



Redefining Qiwwamah as a Transformative Approach to Gender Role Sharing and Redressing Toxic Masculinities in Muslim Communities

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Abstract

Qiwwamah, traditionally interpreted as male authority or headship within Islamic jurisprudence and theology, has often been employed to legitimize patriarchal norms and uphold gendered hierarchies in Muslim societies. These interpretations, shaped by historical, cultural, and legal contexts, have reinforced masculinities rooted in control and dominance. However, recent scholarly work within contemporary Shia thought has begun to reconceptualize qiwwamah in a manner that departs from patriarchal paradigms and instead aligns with emerging frameworks of gender equity and shared familial roles. This paper introduces and applies a gender role-sharing framework that promotes equitable distribution of domestic responsibilities, decision-making power, economic contributions, and moral leadership between spouses. Central to this model are values such as mutual care, emotional intimacy, cultural sensitivity, love, respect, and the affirmation of personal agency and autonomy for both partners. The study argues that realizing true gender equity in Muslim communities requires critically challenging entrenched assumptions, dismantling paternalistic oversight, and rejecting benevolent sexism that often masks deeper inequalities. By reimagining qiwwamah not as a static, male-dominated hierarchy but as a dynamic and reciprocal partnership, this redefinition has the potential to subvert toxic forms of masculinity and offer a transformative model for future Muslim social development. The paper thus positions this evolved understanding of qiwwamah as a meaningful contribution to broader discourses on Islamic gender ethics and as a viable pathway toward justice-oriented Muslim family structures.

Keywords:

Familial Masculinities, Gender Role Sharing, Diasporic Shia-Muslim Scholars, Qiwwamah.

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Introduction

In recent times, more women are into jobs and professions around the world and especially in the diaspora all members of the family work for enjoying a better life [1]. As a result of this move, families need restructuring of familial patterns by redefining familial masculinities. The post-development agenda 2030 also focuses on redefining familial masculinities. This approach has been discussed and highlighted in national and international policy documents calling for men to share roles with their partners.

Muslim diasporic scholars or the ones who have been living in diaspora also highlight the significance to share familial roles from an Islamic perspective. They are providing Muslim men and women with that kind of knowledge, which was not shared earlier, or some have provided with a new explanation. As a result, the existing feminist discourse that terms religious knowledge created and disseminated by male scholars as ‘malestream’ promoting gender inequalities has been addressed. The questions of *qiwamah* that were earlier posed by Omaira [2] and Hosseini [3] are addressed recently.

It is interesting to note that instead of condemnation, many scholars are understanding the need to restudy and redefine or reshare the meanings of these terms that are more inclined towards equitable distribution. This paper studies how religious knowledge by contemporary Shia-Muslim male scholars is introducing new meanings and understandings of certain contested terminologies especially the terminologies related with *qiwamah*.

Literature Review

Muslim cultures around the world are dominated by patriarchal culture and ethos. The ample research confirms that patriarchal culture reinforces and promotes the gendered concept of masculinity to men. Masculinity is gender as per feminist scholars because it is socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes of men. In addition, masculinity also has many manifestations and forms [4] that differ as per context, environment, power position, etc. However, in any form it stands on two legs: the domination of women, and a hierarchy of intermale dominance. The story begins when male childbirth is celebrated because men are considered heirs who would carry on the bloodline and take the family name forward [5]. The socio-cultural processes of gender formation; socialization, treatment, roles, and behavioral patterns are all shaped in a way that maintains gendered relationships between siblings and spouses and distributes power and privilege unevenly [6]. Thus, the aspects of culture, family scripts and life stories all inform individual men how they should behave within their intimate relationships. In addition, all knowledge production systems i.e., academia, religion, culture, media, and the state play a key role in forming masculinities within a specific context.

However, the works by Omaira and Ziba Mir Hosseini shares an overarching picture. They contend that the underlying issue of all these toxic masculinities and male authority lies with the concept of *qiwamah*. Omaira Abou-Bakr writes in her chapter ‘The Interpretive Legacy of *Qiwamah* as an Exegetical Construct about some traditionalist Sunni scholars who have interpreted *qiwamah* in a way that favors men. She mentions Al Tabri who used the phrase *ahl qiyam ‘ala nisa’ihim* (watching over or being in charge of their women) to establish men’s collective task or responsibility of *qiyam* in disciplining women [7]. Similarly, Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn Umar al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144) consolidated superiority and the right to discipline by introducing a metaphor that likened the relationship between men and women to the relationship between ‘rulers’ and ‘subjects’, in that they ‘manage them by ordering and forbidding’ (*amirin, nahin*). Second, he consolidated the notion of *tafdil* (favoring) as the God-given reason for the fact that they are in control *musaytirin* [8].

On the other hand, Musawah, a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family which was launched in February 2009 at a Global Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia initiated an initiative and a project under the Ziba Mir-Hosseini's direction to rethink authority in Muslim tradition, focusing on *qiwamah* and *wilayah*. These concepts, traditionally

interpreted by Muslim scholars, place women under male control, underpinning contemporary Muslim family laws. Qiwāmah refers to a husband's authority over his wife, while wilayah denotes male guardianship over female family members, such as fathers over daughters in marriage contracts. These notions inform legal provisions regulating spousal and parental rights and duties [9]. Central to this discussion is Qur'an Verse 4:34, which supports men's authority over women and is widely known among Muslims in gender relations and family law contexts. The verse has been contested for over a century, with substantial literature challenging its traditional interpretations. Mir-Hosseini argues that feminist scholars and reformists advocate for reinterpretations of this verse to promote justice and equality, challenging the gender biases in traditional exegesis. Not only feminists but the state policies, UN's sustainable development goals 2030 's agenda proposes "recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure, and social protection policies, and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate." To achieve this, many countries including Pakistan enacted different policies to promote engaging father and husband approaches by creating discourse through engaging all main actor: religion, media, academia, state apparatus etc. [10]. In this vein, Islamic Shia scholars offer redefined concept of qiwāmah to maintain a perfect family life and to integrate well in the present scenario.

This paper fills this gap by highlighting the works of those Islamic Shia scholars who are teaching in their own respective national universities or internationally or lecturing or delivering sermons in the imam bargahs or mosques and have redefined the concept of *qiwāmah*. This study assesses the redefined concept of *qiwāmah* by conceptualizing the redefined familial masculinities as gender role sharing. It builds on the explanations of three scholars, their redefinitions expressed in the online blogs, and research papers available on Shia Muslim sites like al-islam.org and others.

Theoretical Framework

This piece of research builds on an analytical framework that lies on the intersection of masculinity and religion. It builds on the premise that the religious construct or frameworks, particularly qiwāmah serve as a critical force in reshaping the gender norms, roles, or relationships and also redefining masculinities in Muslim communities. Traditionally, Qiwāmah is a religious Islamic concept – associated with male authority, reinforcing patriarchal norms that shape gender relations and masculinities. However, by re-examining qiwāmah through a contemporary lens, this study argues that headship or qiwāmah can be redefined in ways that challenge the entrenched toxic traits, such as male dominance, and lead men to engage in more equitable relationships with their spouses. By drawing on Connell's theory of masculinity, which posits that masculinity is not fixed but constructed through relationships, the framework suggests that reinterpreting religious constructs like qiwāmah can facilitate more equitable gender dynamics – moving away from dominance and control toward partnership and mutual respect in both familial and societal roles and relationships. This conceptual framework is identified as gender role sharing framework because it aligns with the Connell's theoretical understanding of masculinities as relationally constructed and adaptable. By integrating this perspective, the framework highlights the fluidity of the gender roles and the potential for religious constructs like qiwāmah to evolve in support of gender equity through balanced masculinities.

Methodology

For the collection of relevant data, we employed both "textual and contextual approaches" to gain a comprehensive understanding of qiwāmah within Islamic traditions.

Textual Approach

Firstly, we utilized 'hermeneutic approaches' such as thematic analysis and comparative study of interpretations by esteemed scholars. By scrutinizing diverse perspectives

through "exegetical traditions (tafsir)", we aimed to unearth the underlying meanings and implications of these verses regarding qiwāmah in Islam. This included examining "literal interpretations" and "philological analysis" to understand the Quranic verses based on their direct, intrinsic meanings. Through this analysis, we gained valuable insights into the complexities and divergences surrounding the concept of qiwāmah within Islamic scripture.

Contextual Approach

Secondly, we adopted a "contextual approach" by visiting important Shia websites, including scholars' own profiles, official websites, and al-islam.org. we collected blogs, articles, and research papers that cover the topics of qiwāmah and related issues. By employing 'content analysis methods' such as thematic coding and qualitative data analysis software, we meticulously dissected the literature to uncover recurring themes, perspectives, and theoretical frameworks. This involved examining the 'socio-historical context' of the revelations and their contemporary relevance. This methodological approach allowed me to discern the overarching narratives shaping contemporary discussions on gender roles within Shia Islam.

We gleaned from the scholarly works of Ali Torkamani, Ahmad Haneef, and Syed Mujtaba Lari, and Sayyid Through this exploration, we gained a deeper understanding of the evolving discourse on qiwāmah and the gender roles within Shia Islam, and the contributions of these scholars to this ongoing dialogue. By integrating "traditional and modern insights" and encouraging "interdisciplinary dialogue", we aimed to bridge the gap between the textual integrity of the Quran and its application in contemporary contexts, thereby contributing to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of qiwāmah.

Units of Data Collection and Analysis

UDC - 1: Quranic verses of Chapter 4 The Women - Al Nisa 19; 32; 34 and their interpretations: We embarked on a deep exploration of Quranic verses concerning gender roles, particularly focusing on concepts like qiwāmah, through a meticulous textual and contextual analysis. Engaging with the original Arabic text, and the English translation we delved into historical contexts and various interpretations offered by scholars; Ayatollah Tabatabai [11], Ayatullah Nasir Makarem Shirazi [12].

UDC - 2: Blogs, Articles

We have scrutinized a myriad of literature, including blogs, articles, and research papers, discussing the scholarly contributions of figures like Ali Torkamani, Ahmad Haneef, and Syed Mujtaba Lari and Sayyid Moustafa Al-Qazwini to the discourse on gender roles in Shia Islam. With a critical eye, we engaged in a thorough examination of their interpretations and arguments.

Profile of the UDC 2 - Scholars

My primary units of data collection consist of three scholars Syed Ali Torkamani , Ahmed Hanif, and Syed Mujtaba Lari.

Syed Mujtaba Lari was an Iranian Twelver Shia scholar who was born in 25 in Lar, Iran, and died on the 9th March 2013 at the age of 88. After completing his preliminary studies in Lar in 1953, he continued his Islamic studies in Qom city in Iran. He went to Germany and received his medical treatment there in 1963. He lived in diaspora "Germany" and realized different issues and has had a different lens to see and discuss various matters. He authored many books but his book "Western Civilization Through Muslim Eyes" has been translated into many languages. In 1964, he founded a charity in Lar to help the poor and promote Islam among rural youth. The charity-built mosques, schools, and clinics across Iran.

Ahmed Hanif is a living Twelve Shia scholar who was born to an Afro-Caribbean Roman Catholic family in Trinidad in 1950s. He grew up witnessing the Vietnam war and Black power movements. He left Trinidad while he was seventeen and settled in Canada to pursue his education. His experience in the diaspora and studied at Qom seminary. Both helped him to see the world around him differently.

Hossein Ali Torkamani is an Iranian Twelver Shia is an Islamic research scholar and professor. He was born in 1959 into a religious, middle-class family in the city of Hamedan. In 1979, he was admitted to the Chemical Engineering program at Iran University of Science and Technology. During the Cultural Revolution, he served in the cultural department of the Jihad of Construction and the educational affairs of Tehran's District 16. He then changed his major to Theology at the University of Tehran, where he defended his doctoral dissertation with a grade of 19.5 out of 20. Since 1990, he has been a faculty member at Bu-Ali Sina University. He published many works and articles for national and international journals and magazines. His work family- the Center of Stability is the only work available in English online.

Sayyid Dr. Moustafa al-Musawi al-Qazwini (born 1961) is an Iraqi-American Shia imam based in Orange County, California. He is the imam of the Islamic Educational Center of Orange County and a board member of the Development and Relief Foundation in Iraq. Born in Karbala, Iraq, he was exiled to Qom, where he began his religious education. Al-Qazwini has also served as a teacher in Damascus and an associate imam in London before moving to the United States in 1994. He is actively involved in interfaith dialogue and lectures globally on Islamic studies, in one of his sermons during Muharram in Manchester emphasized to revisit the treatment and role of women must be revisited and reformed to align with the principles of equality and justice inherent in Islam. He affirms that for centuries, women in many Islamic societies were neglected and mistreated, often barred from education and denied basic rights.

Limitations

Limitations of this research paper include its exclusive reliance on the redefinitions of Shia male scholars whose works are accessible in English written form online. The absence of contributions from female Shia scholars is noted due to the lack of available written material authored by them. This limitation may restrict the breadth of perspectives and insights into Qiwāmah conceptualization and redefinitions within Shia Islamic discourse, potentially overlooking nuanced viewpoints and interpretations that female scholars could provide. Future research could benefit from broader inclusion of diverse voices within Shia scholarly community, particularly focusing on efforts to access and amplify the contributions of female scholars where available resources permit.

Positionality

As a practicing Muslim and a dedicated scholar in the field of gender and development, our positionality in conducting this research is shaped by both our personal beliefs and professional commitments. Our faith provides us with a deep appreciation for the spiritual and ethical dimensions of Islamic teachings, urge us to unbox the meanings and terminologies that are contested within academic realm, while our academic background equips us with the tools to critically analyze gender roles and dynamics within various cultural and religious contexts. Our involvement in gender and development have allowed us to witness firsthand the challenges and opportunities that arise when traditional gender norms intersect with modern socio-economic demands. This dual perspective enables us to approach the concept of qiwāmah with both reverence for its religious significance and a critical eye towards its implications for gender equality. We are committed to exploring how Islamic teachings can evolve to support equitable and sustainable development, ensuring that both men and women can fully participate and thrive in all aspects of life.

In this research, we strive to balance respect for traditional Islamic scholarship with the need for contemporary reinterpretations that address the realities of today's Muslim communities. Our goal is to contribute to a nuanced understanding of qiwāmah that honors its historical and textual roots while promoting gender justice and inclusivity. This work is driven by a desire to bridge the gap between classical Islamic teachings and modern gender

perspectives, fostering a dialogue that can lead to meaningful and positive change for sustainable development in Muslim societies.

While endeavouring to adhere to the discourse, we strove to maintain equilibrium between the redefinition and reinterpretation of the verses pertinent to the concept of qiwāmah as articulated by the scholars, without delving into the scholars themselves. This distinction is crucial, as an exhaustive and detailed exploration of the scholars would necessitate a separate, comprehensive study.

Results and Discussions

Qiwāmah Redefined...The Basic Criteria

The Shia Islamic scholars who have lived or are living in the diaspora have redefined qiwāmah by interpreting Quranic verses in light of the sayings of the Prophet and the teachings of his household. The scholars argue that it is essential to understand Qur'anic meanings as per the needs of the present times. However, the interpretations and exegesis should be in line with the Qur'anic principles and as per the hadith of the Prophet of Islam and not as per the personal views of the scholars [14]. Muslim scholars have done interpretation of Quranic verses in the light of hadith of Prophet of Islam hundreds of years ago and some have done it recently. Tafsir Al Qummi is considered to be the one that was done hundreds of years ago.

Scholars recognize the fact that the first relationship that God has created on this earth was of husband-wife. So, this is the most significant relationship. So, to deal with the issues related to this relationship and contract, many verses present solutions. One solution identified by scholars to sustain relationships today is to reinterpret contested verses that have been misused in many Muslim cultures and communities [14]. Experts like Mir Hosseini highlights that some of the empowering meanings were present in the existing Islamic literature and of past scholars but were not widely disseminated due to various reasons such as the unavailability of translators, constraints of time and money, and a lack of interest from publishers and for political reasons. As a result, the scholars from different regions could not translate the whole texts of the great interpreters and exegetists they have been picking and choosing certain explanations while leaving the others.

However, in recent times, the questions regarding masculinity and femininity posed by feminists and human rights' activists urged contemporary scholars to go back to the past literature and figure out what Islam offers to a couple for their peaceful married life. Quranic verses 19, 32, 34 of Chapter 'Women' Aal-Nisa specifically deals with the topics of familial masculinities and femininities, the relationship of a husband and wife and the gender role division. Although, feminist scholarship challenges the interpretation of these verses, however, the following explanations and interpretations of these verses explain how Muslim scholars have reinterpreted these verses or utilized those meanings that were not picked up by the majority scholars previously. They have revisited these verses and presented alternate meanings to explain how the Quran provides the working model for humanity to prevail. They do so to save the institution of marriage without which humanity cannot prevail and sustain.

Connection between Qiwāmah and Ma'ruf (Respecting and Honoring Partner)

Sura Al Nisa: Verse 19

Wa 'aashiroohunna bil-ma'roofi. Fa'in karihtumoohunna fa'asa an takrahoo shay'an wa yaj'alallahu feehi khayran katheera

"And consort with them (your wives) in honor and equity [ma'ruf]. and if you hate them, it may be that you dislike a thing while Allah has placed abundant good in it."

The textual analysis of this verse involves a close examination of its language and meaning within the Quranic text. The word *ma'ruf*, in the following verse is the opposite of *munkar* (meaning wicked). *Ma'ruf* refers to behavior that is approved by both reason and religion, and it is also understood as a thing or custom that people recognize in their social structure, which they do not reject or disapprove of. The term *ma'ruf*, which implies actions

approved by both reason and religion, underscores the expected behavior of men towards their wives⁴. This verse precedes the verses on divorce, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and honorable conduct in marital relationships. The text asserts that even if men do not favor certain aspects of their wives, they are commanded to treat them kindly and maintain the relationship positively, as God has placed goodness in it for them.

The context of this verse reveals that it has been revealed before the verses on divorce and qiwāmah. So, the contextual analysis reveals that contemporary Muslim scholars in their lectures referred to this verse highlighting the role of men. However, this verse can be seen as establishing a foundational ethic for marital conduct before addressing the specific legalities of divorce. By encouraging behaviors approved by societal and religious norms, the verse aims to promote harmony and prevent divorce. This contextual understanding helps in comprehending the broader social implications of the verse and its relevance to contemporary issues.

Considering this verse, Torkamani [15] applies it to explain that “in recent times, if, due to certain reasons, women have the opportunity to work while men do not, men should not become apprehensive or treat their wives wickedly.” Torkamani’s interpretation aligns with the contextual approach, as it addresses modern-day scenarios and the evolving dynamics of gender roles. This verse calls for men to submit themselves to God, seeking good by being kind to their wives regardless of the situation. In present contexts, this verse redefines familial masculinities inspired by hegemonic masculinities, where traditionally men control wives and may consider being bad-tempered as a way to resolve issues. This highlights that God wants couples to adopt those manners, behaviors patterns that could avoid leading to separation or divorce. The text asserts that whether men do not like their women (or any of their act) for any reason; cultural or social, they need to treat wives and keep them in the relationship nicely because God has placed abundance of good in them. According to Allama Tabatabai’s Tafsir al Mizan, this verse calls men to submit themselves to God for seeking good by being kind to their wives in situations whatsoever [16]. Tabatabaei gives an example of how certain rights are given to a special group. He says, for example, man has been given the right to marry more than one wife, and gets a double share in inheritance, while woman is entitled to receive her dower and maintenance from her husband. In the present situations, this verse redefines the familial masculinities inspired by hegemonic masculinities where men control wives, consider being bad-tempered a way to resolve issues.

Qiwāmah Acknowledges Partners’ Status, Work and Bestowed Position

Sura Al Nisa , Verse 32

Wa la tatamannaw ma faddalallahu bihi ba'dakum 'ala ba'd. Lilrijali naseebum mimma iktasaboo walin-nisa'i naseebum mimma iktasabna. Was'alullaha min fadlihi. Innallaha kana bikulli shay'in 'aleema.

"And in no wise covet those things in which God hath bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others; to men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn; but ask God of His bounty. For God hath full knowledge of all things."

Recent scholarly discourse has engendered novel hermeneutical approaches to Quran 4:32, contrasting with antecedent Shia exegesis. Historically, Shia exegetes elucidated "fadl" as signifying "extra bounties," conceptualized as distinct prerogatives allocated to a particular cohort, whether men or women³.

These antecedent interpretations like in "Tafsir al-Mizan" by Allamah Tabatabai and other contemporary commentaries provide comprehensive insights construed "fadl" as denoting specific privileges or endowments conferred upon individuals based on gender. This

exegesis delineated such bounties as divinely ordained rights or favors, particularly bestowed upon men or women, thereby instituting a framework of gender-specific prerogatives within the Islamic legal and ethical corpus.

Contemporary scholars, however, advocate for a more nuanced and egalitarian interpretation. They posit that "fadl" should not be constricted to gender-based allocations of rights but rather encompass a broader spectrum of divine beneficence and moral excellence. This recontextualization aims to transcend traditional gender dichotomies, advocating for a more inclusive understanding that emphasizes mutual respect and equitable treatment in alignment with the overarching Islamic principles of justice and compassion.

The textual analysis verse 32:4 explains that Allah Almighty suggests men and women not wish for the '*fadl*' that is been bestowed to the other because every man and woman belongs a share of what they have earned. The contextual analysis explains that this verse explains two different meanings, at one side it explains to admit the differences as far as God's bestowing is concerned. On the other side, it promotes equality in terms of reward and of anyone's deeds irrespective of their biological differentiation. Ayatullah Nasir Makram Sherazi and Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faghih Imani [17] explain the context of revelation in the commentary of this verse that this verse was revealed at a time when Lady Salma the wife of the Prophet Mohammed said to him,

"Why do men go to Holy Struggle/War jihad, but women do not? Why has Islam legislated inheritance for us half of men's portion? We wish we were men and went to Holy struggle like men and equally obtained their social position."

On the other hand, some men found that women's reward for staying at home and serving family patiently has been considered the greatest Jihad. Therefore, they wished they had been given this chance to earn this status. Allah Almighty shunned this kind of approach to envy others for what they have and asked the believers to accept the differences and the bestowing of Allah. It also encourages men to realize that whatever they will do, they will get their share as per their deeds, and women will get their share as per their deeds. Therefore, they should not be envious, instead focus on what they can do to seek rewards from Allah Almighty. However, the recent scholars realized that different critiques around the world question the stance of Islam on women's work and their role in the country's development. As a result, some scholars are utilizing and applying the rules to emerging questions and needs.

Contemporary scholars like Hossein Ali Torkamani and Al Qazwini uses this verse to explain the socio-economic role of both men and women. Torkamani uses this verse to highlight how the Quranic text encourages women to be part of the economic processes. He writes that women and men are allowed to do work as per their physical and psychological strengths, abilities, and skills. He writes that the analysis of the verse explains that not only women and men will get rewards for their efforts in the hereafter but in the world as well. He considers that this verse concludes that women have the right to work. This right is among the privileges that women have achieved through religion Islam. Therefore, the explanation by Torkamani is an extended explanation of the verse as per the needs of the time. This explanation is encouraging women to work and encourages men to accept women's roles in the public economic space that is redefining familial masculinities where men were the sole economic contributor to family life.

On the other hand, Al- Qazwini interprets that this verse as a clear indication of equality, where both men and women are entitled to the rewards of their labor. He also emphasizes as follows:

"God said to them, to his community, to his people, men and women I am not going to overlook, I am not going to let go in vain. I am not going to undermine the work of your men and your women, both are appreciated. God is not misogynist. God does not love men more than women. God did not create women to serve men. God created both to

serve each other. We have to serve women, and they serve us. We need them and they need us. We cannot live and produce and move forward in this life without the other half."

This directly refutes the notion of women's inferiority and supports the idea that both genders have equal standing and rights in Islam. By emphasizing that both men and women earn their share based on their efforts, the scholar promotes a model of qiwamah that is not based on male superiority but on mutual respect and equitable sharing of responsibilities.

While, analysing Hossein Ali Torkamani's interpretation of Quran 4:32 through a gender lens reveals its progressive stance on women's economic participation while highlighting potential limitations. Torkamani's view promotes gender equality by endorsing women's right to work and redefining traditional familial roles, thus challenging patriarchal norms. However, his emphasis on conditional participation based on "physical and psychological strengths" may inadvertently reinforce gender stereotypes, limiting women's opportunities in certain fields. Additionally, while advocating for women's economic roles, his interpretation does not fully address systemic gender biases, requiring broader cultural and structural reforms for true gender equality

Qawwamon – Individuals Who Help Somebody to Stand, Enabling their Existence and Identity
Sura al Nisa Verse 34

Ar-rijalu qawwamuna 'ala an-nisa'i bima faddalallahu ba'dahum 'ala ba'din wabima anfaqoo min amwalihim. Fassaalihaatu qanitatun hafizatun lilghaybi bima hafizallah. Wallati takhafuna nushuzahunna fa'idhuhunna wahjuruhunna fil-madaji'i wadribuhunna. Fa'in ata'nakum fala tabghoo 'alayhinna sabila. Innallaha kana 'aliyyan kabira.

Men have been given precedence over women by virtue of excess bounty and for their sacrifice of property on their behalf. The virtuous contented wives will guard their rights in their absence. And (as to) those [women] on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and [if that does not make any difference, then] leave them alone in the sleeping-places and [if that does not make any difference, then] strike them.

The aforementioned verse 34:4, holds significant pertinence as a continuation of verse 32:4, crucial for understanding the redefined forms and paradigms of masculinity. Historically, scholars have posited that the initial segment and part of the verse defines male authority over their wives. Traditional translations frequently render and translate the term qawwam as “the ruler” “bread earner, and “care taker”[18]. However, Al-Qazwini employs an egalitarian lens to argue that men's designation as qawwamun (protectors/maintainers) over women denotes their “responsibility rather than superiority”. He asserts that this role is rooted in physical, psychological, and physiological differences between men and women, acknowledged by science and psychology too, emphasizing men's duty to provide and protect within the family structure. Al-Qazwini contends that decision-making should ideally be a joint process between spouses yet leans towards the husband's decision if consensus cannot be reached, likening this leadership role to that of a pilot in an aircraft cockpit—specialized but not indicative of inherent superiority. He stresses mutual respect and dialogue between spouses as essential for maintaining a harmonious family dynamic, rejecting the notion of marital dictatorship and advocating for balanced decision-making based on circumstances and mutual understanding. This interpretation challenges traditional notions of male dominance by framing qawwamun as a responsibility grounded in roles rather than a justification for gender-based hierarchy.

Similarly, Ahmed Haneef [19], a contemporary Shi'i Islamic scholar redefines it by arguing that it should not be construed as bread-earner or caretaker. Haneef elucidates that qawwamon derives from and qawwamon is its intensified form. Qaim is a person who is standing while qawwam is someone who helps somebody to stand. Standing means, in many cases, being able to exist, being able to maintain its identity, being able to preserve something continuously and constantly.”

The contextual analysis of Ahmed Haneef's interpretation reveals a women-centric perspective, and a women-friendly explanation, advocating for a redefined behavioral paradigm that enables women to exist and sustain their identity. He writes, "It is the idea of men having a very central role in maintaining women and preserving them on all aspects of their being, protecting them, for example, from the danger of the world. Therefore, for example, we are standing armies to protect society in general and women."

Haneef also considers that part one of this verse is not exclusively pertinent to husbands; but encompasses all men in the society who are accountable to safeguard women's rights, their identity, and honor comprehensively while, radical feminists contest this notion of why women necessitate protection, why men to be protectors, the development feminists highlight contemporary paradigm of engaging men to achieve the targets of gender equality. In this vein, the explanation calls for a just, peaceful societal free of any kind of harassment, bullying, violence where all men going to protect the rights of women in every conceivable manner. Therefore, this definition stands with the contemporary idea of engaging men approach. The second part deals with "righteous women who guard men's rights in their absence" is skipped for the analysis because that is not in the scope of the paper because it deals with femininities.

The analysis of Ahmed Haneef interpretation reveals that he diverges from the historical interpretation of the term *qawwam* that has been a point of contestations and being labeled as a term that reinforces patriarchal structures, positioning men as rulers, breadwinners, and caretakers of women, emphasizing male authority and female dependency. scholarly perspective diverges from this norm, suggesting a redefined paradigm where *qawwamon* is understood as men who enable and sustain women's ability to maintain their identity and existence, shifting from dominance to supportive guardianship. However, his interpretation and redefinition can be seen with two lenses: the first is the critical lens, and the other is the progressive engaging men lens. So, the critical lens suggests that although Haneef's reinterpretation shifts the focus from dominance to support, it can still be critiqued for paternalism. The notion that men are essential for women's protection and identity maintenance can be seen as perpetuating a form of benevolent sexism, where women are viewed as inherently vulnerable and in need of male guardianship. Yet the second lens of progressive engaging men lens finds that his interpretation aligns with contemporary gender equality strategies that involve engaging men.

However, it still can be questionable for radical progressive feminists who critique such a redefinition for not fully addressing the underlying power dynamics. They argue that his interpretation and redefinition still situate men as central of women's liberation. Our analysis highlights that while it encourages men to support women, it does not necessarily challenge the structural inequalities that necessitate such support. Yet, from a gender and development feminist viewpoint, Haneef's approach is more acceptable from the traditional paradigms as it recognizes the importance of engaging men in gender equality initiatives. This perspective values the collaborative efforts of both men and women in dismantling gender inequalities and promoting a just society.

Similarly, the stance of Al-Qazwini although encourages a mutual relationship, however, "men's natural responsibility" emphasis on "protecting women", and "men in the leadership role" still have the tendency to promote the paternalism and benevolent sexism towards the stereotypes. However, his emphasis that traditional gender roles should not limit women's agency or capabilities, advocating for a balanced decision making and consultation highlight that leadership shouldn't be like dictators but inclusive and collaborative.

Qiwāmah Does Not Support Wife Beating

The third part of 34:4 elucidates the directives that when a husband has invested financially in his wife, paying for her maintenance, he fears *nashuz*, he should admonish her. *Nashuz* has been translated differently in the past. Earlier, *nashuz* was translated as

“disobedience,” [20] but now as “desertion” or “rebellion.” Similarly, the word *اضربوهن* has been translated as “beating those women” in the past. Allama Tabatabaei interpreted that this verse suggests three remedies: admonition, leaving them in their beds, and lastly beating. The same kind of interpretations are available by most renowned Sunni Shia scholars. This interpretation does emphasize male authority and female subordination and justify violent control to submit wives to their husbands. Being part of the Muslim community, we know that our grandparents and their parents were okay with these definitions and the past generations complied to these interpretations, yet presently, it seems that this framework not only upholds gender inequality but also normalizes male control over women.

Therefore, contemporary scholars translate it as “parting” and “separation.” Syed Mujataba Muasvi Lari [21] writes that Quran has been revealed in Arabic, and the beauty of Arabic is that each word has many different meanings. The meanings must be given to the words as per the situation and context. He says that looking at the gradual command of the above-mentioned verse, he finds parting and separation the most appropriate words.

Here parting and separation do not mean divorce. For Lari, beating, after admonishing and leaving women in their bed, beating would be inappropriate and disastrous because it will make a rebellious person more rebellious. He says, if we look at the sequence of instructions, we realize that Allah Almighty at first asked men to admonish them, then stop sharing beds with them. This instruction gives the meaning that at stage two, his behavior with the wife would be normal all through the day, he might be communicating with her, only would not share the bed with her at night. However, at the last stage, he would completely end all his communications (now others can also feel that there is something going on).

Lari considers that at this stage when a man would stop communicating with her and part her would let her contemplate and she might rethink continuing her marriage. Lari’s conceptualization of the word ‘*dharbuhunna*’ better fits the meaning of this verse because the next verse asks the people around to decide to settle down their issues. Despite its progressive redefinitions, analysis of Lari’s interpretation with a gender lens highlights that his interpretation still exhibits elements of benevolent sexism which calls for men to cease communication to prompt women to reconsider their actions, positions men as the rational decision-makers who guide and correct women’s behavior.

This implies that women need male intervention to reflect and make sound decisions, thereby undermining their autonomy. This perspective, while less overtly patriarchal and violent, still reinforces traditional gender roles and power imbalances. To move towards genuine gender equity and equality, it is essential to challenge these underlying assumptions and promote a framework where women are seen as autonomous agents capable of securing their own rights and well-being without paternalistic oversight.

Conclusion

Upon scrutinizing the exegeses, the explanations, redefinitions, and reinterpretations of these three scholars with the lens of our framework of gender role sharing we realize that the contemporary Islamic scholarship by Shia scholars who are residing or having resided in diaspora aligns somewhat with our conceptual paradigm of ‘gender role sharing’. It confirms what Ghazanfari et al [22] suggested that interpretations of the Quran are shaped by the diverse intellectual, epistemological and cultural context of the interpreters. The study expands this idea that diasporic scholars or the ones who ever had a diasporic experience not only challenge traditional narratives, but also explain and highlight the potential for more inclusive and futuristic understanding of gender roles. It is interesting to note that some Sunni interpreters are also trying to bring forth redefinitions emphasizing and highlighting its modern application in the Muslim family system [23]. In addition, it is clear that the contemporary Shia scholars reinterpret ‘*qiwāmah*’ to emphasize men as supportive figures who assist women in maintaining their identity and well-being instead of as authoritative figures responsible for

providing for and controlling women, while acknowledging the *fadl* that Allah has destined to the women and the men as well. This shift from a ruler-servant dynamic to one of facilitation and support underscores the idea that men are not to dominate but to aid women in their personal and professional growth through a moral framework. So, the present analysis confirms the perspective laid out by Karen Bauer and Feras Hamza [24] that Quran's imperative egalitarian moral agency which positions men not as dominate figures but as partners who share responsibility for creating a compassionate and equitable household.

By redefining *qiwamah* in this way, the concept promotes a more balanced and equitable relationship between genders, where men and women are seen as partners working together to ensure each other's well-being.

Additionally, the redefinition that women can earn and participate equally in economic chores also promotes the idea of gender role sharing involving both men and women participating equally in household duties, childcare, and decision-making processes. This approach challenges traditional gender roles that confine domestic tasks exclusively to women and bread-winning roles solely to men. By advocating for shared responsibilities, this model promotes a balanced and harmonious household dynamic, fostering mutual respect and understanding between partners.

The reinterpretation of verse 34:4 by scholars like Lari emphasizes non-violent methods of resolving marital conflicts. Instead of resorting to physical punishment, contemporary interpretations encourage men to communicate openly, temporarily separate to allow for reflection, and seek communal mediation if necessary. This approach promotes respect, empathy, and understanding, reducing power imbalances and fostering a more equal partnership. By advocating for non-violent conflict resolution, these scholars challenge harmful traditional practices and encourage healthier, more constructive ways of addressing disagreements within a marriage.

Contemporary scholars stress the importance of men supporting women in maintaining their identity and existence, which involves recognizing women's autonomy and capabilities. Encouraging women's participation in education, employment, and community activities helps create an environment where women can thrive independently and confidently. By supporting women's empowerment, men contribute to a more equitable society where women are not confined to traditional roles but are free to pursue their ambitions and interests. This empowerment promotes gender equality and helps dismantle systemic barriers that have historically limited women's opportunities.

Lastly, contemporary scholars highlight the necessity of interpreting Quranic verses within their proper context and understanding the multiple meanings of Arabic terms. This approach advocates for flexibility in applying Islamic teachings to modern situations, moving away from rigid and potentially harmful traditional interpretations. By adapting the teachings to contemporary contexts, scholars promote gender equality and shared roles, ensuring that Islamic principles are relevant and supportive of modern values and for future too. This contextual understanding allows for a more nuanced and progressive application of religious texts, fostering a more futuristic, inclusive and equitable interpretation of gender roles within the Islamic framework.

Gender role sharing, as advocated by contemporary Islamic scholars, aims to create a more equitable and collaborative family structure. By redefining '*qiwamah*' and promoting mutual support, these scholars challenge traditional patriarchal norms and encourage a balanced partnership where both men and women share responsibilities and contribute to each other's well-being. This approach not only aligns with contemporary values of gender equality but also supports broader societal goals of reducing inequalities and fostering sustainable communities. It suggests that introducing and disseminating Islamic notions of gender role sharing by redefining *qiwamah* can redress toxic masculinities. In this way, this idea serves the

cause to achieve sustainable development goals 5 ‘gender equality’, goal 10 ‘reduced inequalities’, and goal 11 ‘the sustainable cities and communities’ of the 2030 Agenda.

Research with a Sunni Perspective [25] also highlights what Ahmed Haneef, Torkamani, Lari, Al-Qazwini have tried to emphasize that men are not like chief justice as suggested by traditional scholars but are like someone at service who must play his role all the time to provide a suitable peaceful life to women by not only providing them with food but enabling them to maintain their identity, their existence. It is worth mentioning that these scholars observe how various activities and feminists’ questions call redefinitions and reinterpretations of these verses. Both Ahmed and Torkamani write in the opening sentences how these verses are questioned and misunderstood without understanding the context. The analysis reveals that they urge Muslims to realize the fact that Islam stresses at maintaining family life by tolerance, patience, love, and care where roles can be shared to bring harmony and as a matter of showing love. This stance is an encouraging move towards achievement of those very goals that could better serve the purpose of sustainable development. However, to align it completely with the gender role sharing model for achieving true gender equity and equality, it is imperative to contest all underlying assumptions that limit to advocate for a perfect gender role sharing model where women are acknowledged as autonomous individuals, capable of securing their own rights and well-being without the need for paternalistic supervision.

So, although, the contemporary definitions or interpretations might not be fully applicable in the future, however this thesis opens up an avenue for future interpreters and establishes a foundational framework which is innovative, progressive and forward-thinking framework for interpreting the Quran. It allows future scholars to engage with its teachings in a manner that resonates with the contemporary needs, challenges toxic masculinities and traditional norms, while also fostering a futuristic understanding of gender roles within Islamic Scholarship.

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