

# METHOD OF PROBLEM SOLVING THROUGH QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION (*TAFSĪR*)

## 3.0. INTRODUCTION

SIS states that its group is different from other feminist groups because the members of SIS fight for justice and equality within their faith, studying the foundational texts of Islam and the variety of interpretations of the Qur'anic Text, the Hadith, and juristic views on a range of issues.<sup>1</sup> The members of the group aim to reinterpret the texts of Islam because they believe that their proposed interpretations should be able to solve problems arising in society, especially those related to what they claim as gender inequality and human rights. In other words, they want to offer an alternative problem solving for society. One of the methods of problem solving that is claimed to be used by SIS in solving problems is through a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics.

This chapter brings into discussion the method of problem solving through Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*). This chapter begins with an elaboration of the problems that arise in society as claimed by SIS. After which, the general principles of the method of problem solving through the Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) as determined by renowned Muslim scholars are discussed. Following that, this chapter also discusses the qualifications required of a *mufassir*. This chapter further clarifies the method of problem solving applied by SIS through the model of Qur'anic hermeneutics and its analysis from an Islamic thought perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Zainah and, Shanon, *Sisters in Islam*, 14.

### 3.1. WHAT ARE THE PROBLEM?

The founding members of SIS claim that there is a problem of discrimination against women in the name of Islam. The question that they are faced with is “... - *if Islam is just - why do laws and policies made in the name of Islam create injustice?*”<sup>2</sup>

SIS claim that one of the problems faced by Muslim women occur due to the discrimination against women where it is believed to be parallel with the teachings of Islam, such as women are taught that they are inferior to men, and would face hellfire as the punishment for their disobedience as a wife. It is not only that, but according to SIS, women are also taught that they must demonstrate total obedience towards her husband without question, which in turn results in silent discontent among women. These points are considered by SIS as among the problems that should be solved in which SIS is required to study sections of the text used to justify gender inequality in general.<sup>3</sup>

According to SIS,

It became patently clear that it was not Islam that oppressed women, but male-centred interpretations of the Qur’an influenced by cultural practices and values of patriarchal society. Throughout much of Islam’s history, the realities, voices, and experiences of women have been largely silent – and silenced – in the reading and interpretation of the Text. This human silence, the group believed, had been erroneously interpreted as the silence of the Qur’an.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, SIS believes that this factor has created a problem among Muslim women.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

*Ibid.*

According to Zainah, the classical jurists (*fuqahā'*) in the past developed their theories and concepts according to their historical, social and economic contexts which are hugely dissimilar with current Muslim societies. She believes that it is one of the causes of the problems in Muslim societies when most family laws and practices nowadays are still based on those theories and concepts.<sup>5</sup>

Zainah declares that classical jurists who interpreted the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* were guided by the actual social and political situation of their time and a set of hypotheses pertaining to law, the community, and gender which revealed their state of knowledge, normative values and patriarchal institutions of their age.<sup>6</sup>

Zainah mentioned that the issue of gender inequality was initially discussed in the early twentieth century after the time of the classical jurists (*fuqahā'*). She said: “*But the unequal construction of gender rights formulated in their text lingered reproduced, in a modified way, in colonial and post colonial family laws that merged classical juristic concepts with colonial influences and negative aspects of local customs*”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Zainah Anwar, “Introduction: Why Equality and Justice Now,” in *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family*, ed. Zainah Anwar (Petaling Jaya: Musawah, 2009), 13.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

*Ibid.*

Zainah believes that because of the above process, most of the Muslim family laws today are based on assumptions and concepts that are not related to what Muslims want, what they go through and what values they uphold today. She said: “*Even in Muslim communities where classical juristic concepts have not been codified into law, the centuries-old fiqh rules and colonial and local norms have, in many cases, been invoked to sustain inequality between women and men within the family and wider society.*”<sup>9</sup>

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According to Zainah, many parts of family law, as described by classical jurists and reproduced in contemporary legal codes, are unreasonable and unjustifiable with Islamic views.<sup>8</sup>

SIS activism also extended to take account of even larger non-sectarian matters towards the end of the 1990s. Among the issues included under its activities are upholding the principles of democracy and the fundamental liberties secured by the Federal Constitution, and urging compliance with principles of human rights and international agreements and conventions signed by the Malaysian Government.<sup>9</sup>

SIS believes that the larger human rights movement should include a movement for gender justice as a necessary part of them, and vice versa. According to this organization, the protection and development of the democratic space allowing a civil society to flourish

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Zainah and Shanon, *Sisters In Islam*, 8.  
*Ibid.*

“*and enforcing the fundamental liberties of the Malaysian Constitution*” are the tasks of all people, because it is exactly these liberties that have allowed organisations like SIS to be present.<sup>12</sup>

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*Ibid.*

As a group struggling for gender equality, SIS also believes the struggle is concurrent with the fight for human rights. This in turn has led them to focus on areas of Muslim family law, *hijāb*, moral policing, polygamy, child marriage, Islamic legal theory, violence against women, *hudūd*, fundamental liberties and inheritance. Their fight for gender equality and human rights is based on their perspectives, ideas and their own method of interpreting the Qur'an.

### **3.2. GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF THE METHOD OF QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION**

Before undergoing the analysis of the problem solving method of SIS through a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics, it is important to know the general principles of the method of Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) as determined by renowned Muslim scholars who are experts in this field. This topic will discuss about these general principles which will become a tool to analyze the method of problem solving of SIS through the model of Qur'anic hermeneutics from an Islamic thought perspective. After that, the qualifications of a *mufassir* will be discussed. These two aspects are crucial matters to be discussed because any *mufassir* who intends to interpret the al-Qur'an must fulfil certain qualifications as outlined by Muslim scholars. They must apply the proper method of Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) in order to obtain the actual meaning of the Qur'anic verses.

### 3.2.1. The Method of Qur’anic Interpretation (*Tafsīr*)

*Tafsīr* of the Qur’an is one of the most important knowledge in Islam because the Qur’an contains the revelation of Allah s.w.t. for human beings. The Prophet Muḥammad s.a.w. left to us the Qur’an. Thus, Muslims have given great importance in studying the Qur’an. The method of *tafsīr* (Qur’anic interpretation) is one of the subjects in studying the Qur’an.

Literally, *tafsīr* means, “*clarification, explanation and illustration.*”<sup>10</sup> Technically, according to al-Zarkashī (d. 795/1392), *tafsīr* is “*an area of knowledge by which one understands, explains and derives rulings and wisdom from the book of Allah revealed to the Prophet Muhammad.*” Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344) defines *tafsīr* as “*a discipline that examines the recitation of the words of the Qur’an, what these words signifies, their connotations when they stand alone or in context.*”<sup>11</sup>

Methods of the Qur’anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) are generally divided into two kinds. They are Qur’anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) based on the method of transmission (*tafsīr bi al-riwāyah*), and another one is Qur’anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) based on opinion or knowledge (*tafsīr bi al-ra’y* or *tafsīr bi al-dirāyah* or *al-ijtihād*).<sup>12</sup>

#### 3.2.1.1. *Tafsīr bi al-Riwāyah*

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<sup>10</sup> Shiḥātah, ‘Abdullāh, ‘*Ulūm at-Tafsīr* (Qāhirah: Dar Shurūq, 2001), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur’an: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 58.

<sup>12</sup> Safiyah Shams al-Din, *Al-Madkhal Ila Dirasat ‘Ulum al-Qur’an* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2006), 300.



The Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) based on the method of transmission (*tafsīr bi alriwāyah*) consists of 4 methods of interpretation:<sup>13</sup>

- 1) Interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an;
- 2) Interpretation of the Qur'an by the *Sunnah*;
- 3) Interpretation of the Qur'an based on what has been transmitted by the companions (*ṣaḥābah*);
- 4) Interpretation of the Qur'an based on what has been transmitted by the *tābi'īn*.

Indeed, the highest references of Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) are the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an and the interpretation of the Qur'an by the Prophet s.a.w.. Following these two methods are the interpretation by the companions (*ṣaḥābah*).<sup>14</sup>

In other words, the method that should be implemented by the *mufassir* in understanding the Qur'an is firstly by looking in to the Qur'an itself.<sup>15</sup> It is the best method of interpretation or *tafsīr*, and it is the best way to explain the Qur'an.<sup>19</sup> For what the Qur'an alludes to in one point is explained in another, and what it says in brief on one occasion is elaborated on another.<sup>16</sup>

If nothing can be found in the Qur'an, then they turn to the *Sunnah*.<sup>17</sup> It is because the *Sunnah* explains and elucidates the Qur'an.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Saqr, Muḥammad Abū al-Nūr al-Ḥadīdī, *Tafsīr Bi al-Ma'thūr wa Manhaj al-Mufassirīn Fīhi* (Makkatul Mukarramah: World Centre for Islamic Education, Umm al-Qura University, 1983), 29; Wan Nasyrudin bin Wan Abdullah, (Senior Lecturer, Department of al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah, Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia), in an interview with the writer, February 12, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Thameen Ushama, *Methodologies of the Qur'anic Exegesis* (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Nordeen, 1995), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Tahbir Fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, ed. Faṭḥī 'Abd al-Qādir Farīd (Al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Manār, 1986), 323; Muḥammad Ḥussain Al-Zahabī, *Al-Tafsīr Wa al-Mufassirūn* (Qāhirah: Maktabah Wahbah, 1995), 1: 285. <sup>19</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Saqr, *Tafsīr Bi al-Ma'thūr*, 29.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Tahbir*, 323; Muḥammad Ḥussain Al-Zahabī, *Al-Tafsīr*, 1: 285.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Tahbir*, 323; Safiyah, *Al-Madkhal*, 300.

Allah s.w.t. says:

إِنَّ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بِهِ أَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَبْغُونَكَ لِمَا تَكُنْ لِحُكْمِ اللَّهِ فَخُذْ حُكْمَ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَكُنْ لِلْكَافِرِينَ حَكِيمًا

Al-Nisā' 4: 105

Translation: We have sent down to thee the Book in truth, that thou mightest judge between men, as guided by Allah: so be not (used) as an advocate by those who betray their trust

Allah s.w.t.

سَيَقُولُ لِمَ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابُ بِاللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ وَقَدْ خَلَقْتَهُمْ بِلُغَاتٍ بَیِّنَاتٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

Al-Naḥl 16:44

Translation: (We sent them) with Clear Signs and Books of dark prophecies; and We have sent down unto thee (also) the Message; that thou mayest explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought.

Allah s.w.t.

وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا لِيُبَيِّنَ لَكَ آيَاتِهِ وَلَعَلَّكَ تَمُنُّونَ

Al-Naḥl 16:64

Translation: And We sent down the Book to thee for the express purpose, that thou shouldst make clear to them those things in which they differ, and that it should be a guide and a mercy to those who believe.

The Prophet s.a.w. said:

أَنَّ الْأَمَانَةَ نَزَلَتْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فِي جَذْرِ قَلْبِ رَجُلٍ، وَنَزَلَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاقْرَأُوا

الْقُرْآنَ، وَعَلَّمُوا مِنَ السُّنَّةِ

Translation: Honesty descended from the Heavens and settled in the roots of the hearts of men (faithful believers), and then the Qur'an was revealed and the people read the Qur'an, (and learnt it from it) and also learnt it from the *Sunnah*.<sup>19</sup>

The Prophet s.a.w. said:

أَلَّا إِنِّ أُوتِيتُ الْكِتَابَ، وَمِثْلُ لَهُ مَعَهُ

Translation: Know that I have been given the Qur'an and something like it.<sup>20</sup>

If nothing can be found in the Qur'an or *Sunnah*, then they turn to the words of the companions (*ṣaḥābah*). For they knew the Qur'an best: they knew and understood it fully.<sup>21</sup> They witnessed its revelation, and experienced the situations in which it was revealed.<sup>22</sup> If nothing can be found in the Qur'an, *Sunnah*, and words or reports of the companions, they then turn to the words or reports of the *tābi'īn*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-l'ṭiṣām bi al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah, Bāb al-Iqtidā' bi Sunan Rasūlullāh ṣallallahu 'alayh wa sallam, number of hadith 7276.

<sup>20</sup> Hadith narrated by Abū Dawud, Kitāb al-Sunnah, Bab fī Luzūm al-Sunnah, number of hadith 4604.

<sup>21</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Taḥbīr*, 324; Muḥammad Ḥussain Al-Zahabī, *Al-Tafsīr*, 1: 285.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Taḥbīr*, 324; Muḥsin 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, *Dirāsāt Fī Uṣūl Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Baghdād: Dār alThaqāfah, 1984), 133.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Von Denffer, "Ulūm al-Qur'ān: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an (Chapter 6: Interpreting the Text)", *IslamBasics.com* website, January 13, 2015, <http://www.islambasics.com/view.php?bkID=65&chapter=7>.

The Prophet s.a.w. said:

خَيْرُ أُمَّتِ الْقَرْنِ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَنِي، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَنِي

هُمْ، ثُمَّ يَلُونَنِي ثُمَّ يَلُونَنِي ثُمَّ يَلُونَنِي ثُمَّ يَلُونَنِي ثُمَّ يَلُونَنِي

Translation: The best of my *Ummah* would be those of the generation nearest to mine. Then those nearest to them, then those nearest to them, then people would come whose witness would precede the oath and the oath will precede the witness.<sup>24</sup>

If nothing can be found in the Qur'an, *Sunnah*, the reports of the companions (*ṣaḥābah*) and *tābi'īn*, then they are allowed to practice *tafsīr bi al-dirāyah* or *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* or *tafsīr bi al-ijtihād*. However, it does not mean that they can make personal conclusions. They must base their interpretations on the determined method of Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) and fulfil certain qualifications.

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<sup>24</sup> Narrated by Muslim, Kitāb Faā'il al- ṣaḥābah Raḍiyallāh Ta'ālā 'anhum, Bāb Faḍl al-ṣaḥābah  
ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَنِي ثُمَّ يَلُونَنِي ثُمَّ يَلُونَنِي ثُمَّ يَلُونَنِي ثُمَّ يَلُونَنِي, number of hadith 2533.

Some companions of Mu'adh ibn Jabal said: When the Prophet s.a.w. intended to send Mu'adh ibn Jabal to the Yemen, he asked:

كَيْفَ تَقْضِي إِذَا عَرَضَ لَكَ قِضَاءٌ؟»، قَالَ: أَقْضِي بِكِتَابِ اللَّهِ، قَالَ: «فَإِنَّ دُونََ دِفِ كِتَابِ اللَّهِ؟»، قَالَ: فَسُنَّةِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، قَالَ: «فَإِنَّ دُونََ دِفِ سُنَّةِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، وَفِي كِتَابِ اللَّهِ؟» قَالَ: أَجْتَهُدُ رَأْيِي، وَفَلَوْ فَضَّرَبَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ صَدْرَهُ، وَقَالَ: «إِلْمُذِلِّي لِي الَّذِي وَفَّى رَسُولَ،

رَسُولِ اللَّهِ لَمَّا يَرْضِي رَسُولَ اللَّهِ

Translation: How will you judge when the occasion of deciding a case arises? He replied: I shall judge in accordance with Allah's Book. He asked: (What will you do) if you do not find any guidance in Allah's Book? He replied: (I shall act) in accordance with the *Sunnah* of the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him). He asked: (What will you do) if you do not find any guidance in the *Sunnah* of the Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) and in Allah's Book? He replied: I shall do my best to form an opinion and I shall spare no effort. The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) then patted him on the breast and said: Praise be to Allah Who has helped the messenger of the Apostle of Allah to find something which pleases the Apostle of Allah.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Hadith narrated by Abū Dawud, Kitāb al-Aqḍīyah, Bab Ijtihād al-Ra'y fī al-Qaḍā', number of hadith 3592.

### 3.2.1.2. *Tafsīr bi al-Dirāyah/al-Ra'y/al-Ijtihād*

*Tafsīr bi al-ra'y* “is not based directly on transmission of knowledge by the predecessors, but on the use of reason and *ijtihād*”. *Tafsīr bi al-ra'y* means “deriving an opinion through *ijtihād* based on sound sources.”<sup>26</sup>

The Qur’anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) based on opinion or knowledge (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y* or *tafsīr bi al-dirāyah*) is divided into two categories: praiseworthy *tafsīr* (*tafsīr mamdūhah*) and blameworthy *tafsīr* (*tafsīr madhmūmah*).<sup>27</sup>

It is permissible and acceptable for a *mufassir* to interpret the Qur’an “based on his or her opinion, but absolutely committed to the comprehension of the stipulations and relies on the meanings of the Qur’an.” This interpretation is categorised as a praiseworthy *tafsīr*. Thus, it is lawful for a *mufassir* to interpret the Qur’an using this method.<sup>28</sup> It does not mean that the commentator (*mufassir*) uses his mere opinions. But, it is in consonance with the rules of the Arabic language. It relies on proper methods in understanding the passages of the Qur’an.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ahmad Von Denffer, “Ulūm al-Qur’ān: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur’an (Chapter 6: Interpreting the Text)”, *IslamBasics.com* website, January 13, 2015, <http://www.islambasics.com/view.php?bkID=65&chapter=7>.

<sup>27</sup> Muḥammad Ḥussain Al-Zahabī, *Al-Tafsīr*, 1: 274.

<sup>28</sup> Thameen, *Methodologies of the Qur’anic Exegesis*, 20-21. <sup>33</sup> Safiyah, *Al-Madkhal*, 306.

Whereas it is considered a blameworthy *tafsīr* when one interprets the Qur'an based merely on his or her personal opinions without understanding the rules and regulations of Shariah and the Arabic language. The interpretation of the Qur'an is also categorised as blameworthy or false if someone does so without possessing the qualified knowledge for interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

The Prophet s.a.w. said:

مَنْ قَالَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ بَغْيًا عِلْمَ فَي تِ َوَّأُ مَقْعَدُهُ مِنَ النَّارِ .

Translation: Whoever says (something) about the Qur'an without knowledge, then let him take his seat in the Fire.<sup>30</sup>

*Tafsīr bi al-ra'y* which is categorized as praiseworthy *tafsīr* (*tafsīr mamdūhah*) is an interpretation of the Qur'an based on *ijtihād*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Narrated by al-Tirmidhi, *Abwāb Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Bāb Ma Jā' fī alladhī Yufasīr al-Qur'ān bi Ra'yih, number of hadith 2950, Hadith Ḥasan. <sup>36</sup> Safiyah , *Al-Madkhal*, 306.

### 3.2.2. The Qualifications of a *Mufasssir*

One who wants to interpret the Qur'an must be knowledgeable of various sciences that are required to understand the Qur'an correctly. Therefore, Muslim scholars who are specialists in this field have formulated the conditions and qualifications for those who wish to interpret the Qur'an.<sup>31</sup>

The following are the qualifications that are required to be fulfilled by those who wish to interpret the Qur'an:

1. Knowledge of the Arabic language and its vocabulary;
2. Knowledge of Arabic grammar (*nahw*);
3. Knowledge of Arabic morphology (*ṣarf*);
4. Knowledge of the basis of Arabic words and word structures (*ishtiqaq*);
5. Knowledge of Arabic rhetoric, eloquence and manners of oratory;
6. The knowledge of *qirā'āt*;
7. The knowledge of *uṣūl al-dīn*;
8. The knowledge of the principles of *fiqh* (*uṣūl al-fiqh*);
9. The knowledge of *asbāb al-nuzūl*;
10. The knowledge of *al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*;
11. The knowledge of the Hadith of the Prophet s.a.w., in particular those related to the interpretation of the Qur'an<sup>32</sup>
12. The knowledge of *fiqh*;<sup>33</sup> and
13. The knowledge of *al-qīṣaṣ*.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Thameen, *Methodologies of the Qur'anic Exegesis*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Tahbir*, 328-329; Muḥammad Ḥussain Al-Zahabī, *Al-Tafsīr*, 1: 275-277; Safiyah, *Al-Madkhal*, 293-294.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Tahbir*, 329; Al-Tūfī, Sulaymān Ibn 'Abd Al-Qawī, *Al-Iksīr Fī 'Ilm al-Tafsīr*, (Qāhirah: alMaṭba'ah Al-Namūdhiyyah, 1988), 23; Safiyah, *Al-Madkhal*, 294.

<sup>34</sup> Muḥammad Ḥussain Al-Zahabī, *Al-Tafsīr*, 1: 276; Safiyah, *Al-Madkhal*, 294.



Hence, any Muslim who wishes to interpret the Qur'an must fulfil the above qualifications. Without fulfilling these qualifications, he or she would not be eligible to do so.

For example, one who intends to interpret the Qur'an must be knowledgeable of the rules of the language and basic principles of Arabic. Without this knowledge he or she cannot do justice to his or her interpretation of the text.<sup>35</sup> Being knowledgeable of the Arabic language is very important in interpreting the Qur'an. Hence, as a commentator, he or she must be knowledgeable of linguistic command over the Arabic language, for example he or she must master its morphology and etymology. A commentator must also be well-versed in its vocabulary and idioms to understand the meaning of the verse correctly.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Thameen, *Methodologies of the Qur'anic Exegesis*, 22.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Imām al-Shāfiʿī (d.204 A.H.) said:

It is impermissible for any person to give verdicts concerning the religion of Allah, unless he is knowledgeable of the Book of Allah, and its *nāsikh* from its *mansūkh*, and its *muḥkam* from its *mutashābih*, and its interpretation, and its process of revelation, and its *makkī* from its *madanī*, and its *asbāb al-nuzūl*. On top of this, he must be knowledgeable of the *Sunnah*...

Thus, a *mufassir* is prohibited from the task of a *tafsīr* if he or she does not meet the qualifications. These qualifications are necessary to avoid any mistakes in its commentary.

The interpretation of the Qur'an must be done by a qualified individual.

In other words, one is not allowed to interpret the Qur'an without fulfilling certain conditions and qualifications.

In conclusion, our renowned Muslim scholars have determined the general principles of Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsīr*) method to avoid any misinterpretation. In addition to that, certain qualifications to interpret the text are required to be met. In other words, those who wish to interpret the al-Qur'an must fulfil the required qualifications and apply the proper methods of interpretation.

### 3.3. METHOD OF PROBLEM SOLVING THROUGH A MODEL OF QUR'ANIC

#### HERMENEUTICS APPLIED BY SIS

SIS has made an effort to uphold alternative readings of the Qur'an and the Hadith.<sup>37</sup> Besides that, the group also wishes to reinterpret Islamic principles and practices.<sup>38</sup>

This topic will discuss the method of problem solving suggested by SIS through a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics. The group suggests reinterpreting the religious texts where they assert that the method they have applied would be able to solve the problems relating to gender inequality and human rights.

Zainah<sup>39</sup> says that in reading the Islamic texts, equal rights and duties should be given to all Muslims whether they are men or women without any discrimination. She affirms that everybody who is Muslim should be given the opportunity to engage in comprehending the message of God, and act for justice, equality and the betterment of people within their family, society and country.<sup>46</sup>

It is mentioned in the book "*Qur'an and Woman*" that Wadud<sup>40</sup> does her work of rereading the Qur'an from the women's perspective and decides to concentrate on the Qur'an by applying an approach that allows her to perceive justice between both sexes as one of the foundations of the Qur'anic message. According to her, "*egalitarianism is distorted by centuries of male-interpretations,*" so she proposes the reinterpretation of the religious texts from women's perspectives. She claims that through this approach, the original meaning of the Qur'an will be uncovered.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Nathan Glazer, *Sovereignty under Challenge: How Governments Respond* (t.tp.: Transaction Publisher, t.t.), 237.

<sup>38</sup> Rosemary Skinner Keller, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Marie Cantlon, *Encyclopedia of Women and Religion in North America* (t.tp.: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1: 628.

<sup>39</sup> One of the founding members of Sisters In Islam. <sup>46</sup>

Zainah, "Introduction: Why Equality," 12.

<sup>40</sup> One of the founding members of Sisters In Islam.

<sup>41</sup> Raja Rhouni, *Secular and Islamic Feminist Critiques in the Work of Fatima Mernissi* (t.tp.: BRILL, 2010), 254.

As one of the founding members of SIS, Wadud has become one of the most important people who SIS refers to. She contributes many ideas to SIS especially in the works of reinterpretation. She cited that she plans to do a 'reading' of the Qur'an from the actual life experiences of women without the stereotypes which has been the structure for many of the interpretations by men. She said that her treatment of this matter varies from many of the works available on this topic because she is not examining the interpretations of the text, but she is reinterpreting the text.<sup>42</sup>

A method which is offered by SIS suggests that a verse should be comprehended from the situation and circumstance of its revelation or through its context. It also proposes to make reference to the entire text on a particular topic as a whole to comprehend the course of the message. It believes that this method can help to extract values and principles of the message towards understanding the Qur'an through a more holistic approach.<sup>43</sup>

SIS asserts that it has prepared "*a meticulously documented and analysed reinterpretation of the Qur'an, which takes the text as a whole and in context, in an attempt to trace the evolution of ideas, and extract the spirit of the message, in contrast to the customary exegetical method of selecting isolated verses to suit the (particular scholar's) argument of the moment.*"<sup>44</sup> It is claimed that SIS also believes the Qur'an and Hadith have to be interpreted according to historical and cultural contexts.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Fajar Bakati, 1992), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Zainah Anwar, "In Search of What Islam Really Says," *Sisters In Islam* website, January 13, 2015, <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item.774.6>.

<sup>44</sup> Akbar S. Ahmed, Hastings Donnan, *Islam, Globalization, and Postmodernity* (t.tp.: Routledge, 1994), 78. <sup>52</sup> Khoo Gaik Cheng and Gaik Cheng Khoo, *Reclaiming Adat: Contemporary Malaysian Film and Literature* (t.tp.: UBC Press, 2006), 130.

Since SIS has actively engaged in a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics as demonstrated by Wadud in interpreting the Qur'an, it is very important to understand more about it.

Through Amina Wadud, the group engaged actively in a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics that examine the socio-historical context of Revelation as a whole, and that of particular Qur'anic verses. The group examined the language of the Text and its syntactical and grammatical structure, and it looked at the Text as a whole to understand its worldview.” This combined methodology allowed an exciting interface to emerge between theology and interpretation on one hand, and daily realities of Muslim women within the contemporary socio-legal context on the other.<sup>45</sup>

### **Method: A Hermeneutical Model**

Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek term from the verb '*Hermeneuein*' (to speak / interpret) and the name '*Hermeneia*' (speech / interpretation). The term was first used by Jewish and Christian theologians and developed by Protestant Liberals when they faced difficulties in understanding the Bible.<sup>46</sup> It started from the questioning of the authenticity of the Bible as there were many different versions of it. Furthermore, the Bible is not written nor read in its original language. The term hermeneutics was then removed from the scope of theology to philosophy and produced different schools of thought.<sup>47</sup>

Wadud declared that the method which she applied in her work of reinterpreting the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, is the hermeneutical model, in which to support its conclusion, the model is concerned with three aspects of the text: the first aspect is the text's context in which it was written (in the case of the Qur'an, in which it was revealed); the second aspect is the text's grammatical composition; and the third aspect is the text's worldview.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Zainah and Shanon, *Sisters In Islam*, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Anzaruddin Ahmad, "Applying Hermeneutics (Textual Criticism) to the Qur'an: A Recritic" (Working Paper, International Seminar on al-Qur'an, Kolej Universiti Islam Selangor (KUIS), September 19-20, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Tengku Intan Zarina Tengku Puji and Muhd. Najib Abdul Kadir, "The Criticism of Liberal Muslims Against Ulum al-Qur'an: A New Tendency in the Interpretation of al-Qur'an", *ISLĀMIYYĀT* website, January 13, 2015, <http://journalarticle.ukm.my/6885/1/4328-10068-1-SM.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 3.

According to her, differences in stressing between these three aspects would often produce the variation of views in the interpretations of the text.<sup>49</sup>

Zainah says, “*We presented a methodology where a verse should be understood through the context of its revelation,*”<sup>50</sup>

Some traditional interpretations were disputed by Wadud, particularly about certain words used in the Qur’an to define and explain universal guidance. She claimed that some discussions of traditional interpretations were gender biased, thus she adapts them to become unbiased or provides neutral terms. According to her, the other discussions of traditional interpretations heretofore that were regarded as universal was further examined on the basis of their restrictions and expressions particular to seventh century Arabia. She also took into consideration historical information to occasions of the revelation and its general period.<sup>51</sup>

Wadud proclaims that in doing her research, the early question behind it was why does the Qur’an indicate males and females in certain verses (as in ‘Believing males and Believing females’ [masculine plural followed by feminine plural forms] ), while in other verses it uses a more generic (‘*Oh you who believe...*’ [masculine plural]) form? She found that the masculine plural form which is used in the Qur’an is meant to comprise both sexes male and female, equally, unless it contains definite indication for its special use to males.<sup>52</sup>

According to her, all the verses which contained any reference to women, separately or together with men, were analysed with the method of “*tafsīr al Qur’ān bi al Qur’ān*” (interpretation of the Qur’an based on the Qur’an itself). However she detailed the particular terms of this method in which each verse was examined and analysed in the:<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Zainah Anwar, “In Search of What Islam Really Says,” *Sisters In Islam* website, January 13, 2015, <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item.774.6>.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> , 5.

*Ibid.*

1. context of the verse;
2. context of the same subjects discussed in the Qur'an;
3. light of same language and syntactical structures used in another place in the Qur'an;
4. light of overriding the principles of the Qur'an; and
5. context of the worldview of the Qur'an.

Wadud says that the fundamentals and principles of the Qur'an are permanent and fixed. The Qur'an, she states, acts as a catalyst affecting human behaviour in society in which to apply its principles, society must first understand them before applying them according to their own unique interpretations. According to her, the principles of the text do not change, but the capability and distinctiveness of the understanding and reflection of the texts' principles are based on the society of a nation.<sup>54</sup>

According to Wadud, *“the Qur'an must be flexible enough to accommodate innumerable cultural situations because of its claims to be universally beneficial to those who believe.”* She says that the contradiction with the universal purpose of the Qur'an occurs when they restrict its application by having only one particular cultural point of view.<sup>55</sup>

She declared that she used a different approach to understand the Qur'an to ensure that she is not imprisoned in the context of a gender-distinct language, so that she approaches the text from outside.<sup>56</sup>

In the absence of the Arabic neuter, Wadud mentions the importance of having a new look into the Qur'anic language with considerations to gender. However, from the viewpoint

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>56</sup> , 6-7.

*Ibid.*

of the universal Qur'anic guidance, she believes that each use of masculine or feminine persons is not essentially limited to the stated gender. She shows that gender distinction is overcome by the text to fulfil its purpose of universal guidance.<sup>57</sup>

According to Wadud, the discriminating perspectives towards women have affected the position of women in Muslim societies and the interpretation of women in the Qur'an. Because of that, she states that she worked against those interpretations that discriminate women.<sup>58</sup>

Wadud says that the Qur'an is not limited to only one particular society. For that reason, all new Muslim societies must comprehend the principles outlined in the text, so that they can apply those principles in different social circumstances.<sup>59</sup>

She gives an example that one of the principles mentioned in the Qur'an is modesty. In Saudi Arabia, at the time of the revelation, she mentions that the wealthy and powerful women of certain tribes were protected with prevailing practices where these women were veiled and secluded. She claims that the important point that Muslims should understand here is the principle of modesty and not the veiling and seclusion which was demonstrated in that situation. According to her, modesty is for all believing women in which they are deserved the greatest respect and protection of their modesty—though it is observed differently in various societies. Therefore, she believes that Muslims should comprehend the principle of modesty and should preserve it on the basis of faith.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> , 10.

*Ibid.*



Wadud says that this method is different from earlier exegetical methodologies, because it limits the details to a definite situation, and then extracts the principles as intended by the Qur'an through that particular situation. After understanding those principles Muslims

can then apply them in a variety of different cultural situations. She emphasizes that the Qur'anic interpretation is constantly evolving over time and can never end.<sup>61</sup>

According to Wadud, there is a style of language that cannot be interpreted empirically and literally, particularly on the discussion of the Unseen which is hidden from human perception. She emphasizes that as a result, particular stress must be made on the language used to relate about the Unseen.<sup>62</sup>

Wadud concludes that a relationship is required to be made between guidance and every theme discussed in the Qur'an. She affirms that the Qur'an identifies itself as *hudan*: guidance and it (guidance) extends beyond gender distinction.<sup>63</sup>

Zainah says:

“... contemporary family laws, whether codified or uncoded, are not divine, but are based on centuries-old, human-made fiqh interpretations that were enacted into law by colonial powers and national governments. Since these interpretations and laws are human-made and concern relations between humans, they can change within the framework of Islamic principles and in accordance with the changing realities of time and place.”<sup>64</sup>

Thus, the method of problem solving that is offered by SIS proposes that the Qur'anic verses should be understood through the context of its revelation, reviewing the entire text on a particular topic as a whole, interpreting the Qur'an based on the concept of equality and justice, understanding the teachings of Islam according to the context of contemporary Muslims, and reading the Qur'an from a woman's perspective. Through Wadud, the group engaged actively in a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics, in which this model is concerned with the aspect of the text's context in which it was revealed; the text's grammatical composition; and the text's worldview.

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Zainah, “Introduction: Why Equality,” 17.

### **3.4. AN ANALYSIS ON THE METHOD OF PROBLEM SOLVING THROUGH A MODEL OF QUR'ANIC HERMENEUTICS APPLIED BY SIS FROM AN ISLAMIC THOUGHT PERSPECTIVE**

This topic will use the general principles of the method of problem solving through Qur'anic interpretation as determined by the renowned Muslim scholars in this field as a tool to analyze the method of problem solving of SIS through a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics.

A model of Qur'anic hermeneutics is the method that has been implemented by SIS to solve certain problems in society. Thus, as a Muslim and member of society, it is necessary to know whether the method of problem solving that is used by this group is based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah* or not.

With regards to the method of Qur'anic interpretation applied by Sisters In Islam, the group claimed that they engaged actively in a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics by Wadud. Therefore it is very important to analyze this method in order to determine whether it can or cannot be accepted within the Islamic context.

There is no accurate information as to the source of the hermeneutical model implemented by Wadud. However, in her explanation of it, Wadud was likely influenced by other Muslim Feminist groups from other countries because many of them also use the term "hermeneutics" in their models of Qur'anic interpretation. Her clarification of the model also shares similarities with those given by the Muslim Feminist groups. She may be convinced that her methods would best solve the problems of inequality and injustice in society. It is likely influenced by her life experience as an African-American living among a whitemajority community, feeling unfairly treated as well as her background as a divorcee and single mother. These may have played a big part in her chosen approach to the Qur'anic interpretation.

According to Wadud,

A hermeneutical model is concerned with three aspects of the text, in order to support its conclusion”:<sup>65</sup>

1. the context in which the text was written (in the case of the Qur’an, in which it was revealed);
2. the grammatical composition of the text (how it says what it says);
3. the whole text, its Weltanschauung or world-view.

The aspects of “*the context in which the text was revealed*,” “*the grammatical composition of the text*” and “*the whole text*” that concerns the hermeneutical model are insufficient to support the conclusions of the interpretation of the Qur’an and *Sunnah*. There are many other aspects that must be taken into consideration as a commentator (*mufassir*) in order to get the actual meaning of the texts as discussed in the previous topic. Whereas the third aspect (the text as a whole, its Weltanschauung or worldview) that is stressed in this model is too general in nature. It has to put certain guidelines in this aspect to avoid liberal interpretations.

It is questionable why Wadud uses the method of *tafsir al-Qur’an bi al-Qur’an* only for verses containing references to women. What about the other verses? Why does she not use this method (*tafsir al-Qur’an bi al-Qur’an*) for other interpretations?

The model of Qur’anic hermeneutics only mention the method of “*tafsir al Qur’an bi al-Qur’an*”, however this model does not mention the other methods as outlined by renowned Muslim scholars. These include the method of interpretation of the Qur’an by the *Sunnah*, the interpretation of the Qur’an based on what has been transmitted by the *ṣaḥābah*, and the interpretation of the Qur’an based on what has been transmitted by the *tābi’in*.

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<sup>65</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman*, 3.

The interpretation of the Qur'an recognized by the *ummah* is the interpretation that meets the determined methods set out by Muslim scholars. Thus, any *mufassir* who wishes to *tafsir* should apply the methods that have been determined by the Muslim scholars who are specialists in this field.

According to Wadud, “*prior text adds considerably to the perspective and conclusions of the interpretation.*”<sup>66</sup> Regarding this statement, she should acknowledge that the Muslim scholars were very careful in their interpretations of the text to ensure that they did not make personal conclusions. It is impossible for them to base their interpretations merely on prior texts that they had read. They took much caution in issuing an interpretation. They are considered as specialists and well-versed in the Arabic language. Being specialists of the Arabic language is crucial in determining the actual meaning of the text. They were not only well-versed in the Arabic language, but they were also experts in other fields that were required of them to ensure the accuracy of their interpretations. Their method of interpretation is in accordance with the methods approved by professionals in the field of interpretation. They constantly made sure their interpretations were not influenced by their backgrounds, cultures, or other aspects that could lead their interpretations to stray from the true teachings of Islam.

Wadud claims that some discussions of traditional interpretations are “gendered”. She also claims that there are traditional interpretations regarded as universal for aspects she believes are actually specific to seventh-century Arabia. These accusations come from her misunderstanding of the concept of justice and equality. She also generalises the matter based on isolated cases. Besides that, the improper method that she uses in the interpretation of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* will lead to inaccurate interpretations and misleading teachings. The

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<sup>66</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 5.

proper and correct interpretations can only be extracted using the methods specifically outlined by the Muslim scholars.

The group must first understand equality and justice from the Islamic perspective, before judging the interpretation of others as bias. To make the accusation of gender discrimination contained in the interpretations of male Muslim scholars is baseless and objectionable.

According to Assistant Prof. Dr Sofiyah, when we look at the history of interpretation, we find that *tafsīr* or Qur'anic interpretation is a tool to understand the Qur'an. The text or *naṣ* of the Qur'an is at times general and sometimes directive. How does one practice the text or *naṣ* that is directive in nature? They must refer to the Prophet's teachings.<sup>67</sup>

Women were oppressed by men during the days of *jāhiliyyah*. Islam was then revealed and it condemns all kinds of discrimination that was being practiced in society. There is no bias against women as this was what even the Prophet s.a.w. himself demonstrated. During the time of the *ṣaḥābah*, the *ṣaḥābah* interpreted the Qur'an with integrity; there were no discriminatory nuances against women in any of their interpretations. Although the *ṣaḥābah* were not free from mistakes, if any one of them were found to be in error, they would be corrected by other *ṣaḥābahs* as they lived among a pious community. Thus, they constantly corrected and advised each other in matters of religion.<sup>68</sup>

From then until now, Muslim scholars continue to explain the true teachings of Islam in issues related to women. These Muslim scholars refer to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* in discussing justice between genders and other issues. Misinterpretation of the Qur'an can be

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<sup>67</sup> Safiyah Shams al-Din (Assistant Professor, Department of Qur'an and Sunnah Studies, Kuliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic University Malaysia), in an interview with the writer, September 4, 2014.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

found when someone did not apply the proper methods of interpretation. That is the reason why the great Muslim scholars have determined the methods of interpretation to avoid incorrect or misleading understanding of the Qur'anic text. Muslim scholars have continuously made corrections to any misunderstanding made by interpreters. Thus, it is unfair for anyone to judge these Muslim scholars and make generalisations based on isolated cases. They should avoid making references to isolated interpretations in their arguments against Muslim scholars who they accuse of discrimination. The group should be impartial in this matter.

According to Assistant Prof. Dr. Sofiyah, the interpreter must apply the proper methods of interpretation. The interpreter may have differences in opinions as long as the text or *naş* is not *qat'ī*. They may differ in their interpretations because they live in different situations and places. Although it is not prohibited to have different opinions for certain interpretations, for example in texts that are general in nature, the text must be interpreted based on the determined method of interpretation, and not from personal conclusions. The opinion must also not contradict with the *naş şarīh*.<sup>69</sup>

According to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Azizah, the interpreters of the Qur'an are qualified people and have met the necessary qualifications. Many *mujtahid* and Muslim scholars are men. Although there are people refer to them as irrelevant to our time, they are nonetheless qualified people to interpret the texts. Based on the evolution and history of *fiqh*, from the time of the Prophet s.a.w. to the period of *tābi' tābi'īn*, many of the '*ulamā*' are men. The founders of *madhāhib* were also all men.<sup>70</sup>

In her opinion, many of these intelligent people, interpreters, and qualified people were men. Thus, she found that it was not a question of bias when one interprets the verse of

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Azizah Mohammad (Associate Professor, Department of Islamic Family Laws, AIKOL, International Islamic University Malaysia), in an interview with the researcher, April 16, 2014.

the Qur'an based on the laws of Allah s.w.t.. She also mentions that there is not only one interpreter rather a multiple number of them and if one compares the interpretations from the time of the Prophet s.a.w. to the ones found today, they will find that the rules are still the same.<sup>71</sup>

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Azizah then mentions that those who interpret the Qur'an are those who meet its qualifications, for example their proficiency in the Arabic language. She does not believe that their Arabic background or culture influences their interpretations. Muslims themselves have certain limitations. As Muslims who believe in Allah s.w.t., they will work in line with what Allah s.w.t. commands of them. There are certain guidelines in interpreting the Qur'an. It does not matter whether you are a man or a woman. She does not believe that the male Muslim scholars interpret the Qur'an with bias towards the female gender for their benefit alone.<sup>72</sup>

Muslim scholars have applied the proper methods as determined by the experts in interpreting the Qur'an to ensure their interpretations are parallel with the original teaching of Islam and serve justice to all parties. They also avoid from being biased in their work of interpretation as their personal quest to seek Allah's pleasure. (*riḍā*).

It is unacceptable to accuse that some commentators (*mufassir*) were intentionally biased in interpreting the text as they were people who were vigilant in their trust (*amānah*) of *tafsīr*. They believed that the task of interpretation is a trust (*amanāh*) from Allah s.w.t.. Thus, they would have ensured that their interpretations are based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah* and abstained from succumbing to their personal interests.

Moreover, the male Muslim scholars were people who were not only knowledgeable, but they also pious (*taqwā*). This should protect them from purposely providing discrepant

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*



interpretations for the purpose of elevating the status of the male gender over the other. In addition to this, they were known to devote their lives to Allah s.w.t.. They abstained from committing any acts of dishonesty that would result in accumulation of sin. They refrained from making interpretations based merely on personal opinion. Thus, it is farfetched for them to unanimously agree on a matter prohibited by Allah s.w.t. such as discriminating women in their interpretations or silencing the rights of women.

Wadud also does not provide any evidence of her claim that there are Muslim scholars who declare there is only one interpretation of the Qur'an. Who are these scholars of *tafsīr* that declare that only their interpretations are correct?

SIS should recognise that interpretations which were dismissed or rejected were those produced by individuals who did not meet the qualifications as *mufassir* and did not follow the proper methods of interpretation.

Besides determining the guidelines of interpretation, Muslim scholars have also determined the qualifications that are required for the commentator (*mufassir*) as has mentioned in the previous topic of “the qualifications of a *mufassir*”. Fulfilling the qualifications as a commentator (*mufassir*) would contribute to the impartiality (*'adl*) of the interpretation. Therefore, the members of SIS should also be qualified as commentator (*mufassir*) before producing any interpretations. They must be qualified in the field that they intend to debate and make reference with knowledgeable parties in their discussions about Islam.

Within the aspect of who is qualified to interpret the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, whether man or woman, the group should acknowledge that there are no Muslim scholars who have claimed that women are prohibited from interpreting the Qur'an. Both men and women are allowed to engage themselves in the interpretation of the Qur'an as long as they are able to fulfil the qualifications as *mufassir* and follow the outlined methods.

Thus, if the woman member of the group wishes to interpret the Qur'an, this is not prohibited, but the woman who wishes to interpret it should be qualified in doing so. It is not a matter of whether a man or a woman is interpreting the text, rather it is the concern of whether they meet the qualifications or not.

It should be noted that the correct interpretation is the interpretation of a qualified individual who has implemented the determined methods. One cannot be free from any guidelines to interpret the text at their own whim. In other words, if someone intends to undergo *tafsīr*, he or she must be qualified as a *mufassir* and follow the determined method in doing so.

The researcher also found other accusations against Muslim scholars in the statements given by Wadud, and they are as follows:

- i. *"...the customary exegetical method of selecting isolated verses to suit the (particular scholar's) argument of the moment."*
- ii. *"...egalitarianism is distorted by centuries of male-interpretations."*
- iii. *"...there are stereotypes which have been the framework for many of the male interpretations."*

The above accusations against Muslim scholars are baseless without any proof of evidence given. Wadud did not mention who the Muslim scholars were. She failed to provide any proof to these claims. Were they isolated cases? This matter cannot be generalised as they are the basic matters already accepted by a majority of the *ummah*.

With reference to the issue of women's status, no one from among Muslim scholars claim that the status of women is inferior to men. They also have not made any claim that men and women are different in their accessibility to guidance (mainly to Qur'anic guidance), and in the rewards due to them in the Hereafter. In fact, men and women complement one another. Thus, it is not valid to say that there is discrimination against women as an effect of the position of women in Muslim societies and the

interpretation of the women from the Qur'an. How does one work against the notion that the interpretations discriminate women if it is not even true? Firstly, the definition of justice from the Islamic perspective must be clear before one accuses others of being unjust or discriminatory. Secondly, they cannot judge male Muslim scholars as bias against women in their interpretations of the text based on a few isolated cases.

With reference to the method that was used by SIS in their interpretation of the Qur'an, Zainah says, "*We presented a methodology where a verse should be understood through the context of its revelation,*"<sup>73</sup>

Based on the above statement, the group should understand that there is no denying that knowing the context of its revelation is essential in understanding the meaning of the verses, but there are many other principles that should be taken into consideration towards obtaining the correct interpretations. Knowing only the context of its revelation is insufficient in getting the actual meaning of the text.

Zainah says,

... contemporary family laws, whether codified or uncoded, are not divine, but are based on centuries-old, human-made fiqh interpretations that were enacted into law by colonial powers and national governments. Since these interpretations and laws are human-made and concern relations between humans, they can change within the framework of Islamic principles and in accordance with the changing realities of time and place.<sup>74</sup>

Based on the above statement, the group should know that the interpretations made by Muslim scholars are not merely based on what is rational. Scholars interpret the texts based on Islamic sources and supporting evidence. It should be understood that even though interpretation is done by humans (*mufassir*), it doesn't mean that the law or *hukm* comes from *mufassir*. This is the reason why people who wish to interpret the Qur'anic verses must

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<sup>73</sup> Zainah Anwar, "In Search of What Islam Really Says," *Sisters In Islam* website, January 13, 2015, <http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/news.php?item.774.6>.

<sup>74</sup> Zainah, "Introduction: Why Equality," 17.

fulfill certain qualifications and follow the predetermined methods of *tafsīr*, to ensure their interpretation is based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, and not based merely on what is considered rational.

They cannot interpret the Qur'an and *Sunnah* merely to suit the changing realities of time and place or with accordance to contemporary Muslim context and culture. The interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith may consider the changing realities of time and place, but it is not a must to change according to its context. Thus, in one aspect, we may consider the changing realities of time and place, but it is not to the extent that the Qur'an and Hadith have to be fully interpreted with accordance to the contemporary context. However, the contemporary Muslim context and culture should be adapted in order to accord with teachings of Islam and not the other way around.

One is not allowed to interpret the Qur'an and Hadith based merely on personal opinion even when they claim that they do so in order to adapt with the changing realities of time and place or with contemporary context and culture. In Islam, there are matters which are *thawābit* (unchangeable) and there are matters which are *mutaghayyirāt* (changeable). For the things which are *mutaghayyirāt*, they can be changed, but with the condition that the change must be based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*.

In the context of Islamic law, the laws that can change are the laws which have been decided by the *dalīl* that is interpretable (*ẓanni*), but not the laws which have been decided by *dalīl* that is *qati* 'ī.

Wadud claims that "... *the Qur'an must be flexible enough to accommodate innumerable cultural situations because of its claims to be universally beneficial to those who believe.*" However, this should be adapted to the following: "... *the cultural circumstances must be flexible enough to adapt according to the teachings of the Qur'an and not otherwise.*"

In this matter, Wadud must realize that the interpretation of the Qur'an may consider the cultural situation, but it is not a necessity. Changes are only possible to matters that are related to the *dalīl* which is *ẓannī* and must be based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. They must understand that not all matters can be changed to adhere to personal interests.

If the group intends to interpret the Qur'an and Hadith or reinterpret Islamic principles and practices, they have to ensure that the interpretation must be done based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. They must be qualified to do so and have sufficient knowledge of it. It is not allowed to reinterpret the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic principles and practices merely based on personal opinion and interest without deeper knowledge.

It is true that the principles of the text do not change, but the capability and distinctiveness of the understanding and reflection of the text's principles in the society of a nation should still be guided by what is contained in the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. Their understanding and reflections should be parallel with both primary sources. They are still bound to certain methods to attain the correct understanding of the text. Besides that, they have to ensure that they really know and understand those principles according to the Islamic thought perspective and not just based on their personal opinions.

The *ṣaḥābah* were trained to search for the meanings of the Qur'anic verses from within the Qur'an itself, and then this is followed by the explanations and practices of the Prophet s.a.w.. After the death of the Prophet s.a.w., the new converts of Islam referred first to the Qur'an to explain itself, and then they referred to the *ṣaḥābah* to interpret the Qur'an to them. The *ṣaḥābah* would explain the circumstances in which the verses were revealed, the explanation of the Prophet's statements and his actions, and finally the *ṣaḥābah* would let them know the meanings of some words in the verse of the Qur'an that required explanation for those outside of the Arabian Peninsula.

After the period of the *ṣaḥābah*, the Muslim scholars among the *tābi‘īn* took on the task of conveying the original meanings of the Qur’an exactly as they had received them from the *ṣaḥābah* to the Muslim generations that came after that. The various narrations of *tafsīr* from the *tābi‘īn* were then collated and recorded in the period of the third generation after the Prophet s.a.w.. Based on the methodology of the Prophet s.a.w., *ṣaḥābah* (companion) and that of the early generations of Muslim scholars which followed them, there are certain steps and methods that should be followed by a *mufasssīr* to interpret the Qur’an: they are *tafsīr* of the Qur’an by the Qur’an, *tafsīr* of the Qur’an by the *Sunnah*, *tafsīr* of the Qur’an by *ṣaḥābah*, *tafsīr* of the Qur’an by *tābi‘īn*, and *tafsīr* of the Qur’an by opinion.

The question here is: Do the Sisters In Islam follow the steps and methods deduced by our great Muslim scholars to ensure that they make the correct interpretation (*tafsīr*) of the Qur’an? If we look in to the method of a model of Qur’anic hermeneutics as suggested by the group, we will find that this method does not fulfil the proper method as determined by Muslim scholars of this field. If the group wishes to reinterpret the Qur’an, they have to follow the steps and method as determined by the great Muslim scholars. They have to begin their interpretation (*tafsīr*) of each verse in the Qur’an by the Qur’an first, then interpretation (*tafsīr*) of the Qur’an by the *Sunnah*, interpretation (*tafsīr*) of the Qur’an by *ṣaḥābah*, interpretation (*tafsīr*) of the Qur’an by *tābi‘īn*, and then interpretation (*tafsīr*) of the Qur’an by opinion.

Hence, the only acceptable interpretation (*tafsīr*) is that which adheres to the proper method as deduced by our great Muslim scholars. Besides that, the group also has to make sure that any member of its group who wants to interpret or reinterpret the Qur’an should fulfil the qualifications of a *mufasssīr*. Only a Muslim who meets the conditions as a *mufasssīr* is allowed to interpret the Qur’an.

The method of a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics as suggested by SIS will open a wider field of interpretation without limitation. This method will also allow others to interpret the Qur'an incorrectly. Our great Muslim scholars have already determined the methods and conditions for those who wish to interpret the Qur'an. These methods and conditions have been debated and agreed upon to avoid discrepant interpretations.

The method of a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics as suggested by this group is based merely on relative interpretation, suspicion, doubt and life experience.

Then, another question arises; do Muslims require the method of a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics to help them understand the actual meaning of the Qur'an? The answer is of course no, because the method of interpretation of the Qur'an implemented by our *mufasssir* is clear and includes every knowledge to help the *mufasssir* understand the text of the Qur'an.

### **3.5. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, even though the method of a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics mentions a few principles that are necessary in the work of interpretation, they are insufficient in obtaining the actual meaning of the interpretation of the text. There are many other principles and guidelines that must be followed and fulfilled by the group in order to obtain the true meaning of the verses. In addition to this, there are also principles of SIS's interpretation method that are too general and can lead to free interpretation without limitation. Moreover, some of SIS's principles of interpretation contradict with the general principles of Qur'anic interpretation as determined by Muslim scholars of this field. Thus, the method of problem solving through a model of Qur'anic hermeneutics used by SIS does not fulfil the requirements of acceptable method for Qur'anic interpretation from an Islamic thought perspective.









*Ibid.*