

## THE HERMENEUTIC THOUGHTS OF ASHGAR ALI ENGINEER IN THE INTERPRETATION OF FEMINISM

**Irsyadunnas**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia  
irsyad\_buya@yahoo.co.id

### Abstract

*Using hermeneutic as a method and approach in systematic interpretation of al-Qur'an had begun during contemporary period. The reality and fulfillment of the academic standard had pushed contemporary Muslim scholars used the method. Asghar Ali Engineer was one of the Muslim scholars who supported hermeneutic in the study of Qur'anic exegesis on feminism. This article examined the impacts on how feminism in Engineer's hermeneutic exegesis of the Qur'an played significant role in the Qur'anic exegesis studies. He was placed at the same position with other contemporary Muslim scholars. His popularity as a Muslim feminist had been well-known mainly on his interpretation of the Qur'an about feminism. According to Engineer, the interpretation of the Qur'an had to consider three concepts, "the freedom of al-Qur'an," "the spirit of the Qur'an against Patriarchy," and "the classified Qur'anic verses and sociological normative." Engineer offered three sources when interpreting al-Qur'an; namely, text, context, and perspective. The Engineer interpreted Qur'anic verses about gender at QS. an-Nisa: 1; 3, and 34 by applying these concept, method and sources.*

**Keywords:** *Hermeneutic, Feminist, Qur'anic Exegesis, and Interpretation.*

### Abstrak

*Penggunaan hermeneutika sebagai sebuah metode dan pendekatan dalam penafsiran al-Qur'an secara sistematis baru muncul pada masa kontemporer ini. Kesadaran akan hadirnya realitas kekinian dan pemenuhan standar ilmiah telah mendorong para tokoh Islam kontemporer untuk melakukan hal tersebut. Asghar Ali Engineer adalah salah seorang tokoh feminis muslim yang mendukung keberadaan hermeneutika dalam kajian tafsir. Kajian ini ingin mengkaji bagaimanakah pengaruh hermeneutika feminisme dalam pemikiran tafsir Asghar Ali Engineer. Keradaan seorang Engineer dalam kajian tafsir al-Qur'an telah menempatkannya sebagai tokoh Islam kontemporer yang sejajar dengan tokoh Islam kontemporer lainnya. Lebih dari itu, ketokohnya dalam bidang feminis juga memberi andil bagi perkembangan pemikirannya dalam bidang tafsir. Konsep metodologi yang dikemukakannya dalam kajian tafsir adalah mengacu kepada tiga hal yakni konsep pembebasan al-Qur'an, anti patriarkhi, dan klasifikasi ayat menjadi normatif dan sosiologis. Sedangkan yang dijadikan sumber dalam penafsiran al-Qur'an adalah teks, konteks, dan perspektif. Mengacu kepada konsep dan sumber tafsir tersebut, Engineer telah menerapkannya terhadap ayat-ayat al-Qur'an, terutama ayat-ayat yang berbicara tentang gender, yakni ayat tentang penciptaan perempuan (QS. an-Nisa':1), nusyuz (QS. an-Nisa':34), dan poligami (QS. an-Nisa':3).*

**Kata Kunci:** *Tafsir, Hermeneutika, dan Feminisme.*

## Introduction

Al-Qur'an, as one of the holy books, has long been widely understood theologically. By this understanding, the interpretation appears to be opinionated, justified the idea of the Qur'an in accordance with textual statement that tends to be dogmatic. Consequently, there appears interpretations from Muslim feminists whose viewpoints much pleaded the inferior position of women compared to men. It could be understood that the result would be interpretatively varied to some extent, but most Muslim feminists interpreted the verses by considering the social context and the history.

According to Freda Hussain, Muslim feminists applied the feminism hermeneutics approach to meet eligible path to reject any interpretations that spawned the so-called an institution of "Islamic pseudo".<sup>1</sup> This term obviously intended the practices in Islam that seemed to subordinate women. Similarly, Barbara Freyer judged that feminist hermeneutics was part of the efforts of Muslim feminists to achieve modernity, which is based on the Qur'anic authenticity.<sup>2</sup>

Asma Barlas asserted that there were two major aims of feminist hermeneutics as follows: *first*, the sign indicated epistemology of al-Qur'an was inherently anti-patriarchy. *Second*, the sign showed an endorsed action to formulate a theory of equality between men and women.<sup>3</sup>

The writer contended that Barlas' statement above was true if the verses of the al-Qur'an are read thematically comprehensible. It is reasonable

because in the Qur'an there are verses that are normative universal and there are passages that are responsive to local/regional understanding. If the verses are read separately, then they will also come the understanding them apart. It is often issued as the major cause of debate among Muslims. Most of them are more often put forward understanding the verses of al-Qur'an in the context of local/regional responsive, but positioned as part of the verses are normatively universal. This is done without comparing it to the verses which holds editorial contains about universal normative understanding. Some examples that can be raised is as it appears in the studies of Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, the writer sees that Barlas' statement emphasized more on the universal normative meaning. If it is examined carefully, it indeed the verse that actually contains values of similarity and the equality between men and women, such as QS. at-Taubah: 71. If the passages are responsive to local/regional understanding, they tend to be discriminatory, be understood simultaneously with the universal normative verses, then surely it will not appear that patriarchal understandings.

By rejecting the secular feminist approach in the fight for women's liberation, Barlas and Wadud put forward feminist hermeneutics to develop the idea of women's liberation that is explored from Islam itself. More than just a fight for the equality of men and women, they are even making the activity of the interpretation of the Qur'an as a part of the existential struggle for women as the *caliph of God fi al-ard*. Moreover, they strongly believe that the feminist hermeneutics is a new strategy that will encourage the growth of women as a real human being. Borrowing the term Elizabeth Johnson, feminist hermeneutics then become "*new strategies of interpretation are furthering the growth of women*

<sup>1</sup>Read, Freda Hussain (Ed.), *Muslim Women* (Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984), 1-7.

<sup>2</sup>Barbara wrote: "*in the ever-increasing Muslim debates addressed on how to achieve both an authentic modernity and the authenticity of Qur'an-centered Islam, gender issues continued to hold the center stage. The protagonists in the debate now are modernist Qur'anic scholars, feminists, linguists, cultural anthropologists, philosophers, and sociologists*". Cited from Barbara Freyer Stowasser, "Gender Issues and Contemporary Qur'anic Interpretation", in *Islam Gender and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42.

<sup>3</sup>See Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 33.

<sup>4</sup>It's similar to inheritance. It is based on (QS. an-Nisa/4: 11) that read the inheritance allotment for Muslim women is a half of those men.

as fully human values persons".<sup>5</sup>

One of the leaders among men who applied the study of feminist hermeneutic interpretation was Asghar Ali Engineer. He was one of the figures supported the existence of hermeneutics in the study of Qur'anic exegesis. Asghar had his own charm. He was an Indian Muslim citizen born in a very strong patriarchal culture. He witnessed various forms of indoctrination and violence from one party to another in the course of his life. He often saw the ruling authority conducted religious indoctrination towards the followers. The indoctrination was increasingly obvious as the followers were all women. In addition, India had been very strongly attached with patriarchal culture. Such a situation was quite contrary to his soul. So, he often involved with issues related to gender and feminist ever since. It is not surprised he was then considered to be one of the leading Muslim feminists.<sup>6</sup>

He had criticized the stagnation in thinking and practice of religion because the ruler maintained the *status quo*. In this context, religion only functioned as an enlightenment for human life and it had been shifted to be a tool of exploitation in the name of religion.<sup>7</sup> This was used by a group of conservative clerics to oppose the decision of Indian Supreme Court in the matter of divorce. The decision ultimately provided benefits to husbands. This decision made him move to a reinterpretation of the teachings of Islam, which he loaded to be full of justice and equality values.<sup>8</sup> Since then he became Muslim feminists.

In line with the spirit of liberation theology that he embraced, to liberate women from male

domination he had to reread holy book, al-Qur'an, in which he believed the major sources of Islamic teachings were available. He started with a belief that it was impossible the holy book provided discriminate against people, especially in the context of the relationship of men and women. The writer observed that this issue was quite interesting to be examined on how the influence of feminist hermeneutics in the thought of Qur'anic interpretation of Asghar Ali Engineer.

In connection with Asghar Ali's viewpoints, there were some literatures the writer had found. A doctorate thesis written by M. Agus Nuryatno entitled *Asghar Ali Engineer's Views on Liberation Theology and Women Issues In Islam: An Analysis*. There were two important points raised in this thesis: 1) Engineer's thinking can be categorized in liberal textualistic. This confirms that Islam is very concerned about the issues of justice, equality and gender equality. 2) in interpreting a text, Engineer did not see it in *ansich* theological perspective. But he gave the charge to the sociological texts.<sup>9</sup>

Then, a thesis written by Nasihun Amin, entitled *The Islamic Liberation Theology as an Alternative (Assessing Thinking Against Asghar Ali Engineer)*.<sup>10</sup> This work concluded that the Islamic liberation theology tends to be transformative and revolutionary. It can be seen from four characteristics, namely: 1) It emphasized more on empirical-morality issue rather than abstract normative, 2) It tended to be anti-status quo, 3) It was the ideological inspiration for oppressed people, and 4) It emphasized the recognition of the need to seriously fight bipolarity spiritual-material problems.

In an article written by Baidawi Ahmad

<sup>5</sup>Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Feminist Hermeneutics", *Journal Chicago Studies* 27, no. 2 (1988): 123.

<sup>6</sup>In this context, Margon Badran cited names, such as Nawal as-Sadawi (Egypt), Fatima Mernissi (Marocco), Riffat Hasan (Pakistan), Asghar Ali Engineer (India), Wadud Muhsin (Malaysia/Amerika) and others. Read John L. Esposito, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of The Modern Islamic World*, Jilid II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>7</sup>Asghar Ali Engineer, *What I Believe* (Mumbai: Institut of Islamic Studies, 1999), 10.

<sup>8</sup>Read, Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam* (Lahore: Vanguard books, 1992), 12-13.

<sup>9</sup>M. Agus Nuryatno, "Asghar Ali Engineer's Views on Liberation Theology and Women Issues in Islam: An Analysis" (Tesis: McGill University, 2000). This thesis has been published with Indonesian title *Islam Teologi Pembebasan dan Kesetaraan Gender Studi Atas Pemikiran Asghar Ali Engineer* oleh UII Press tahun 2001.

<sup>10</sup>Nasihun Amin, "Teologi Pembebasan Islam Sebagai Alternatif (Telaah Terhadap Pemikiran Asghar Ali Engineer)" (Tesis: Pascasarjana UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2001).

entitled *Hermeneutics Al-Qur'an Asghar Ali Engineer*.<sup>11</sup> This article explained that in formulating the theory of his hermeneutics, Engineer differentiated Qur'anic verses into two terms, namely *theological* and *sociological* normative and contextual terms.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, in understanding Qur'anic verses, Engineer overlooked normative statement, rather than contextual messages.

In this context, the writer put Asghar as a progressive figure. Basically, this paper had similar idea with the previous opinion (Nuryatno and Baidowi) for which Asghar's viewpoints were more forward his contextual sociological nature of a Qur'anic verse, rather than normative theological. In addition, the methodology used in this paper differed from previous writings. The methodology used in this paper was the Qur'anic exegesis method combined with feminist theories. This can be the evidence of some interpretations of feminists' verses that will be discussed in the following description. The main references to be studied in this paper are books directly written by Asghar, namely *Islam and Liberation Theology* (1990), *The Rights of Women in Islam* (1992), and *The Qur'an Women and Modern Society* (1999).

## About Asghar Ali Engineer

### a. Background Life and Education

Asghar Ali Engineer (here in after called the Engineer) was born on March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1939 in Salumbar, Rajasthan, India.<sup>13</sup> His father,

Sheikh Qurban Husain, was a scholar and religious leader at the Institute of Religious Bohra.<sup>14</sup> His father was an educated Islamic scholar. Although initially his attitude was quite exclusive towards his faith, he then changed to be inclusive and be open-minded on other's religious beliefs. Since then, his father opened dialogue and exchanged views with the leaders of other religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>15</sup>

Asghar Ali Engineer was an engineer in civil engineering who held Bachelor of Sciences in Civil Engineering (B.Sc.Eng). He obtained his first degree from Vikram University in 1962 AD.<sup>16</sup> As an expert in civil engineering, he worked for *Bombay Municipal Corporation* for about 20 years. Then, his engagement in the religious movement was stronger. The strong interest led him to become a leader of the Islamic reformist movement in India.<sup>17</sup>

Although Engineer never sat formally at a formal religious education, informally he already got it. He got his religious education directly from his father in the field of *Qur'anic Exegesis, Hadith, Islamic Jurisprudence, etc.* This was undoubtedly surprising because his father was a scholar or religious leader in the Bohra community. Engineer also received guidance from his father in the fields of language, both Arabic and other foreign languages, such as Urdu, Persian and English.<sup>18</sup>

His academic career was remarkable. He was appointed a lecturer or visiting scholar at various universities in several countries, such as in the USA: New York, Columbia, Chicago, UCLA, Philadelphia, Minnesota,

<sup>11</sup>Ahmad Baidowi, "Hermeneutika Al-Qur'an Asghar Ali Engineer", *Jurnal Al-Jami'ah* 41, no. 2 (2003): 386-396.

<sup>12</sup>As Amin Abdullah asserted, he mentioned the term as normativity and historicity. In his book, Amin wrote that normativity of revealed knowledge is usually be constructed, be integrated, be standardized and be examined through doctrinal-theology's approach. While historicity of human diversity is usually examined from different angles of approach in religious social knowledge which is multi and inter discipliner, either philosophical historic, psychological, sociological, anthropological or cultural. See Amin Abdullah, *Studi Agama Normativitas atau Historisitas* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), v.

<sup>13</sup>See <http://www.in.com/asghar-ali-engineer/biography-27645.html> [home page on-line]: internet (Accessed on 20 October 2015).

<sup>14</sup>Bohra Institute of Religion was a mainstream of religious sectarian in Islam found in India as an affiliation of Ismailiyyat Shia. Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *What I Believe*, 1.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>16</sup>See <http://www.in.com/asghar-ali-engineer/biography-27645.html> [home page on-line]: internet (Accessed on 20 October 2015).

<sup>17</sup>M. Agus Nuryatno, 8.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 7-8.

and some other countries, such as France, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Italy, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and others.<sup>19</sup> Although he held only an undergraduate degree in civil engineering, he had been inspired by tremendous religious knowledge obtained informally from his father. Likewise, the socio-cultural context surrounded him affected the patterns of his thought.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it was not surprisingly if his lectures conveyed to the students in various parts of the world were the matters relating to the field of religion, the freedom, independence, and democracy.

Besides he was a full-time lecturer, Engineer also heavily involved in the activities of NGO. He had been a chairman of the Centre for Development Studies, Chairman of the Committee for Communal Harmony, Chairman of the Centre for Study of Society and Secularism, Vice-Chairman of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, Secretary General of the Central Board of Dawoodi Bohra Community, Founder of the Asian Muslim Action Network. In addition, he also served a Director of Institute of Islamic Studies, who concerned about studies and researches in *human right perspective* and *peace non-violence*. In fact, he involved directly in providing public protection who suffer from in justice and human right violations (*advocate of a culture of peace and non-violence*).<sup>21</sup> Being involved actively in various organizations, he had received overwhelming response from public. He also got several awards, such as *Communal Harmony Award* in 1997.<sup>22</sup>

## b. Developments of Engineer's Thoughts on Islamic Studies

Engineer had a very broad insight of Islamic thoughts. In addition to having progressive insights on issues of liberation and feminist, his insights and thoughts were much associated with many other Islamic studies. He was confident that the products of his religious thoughts was something relative. In other words, there was no permanent system of thought, especially in Islamic studies. Because the emergence of each product of ideas in the name of theology was the construction of man that had always been influenced by their socio-cultural context. The Islamic system of thought had been developed by theologians over the period and its era. Human thought was much influenced by certain factors which cannot be avoided. Likewise, human understanding of God's command must have been influenced by certain socio-cultural context, and the effect is then reflected in the system of religious thought.<sup>23</sup>

Engineer was very confident that the reconstruction of the system of Islamic thought was a necessity. Because the Islamic values that someone wanted to apply in his life were not on a vacuum or empty space. Hence, Engineer had thought to reformulate the Islamic *Shari'a* which were adapted to the conditions of his time. It did not mean against God's commandments, rather it was the attempt to posit each of the command in accordance with appropriate experiences and assumptions that were constantly changing.

If Muslims were pleased to develop such Islamic thoughts, the dynamic problems of change and religion would promote the realization of spiritual transformation in order to head on better change. Naturally, differences of opinion when making a change

<sup>19</sup>See "Progressive Dawoodi Bohras", [http://dawoodi-bohras.com/about\\_us/people/engineer](http://dawoodi-bohras.com/about_us/people/engineer) (Accessed on 21 October 2015).

<sup>20</sup>The socio cultural context will be specifically explained in the following items of this chapter.

<sup>21</sup>See <http://word.world-citizenship.org/wp-archive/2733> [home page on-line]: internet (Accessed on 21 October 2015).

<sup>22</sup>See <http://word.world-citizenship.org/wp-archive/2733> [home page on-line]: internet (Accessed on 21 October 2015).

<sup>23</sup>Asghar A li Engineer, "Reconstruction of Islam Thought", <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu~rtavakol/engineer.recon.htm> (Accessed on 12 September 2015), 5. B

is a natural thing. Therefore, according to Engineer, Muslims should not fear differences. Any difference if guided by sincere and honest intentions would be a tremendous force for the development of human thought. It was the attitude exemplified by former Muslim figures and founders of the school of law in the past, where they had never been afraid of differences, even the differences made their insights getting evolved.<sup>24</sup>

In line with the reconstruction of Islamic thought, Engineer also had an idea of the need to reconcile between Islam and secularism. In this case, he distinguished secularism into two forms, *atheistic secularism* and *liberal secularism*. Atheistic secularism was an ideology that assumed religion and secularism was contradictory. Secular state was an anti-religious state. So the secular political philosophy required to act without being bound by the doctrines and teachings of religion. Any legislation should be free from religious issues, even citizens had no freedom to practice their religion. This concept was ever executed by the Soviet Union and China.<sup>25</sup>

While liberal secularism is an ideology that recognized the role of religion in society, despite the existence of religion was not a major cornerstone in the state. Secularism liberal had several criteria: 1) It does not firm on atheism, 2) It supports pluralism and respected all faiths, 3) It guarantees freedom of religion for all citizens, and 4) It guarantees equal rights for all its inhabitants without distinction of caste, creed, race, language and religion.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, if Islam juxtaposed with clearly atheistic secularism can never be consistent. Because the basic concept is very contradictory. But if Islam juxtaposed with liberal secularism, according to Engineer, is very likely to occur. This concept has been adopted by some countries in the Middle East postscript majority of its people are Muslims, like Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen. Likewise, some countries in Asia also are adopting the concept of liberal secularism, such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

According to Engineer, the relationship between Islam and secularism is more dynamic. In some conditions, it can go hand in hand, but in certain circumstances it may be a bit contrary. But if Islam and secularism is interpreted liberally, Engineer believed there would not be a problem arise. If the Qur'an is studied historically, it will be found a strong impetus towards non-atheistic liberal ideology.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, Engineer asserted that Islam supports pluralism, freedom of conscience and human rights, as well as democracy. Thus, no contradiction with secularism. It should be noted secular law's state, such as in India, the concept of secular government was accepted by Muslim scholars and never objected.<sup>28</sup>

Al-Qur'an never really explained the concept of the Islamic state. Al-Qur'an does not require to refer or follow any concept of a state (including the Islamic state). Al-Qur'an only emphasizes some basic principles in ruling a country, namely the aspect of freedom, justice, benevolence, compassion, tolerance, and deliberation.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the concept of the

<sup>24</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, "Reconstruction of Islam Thought", 6.

<sup>25</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, "Islam and Secularism", in *Islam in Transition Muslim Perspectives*, ed. John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 138.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 139. It's necessarily confirmed here that Muslims were under apprehension on secularism issues. Secularism is an ideology that an institution must stand in separation with religion or faith. Secularism can support freedom of religion and of being oppressed of any beliefs by providing a neutral frame on beliefs

and does not close on feeling to a certain religion.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>29</sup>In comparison with Munawir Sjadzali who states that al-Qur'an has a number of verses indicated basic principles of life in society and country, such as the principle of deliberation (QS. Ali Imran/3: 159 and QS. Syura/42: 38), obedience to a state leader (QS. an-Nisa'/4: 59), justice (QS. an-Nahl/16: 90 and QS. an-Nisa'/4: 58), equality (QS. al-Hujurat/49:13), freedom

Islamic state is actually a historical formation that is constructed by experts in Islamic law in each of their time.<sup>30</sup>

The only model or concept of state exemplified by the Prophet was the state of Medina. Declaration of Medina, in its spirit, the declaration prepared valuable clues to arrange political rights for modern citizens which were not based on any religious beliefs. Therefore, it is unfortunate that recent Muslim theorists mostly neglect the very important political document. Prophet has shown a very thoughtful gesture in drafting legislation and political equality of religious rights for non-Muslims. This theory should have been supposed to be relied upon by modern Islamic intellectuals in formulating the concept of a democratic state.<sup>31</sup>

As a messenger of God, the Prophet never wanted political power. He was a spiritual leader who gained great respect and had a very inclusive concept on citizens. He was included Jews, pagans and Muslims in the category of his people.<sup>32</sup> He gave full freedom to them to follow the trend of their respective faith without coercion. This is a form of modern democratic approach.<sup>33</sup>

Engineer had no doubt that democracy is the best form of a government, especially in the modern era. Wherever dictatorship or monarchy occurs, people are always trying to fight for a democratic government. Ideally, in a democracy the power vested in the hand

of people and there is no government policy that does not favor on the people. However, the form of government as it also raises quite complex issues as well as providing the opportunity for officials to manipulate.

Democratic governance is not possible without guaranteeing freedom of conscience, which is no longer existing in Muslim countries and this has been in name. Various independent thought especially in religious matters has always been pressed. The examining of Islamic Shari'a enhanced and strengthened mechanically and go beyond the spirit of justice and human dignity. The shaped Islamic Shari'a in the socio-political environment is difference and almost all the conclusions drawn always refer to the background of particular scholars or condition. Due to such a condition, reformation is very important to be done.<sup>34</sup>

The most fundamental principle of democracy, according to Engineer, is freedom. The conscience is not possible without rethinking *mu'amalah* problems, including the problem of the relationship between men and women. The overall approach of the Qur'anic attention to gender equality, but unfortunately Shari'a only reflects the spirit of medieval times where women could not stand equal with men. If democracy is executed in Muslim countries, the issue of women will be the center of attention.

Many Muslim countries substantially have population of non-Muslims. In a democratic government, thing like that is needed, but is not necessarily able to guarantee freedom of religion. Non-Muslims have a right to be guaranteed to hold equality of rights in democracy and politics. In addition, Engineer respects human rights which he considered to be needed in a democratic political culture. Without a culture of human rights may

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of religion (QS. al-Baqarah/2: 256, QS. Yunus/12: 99, QS. Ali Imran/3: 64 and QS. al-Mumtahanah/89: 8-9). Read Munawir Sjadzali, *Islam dan Tata Negara* (Jakarta: UI Press, 1990), 4-7.

<sup>30</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, "Islam and Secularism", 140.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>32</sup>As Asghar Ali wrote: "that is why Muslim shows equal respect to all the Prophets right up to Muhammad whether named or not named in the Qur'an. The Qur'an also declares unequivocally that paradise is not the monopoly of any religious group". See Asghar Ali Engineer, "Muhammad as Liberator", *Jurnal Jeevadhara*, 200.

<sup>33</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, "On Absence of Democracy in Muslim World", <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~rtavakol/engineer/absence.htm> (Accessed on 28 October 2015).

<sup>34</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, "On Absence of Democracy in Muslim World", 5.

not exist truly democratic culture. Muslim intellectuals must strongly strive to ensure human rights for all citizens in Muslim countries. The culture would be expected to extend the power of democracy and throw away the feudal culture that favors only to certain elite class in the society, forgetting the fate of the people as a whole.<sup>35</sup>

## Engineer's Thoughts on Qur'anic Exegesis and Feminism

### a. Feminism

The general thought of Engineer on could not be separated from liberation theology that he had constructed. Hence, his thoughts on feminist issues closely related to this discipline. Theology of liberation commitment against marginalized groups are clearly reflected in his view of the status of women in Islam.<sup>36</sup> No doubt that women are seen as the weaker groups in society.

The developmental of his thoughts on feminism was clearly visible after he responded to a case involving Shah Bano in 1985 in India. This case related to the decision of Supreme Court confirming the High Court Personal Muslim's decision that obliged Mohammad Ahmed Khan to provide basic necessity of life for Shah Bano, the wife he divorced. However, his idea on this matter could not be accepted by the Council of Muslim Personal Law because it was considered as the intervention in the religious life of Muslims, and the Supreme Court had no right to try to interpret the Qur'an.

This view was reasonable to arise in the life of Muslim community in India because the people of this country were very patriarchal<sup>37</sup> which had been determined by the power structure and the strength of man associated

with the term of superiority and inferiority. Thus, it is a fundamental principle for all subordination, the spirit of racism, domination of one over another, and the determination of job opportunities and gender differences.<sup>38</sup>

Engineer feminist outlook awakened in paces after he witnessed the situation of women in India on that day.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, he said that if the women were already growing social awareness of their domestic roles had to be assessed and rewarded according to the doctrine taught by the Qur'an and it was not merely a duty they had to do, then of course the protection and sustenance given by men to women could no longer be regarded as the superiority of men over women. Because the roles of domestic accomplishments should be offset by a male role in protecting and giving their basic necessity of life by which the Qur'an referred to as *Qawwam*.

In this context, Engineer proposed a balance between men and women in charge of making a living which was considered as a noble job and got an award, then women who did domestic work should also be given the same award. Both must be complementary to each other. It is quite unjustified and should be maintained strictly. Whatever a person (male or female) must be given full recognition. So, no party suffered discriminatory actions, both in terms of employment (public or domestic), social relationships, politics and others.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to this context, Engineer confirmed the most fundamental and principle values in Islam was justice and equality. Therefore, if the women had begun to acquire a greater role in terms of politics, education,

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>36</sup>See Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology*, v.

<sup>37</sup>Read Jessie Tellis Nayak, "Status of Women in India: Some Reflections", in *Indian Missiological Review* (April 1990):72.

<sup>38</sup>See Mansoer Fakih, "Posisi Perempuan dalam Islam: Tinjauan dari Analisis Gender", dalam *Membincang Feminisme Diskursus Gender perspektif Islam*, ed. Mansoer Fakih (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 1996), 50.

<sup>39</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology*, 171.

<sup>40</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Right of Women in Islam*, 62-63.



employment and other productive regions, then the applicable Shari'a formulations also had to be re-examined. The most modern of Islamic value system if applied in the Islamic law with regard to women's issues, then the law would be a progressive law. Today, the spirit of Islamic values is being covered by the "shadow of medieval social ethos". Therefore, it is the duty of Muslims today is conducting their utmost movements to liberate the Islamic law from the "shadow", and to reconstruct the new light, current, accommodative and inclusive Islamic values.<sup>41</sup>

#### b. The Nature Interpretation

Talking about the nature of interpretation, Engineer stated that it was not an easy job to translate or to interpret al-Qur'an, because there were some phrases in Arabic, the so-called language of al-Qur'an could not be translated into other languages. Therefore, in interpreting the Qur'an a lot of note takings to explain words or phrases should be clearly specified. In this connection, the knowledge of *Asbab al-nuzul* or the background knowledge of the declined verses of al-Qur'an became a very important requirement.

The emergence of the difficulties to translate and to interpret the al-Qur'an, as described above was not surprising because the Qur'an was the word of God, not the word of man (Muhammad). Thus, it was not surprising if the emergence of the translation or different interpretations of the verses of al-Qur'an. The existence of the differences was not a new problem in the treasures of Islamic thought. It had emerged since classical times, ever since the time of companions.<sup>42</sup>

Furthermore, Engineer explained in real terms there was no identical translation

or interpretation. Al-Qur'an which was understood by everyone or *mufasir* would always be tied up with political, social, and economical coverages. In his book, Engineer wrote: "It is very difficult to know what God Almighty meant. Every *mufasir* needs to understand deeply what God's comments in the al-Qur'an based on his capacity."<sup>43</sup>

In the discourse of Qur'anic exegesis, classical scholars divided verses of al-Qur'an into two categories, namely: Verses of *muhkamat* and *mutashabihat*. *Muhkamat* verses were no longer debated in terms of meaning. *Mutashabihat* verses, on the other hand, were still debated by many scholars that the connotation of the meanings maybe varied. In this context, Engineer asserted that al-Qur'an used allegoric-idiomatic expressions to convey meanings recursively.

New experience and consciousness in interpreting al-Qur'an in the context of the so-called interpretive discourses "*bil al-ra'yi*", had often been negatively seen by many orthodox scholars. If the interpretations were based on personal human desires, it must be rejected. On the contrary, if a *mufasir* translated al-Qur'an based on the convinced-personal sincere and integrity, the results of the interpretations would be far away of any deviated personal interests.<sup>44</sup>

As far as the interpretation is concerned in this context, understanding of the verses regarding women could also possibly be interpreted based on personal human desires that tend to proposed similarity and equality between men and women. However, the interpretations from those who hold convinced-personal sincere and integrity interpret in order to raise women dignity and freedom to keep the relevant moral and

<sup>41</sup>See Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an Women & Modern Society*, 13.

<sup>42</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology*, 127.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>44</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Right of Women in Islam* (New York: ST Martin's Press, 1992), 4.

intellectual environment in their era.<sup>45</sup> Here are some movement characteristics done by contemporary feminism figures.

### c. Source of the Interpretation

The discourse about sources of the interpretation was not something new in the history of Qur'anic exegesis. In the contemporary era, the fundamental changes in the formulation of the interpretative sources covered three categories as follows:

#### 1. Text as a source of the interpretation

Engineer stated that the text or the language used in writing, including the writing of the holy book had its own role in conveying the message to its readers. In this regards he stated that the existence of al-Qur'an as a holy writing inspired by the Arabic language was a fact. Text or *lafaz* of Arabic used were loaded with styles or manifold *ushubs*. By this point, he contended that it was uncertain yet someone who held Arabic as a mother tongue (like the Arabs) was able to interpret best and perfect understanding on the text of al-Qur'an in Arabic.<sup>46</sup> The messages which were trying to be emphasized here were that the commentators would not be able to explore the meaning of the scriptures, such as the al-Qur'an, if he did not make the text as one of the sources in the process of understanding. Due to this argument, the existence of the text in the hermeneutic theory could not be ignored, even though text was not the only source of the interpretation.

#### 2. Context as a source of interpretation

The civilization of text containing only with textual interpretation/literally would be impossible give birth to accommodate productive -appreciative interpretation.

Such interpretation would obviously impossible to answer a wide variety of life problems of contemporary society, which at all timed has always changed and evolved.

Engineer stated that the interpretation of Qur'anic verses on the problem of justice or similar values with it (justice for women) should have been changed in line with the emergence of spirit at that time. This was an important element of the methodology in understanding the Qur'an.<sup>47</sup> In other words, there must be a dynamic element in understanding the verses of the Qur'an. For this reason, it was increasingly clear that the context in order to attract the significance of the meaning of these verses needed to be involved. Productive interpretation must have always be end one by giving much attention to the significance of the Qur'anic verses in order to provide solutions for contemporary society's problems in accordance with the godlike values.

Context means the interpretation of the issues related to the socio-cultural surrounding by the time the verses were revealed. The process of interpretation involving this context was tendentiously negated the concept raised by classical commentators "*al-ibrah bi umūm al-lafz la bi khusūs al-sabab* and *al-ibrah bi khusūs al-sabab la bi umūm al-lafz*". Therefore, they created a new concept namely, *al-ibrahmaqās bi id al-shari'a*. The development of this concept was conducted by inserting *maqās id al-shari'a* on the significance of the texts obtained from observing the their motion and then place them in context.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>46</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an Women & Modern Society*, 17.

<sup>47</sup>See Asghar Ali Engineer, "On Methodology of Understanding Qur'an", from <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~rtavakol/engineer/understand.htm> (Accessed on 4 October 2015).

### 3. Perspective as a source of interpretation

Engineer believed that experience in interpreting the Qur'anic verses was one of the significant supports. He added that al-Qur'an was an *Eternal Holy Book* that was always relevant for all times (the past, the present, and the future). Every generation had the right to interpret the Qur'an in their own way based on experience and problems of life they were facing. This should have been recognized because problems and challenges faced by every generation were not the same. Therefore, to get guidance and inspiration from the Qur'an, it was logical that they would interpret the Qur'an based on their own perspectives and experiences.<sup>48</sup>

#### d. Method of Interpretation

The methods used by contemporary commentators somewhat different to the method used by the classical commentators. If the classical commentators tend to interpret the Qur'an using deductive method and atomistic, then contemporary commentators tend to use interdisciplinary methods, such as thematic, linguistic, gender analysis, semiotic, socio-historical, feminist, hermeneutics, and so on. In this context Engineer using hermeneutic methods and feminist. Or more precisely termed feminist hermeneutic method. The following will explain the principles of feminist hermeneutics initiated by the Engineer:

#### 1. Referring to independent method of interpreting al-Qur'an

Philosophically-humanist recognized that human beings were basically independent. Therefore, naturally, people would always fight against all forms of oppression and exploitation. So, also as

intelligent beings, humans had a tendency to have justice and value equalities. Naturally, humans would fight against any forms of injustice and inequality. Therefore, summons for being always revolt against suppression was a basic affirmation of natural identity of human beings.<sup>49</sup> Every suppression should have been opposed because dehumanization process that negated freedom as addressed by Holy Book for human beings is happening.

In this context, Engineer asserted that al-Qur'an already stated clearly that all human beings were of same heredity, men and women. No difference in tribe, citizenship, race or skin color. This particular differences were deliberately created in order human beings knew each other. The more noble men were those the committed justice and pious.<sup>50</sup> This was called a true revolutionary character, not only for the Arabs, but also for all human beings.

#### 2. Rejecting Patriarchy Ideology

Patriarchy ideology sees women as the second class. Engineer stated that this ideology was used by a few traditional communities. This ideology was a huge challenge to obtain gender equity.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup>Engineer wrote: "He launched a powerful struggle right at the outset against the rich and the mighty of Mecca. Even before He was commissioned as the prophet, he took active part in *hif al-fudul* (association of the meritorious) which was formed to get justice for the weak and he ever remained proud of having joined this association". Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology*, 23.

<sup>50</sup>The statement is attached in the QS. al-Hujurat/49: 13, Meanings: "... surely the most honorable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); surely Allah is Knowing, Aware". In this context, Engineer wrote: "this verse clearly demolishes all notions and concepts of racial, tribal, national or familial superiority with one stroke and puts emphasis on piety. Piety as far as the Qur'an is concerned is no mere ritual piety. The Qur'an defines piety in terms of justice: do justice, it is closest to piety". Read, *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>51</sup>See Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an Women & Modern Society* (Kuala Lumpur: Synergy Books International, without year of publication), 2-3.

<sup>48</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, "On Methodology of Understanding Qur'an", from <http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~rtavakol/engineer/understand.htm> (Accessed on 28 October 2015).

On the other hand, the existence of patriarchy ideology was as if in theological support from some of the Qur'anic verses (from sociological view points). Al-Qur'an loaded information that placed men as superior creatures, and women as inferior.<sup>52</sup> The conservative traditional *mufasir* interpreted these verses textual-literally that bore bias Qur'anic exegesis or pro-patriarchy.<sup>53</sup>

According to Muslim feminists, such a Qur'anic exegesis, was not only off line with modern concept of human rights, but also contradictive against fundamental values of Islamic teachings on gender equity, justice, and equality.<sup>54</sup> This caused the Muslim feminists reborn the essential signification of the al-Qur'an to the fundamental values of the Islamic teachings. This was also the reasons why Muslim feminists rejected pro-patriarchic Qur'anic exegesis by exposing a new method of interpretation of al-Qur'an which were more neutral and justice tendency on defense of gender, namely *de-patriarchic Method*.<sup>55</sup> This method was expected to speak up each of the interpreted verse of al-Qur'an on gender and feminism to be understood justly and proportionally.

### 3. The Classification of Qur'anic Verses on Feminism

In interpreting the verses of al-Qur'an (mainly on feminism), Engineer classified

them into two categories, namely verses of normative-theologies and contextual sociology. The normative verses had fundamental values in Islam, regarding justice and equality. The values were eternal and universal which could be applied in various context of space and time.<sup>56</sup> While the sociological verses in connection with the context of time they were revealed in order to respond the social problems at that time. The sociological verses were the verses of al-Qur'an that mostly supported patriarchic ideology.<sup>57</sup>

It was undeniable, the critic by Engineer on the application of sociological verses mostly understood as normative verses, such as the concept of *Purdah*. *Purdah* is a woman's morality conceptualization in the past to be used to protect their dignity. However, in its development, it becomes vague, until then it is seen as women's purity. Muslim women who violate this concept is considered to have violated the concept of Islamic morality. At this level of *purdah* has become a concept of morality for women.<sup>58</sup>

According to Engineer, the main factors supporting the occurrence of irregularities in applying these verses is the power of feudal. In their view women are always regarded as weak and in need of protection. Parties are entitled to protect it is to men. This tradition has been sustained despite the social context has changed.

To minimize or to remove the feudal forces, whose main source is the superiority of men, then women should be given the opportunity to prove that

<sup>52</sup>Such as QS. an-Nisa'/4: 4, 11, 34.

<sup>53</sup>Among books of the concerned classical interpretations, *Tafsir al-Kabir* by al-Razi, *Tafsir al-Kashshaf*, *Tafsir al-Tabari*. Read further Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari, *Jamī' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Ayat al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, t.th). Abi al-Qasim Jar Allah Muhammad bin 'Umar al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf 'an Haqaiq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyūn al-Aqāwil fi Wujūh al-Ta'wīl* (Mesir: Maktabah wa Maṭbūah Mustafa al-Bābī al-Halabī, t.th). Fakhruddin Mahmūd bin Umar bin al-Husain bin al-Hasan bin Ali al-Tamimi al-Bakar al-Razi al-Syafi'i, *Mafātih al-Gaib (Tafsir al-Kabir)* (Libanon: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2009).

<sup>54</sup>There were too many Qur'anic verses the values of equity, justice, and equality, such as QS. Ali Imran/3: 195, QS. an-Nisa/4: 32, QS. Taubah/9: 71, QS. al-Hujurat/49: 13, QS. al-Ahzab/33: 35.

<sup>55</sup>Read Asghar Ali Enginer, *Islam and Liberation Theology*, 5.

<sup>56</sup>See Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an Women & Modern Society*, 17.

<sup>57</sup>Such as QS. an-Nisa/4: 3, 11, and 34.

<sup>58</sup>See Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an Women and Modern Society*, 65-66.

they can no longer be regarded as weak. It is already the evident at present that women are no longer afraid to travel alone, they already have access to the world of public/work, even they have been able to feed themselves. Thus they are no longer dependent on men.<sup>59</sup>

## **Engineer Interpretation of Qur'anic Verses in Perspective Hermeneutics of Feminism**

### **a. Creation of Woman**

As far as gender equity and equality between men and women is concerned, it cannot be separated away from the concept of human creation that has been understood so far. Opinions evolving in today's society is that women are created from the rib of man. Originally, it is the consequence of this opinion that women are different from men. If men are believed to come from a source that was first created by God from the ground (a kind of clay), while women did not. If men have acknowledged the existence of a perfect self, these consequences arose because women were created from a source that was not perfect and was also the part of men. In other words, the creation of woman was dependent on the creation of man. If the man was not or had not been created by God, then women would never be created any way.

The above described opinions were not emerged suddenly or without foundation at all. One of the most powerful base raised from the verses of al-Qur'an *Surat an-Nisa*, verse 1, that at the beginning, God created man from a single source, then women were created from the source (part) of male.<sup>60</sup>

In this context, Engineer rejected the common understanding or interpretation of the classical commentators who claimed

that a woman was created from the rib of man.<sup>61</sup> Such an interpretation indicated no appreciation on the value of humanity of woman. Because how would a woman be valued as a perfect human, if the origin of creation was not recognized on an equal footing with men.

This view had a very big implication that influence the lives of women in the society. So, no wonder, if at present time the public, especially men assumes that women are the second-class beings (*inferior status or the second sex*), whose status is under men. Thus, the position of women in society, both in the domestic and public space, always subordinate to male superiority. Because men believed that they were created by God from one source. While the woman was created from the part of men. So, the notion of men saying that the presence of women in this world is nothing but as complementary to men. This means that women do not personally have a value of humanity as a whole, but only associated with men.

Researchers agreed with the Engineer's view that the existence of the *hadith* about the ribs, which has been used as the main reference for the classical commentators, should be reexamined. It was likely that the intent of the *hadith* was not to suggest that women were made of originally ribs skewer. Instead, there was another meaning. Writer tends to see that the *hadith* was merely *majazi* or figurative. Thus, it is understood that the reference to the ribs in the *hadith* was an allegory of the attitudes and personality of women. This interpretation is seen as more impartial to respect the identity of women as a perfect creature, as a man.

<sup>59</sup>See Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Right of Women in Islam*, 6.

<sup>60</sup>QS. an-Nisa'/4:1. *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya* (Medinah: Majma al-Muluk Fahd li Taba'at al-Mushaf al-Syarif, 1418 H), 114.

<sup>61</sup>Asghar cited Maulana Azad who stated that al-Qur'an disagreed with the interpretation that Hawa was created from the bended rib of Adam and tent to inferior. Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, 43.

## b. The Problems of *Nushuz*

The issue of *Nushuz* can be found in the Qur'an Surat an-Nisa verse 34.<sup>62</sup> This has long issue been debated by scholars, both Qur'anic exegesis and *Fiqh* scholars. So far, the understanding in the vast majority of classical commentators tended to be discriminatory (unfair and underestimate women). In the classical commentators said *nushuz* tends to be interpreted as a way ward wife to her husband, so that the consequences of the decision is allowed to hit.

In commenting on this case, Engineer begin with a view of the world (worldview) of the Qur'an about sex. By quoting some verses of the Qur'an that states that. Among the verse quoted is QS. Taubah verse 71, and QS. al-Ahzab verse 35. According to Engineer, two of the verse egalitarian recognizes the equality and equality between men and women. Explicitly two verses it is mentioned that men and women are partners, they are also recognized as having the same rights in the various activities, both with regard to the issue of God and *hablun min al-nas*. Including no less important is the recognition of the right of women to seek their own income and the result belongs to them alone. This is a tremendous breakthrough that made the Qur'an against women's rights. Due to the seventh century, when the Qur'an was revealed, there is no religion or civilization that provides equal rights for men and women as given by the Qur'an.

*Nushuz*, as addressed by Engineer had been variously interpreted by commentators.<sup>63</sup> At least three meanings arising for the meaning of the word, *i.e.* against or opposed to the husband, embittered about or desertion, and lawlessness. al-Tabari and Zamakhshari

interpreted the word with the same meanings that resisted or opposed to a husband with a sinful purpose.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, al-Raghib al-Isfahani, had slightly different statement that the meaning of the word was resistance to her husband by protecting other man or had an invalid relationship (cheating).<sup>65</sup>

Looking at the description of the meaning of the word *nushuz*, Engineer strongly disagreed with the term *nushuz* because it could only be understood in the context of a wife. He thought it could happen to both husband and wife. Citing the views of other commentators, as well as the views of M. Asad Pervez, Engineer agreed that *nushuz* could not be interpreted by wives against husbands' iniquity, but should be understood as a disharmony in the marriage relationship.

In this context, al-Qur'an had offered solutions in three stages, namely the solution of *verbal*, *non-verbal* (separate beds), and *physical action*. Based on the three stages, Engineer did not specifically express the opinions. He contended that the first two solutions should be maximally implemented before entering into a third solution. It was just, he gets lightly disappointed with the interpretation put forward by the classical commentators whose viewpoints were more likely to promote the three solutions with an emphasis only on the third one. This clearly indicated strong influence of the patriarchal tradition in the classical interpretations.

*Nushuz* cannot be separated from the expression of *daraba*. When this word was interpreted, Engineer quoted the opinion of both classical and modern commentators. Al-Tabari, for example, wrote that beating a wife was considered to be a last resort in the

<sup>62</sup>See *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya* (Medinah: Majma al-Muluk Fahd li Tabat al-Mushaf al-Syarif, 1418 H), 123.

<sup>63</sup>See Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an Women and Modern Society*, 57.

<sup>64</sup>Read Abi Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayān*, juz. V, 62. Juga Abi al-Qasim Jar Allah Muhammad ibn Umar al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, jil. I, 524.

<sup>65</sup>Read al-Raghib al-Isfahani, *Mu'jam Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an*, 514.

settlement of *nushuz*. It is allowed in Islam. However, the beating was not to hurt or not by a desire to harass women, for example, hitting it with a toothbrush. In this regard, al-Tabari quoted the opinion of Ibn Abbas, which also referred to a hadith of the Prophet.<sup>66</sup>

After explaining the opinion of some commentators, both classical and modern, Engineer concluded that the emergence of a nuanced interpretation of discriminatory and subordinate to the position of women over men are more affected by growing social ethos that time. Islam came to a community that embraces a very strong patriarchal tradition. Because the tradition is so strong, even considered absolute and unquestionable.<sup>67</sup>

As explained by Engineer, the issues of *nushuz* and *daraba* referred to the concept that he had mentioned earlier. The mentioned concept was the classification of verses that nuanced to normative and sociological categories. The normative verse should be understood normative, and so did of sociological. In this case, he repeatedly warned that a paragraph about *nushuz* was a sociological paragraph which nuanced and more contextual. He cited several scholarly opinions (commentators) whether classical and modern (India Pakistan) who interpreted the word normatively. Whereas this verse was the nuanced sociological verse. Consequently, it was a fallacy if interpreted normatively. This particular comprehension would be then one of the reasons that caused the emergence of household harassment.

Engineer urged the understanding and interpretation of the Qur'an verse should

have been based on *world view* that had been available in the Qur'an itself, namely: al-Qur'an supported strongly that justice should be upstanding mainly to the weak, including women (QS. al-Qashash/28:5), *second*, al-Qur'an had insisted the illumination of tradition and institution of slavery. Therefore, the way out of those who concerned with the interpretation and comprehension of the similar verses required to concurrently interpret them.<sup>68</sup> In other words, when interpreting verses about injustice on the weak, such as women, the interpretation should be concurrently done with those verses that recognize the equity and equality of both men and women. This was the major points emphasized by Engineer that Qur'anic verses were divided into two major classifications; normative-ideological and practical-contextual verses.

### c. The Issue of Polygamy

The basis of polygamy issue was available in the Qur'an Surat an-Nisa'/4:3, which meant: "And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or what your right hands possess; this is more proper, that you may not deviate from the right course".<sup>69</sup>

In his book "The Qur'an, Women and Modern Society," Engineer wrote that the issue of polygamy as a social problem for both Islamic and non-Islamic countries. For example, in India, women had accepted the institution of polygamy as a natural thing or a gift of God and not against it. The behavior of polygamy had started to get resistance from the public during the modern era mainly during the era of 20th century. It began in line

<sup>66</sup>See Abi Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayān*, juz. V, 97. Zamakhshari, Abi al-Qasim Jar Allah Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, juz. I, 525. Read also Fakhr al-Din Mahmud ibn Umar ibn al-Husain ibn al-Hasan ibn Ali al-Tamimi al-Bakar al-Razi al-Shafi'i, *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, jil. IX-X, 90. Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an Women and Modern Society*, 58-59

<sup>67</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an Women and Modern Society*, 79.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>69</sup>See *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya*, 115.

with the industrial revolution that brought awareness in women about their rights. Since then they began demanding equity and equality with men.<sup>70</sup> Here Engineer associated it with another verse which stated the real man or husband would never be able to do justice to his wives.

Engineer concluded that in principle there is no consent at all general nature of polygamy in Islam except in special or exceptional circumstances. Granting such permission should also be qualified justice in three levels: first, there is no guarantee the use of property of orphans and widows correctly, the second is no guarantee of justice for all his wives, the third is no guarantee she would get the love and affection of the same.

From the above description, it is understood that this verse is the verse in context. Understanding must be linked to conditions and situations when this verse was revealed. In the language of Gadamer explained that the understanding of a text cannot be separated from influenced by history, both the history of the text and its interpreter. A text does not appear a priori or separated from the context of his time. In other words, the appearance of a text is closely related to the condition and situation of his time when the text was submitted.

Another conclusion is that the true concept of marriage in Islam is monogamy. Permissibility of a polygamous marriage is only one solution in solving specific social problems. Particularly here relate to the issue of orphans and widows. Thus, a text which is constructed for a particular problem certainly cannot necessarily be applied in general in all circumstances and conditions. This has been criticized by contemporary Islamic thinkers of the classical interpretations.

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<sup>70</sup>Read Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Qur'an Women & Modern Society*, 85.

## Conclusion

Talking about the problems of women in the interpretation of Qur'anic verses could not be separated from feminist issues which was widely debated. Feminist issues such as gender equality, anti-marginalization, stereotyping, and subordination should be considered as serious issues in interpreting al-Qur'an. Misunderstanding in the interpretation often made the issues inconsiderable. One of the methods that greatly affected the outcome of the nuances in the feminist interpretation was the interpretation resources perspective. The interpreted verses on feminism would result differently outcomes from the perspective of male and female. In other words, the interpretation of the concerned verses could not be based solely on the male perspective alone, without involving perspective of female.

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