse 3. The issues examined in this study concern how the concept of polygamy is understood in Islam and how the principle of justice is applied in practice in accordance with sharia guidance. This study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach and a thematic tafsir method, with the main sources being the Qur'an and various classical and contemporary tafsir works such as Tafsir Al-Maraghi, Tafsir Al-Manar, Tafsir Al-Mishbah, and Tafsir Ibn Kathir. The results of the study show that QS. An-Nisa verse 3 does not encourage polygamy, but merely permits it under certain conditions, with the main requirement being the ability to act justly, both physically and spiritually. The discussion shows that polygamy in Islam is a form of concession aimed at safeguarding social and moral welfare, not at satisfying carnal desire. In conclusion, polygamy in Islam is permitted to a limited extent, accompanied by a great responsibility to uphold justice and avoid harm, in accordance with the principle of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*.

**Keywords:** Polygamy, QS. An-Nisā' Verse 3, Justice, Qur'anic Exegesis, *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*.

### Introduction

The phenomenon of polygamy is often the subject of controversy, as it touches upon fundamental aspects of family life, such as justice, women's rights, and household welfare. Some regard polygamy as a solution to certain social problems, such as an imbalance in the number of men and women within society. Conversely, others criticise the practice of polygamy, considering it prone to injustice and liable to disadvantage one of the parties to

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a marriage.<sup>1</sup>

Islam permits polygamy not for the satisfaction of carnal desire, but for the sake of benefit (*maslahat*). Muhammad Rashid Rida, in *Tafsir Al-Manar*, states that polygamy may only be practised in emergency circumstances. If polygamy is pursued merely out of desire, it is highly likely to give rise to harm (*mudharat*) rather than the benefit that Islam intends.<sup>2</sup>

M. Quraish Shihab argues that Islam encourages fairness in the practice of polygamy. Fairness here does not mean fairness of inclination of the heart, but rather material fairness that can indeed be measured. There is a movement seeking to close the door to polygamy entirely, on the grounds that polygamy carries a great deal of harm, such as serious wrongdoing. It should be remembered that this very understanding has, in practice, given rise to extramarital sexual relations and the emergence of kept women and unregistered marriages, which are in fact highly detrimental to women, since there is no authentic proof of their marital relationship, and this in turn causes harm to their children. The polygamy taught by the Qur'an is, in fact, more humane and moral than what occurs within societies that prohibit polygamy.<sup>3</sup>

Islam was brought by Allah SWT to the earth, together with all its sharia, undoubtedly in order to bring benefit to humankind and avert existing harm. Monogamous or polygamous marriage is one form of its sharia, as an application of the five *maqāsid al-sharī'ah* (objectives of Islamic law), namely *hifz al-nasl* (the preservation of lineage), which is why religious guidance and the guidance of the local state are needed in order to bring about perfection for those who practise it.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the discussion of polygamy cannot be separated from the explanation given in the Qur'an, particularly in Surah An-Nisā' verse 3, which forms the legal basis for the practice. This verse affirms that polygamy of up to four wives is permitted, with the main condition being the ability to act justly. However, if a person fears that he will be unable to uphold justice, he is advised to marry only one wife. The interpretations of scholars, such as those provided by Muhammad Rashid Rida and M. Quraish Shihab, show that this verse is not a command to practise polygamy, but rather a form of concession (*rukhsah*) carrying great moral and social responsibility. Therefore, understanding Surah An-Nisā' verse 3 confirms that polygamy in Islam is genuinely intended to uphold justice, safeguard honour, and realise benefit in family and community life.

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<sup>1</sup>Rahmat Syukri et al., "Poligami dalam Al Quran Perspektif Penafsiran," *Reflection: Islamic Education Journal* 2, no. 1 (2024): 77–84, <https://doi.org/10.61132/reflection.v2i1.398>.

<sup>2</sup>Muhammad Rasyid Ridho, *Tafsir al-Manar Juz IV (Haiah Misriah Ammah Lil Kitab, 1990)*.

<sup>3</sup>M. Quraish Shihab, *Perempuan (Lentera Hati, 2018)*.

<sup>4</sup>Rico Setyo Nugroho, "Praktik Poligami Dan Tujuan Pernikahan Dalam Rumah Tangga," *Jipolis: Jurnal Ilmu Politik Dan Ilmu Sosial* 1, no. 2 (2024), <https://ejournal.fisip.unjani.ac.id/index.php/jipolis/article/view/2071>.



In the digital space, discourse on polygamy has given rise to two major camps: a group in favour of polygamy, on the grounds of following sharia and upholding social benefit, and a group opposed to polygamy, who regard the practice as a form of injustice towards women and a potential cause of household breakdown.

Pro-polygamy narratives generally emphasise that Islam permits polygamy not to satisfy carnal desire, but as a solution to certain social conditions, such as the protection of widows and orphans, as stated in QS. An-Nisa verse 3. Supporters of this view frequently cite classical tafsir works such as *Al-Manar* by Muhammad Rashid Rida and *Al-Mishbah* by M. Quraish Shihab, which affirm that the permissibility of polygamy is a form of *rukḥṣah* (concession), with the main condition being the ability to act justly. From this perspective, polygamy is seen as a sharia mechanism for safeguarding the welfare and honour of women.

Conversely, the contra narrative that frequently appears on social media highlights the practice of polygamy today, which is often far removed from the principle of justice intended by the Qur'an. Many netizens, particularly women, consider that the justice referred to is not merely material fairness, but also encompasses inner aspects such as attention, affection, and emotional balance. The experiences of wives who feel neglected within polygamous households form a strong argument for those who reject this practice, leading to the view that polygamy is no longer relevant to the modern social context.

Thus, the debate in cyberspace reflects a contest of discourse between text and context, between normative interpretation grounded in religious argument and the empirical experience of contemporary society. The discussion of polygamy therefore cannot be separated from the interpretation of QS. An-Nisa verse 3 as its legal basis, while also needing to be examined within the framework of social media, which shapes public perceptions of justice and gender roles in Islam. Through an analysis of tafsir and pro-contra narratives on social media, this study seeks to understand how the meaning of polygamy is received and reinterpreted by Muslim communities in the digital era.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the meaning and ruling of polygamy based on the interpretation of QS. An-Nisā' verse 3, emphasising the principle of justice as the main condition for its permissibility in Islam, and to examine the pro and contra narratives developing on social media concerning the practice of polygamy. Through a thematic tafsir approach and an analysis of digital discourse, this study seeks to understand how contemporary Muslim communities reinterpret the verse within a modern social context, to assess the relevance of classical and contemporary tafsir such as *Al-Manar*, *Al-Maraghi*, and *Al-Mishbah*, and to examine the impact of online debate on the understanding of Islamic family law, particularly regarding the application of the values of justice, benefit (*maslahat*), and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* in the practice of polygamy.



## Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach combined with an analysis of digital discourse. The main approach used is thematic tafsir (maudhūī), namely the gathering and examination of Qur'anic verses related to the theme of polygamy, particularly QS. An-Nisā' verse 3, which are then analysed on the basis of their historical, linguistic, and social context. The primary data sources for this study include the Qur'an and classical and contemporary tafsir works, such as Tafsir Al-Maraghi, Tafsir Al-Manar, Tafsir Al-Mishbah, and Tafsir Ibn Kathir. Secondary data sources were obtained from books, academic journals, articles, and digital documentation in the form of netizens' responses, comments, and opinions on social media relating to the issue of polygamy.

Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation and literature review, by tracing, reading, and recording various references relevant to the research topic, drawn from both religious sources and public digital discourse. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and discourse analysis to examine two main aspects: scholars' interpretation of QS. An-Nisā' verse 3 concerning polygamy and the principle of justice, and the construction of pro and contra narratives among netizens towards polygamy-related content on social media. The results of both analyses were then synthesised to present a comprehensive understanding of how the sacred text is interpreted and reinterpreted by modern Muslim society within a digital social context.

## Research Results and Discussion

### The Legal Basis of Polygamy and Asbāb al-Nuzūl (Occasion of Revelation) QS. An-Nisā' Verse 3

وَأِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَقْسِطُوا فِي الْيَتَامَىٰ فَانكِحُوا مَا طَابَ لَكُمْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَثْنَىٰ وَثُلثَ وَرُبْعًا فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا فَوَاحِدَةً  
أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ ذَلِكَ أَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَعُولُوا<sup>5</sup> ﴿٣﴾

*"If you fear that you will not be able to act justly towards (the rights of) orphaned girls (should you marry them), then marry other women that you like: two, three, or four. However, if you fear that you will not be able to act justly, (marry) only one, or those whom your right hand possesses. That is more likely to prevent you from doing wrong."*

The verse above is closely connected to the preceding verse, namely the second verse of Surah An-Nisā'. The content of the second verse of Surah An-Nisā' issues a warning to guardians responsible for managing the property of orphans, stating that such guardians incur sin if they take or replace the property of orphans with something inferior in an

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<sup>5</sup>Departemen Agama Republik Indonesia, Alquran dan Terjemah (Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 2020).



unlawful manner.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, in the third verse of Surah An-Nisā', Allah SWT reminds the guardians of orphaned girls whom they intend to marry to act properly and justly. Such guardians must give the dowry (mahr) and other rights to the orphaned girl they marry, and must not marry her with the intention of exploiting the orphan's property or preventing the orphan from marrying someone else.<sup>7</sup>

This is in line with the explanation given by Aisha RA when Urwah ibn Zubair RA asked about the meaning of the third verse of Surah An-Nisā'. If the guardian of an orphaned girl feared that he would be unable to treat her justly, he was not permitted to marry the orphan under his care. Instead, the guardian had to marry another woman he liked, up to a maximum of four wives, provided he was able to treat them all justly.<sup>8</sup>

It is narrated from Urwah ibn al-Zubair that he asked Aisha RA, the wife of the Prophet SAW, about the words of Allah SWT which state, "And if you fear that you will not be able to act justly towards (the rights of) orphaned girls (should you marry them), then marry other women that you like." Aisha replied, "O son of my brother, this refers to a girl who is an orphan under the care of her guardian, with whom the guardian shares property; the guardian is then captivated by the wealth and beauty of the orphaned girl, and wishes to marry her without acting justly, as he would with other women, in giving the dowry. They are therefore forbidden from behaving in this way, unless they are willing to act justly in giving the dowry, as they would to others. They are instead commanded to marry other women whom they desire, apart from these orphans." Urwah said, "Aisha said, 'People sought a ruling from the Messenger of Allah SAW after this verse was revealed to them, whereupon Allah SWT revealed the verse, "And they ask you for a ruling concerning women. Say: Allah gives you a ruling concerning them, and what is recited to you in the Qur'an concerning orphaned girls to whom you do not give what has been decreed for them, while you wish to marry them..."' Aisha then said, 'What Allah SWT refers to in the Book is the first verse, where Allah SWT says, "If you are unable to act justly towards orphaned girls, then marry other than them."' Aisha added, 'As for the words of Allah SWT in that verse, "And you wish to marry her," this refers to the reluctance of one among you towards an orphaned girl under his care who possesses little wealth and is not beautiful. Such men are then forbidden from marrying beautiful and wealthy orphaned girls unless they can act justly towards them.' Rabi'ah, commenting on the words of Allah SWT, "If you all fear that you will act unjustly towards orphaned girls...", said, 'Leave them if you fear

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<sup>6</sup>Mhd Irfan AD and Afdhalia Mahatta, "Konsep Keadilan Dalam Poligami (Telaah QS An-Nisa Ayat 3)," *Sakena: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 9, no. 1 (2024): 53–60, <https://journals.fasya.uinib.org/index.php/sakena/article/view/582>.

<sup>7</sup>Rahmi Bakhtiar, "Poligami: Penafsiran Surat An Nisa' Ayat 3," *Kafa'ah: Journal of Gender Studies* 5, no. 1 (2015): 114, <https://doi.org/10.15548/jk.v5i1.117>.

<sup>8</sup>Imam Ibnu Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'anul Adzim*, vol. 4 (Insan Kamil, 2017).



this, for We have made lawful for you four women." (Agreed upon)<sup>9</sup>.

### Linguistic Analysis of QS. An-Nisā' Verse 3

The phrase "wa in khiftum allā tuqsiṭū fī al-yatāmā fankihū" means that a man cares for an orphaned girl because he is her guardian. He then wishes to marry her, but does not act justly in giving the dowry that is, he fails to give the dowry that other husbands customarily give to their wives. When the verse uses the word "al-khawf" (fear, apprehension), this conveys the understanding that a person is aware that he is unable to act justly. The word implies that the inability to act justly is something to be feared and avoided.<sup>10</sup>

The verse above uses the words *tuqsiṭū* and *ta'dilū*, both of which are translated as "to act justly." Some scholars regard their meanings as identical, while others draw a distinction, holding that *tuqsiṭū* means to act justly between two or more people in a manner that satisfies both parties, whereas *ta'dilū* means to treat both others and oneself well, though such justice may not necessarily satisfy one of the parties.<sup>11</sup> In the Qur'an, the verse that most clearly addresses matters relating to polygamy is Surah An-Nisā' [4]: 3. *Tuqsiṭū* is a *fi'l muḍāri'* (present-tense verb) derived from *aqsaṭa-yuqsiṭu*, meaning to act justly and without oppression. Its meaning differs if the word is instead derived from *qasaṭa-yaqsiṭu*, which means to act unjustly and to oppress.<sup>12</sup>

*Al-yatāmā* is the plural of *yatīm*, meaning a child not yet of age (*bāligh*) who has lost his father and has not yet reached maturity. An orphan is one who has no father and has not yet reached the age of male maturity; this description applies to human beings, whereas for animals, being "orphaned" refers to the absence of a mother.<sup>13</sup> *Fankihū* is a *fi'l amr* (imperative verb) meaning "marry." The word derives from *nakaḥa-yankihū*, synonymous with *tazawwaja-yatazawwaju*.<sup>14</sup> Linguistically, *nikāḥ* (marriage) means "to bind"; accordingly, the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) defines marriage as a marital bond (contract) entered into in accordance with legal provisions and religious teachings.<sup>15</sup>

The command in the verse, "*fankihū*," is a command denoting permissibility (*al-*

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<sup>9</sup>Hamka, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, Juz IV (Pustaka Panjimas, 1983).

<sup>10</sup>Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-'Aqidah wa al-Syari'ah wa Manhaj* (Dar al-Fikr, 2009).

<sup>11</sup>M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah* (Lentera Hati, 2010).

<sup>12</sup>Mahfud Mahfud and Muhammad Qudwah I'tishom Billah, "Tafsir Ayat Ahkam Surah An-Nisa Ayat 3: Etika Poligami dan Hikmahnya Dalam Syari'at Islam," *Al-Fahmu: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (2022): 18–26, <https://doi.org/10.58363/alfahmu.v1i1.1>.

<sup>13</sup>Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim: Tafsir atas Surat-surat Pendek Berdasarkan Urutan Turunnya Wahyu* (Pustaka Hidayah, 1997).

<sup>14</sup>Mahfud and Billah, "Tafsir Ayat Ahkam Surah An-Nisa Ayat 3."

<sup>15</sup>Indonesia and Pusat Bahasa (Indonesia), eds., *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia Pusat Bahasa*, 4th ed. (Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2008).



ibāḥah). Some hold the view that the command is obligatory, though this obligation is limited to the number of wives specified in the verse namely two, three, or four. In other words, where polygamy is practised, the obligation applies only to the number of wives stated in the verse, and this number may not be exceeded.<sup>16</sup> Al-Maraghi, in his tafsir, explains that the permissibility of polygamy set out in this verse is one applied under strict and demanding conditions. In his view, polygamy is permitted only in emergency circumstances.<sup>17</sup>

M. Quraish Shihab affirms that this verse neither compels nor encourages polygamy, but merely discusses its permissibility and even this permissibility is confined to a narrow door that may be entered only in situations of genuine necessity and under stringent conditions.<sup>18</sup> Thāba derives from ṭayyib, meaning good, fine, and beautiful; something is described as ṭayyib if it is good. An-nisā' may be translated as "women," being the plural form of al-mar'ah, though not derived directly from its singular.

Mathnā wa thulātha wa rubā' linguistically mean "two by two," "three by three," and "four by four," since words formed on the pattern maf'ala and fu'ala carry a distributive, "one by one," meaning. Ta'dilū means "to act justly"; 'adl denotes equality. Al-'adl and al-'idl, with a kasrah on the 'ayn, are close in meaning; the difference is that al-'adlu is a form of justice recognised through reason, as in justice within a court of law, whereas al-'idlu is recognised through the senses, as in fairness on a set of scales. Al-Aṣfahānī distinguishes the meaning of "justice" in Surah An-Nisā' verse 3 from that in Surah An-Nisā' [4]: 129. Regarding the latter, he states that the verse points to natural disposition and inclination, and therefore a person cannot possibly act justly towards his wives in matters of affection.

Mā malakat aymānukum, translated as "female slaves whom you possess," refers to a group that was, at the time, a common phenomenon within human societies worldwide. It may be affirmed that Allah and His Messenger did not condone slavery, although it must also be acknowledged that the Qur'an and the Sunnah did not take drastic steps to abolish it all at once. The Qur'an and the Sunnah closed off every avenue for the emergence and expansion of slavery except one like prisoners of war, resulting from warfare waged in self-defence and in defence of faith, reflecting how humankind at that time treated its prisoners of war. However, although prisoners of war were permitted to be enslaved, their treatment was highly humane; the Qur'an even gave Muslim rulers the opportunity to free them, with or without ransom, in contrast to the prevailing attitude of humankind at the time.<sup>19</sup>

Aymānikum is the plural of yamīn. In al-Mufradāt, the original meaning of al-yamīn

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<sup>16</sup>A. Syaifullah and Fahrur Razi, "Kontekstualisasi Poligami Dalam Surah Al-Nisa' Ayat 3 Perspektif Abdullah Saeed," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 10, no. 02 (2025).

<sup>17</sup>Ahmad Mustafa Al-Maragi, *Tafsir Al-Maragi Juz 1* (Cv Toha Putra, 1992).

<sup>18</sup>M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Quran* (Mizan, 1999).

<sup>19</sup>Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah*.



is "slave"; the word was subsequently borrowed for other meanings, such as the right hand, the right side, and a sign of goodness. Ta'ūlū may be understood to mean "to act unjustly." Linguistically it means "to bend" or "to deviate"; the root 'awl originally denotes tilting towards something tangible, as in the phrase 'āla al-mīzān (an uneven set of scales), before being transferred to something abstract (ma'nawī) namely, injustice or wrongdoing.

## Legal Interpretation of QS. An-Nisā' Verse 3

### 1. Polygamy

According to the majority of scholars (jumhūr), verse 3 of Surah An-Nisā' was revealed after the Battle of Uḥud, when many Muslim fighters fell on the battlefield. As a result, many children became orphans and many women became widows, having lost their fathers and husbands, leaving a considerable number of orphans and widows neglected in terms of their lives, education, and future prospects. Muhammad Baqir al-Habsyi argues that there is not a single verse in the Qur'an that commands or encourages polygamy. Its mention in QS. An-Nisā' verse 3 serves merely as supplementary information within the framework of Allah's command to treat relatives, especially orphans and their property, with justice.

In Al-Maraghi's view, the permissibility of polygamy in Surah An-Nisā': 3 is a permissibility that is made difficult and strict. Polygamy is permitted only in emergency circumstances, undertaken by someone genuinely in need of it. Where polygamy is likely to give rise to harmful consequences, it is better avoided, in accordance with the fiqh principle dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ (averting harm takes precedence over securing benefit). Quraish Shihab states that Surah An-Nisā' verse 3 neither obliges nor encourages polygamy; it merely discusses its permissibility, and even this is a narrow door that can be entered only by those genuinely in need of it and under far from light conditions. Accordingly, the discussion of polygamy in the Qur'an should not be assessed in terms of whether it is ideal or good or bad, but rather examined from the standpoint of legal rulings applicable to the various circumstances that may arise. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida understand verse 3 of Surah An-Nisā' that often cited as the basis for the permissibility of polygamy, within the context of the treatment of orphans and the women being married, the primary consideration of the verse being just treatment of the rights and interests of orphans and the women married.<sup>20</sup>

### 2. Having More Than Four Wives

The fact that the Prophet had more than four wives does not constitute a violation of verse (3) of Surah An-Nisā'. This is because the verse applicable to him is not this one,

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<sup>20</sup>Alfattiah Aldin, "Hukum Poligami dan Interpretasi dalam Q.S. An-Nisa Ayat 3," Jurnal Tahqiq: Jurnal Ilmiah Pemikiran Hukum Islam 17, no. 1 (2023): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.61393/tahqiq.v17i1.82>.



but rather verse 50 of Surah al-Aḥzāb, which means: "O Prophet, indeed We have made lawful to you your wives to whom you have given their dowries, and those whom your right hand possesses from those whom Allah has granted you, and the daughters of your paternal uncles, the daughters of your paternal aunts, the daughters of your maternal uncles, and the daughters of your maternal aunts who emigrated with you, and a believing woman if she gives herself to the Prophet, should the Prophet wish to marry her, this is exclusively for you, not for the believers in general. We certainly know what We have made obligatory upon them concerning their wives and those whom their right hands possess, so that there will be no discomfort for you. And Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful."

This clause may reasonably be understood as indicating that the Prophet's wives already married at the time verse 3 of Surah An-Nisā' was revealed that numbering more than four did not need to be divorced, provided their dowries had been paid, since having more than four wives was a permission exclusive to the Prophet. That verse applies only to his community, since it was their conduct that occasioned its revelation, until Allah set the maximum limit at four wives.

According to Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Mujahid, al-Hasan, Qatadah, and Ibn Jarir, as cited by Ibn Kathir in his tafsir, the phrase in question refers to the limit of four wives for the community (ummah) of Muhammad, a limit that does not apply to the Prophet Muhammad himself. Continuing the verse, Allah says, meaning, "So that there will be no discomfort for you." Had verse (3) of Surah An-Nisā' applied to the Prophet, he would have had to divorce his wives, since at that time his wives already numbered more than four, which would have caused him hardship and discomfort.

Al-Maraghi holds the view that verse 3 of Surah An-Nisā' contains the permissibility (lawfulness) of polygamy up to a maximum of four wives, and explains under what conditions polygamy is not permitted. On close examination, al-Maraghi's opinion is explicitly consistent with that of the exegetes discussed above, in that acting justly is the main condition for a man to be permitted to practise polygamy; if he is unable to act justly, polygamy is not permitted.

Al-Maraghi limits the number of women that may be married under the concept of polygamy to no more than four, based on his understanding of the words *mathnā wa thulātha wa rubā'*, meaning two, three, or four, in accordance with common usage in the Arabic language. This maximum of four is consistent with the opinion of the majority of fiqh scholars and exegetes, and is also based on the case of Ghaylan ibn Salamah, who had ten wives. He and his wives came before the Messenger of Allah to declare their acceptance of Islam, following which the Prophet instructed him to retain four wives and



divorce the rest.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to the above opinion, the Shi'a hold that polygamy may involve more than four wives, on the basis that the Messenger of Allah had more than four wives. Among exegetes, al-Zamakhsharī, for example, holds that it is permissible to marry up to nine women, treating the "wa" (and) in the verse as cumulative (li al-jamī'), that is, by adding two plus three plus four. This opinion was refuted by exegetes, including al-Qurtubī, who stated that those holding such a view lack knowledge of the Arabic language and the Sunnah, and have deviated from the consensus (ijmā') of the ummah, this practice never having occurred in the time of the Companions or their successors.<sup>22</sup>

The majority of scholars agree that the command in Surah An-Nisā' verse 3 denotes permissibility rather than obligation, although some hold that the imperative here denotes obligation namely, the obligation to limit one's wives to no more than four. This permissibility is, however, accompanied by the condition of acting justly; indeed, even confidence in one's ability to act justly is required. A man who is not confident that he will be able to act justly is forbidden from practising polygamy.<sup>23</sup>

### 3. The Concept of Justice in Polygamy

In the tafsir discussed above, the words ta'dilū and tuqsiṭū appear, which, as explained in Tafsīr al-Qurtubī, share the same meaning, though a distinction exists between aqsaṭa and qasaṭa, since qasaṭa means "to act unjustly," whereas aqsaṭa carries the same meaning as 'adala. This gives rise to a difference in meaning between ta'dilū and tuqsiṭū where tuqsiṭū is understood as derived from its root form (fi'l al-māḍī) in the thulāthī mujarrad pattern, namely qasaṭa.

However, the book Furūq al-Lughawiyah draws a distinction between qasaṭa and 'adala, since qasaṭa carries the meaning of clear and manifest (zāhir) justice, such as justice on a set of scales, where the weight of an object in kilograms or tonnes can be seen clearly and openly though qasaṭa is sometimes also used for something hidden (khafī), such as a sense of justice felt within the heart. The word 'adala, by contrast, may be used for both outward (zāhir) and inward (bāṭin) matters.

Regarding the distinction between ta'dilū and tuqsiṭū, the author is inclined towards the view of Tafsīr al-Qurtubī, which holds that the two share the same meaning namely, that both are used to denote outward and inward justice alike. Accordingly, in polygamy a man must be just outwardly, in terms of mu'nah (maintenance and financial responsibility) and his conduct towards his wives, as well as just inwardly, encompassing feelings and love. However, where his feelings unintentionally incline

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<sup>21</sup>Katsir, Tafsir Al-Qur'anul Adzim.

<sup>22</sup>Syamsudin Al-Qurtubi, Al-Jami' Li al-Ahkam al-Qur'an (Beirut: Dar Alam al-Kutub, 2003).

<sup>23</sup>Nur Chozin, Poligami dalam Al-Qur'an, Mimbar Hukum 54 (Jakarta: Al-Hikmah, 2001).



more towards one wife, this is forgiven.

It is this very principle of justice that Muhammad Abduh emphasised when he once issued a fatwa on polygamy. As cited by Ali Ahmad al-Jurjawi in his book *Ḥikmat al-Tashrī' wa Falsafatuhu*, the fatwa issued by Abduh in 1298 AH states that the Islamic sharia brought by the Messenger of Allah does indeed permit a man to marry four women at once, provided he is able to gauge and is aware of his own capacity to act justly. If he is not able to do so, he is not permitted to have more than one wife, since a husband's inability to fulfil his wife's rights damages the structure of the household as well as the foundation of family livelihood, the main pillar in managing household life being unity and mutual affection among family members.<sup>24</sup>

According to Syafiq Hasyim, Abduh's opinion indicates an emphasis on the fulfilment of qualitative justice, such as equal affection and love (not inclined towards any particular party) matters that cannot be measured through mathematical calculation or figures. This is consistent with the diction used in the Qur'an, namely *al-'adālah*, which leans more towards a qualitative meaning. This differs from the understanding of justice put forward by *fiqh* scholars (*fuqahā'*), who tend to adopt a more quantitative approach, such as in the division of the amount of maintenance and the scheduling of each wife's turn, a matter that is in fact more accurately represented by the word *al-qistū*.<sup>25</sup>

Verse 3 of Surah *al-Nisā'* commands justice towards all of one's wives. The justice intended in this verse is justice that can be realised by human beings namely, treating all wives equally in terms of food, drink, accommodation, overnight stays, and social conduct (*mu'āmalah*). Justice that lies beyond human capacity is not demanded; love and inclination of the heart, being beyond human will, are not a matter of choice, and Allah does not burden a person with something beyond their ability. What must be striven for by a person practising polygamy is not to neglect his other wives on account of a preference for one of them.

### **Pro and Contra Narratives of Social Media Users in Understanding Polygamy Content**

Some social media users argue from a historical perspective and in terms of the objectives of sharia, emphasising that polygamy in Islam actually exists in order to restrict arbitrary practices that occurred in the past. In response to polygamy-related content, a comment appeared from an account under the username Bunny: "Do they even realise that

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<sup>24</sup>Fajarwati Fajarwati, "Tanggung Jawab Orang Tua Terhadap Anak Dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam," *Tahqiqah: Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum Islam* 13, no. 2 (2019): 151–64, <https://jurnal.stisalhalsigli.ac.id/index.php/tahqiqah/article/view/177>.

<sup>25</sup>Syafiq Hasyim, *Hal-hal yang Tak Terpikirkan tentang Isu-isu Keperempuanan dalam Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 2001).



the original purpose of polygamy was to reduce, not increase, [the number of wives]? Back in the age of Jāhiliyyah, one man could have hundreds, even a thousand wives; women truly had no dignity, and were treated like objects and goods. When Islam arrived, women were honoured, and the sharia of polygamy was, among other things, meant to reduce [this practice]."

In response to polygamy-related content, a comment appeared from an account under the username Fachri Muchlasul A'mal: "Bro, do you even know the purpose of the law limiting a man to a maximum of four wives? It's meant to restrict, not to add. So this is a sunnah that isn't strongly encouraged." These comments refer to the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasion of revelation) of QS. An-Nisā' verse 3, which historically emerged as a response to the practice of unlimited polygamy during the Jāhiliyyah era. The verse in fact restricts the number of wives to a maximum of four, on condition that one is able to act justly. In his tafsir, Ibn Kathir states: Allah tells His Prophet that He has made lawful for him, from among women, his wives to whom he has given their dowries, being an obligation upon them (that is, the Muslim community) to limit themselves to four free women and as many slave women as they wish, subject to the further conditions of a guardian, a dowry, and witnesses. As for the Prophet, Allah does not burden him with any of this, so that there will be no discomfort for him; and Allah is ever Forgiving, Merciful.

Thus, Bunny's statement is consistent with the principle of historical tafsir and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the objectives of sharia), namely safeguarding justice and the dignity of women.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the personal experience of a first wife reveals criticism of polygamous practices that are just only in outward, material terms, yet fail to fulfil emotional justice and attention. There was also a comment from an account under the username salfarina: "My husband's polygamy is fair only in material terms; attention, time, and affection are set aside, and he only focuses on his turn to stay overnight. For example, when he stays at my house as the first wife, it's only enough to fulfil the minimum requirement. He can be on his phone 24 hours a day because of work. As for the children, sometimes he asks about them, sometimes he doesn't."

There was also a comment from an account under the username kein\_: "A week has seven days, that's fine, split it 4 and 3, as long as it rotates each week between who gets the 4 days and who gets the 3."

There was also a comment from an account under the username Melati, as a second wife: "Forget about a car, not even a house, sir. I've never even received housekeeping money. Everything goes to the senior wife; I've never received justice, either materially or emotionally. And he also lives with the first wife."

These comments illustrate injustice in both material and non-material dimensions,

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<sup>26</sup>Nurul Husna, "Pandangan Mufasssir Klasik Dan Modern Terhadap Poligami" (Thesis, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, 2013).



which is precisely what is emphasised in the verse of Surah An-Nisā'. Verse 3 requires justice, and exegetes explain that justice encompasses maintenance, time, attention, and emotional treatment.

According to al-Rāzī, the justice intended in this verse is justice in love; were the verse to be interpreted as demanding this form of justice, polygamy would certainly become impermissible, since the element of just love could never be fulfilled. However, Allah does not burden a person with something beyond human capacity, since control over the heart truly lies in Allah's hands. The Prophet himself, towards the end of his life, once stated that his love and sense of peace were far greater when he was with Aisha than with his other wives (something he always did with the knowledge and permission of his other wives), leading him to say, "O Allah, this is the capacity I have in dividing [my time] among my wives, so do not hold me to account for what I do not possess" that is, the inclination of the heart (love).<sup>27</sup>

According to Hanafi scholars, the verse encouraging a man to marry only one wife if he fears he will be unable to act justly refers to fairness in matters of accommodation, clothing, and food, not in matters of sexual relations; there is no distinction in this regard, whether the man is impotent or not, ill or healthy. According to these scholars, acting justly in fulfilling a wife's rights is also obligatory upon a husband, in the same way as other rights that are obligatory under sharia.

There was also a comment from an account under the username sudarjatiVNjyax: "Because of polygamy, the first wife and her children are often insulted, where's the fairness in both material and emotional terms? This is a fact, not just talk."

This comment highlights the negative social and psychological impact of unjust polygamous practices. From the perspective of Islamic family law, polygamy that gives rise to harm (mafsadah), such as enmity, the breakdown of a household, or psychological pressure on children, is inconsistent with the objectives of sharia (maqāṣid al-sharī'ah), which seek to protect religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of this study concerning QS. An-Nisā' verse 3, it can be concluded that this verse does not command or encourage polygamy, but merely grants permission under strict conditions, particularly the ability to act justly. Polygamy in Islam constitutes a rukḥṣah (concession) granted under certain circumstances for the sake of social benefit, such as the protection of orphaned girls and widows in the aftermath of war. Polygamy is thus not a means of satisfying carnal desire, but a great responsibility that must be discharged on the principles of justice, welfare, and the protection of women's rights, as

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<sup>27</sup>Al-Razi, Tafsir Al-Kabir wa Mafatih Al-Ghaib (Dar al-Fikr, 1981).



emphasised by exegetes such as Muhammad Rashid Rida, al-Maraghi, and M. Quraish Shihab.

The concept of justice in this verse encompasses two aspects: outward justice (*lahiriyyah*) and inward justice (*bāṭiniyyah*) feelings and affection. Islam affirms that if a person fears he will be unable to uphold justice in both of these aspects, he is advised to marry only one wife, since doing so is "more likely to prevent wrongdoing." QS. An-Nisā' verse 3 therefore confirms that the primary purpose of polygamy in Islam is to bring about benefit and avert harm, rather than to open the door to injustice. Polygamy practised without fulfilling the condition of justice is, in fact, contrary to the principle of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* – namely, the safeguarding of lineage, honour, and family welfare within the framework of Islam's noble values.

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