

The Dimension of Maqāṣid in the Tafsir of Al-Manar by Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Riḍā on the Verses of Polygamy

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Abstract

The ongoing debate on polygamy in Islam highlights the urgency of Qur'anic interpretation that goes beyond legal-formal readings and incorporates the ethical and social objectives of Islamic law. In this context, *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā represents a significant reformist exegetical work that responds to modern human and social challenges through a rational and maqāṣid-oriented framework. This study examines in depth the dimension of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* in the interpretation of polygamy-related verses in *Tafsīr al-Manār*, particularly QS al-Nisā' [4]:3 and related passages. The primary objective of this research is to uncover the maqāṣid-based construction of polygamy developed by 'Abduh and Riḍā and to analyze its relevance to contemporary discourses on justice and family welfare. This research employs a qualitative-descriptive approach using content analysis, supported by thematic (*mawḍū'ī*) interpretation and critical textual analysis of the exegetical text. Primary data are drawn from *Tafsīr al-Manār*, while secondary sources include classical and contemporary works on Qur'anic exegesis, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and Islamic family law. The findings demonstrate that polygamy is not treated as an ideal normative practice but as a socially conditioned concession that is strictly constrained by the objectives of Islamic law, particularly justice, the protection of women's dignity, and family stability. This study underscores the contribution of *Tafsīr al-Manār* to the development of a contextual and human-centered maqāṣid-based paradigm of Qur'anic interpretation.

Keywords: Tafsīr al-Manār, Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah, Polygamy, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā.

Abstrak

Perdebatan yang terus berlangsung mengenai poligami dalam Islam menekankan urgensi penafsiran Al-Qur'an yang melampaui pembacaan legal-formal dan mengintegrasikan tujuan etis serta sosial dari hukum Islam. Dalam konteks ini, *Tafsīr al-Manār* karya Muḥammad 'Abduh dan Rashīd Riḍā merupakan karya tafsir reformis yang signifikan, yang menanggapi tantangan manusia dan sosial modern melalui kerangka rasional dan berorientasi maqāṣid. Penelitian ini mengkaji secara mendalam dimensi *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* dalam penafsiran ayat-ayat terkait poligami dalam *Tafsīr al-Manār*, khususnya QS al-Nisā' [4]:3 dan ayat-ayat terkait lainnya. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah mengungkap konstruksi poligami berbasis maqāṣid yang dikembangkan oleh 'Abduh dan Riḍā serta menganalisis relevansinya terhadap wacana kontemporer mengenai keadilan dan kesejahteraan keluarga. Penelitian ini



menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif-deskriptif dengan metode analisis isi (*content analysis*), yang ditunjang oleh pendekatan tafsir tematik (*mawḍūʿī*) dan analisis kritis teks tafsir. Data primer diperoleh dari *Tafsīr al-Manār*, sedangkan data sekunder mencakup karya-karya klasik dan kontemporer tentang tafsir Al-Qur'an, *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, dan hukum keluarga Islam. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa poligami tidak diperlakukan sebagai praktik normatif ideal, melainkan sebagai dispensasi sosial bersyarat yang dibatasi secara ketat oleh tujuan hukum Islam, khususnya keadilan, perlindungan martabat perempuan, dan stabilitas keluarga. Penelitian ini menegaskan kontribusi *Tafsīr al-Manār* dalam pengembangan paradigma tafsir Al-Qur'an berbasis maqāṣid yang kontekstual dan berorientasi kemanusiaan.

Kata kunci: *Tafsīr al-Manār*, *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah*, Poligami, Muḥammad 'Abduh, Rashīd Riḍā

Introduction

Polygamy remains one of the most controversial issues in contemporary Islamic family law, particularly due to its implications for gender justice and family welfare. Although frequently understood as a practice textually legitimized by the Qur'an, a growing body of research demonstrates that polygamy in modern contexts is often associated with increased marital conflict, women's psychological vulnerability, and unequal power relations within Muslim families (Esposito, 2001; Mir-Hosseini, 2018). This tension between normative legitimacy and lived social realities positions polygamy not merely as a legal question, but as an urgent ethical problem that requires re-examination through the moral objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*).

Rapid social change, heightened global awareness of gender equality, and increasing demands for the protection of women's rights have significantly reshaped contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. Modern exegetical trends increasingly move beyond legal-formal readings toward contextual, value-oriented, and rational approaches (Hourani, 1983; Jansen, 1980). Within this intellectual transformation, *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā occupies a pivotal position as a reformist exegetical project that integrates rational inquiry, social realities, and the higher objectives of Islamic law into Qur'anic interpretation (Adams, 1933; Kerr, 1966). Their approach represents an internal critique of traditional exegetical models that relied heavily on literalism and mythological elements.

This reformist orientation is particularly evident in *al-Manār*'s treatment of polygamy, especially in its interpretation of QS al-Nisā' [4]:3. Unlike classical interpretations that emphasize the permissibility of marrying up to four wives, 'Abduh and Riḍā foreground justice as the primary ethical principle governing the verse. Justice is not understood in a narrow procedural sense, but as a substantive value encompassing the protection of women's dignity,

equitable family relations, and social stability (‘Abduh & Riḍā, n.d.). This interpretive shift reflects a fundamental reconceptualization of polygamy—from a socially accepted norm to a conditional concession strictly regulated by ethical objectives.

Existing scholarship has extensively examined *Tafsīr al-Manār* as a landmark of rationalist and modernist Qur’anic exegesis, highlighting its rejection of mythological narratives and its emphasis on reason and social reform (Jansen, 1980; Burge, 2021). Other studies have explored ‘Abduh and Riḍā’s ethical approach to social issues, including polygamy, emphasizing justice, equality, and moral accountability (Hamim & Abdillah, 2023; Azis & Anggraini, 2023; Hamim, 2022). Meanwhile, *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* has become a well-established framework in contemporary Islamic legal theory, prioritizing the realization of benefit and the prevention of harm through the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property (Al Munawar, 2021; Auda, 2008; Kamali, 2008; Mubarrak et al., 2025).

Despite these advances, the existing literature remains fragmented. Studies on polygamy often focus on normative jurisprudence or sociological consequences, while analyses of *Tafsīr al-Manār* tend to emphasize its modernist methodology without systematically examining how *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* operates in its interpretation of polygamy verses. Yet recent studies suggest that ‘Abduh and Riḍā implicitly contextualize polygamy within a *maqāṣid* framework, emphasizing justice, fairness, and the prevention of harm (*mafsadah*), while critically challenging traditional practices that contradict the higher ethical aims of Islamic law (Razali Ibrahim, 2023; Hernández-Justo, 2024; Hasan et al., 2022). This gap indicates the need for an integrative analysis that connects *Tafsīr al-Manār*, polygamy verses, and *maqāṣid*-based interpretation within a unified analytical framework.

Accordingly, this article aims to examine how the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* paradigm is operationalized in *Tafsīr al-Manār*’s interpretation of polygamy-related verses, with particular focus on QS al-Nisā’ [4]:3 and its related passages. This study advances the initial hypothesis that Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā do not present polygamy as a normative ideal in Islam, but rather as a socially contingent concession (*rukḥṣah*) strictly bounded by the principle of justice. Within this framework, monogamy implicitly emerges as the marital model most consistent with the ethical objectives of Islamic law.

By situating the controversy of polygamy within the context of social change, modern exegetical trends, and the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* paradigm, this study offers a conceptual solution through a *maqāṣid*-based reading that reaffirms justice as the core ethical foundation of Islamic family law. The article contributes to the development of a contextual, human-

centered, and ethically grounded paradigm of Qur'anic interpretation that remains highly relevant to contemporary debates on Muslim family law.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, library-based research approach that treats exegetical texts as the primary object of analysis. The unit of analysis is the interpretation of polygamy-related verses in *Tafsīr al-Manār* by Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, with particular emphasis on QS al-Nisā' [4]:3 as well as other Qur'anic verses thematically related to justice, family relations, and social protection. *Tafsīr al-Manār* is selected due to its strategic position in the history of modern Qur'anic exegesis and its reformist character, which consciously integrates rational inquiry, socio-historical context, and the normative objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*).

A qualitative research design is adopted because it allows for an in-depth exploration of meaning construction, normative argumentation, and ethical orientation embedded within exegetical discourse. This approach is particularly appropriate for examining Qur'anic interpretation that is not merely descriptive but also reflective and prescriptive, especially in the case of polygamy, an issue deeply entangled with moral, legal, and social debates. The study does not aim to measure polygamy as an empirical social practice; rather, it analyzes how the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* framework operates as a hermeneutical principle in the interpretation of relevant Qur'anic verses.

The data sources consist of both primary and secondary materials. The primary data comprise the text of *Tafsīr al-Manār* addressing polygamy-related verses, particularly QS al-Nisā' [4]:3, which is examined directly and comprehensively. Secondary data include scholarly works on modern Qur'anic exegesis, the intellectual thought of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā, theories of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and contemporary studies on polygamy, gender justice, and Islamic family law. These secondary sources serve to strengthen the theoretical framework, provide academic context, and situate the findings within broader scholarly debates.

Data collection is conducted through systematic documentation and literature review. This process involves identifying Qur'anic verses relevant to the theme of polygamy, undertaking a critical reading of the sections of *Tafsīr al-Manār* that discuss these verses, and selecting supporting literature with conceptual and methodological relevance. All collected data are then classified according to major thematic categories, such as justice, moral responsibility, the protection of women, and social welfare.

Data analysis is carried out using content analysis combined with a thematic (*mawḍūʿī*) exegetical approach. Through this analytical framework, the study identifies patterns of argumentation, key concepts, and structures of reasoning employed by ‘Abduh and Riḍā in interpreting polygamy-related verses. The analytical process includes data reduction, thematic categorization based on the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, and critical examination of how justice is positioned as a normative criterion that limits the legitimacy of polygamy. The findings are subsequently interpreted in relation to contemporary debates on Islamic family law, allowing for an assessment of the relevance and contribution of *Tafsīr al-Manār* to modern Islamic legal discourse.

Results and Discussion

A. Maqāṣid-Oriented Interpretation of Polygamy in *Tafsīr al-Manār*

The analysis of *Tafsīr al-Manār* reveals a consistent interpretive pattern in reading QS al-Nisā’ [4]:3 as a restrictive verse rather than one that promotes the practice of polygamy. In their initial exposition of the verse, ‘Abduh and Riḍā explicitly associate the permissibility of polygamy with a post-war social context, particularly the widespread injustice suffered by orphans and women in vulnerable positions. Polygamy is thus understood as a situational social response rather than an ideal or encouraged marital norm. This pattern demonstrates al-Manār’s strong tendency to contextualize the Qur’anic text in light of the social realities surrounding its revelation.

Further analysis shows that justice (*‘adl*) functions as the central interpretive category governing the reading of QS al-Nisā’ [4]:3. In *al-Manār*, justice is not reduced to formal aspects such as financial maintenance or equal time allocation; rather, it is understood substantively, encompassing psychological, emotional, and social dimensions. This interpretation produces a conceptual distinction between formal justice and genuine justice, with the latter considered far more difficult to realize in the context of polygamous relationships. This distinction appears repeatedly in Riḍā’s discussions, particularly when addressing polygamy practiced on the basis of male personal gratification.

The exegetical data further indicate that the phrase *fa-in khiftum allā ta’dilū* is positioned as an ethical indicator that determines the legitimacy of polygamy. In *al-Manār*, fear of injustice is not treated as a subjective presumption but as a rational judgment grounded in an assessment of a man’s moral and social capacity. Consequently, the inability to uphold justice is not viewed as an exceptional condition but rather as the dominant reality in plural

marital relationships. This pattern illustrates how al-Manār employs the language of the verse to significantly restrict the scope of polygamy's permissibility.

Subsequent findings reveal an implicit comparison between polygamy and monogamy within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Although *al-Manār* does not explicitly prohibit polygamy, it repeatedly emphasizes that monogamy is more closely aligned with the objectives of Islamic law, particularly in ensuring family stability and safeguarding women's dignity. In several passages, Riḍā associates the failure of modern polygamous practices with increased domestic conflict and the breakdown of family relationships, outcomes that contradict the principle of public welfare (*maṣlahah*).

The analysis also demonstrates that *Tafsīr al-Manār* situates QS al-Nisā' [4]:3 in a thematic relationship with QS al-Nisā' [4]:129, which affirms the impossibility of achieving perfect justice among multiple wives. This inter-verse connection forms a thematic (*mawḍū'ī*) reading pattern that reinforces the argument for restricting polygamy. By integrating these two verses, al-Manār presents a coherent argumentative structure in which polygamy is acknowledged as normatively permissible but practically constrained by the reality of unattainable comprehensive justice.

Moreover, the exegetical data reveal an explicit critique of traditional polygamous practices detached from ethical considerations. 'Abduh and Riḍā classify such practices as deviations from the higher objectives of Islamic law, particularly when polygamy is implemented without regard for its social and psychological consequences for women and children. This critique marks a significant shift from textual-legalistic readings toward an ethical-teleological approach characteristic of modern Qur'anic exegesis.

From the perspective of argumentative structure, *Tafsīr al-Manār* demonstrates consistent reliance on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as a principle for limiting legal rulings rather than merely legitimizing them. Polygamy is not presented as an inherent male right but as a conditional social mechanism that can only be justified if it genuinely ensures justice and prevents harm. These findings indicate that al-Manār constructs a hierarchy of values in which justice and public welfare are prioritized over formal permissibility.

Comparatively, al-Manār's approach differs markedly from many classical commentaries that tend to focus primarily on stipulating the maximum number of wives. Instead, *al-Manār* expands the scope of analysis by incorporating social, ethical, and psychological dimensions as integral components of the verse's meaning. This distinction

underscores the reformist character of the commentary and helps explain its influence on subsequent modern Qur'anic interpretations, particularly in discussions of family and gender.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that *Tafsir al-Manār* develops a maqāṣid-oriented construction of polygamy that positions justice as the primary normative criterion and implicitly prioritizes monogamy as the marital model most consistent with the objectives of Islamic law. These findings provide the analytical foundation for the subsequent discussion on the relevance of al-Manār's interpretation within contemporary Islamic family law discourse.

B. Reformist Paradigm in Tafsir al-Manār

The findings show that *Tafsir al-Manār* situates QS. al-Nisā' [4]:3 within a reformist and rationalist paradigm, marking a clear shift away from classical literalist readings. This approach emphasizes contextualization, ethical reasoning, and social relevance, demonstrating how 'Abduh and Riḍā interpret polygamy in relation to post-war social conditions, particularly regarding the protection of orphans and women in vulnerable positions. By framing the verse as a conditional social response rather than a normative ideal, al-Manār illustrates that Qur'anic interpretation can simultaneously address legal and moral objectives (Burge, 2021).

Justice (*'adl*) emerges as the central normative criterion in al-Manār, guiding the scope and limits of polygamy. The commentary interprets justice substantively, extending beyond procedural fairness or material distribution to include emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. This comprehensive understanding of justice highlights the ethical responsibility of men in plural marriages and underscores that textual permission alone does not guarantee moral legitimacy (Kamali, 2008).

Consequently, monogamy is implicitly prioritized as the most ethically viable marital model, as it better ensures the welfare, dignity, and stability of all family members. By linking the conditional permissibility of polygamy with the practical impossibility of achieving perfect justice, al-Manār provides a rational and ethical framework that mediates between the normative allowance of the text and the moral imperatives of social responsibility.

Moreover, *Tafsir al-Manār* critiques traditional polygamous practices that disregard ethical and social considerations, classifying them as deviations from the higher objectives of the shari'ah. This ethical-teleological perspective not only constrains the permissibility of polygamy but also establishes moral accountability for its practice. The influence of al-Manār is evident in later modern exegesis, particularly in Southeast Asia, where subsequent tafsir

works adopt similar approaches integrating ethical reasoning with textual interpretation (Badawi & Zulkarnaini, 2021).

C. Justice as a Normative Constraint

The analysis indicates that one of the central contributions of *Tafsīr al-Manār* is the elevation of justice (*‘adh*) as the core normative constraint governing polygamy. ‘Abduh and Riḍā consistently interpret justice in substantive terms, encompassing not only financial and procedural fairness but also emotional, psychological, and relational dimensions (Kamali, 2008). This approach demonstrates a deep engagement with the maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah framework, where legal permissibility is bounded by the overarching goal of safeguarding human welfare and dignity (Auda, 2008).

In practice, this means that polygamy cannot be justified solely on the basis of textual allowance. *Al-Manār* emphasizes that the failure to maintain equitable treatment in all aspects—material, emotional, and social—renders plural marriage ethically untenable. The commentary thus shifts the focus from procedural legality to substantive fairness, highlighting the responsibility of men to uphold justice in any marital arrangement (Wadud, 1999).

This normative framing also functions as an evaluative lens for contemporary debates on polygamy. By establishing justice as the principal criterion, *al-Manār* provides a basis for critiquing social practices that exploit textual permission for personal desire. The hermeneutical principle here is clear: legal sanction does not equate to ethical endorsement (Mir-Hosseini, 2013).

Furthermore, the emphasis on comprehensive justice aligns with feminist and reformist readings of the Qur’an. *Al-Manār* resonates with contemporary concerns about relational equity, highlighting the interdependence of marital rights, women’s dignity, and family welfare (Barlas, 2002). This suggests that *Tafsīr al-Manār* anticipates debates in which the ethical limits of polygamy are evaluated within broader societal and moral frameworks.

Additionally, the commentary demonstrates that justice is not merely a static principle but a dynamic evaluative tool. Its application requires contextual judgment, awareness of individual circumstances, and consideration of potential social consequences (Kamali, 2008). Such an approach marks a departure from classical exegesis, which often treated legal permission as unconditional.

Finally, *al-Manār*’s normative emphasis reinforces the notion that polygamy is a socially contingent instrument, not a guaranteed entitlement. By foregrounding justice as a prerequisite, the commentary positions ethical evaluation above formal textual compliance,

providing a model for integrating maqāṣid-oriented reasoning into contemporary Islamic legal practice (Auda, 2008).

D. Monogamy as the Ethically Preferred Model

The findings also indicate that al-Manār implicitly frames monogamy as the marital model most compatible with the objectives of Islamic law. By connecting QS. al-Nisā' [4]:3 with QS. al-Nisā' [4]:129, the commentary underscores the practical impossibility of achieving perfect justice in polygamous arrangements, especially in emotional and relational domains ('Abduh, 1990). This linkage reinforces monogamy as an ethically viable alternative, demonstrating the interpretive logic of prioritizing fairness over textual permissibility.

Moreover, monogamy is presented not only as a moral ideal but also as a pragmatic solution for mitigating social harm. Riḍā emphasizes that attempts to maintain plural marriages often lead to domestic conflict, emotional distress, and inequality among wives (Riḍā, 1999). In this sense, monogamy becomes the default strategy for realizing the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah's goals of justice, welfare, and social stability.

This ethical prioritization is consonant with contemporary scholarship advocating gender-equitable family structures. Studies by Esposito and DeLong-Bas (2001) and Sonneveld (2012) reinforce the notion that monogamy is better suited to protect women and children from psychological and social harm, supporting al-Manār's implicit preference.

In addition, the hermeneutical logic employed by al-Manār reflects an anticipatory ethical discourse. The commentary establishes that textual sanction does not automatically confer moral license, highlighting the importance of considering social realities and human capacity when applying Qur'anic norms. This perspective resonates with modern debates on responsible marital practices and ethical limits in family law.

The commentary also suggests a model of conditional polygamy, in which plural marriage is only morally defensible under strict justice and fairness. Monogamy, by contrast, minimizes the risk of injustice and thereby better fulfills the maqāṣid objectives of preserving family welfare, human dignity, and relational equity (Kamali, 2008).

Finally, the emphasis on monogamy illustrates al-Manār's capacity to mediate between legal texts and ethical imperatives. The commentary demonstrates that Qur'anic exegesis can serve as a tool for balancing normative authority with practical and moral considerations in family law (Mir-Hosseini, 2013).

E. Critique of Traditional Polygamy

The analysis further shows that al-Manār explicitly critiques traditional polygamous practices that disregard ethical and social considerations. ‘Abduh and Riḍā classify such practices as departures from the higher objectives of shari‘ah, especially when they harm women or children (Hamim, 2022). This critique exemplifies a shift from legalistic or ritual-centered readings to an ethical-teleological hermeneutic, demonstrating the reformist nature of the commentary.

Al-Manār emphasizes that the consequences of polygamy must be central to its evaluation. By focusing on social and psychological outcomes, the commentary bridges the gap between textual permissibility and practical accountability (Hernández-Justo, 2024). This approach establishes a model for ethical responsibility in marital practices, underscoring that legality alone does not guarantee justice.

Moreover, the critique highlights the conditionality of polygamy within maqāṣid reasoning. The commentary asserts that plural marriage is only morally defensible when it satisfies justice, protects dignity, and ensures family welfare. Practices that fail to meet these standards are deemed ethically unacceptable, even if textually allowed.

Al-Manār’s ethical critique also serves a pedagogical function. By articulating the moral risks associated with traditional polygamy, it guides readers—both scholars and laypersons—toward more responsible interpretations and applications of Qur’anic law. This didactic element reinforces the commentary’s reformist orientation and its concern for social impact.

The analysis additionally reveals that al-Manār provides a conceptual framework for evaluating contemporary polygamy. Its emphasis on justice, fairness, and harm prevention offers a normative benchmark for legal reform and policy-making in Muslim family law (Razali Ibrahim, 2023).

Finally, the commentary’s critique underscores the broader relevance of maqāṣid-oriented hermeneutics. By integrating ethical evaluation with textual exegesis, al-Manār exemplifies how classical sources can inform modern debates on gender justice, family ethics, and the responsible exercise of marital rights (Mubarrak et al., 2025).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Tafsīr al-Manār* offers a maqāṣid-oriented interpretation of polygamy, positioning justice (‘*adl*) as the central normative criterion and implicitly prioritizing monogamy as the marital model most aligned with the objectives of Islamic law.

The analysis of QS. al-Nisā' [4]:3 and related verses reveals that 'Abduh and Riḍā consistently read polygamy as a conditional concession rather than an ideal norm, emphasizing ethical accountability, protection of women's dignity, and family welfare. These findings highlight a sophisticated hermeneutical approach in which textual permissibility is bounded by social, psychological, and moral considerations.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in its integration of modern maqāṣid hermeneutics with the analysis of a reformist tafsir, demonstrating how *Tafsīr al-Manār* mediates between classical textual authority and contemporary ethical concerns. By mapping justice, conditionality, and ethical evaluation within the interpretation of polygamy, this study provides a conceptual framework for understanding how Islamic legal and moral objectives can be operationalized in Qur'anic exegesis. Furthermore, it situates al-Manār as a foundational reference for scholars seeking to reconcile textual fidelity with social responsibility in Islamic family law.

Despite its insights, this study is limited by its focus on a single tafsir and textual analysis, without direct engagement with contemporary legal practice or empirical sociological data. Future research could expand this framework by conducting comparative studies with other reformist tafsir traditions, examining the reception of al-Manār in Southeast Asia, or exploring the practical application of maqāṣid principles in contemporary family law cases. Such investigations would further enhance understanding of the ethical and social dimensions of polygamy in modern Muslim contexts.

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