

The Status of the Family amid Socio-Cultural Change: An Analysis Within the Framework of Verse 34 of Surah al-Nisā'

Toplumsal ve Kültürel Değişim Ortamında Ailenin Konumu: Nisâ Suresi 34. Ayet Çerçevesinde Bir Analiz

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ABSTRACT

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This study will examine the situations families face during periods of social and cultural change through the lens of Qur'an verse al-Nisā' 4/34. The analysis will focus on the impacts of socio-cultural changes on families, considering the social and cultural realities of 7th-century Arabia. The aim is to prevent the misrepresentation of this verse by centering contemporary perceptions. The apparent conflict between the elements emphasized in al-Nisā' 4/34 and modern interpretations highlights the importance of understanding these verses within their proper context. Focusing on the perceptions of the period in which the verse was revealed, rather than contemporary interpretations, will help achieve a correct understanding. Otherwise, there is a tendency to produce literal interpretations based on current perceptions. Consequently, it has been observed that studies related to al-Nisā' 4/34 should prioritize the perceptions of the period of revelation. In this context, my work presents the assertion that the third proposed solution in al-Nisā' 4/34 is intended as a warning rather than for practical application. I support this claim by focusing on developments before and after the verse. As we move further from the time of revelation, understanding the Qur'an becomes increasingly challenging. The vitality of the events surrounding the time of revelation diminishes, and different inclinations arise that diverge from 7th-century perceptions. This situation leads to literal approaches to the verses, imposing contemporary understandings on historical texts. Tracking socio-cultural changes plays a critical role in accurately understanding events and phenomena. It is essential to consider the perceptions of the times and places where these changes occurred. al-Nisā' 4/34 addresses women and is connected to events in Medina; however, its roots trace back to the Mecca period. During the Mecca era, men held dominant roles in families, while in Medina, women began to take on more active roles. The bonds of brotherhood between the Ansar and Muhajir fostered mutual influence. However, a hidden struggle occurred between those unwilling to relinquish the roles assigned to them and those questioning these roles; one of these struggles is related to the reasons behind the revelation of al-Nisā' 4/34. Neglecting socio-cultural mobility has led to misunderstandings of the verse. It is common to develop interpretations based on contemporary perceptions while disregarding the understandings of the period of revelation. The disconnect between the time of revelation and the present complicates the understanding of the Qur'an. The study aims to interpret al-Nisā' 34 accurately. This qualitative research, based on document analysis, examines the context of the command "strike your wives." The findings indicate that this command was not practically implemented and served a warning function instead. Our work provides a different perspective on this verse from classical to contemporary times. When the Qur'an becomes the subject of interpretation, it inevitably falls under the influence of contemporary perceptions, leading to interpretations based on apparent meanings. However, many of these interpretations conflict with the practices of the Prophet Muhammad and subsequent generations.

Keywords: Tafsir,
the 34th verse of
Surah al-Nisā',
Family, Socio-
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Bu çalışmada, Nisâ 4/34. âyet üzerinden ailenin toplumsal ve kültürel değişim dönemlerinde karşılaştığı durumlar ele alınacaktır. Sosyo-kültürel değişimlerin aile üzerindeki etkileri bu çerçevede analiz edilecek ve 7. yüzyıl Arabistan Yarımadası'nın toplumsal ve kültürel olguları dikkate alınacaktır. Güncel algılar merkeze alınarak bu âyetin itibarsızlaştırılmasının önlenmesi hedeflenmektedir. Nisâ 4/34'te vurgulanan unsurların çağın algılarıyla çelişiyor gibi görünmesi, âyetlerin bağlam merkezli anlaşılmasının önemini ortaya koymaktadır. Güncel algılardan ziyade, âyetin nâzil olduğu dönemin algılarına odaklanmak, doğru bir anlayışa ulaşmamıza yardımcı olacaktır. Aksi takdirde, güncel algılara dayalı literal yorumlar yapılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Nisâ 4/34 ile ilgili çalışmalarda nüzul döneminin algısının esas alınması gerektiği gözlemlenmiştir. Bu bağlamda, çalışmam, Nisâ 4/34'teki üçüncü çözüm yolunun uygulama değil, uyarı amaçlı olduğuna dair bir tespit sunmaktadır. Bu iddiayı, âyetler öncesi ve sonrası gelişmelere odaklanarak destekliyorum. Vahyin iniş döneminden uzaklaştıkça, Kur'an'ı doğru anlamak zorlaşmaktadır. Vahyin nüzul dönemine ait yaşanmışlıkların canlılığı kaybolmakta ve 7. yüzyıl algılarından farklı yönelimler ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu durum, âyetlere literal bir bakışla güncel algı ve anlayışların geçmişe dayatılmasına neden olmaktadır. Sosyo-kültürel değişimlerin izini sürmek, olayların ve olguların doğru anlaşılmasında kritik bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu değişimlerin yaşandığı dönem ve mekânların algılarını dikkate almak önemlidir. Nisâ 4/34, kadınları ele alan bir âyet olup, nâzil olma sebebi Medine'deki olaylarla bağlantılıdır; ancak kökleri Mekke dönemine uzanmaktadır. Mekke döneminde ailede erkekler baskınken, Medine döneminde kadınlar daha etkin rol almışlardır. Ensar ve Muhacirler arasındaki kardeşlik bağları, etkileşimlerine yol açmıştır. Ancak, toplumda kendilerine atfedilen rollerden ödün vermek istemeyenlerle bu rolleri sorgulayanlar arasında gizli bir mücadele yaşanmıştır; bu mücadelelerden biri de Nisâ 34'ün nüzul sebebidir. Sosyo-kültürel hareketliliğin göz ardı edilmesi, âyetin yanlış anlaşılmasına neden olmuştur. Nüzul dönemi algılarını yok sayarak güncel algılara dayalı yorumlar geliştirmek yaygın bir durumdur. Vahyin nüzul dönemi ile günümüz arasındaki kopukluk, Kur'an'ı anlamayı zorlaştırmaktadır. Çalışma, Nisâ 34'ün doğru bir zeminde yorumlanmasını hedeflemektedir. Doküman analizine dayalı bu nitel çalışmada, "hanımları dövünüz" emrinin uygulama bağlamı incelenmiştir. Sonuç olarak, bu emrin pratiğe yansımadağı ve uyarı olarak işlev gördüğü ortaya konulmuştur. Çalışmamız, klasik dönemden günümüze kadar bu âyete farklı bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Kur'an, anlamının bir nesnesi haline geldiğinde, güncel algıların etkisi altında kalarak zahiri anlamlarla yorumlanmaya çalışılmıştır. Ancak bu yorumlar, Hz. Peygamber'in ve sonraki dönemlerin uygulamalarıyla çelişmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler:
Tefsir, Nisâ
Sûresinin 34.
Âyeti, Aile, Sosyo-
Kültürel Değişim,
Literal Yaklaşım.

INTRODUCTION

In the Qur'ān, one of the basic sources for Muslim worlds, there are warnings that carry both worldly and ethereal implications. Some of these warnings are specifically designed to serve as cautions; they fulfil their purpose at the warning level without necessitating the implementation of the threatened consequences. Such warnings can be addressed to Muslims, polytheists, and hypocrites alike.

One of the key methods employed in the Qur'ān for the reform of individuals and societies is the use of warnings. It is crucial for Qur'ānic researchers and readers to identify and comprehend the verses that contain warnings in isolation. A literal interpretation of these verses, when detached from their context, has led to numerous interpretations and practices that contradict the universal principles of Islam. For instance, the 34th verse of Surah al-Nisā', which is the focus of our study, can be misinterpreted in a way that appears to legitimize domestic violence.¹ Therefore, when any problem arises in the family, this verse, which should be evaluated within the framework of family reconciliation, can be interpreted in the opposite way. For this reason, the evaluation of al-Nisā' 4/34 in a manner contrary to its message constitutes the problem of this study. This is because this verse continues to be one of the first verses referred to by those who seek to discredit the Qur'an.

This study aims to consider the facts rather than perceptions in understanding of al-Nisā' 4/34. This is because perceptions are constantly changing. Facts, on the other hand, must be understood as they actually occurred. Accordingly, al-Nisā' 4/34 needs to be understood within the context of the conditions of the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century AD.

The fact that the points emphasized in verse of al-Nisā' 4/34 are perceived as being contrary to the perceptions and practices of the present age highlights the importance of understanding the verses in the context of the events and circumstances in which they were revealed. By focusing on the perceptions of the era in which the verse was revealed rather than on contemporary perceptions influenced by various factors, one can arrive at the correct understanding. Otherwise, literal interpretations that align with contemporary perceptions are made. As a result, it has been observed that studies on al-Nisā' 4/34 have been based on the perception of the period of revelation, and that assessments and evaluations based on

¹ Nafiseh Ghafournia, "Towards a new interpretation of Quran 4: 34", *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 15/3 (2017), 279-292; Nabila An'imatul Maula, "The Defense of Women's Rights in QS. al-Nisā'[4]:34 (Analysis Asbāb al-Nuzūl in Tafsīr al-Qurṭhubī)", *International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS) Conference Proceedings* (Indonesia: Uin Ptkin, 2025), 1.

this perception have been lacking. Therefore, our study focuses on an observation that has not yet been encountered in the literature on verse of al-Nisā' 4/34. Specifically, it is to argue that the third solution-based approach mentioned in al-Nisā' 4/34 was revealed not for practical application but for the purpose of warning. We base this claim on the method we have developed, which focuses on events before and after the verses and makes an accurate analysis. Without this approach, one often encounters literal interpretations based on current perceptions.

To contribute to an authentic understanding of the Qur'ān, by this study, this research seeks to address the issues arising from literal interpretations of the verse al-Nisā' 4/34. We have proposed an approach that focuses on the reactions of the addressees to the verses. Following the revelation of al-Nisā' 4/34, it was observed that the expression "beat your wives who commit al-nushūz"² did not manifest in practical terms in the lives of believers, particularly in the life of the Prophet. This situation indicates that this and similar verses were not intended to endorse beating or killing in absolute terms but rather served as warnings and deterrents.

Considering the tafsir literature, there are many studies about the 34th verse of Surah al-Nisā'.³ In many related studies, the verses are typically interpreted from a literal perspective, often neglecting contextual meaning. When the events surrounding the verses are not highlighted, it leads to an inevitable emphasis on their literal meanings, complicating the understanding of their intended purpose. What distinguishes our study from others is its focus on the events and circumstances before and after the verse's revelation, rather than

² an-Nushūz: The verb nashaza from which nushuz is derived means 'to become high', 'to rise'. See also verse 128, where the same word is applied to husbands. It applies to a situation where one partner assumes superiority to the other and behaves accordingly. See for further information: Ebū'l-Hüseyn Ahmed İbn Fâris, *Mu'cemü mekâyîsi'l-luğa*, ed. Abdüsselâm Muhammed Hârûn (Beyrut: Dârü'l-Fikr, ts.), "trf", 5/430; Abdel Haleem, M. A. S. *The Qur'ân/A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54.

³ Ömer Özsoy, "Çağdaş Kur'an(lar) Üretimi Üzerine -'Karı Dövme Olgusu' Bağlamında 4. Nisâ', 34 Örneği-", *İslamiyat* 5/1 (2002), 111-124; Mehmet Okuyan, "Kadına Yönelik Şiddete Kur'an'ın Bakışı", *Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 23 (2007), 93-133; Zeynel Abidin Aydın, "Nisâ Suresinin 34. Ayeti Bağlamında Evlilik Hayatında Kadının Geçimsizliği Durumunda Uygulanacak Çözümlerden 'Darb'a Dair", *Turkish Studies: Türkoloji Araştırmaları* 12/27 (2017), 87-100; Abdülkadir Karakuş, "Çokanlamlı Kelimeler İçeren Ayetlerde Bağlam ve Anlam İlişkisi: Nisâ Suresi 34'üncü Ayetin Anlamı", *e-Şarkiyat İlmi Araştırmalar Dergisi* 11/3 (2019), 1353-1371; Wahyu Fahrul Rizki, "Qirâ'ah Mubâdalah Approach to the Qur'an: The Interpretation of q.s. al-Nisâ' [4]: 34", *Ulu'ul Albab* 21/2 (2020), 269-288; Ali Akpınar, "Aile İçi Sorunların Çözümünde Kur'anî Yöntem (Nisâ Suresi 34. Ayeti Bağlamında)", *İlahiyat Akademi Dergisi* 11 (2020), 1-18; Kutbettin Ekinci, "Nisâ 34. Âyette Hitap Açısından 'Darb' Meselesi", *Şarkiyat İlmi Araştırmalar Dergisi* 13/1 (2021), 242-257; Hanefi Şola, "al-Nisâ' 4/34. Ayeti Bağlamında 'Nuşûz' ve 'Darb' Kelimelerinin Anlam Kronolojisi", *Mecmua Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 12 (2021), 149-176; Mustafa Kara - Hatice Şahin Aynur, "Nisâ' Sûresi 34-35. Âyetler Özelinde Kur'an Âyetlerini Bağlamında Okumak", *Amasya İlahiyat Dergisi* 21 (2023), 462-498; AH. Syukron Yuwafi, "Rereading Surah al-Nisa' [4]: 34: Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh's Contextual Approach to Gender Equality in Islam", *Journal of Ushuluddin and Islamic Thought* 1/1 (2023), 1-30.

solely on the wording of the verse itself. By elucidating these issues, this research addresses a significant gap in clarifying the context and its base and fosters a deeper understanding of that verse.

With this study, it is not claimed that the gap in the literature based on the problem has been identified and that the gap has been completely filled. Because it is not enough to write the problem away from current perceptions and understandings by taking into account the socio-cultural changes in the period of nuzul (*asbāb al-nuzūl* / *cause of revelation*). At the same time, researchers should read it away from current perceptions, as this is an important criterion for determining the truth of the study. The contribution of this study to the literature can be explained by arguing that the explanations of al-Nisā' 4/34 in both tafsirs and articles are not sufficient to reflect the 7th century Hijaz family culture. In this case, the Qur'ān is subjected to a literal approach with current perceptions and ideological interpretations.

In order to understand al-Nisā' 4/34 away from the literal approach, whether with current perceptions or ideological interpretations, with whatever intention and method, the following path was followed: First of all, the developments before and after the verse were analyzed by document analysis method, which is one of the elements of a qualitative research. In this way, the period of revelation was clarified, and the act of understanding and interpretations were built on these data. Accordingly, the Medina period. The developments before and after the verse of al-Nisā' 4/34 were handled under two main headings with two separate subheadings.

To introduce and prepare for understanding the verse, we included narrations under the main heading of developments before the Medina period verse al-Nisā' 4/34. These narrations serve as an important source for interpreting the verses. We analyzed the issue of role conflict between spouses, which these narrations cover intensively, from a scientific perspective. In the second section, we clarified the developments after the verse al-Nisā' 4/34, which is a crucial criterion for understanding the verses. Under the title of the situation between spouses, we provided information about how the verse's message reflects in family life. Finally, we shared the various interpretations of the expression "beat your wives" in al-Nisā' 4/34 as presented in classical and modern tafsirs and articles. The literature for this study primarily consists of classical tafsir, hadith, and historical sources, along with articles

that explore current interpretations. The English translations of the Qur'anic verses included in this study are taken from Abdel Haleem's work entitled *The Qur'an: A New Translation*.⁴

1. Events in the Medinan Period Before Revealing the 34 Verse of al-Nisā'

Recognizing the events and conditions before the verses are revealed is an important factor in the correct understanding of the verses. In this respect, causative narrations serve as one of the tools that illuminate the events preceding the verses. Another important aspect is to take into account the political, economic and socio-cultural history and cultural anthropology before the verses were revealed. All of this indicates that, in the later stages of the Medinah period, issues arose that conflicted with family ethics. The experiences leading up to the revelation of al-Nisā' 4/34 will be elaborated upon through the narrations regarding its nuzūl and relevant historical information:

1.1. The Asbāb al-Nuzūl of the Verse al-Nisā' 4/34

One of the factors that elucidates the period of asbāb al-nuzūl is the narrations concerning causality. However, it is important to note that these narrations do not define or restrict the meaning of the verses; rather, they assist in achieving a correct understanding of the verses.⁵ Although there are many narrations about asbāb al-nuzūl of the verse al-Nisā' 4/34, these narrations can be categorized into three main categories: The first one is the narrations about a quarrel between a family from Ansar, which was conveyed to the Prophet:⁶ An argument arose between Sa'd b. Rabī', a notable member of the Ansar, and his wife, Ḥabībah bint Zayd b. Abī Zuhayr. When Ḥabībah disrespected her husband, Sa'd b. Rabī' responded by slapping her. Subsequently, Ḥabībah went to the Prophet to complain about the incident.⁷ Initially, the Prophet instructed that the woman should retaliate against her husband. However, following the revelation of the verse al-Nisā' 4/34, he sent a message to the family,

⁴ Haleem, M. A. S. *The Qur'ān/A New Translation*.

⁵ Muhammed İsa Yüksek, "Kur'an'da Hitabın Geçişliliğinin İmkânı", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 23/1 (2019), 407.

⁶ Although the names in these narrations differ and there are minor variations in the details, they do not conflict in meaning; rather, they support and complement each other. For instance, in some accounts, the woman approaches the Prophet alone, while in others, she is accompanied by her father. In certain narrations, a judgment of retaliation is issued immediately, whereas in another, revelation is awaited on the matter. Additionally, many narrations attribute the phrase "We intended one thing, Allah intended another. Surely, what Allah has willed is better" to the Prophet. In one account, this phrase is attributed to the woman, expressed as "you intended something..." See for further information. Abū al-Hasan 'Alī b. Ahmad b. Muhammad b. 'Alī an-Nisābūrī Wahidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, ed. Māhir Yāsīn al-Fahl (Dāru al-Merman, 1426), 151-152; Bedreddin Çetiner, *Fātiha'dan Nās'a Esbâb-ı Nüzûl Kur'ân Âyetlerinin İniş Sebepleri* (İstanbul: Çağrı Yayınları, 2013), 1/214.

⁷ There is another narration from Muqatil that Habiba came to the Prophet with her father and said, 'I gave him my daughter and he slapped her'. See for further information. al-Wāhidī, *Asbāb al-Asbab al-Nuzul*, 327.

advising them to refrain from seeking retaliation. The Prophet Muḥammad (saw) then stated, “we intended one thing and Allah intended another. Surely, what Allah willed is better.” leading to a reversal of the judgment he had previously issued in this case.⁸

The Prophet Muḥammad’s initial decision for retaliation before the revelation of al-Nisā’ 4/34 did not align with the patriarchal structure of 7th-century Arabic society. The fact that Allah intended something different from the Prophet’s decision, as highlighted in the narration regarding the verse’s revelation, is significant. There was no confusion or misunderstanding among the men and women of the companions regarding the regulation introduced by al-Nisā’ 4/34, aside from the Prophet’s expression of astonishment at that time. The second narration related to *asbāb al-nuzūl* of the occurrence is attributed to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. He noted that during the Maccan period, men held dominance over women, but upon arriving in Medina, he observed that women had more influence over men. Concerned by this shift, he reported to the Prophet that the women of Mecca were being influenced by the women of Medina and were rebelling against their husbands. The Prophet stated that women who were rebellious and insubordinate could be beaten. Following this, many women gathered around the rooms of the Prophet’s wives to complain about their husbands. Ultimately, the Prophet had to clarify that wives who beat their husbands are not good, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect in relationships.⁹

The third narration about *asbāb al-nuzūl* of the revelation of the verse al-Nisā’ 4/34 states that the verse was revealed because of the division of inheritance. Accordingly, the women of the companions made speeches among themselves expressing their dissatisfaction with the fact that women received a smaller share than men in the division of inheritance. Following these events, verses 32th¹⁰ and then 34th of al-Nisā’ were revealed.¹¹ In the first part of verse al-Nisā’ 4/34, the rationale for men’s higher share of inheritance is explained. Thus, the narration regarding inheritance may pertain to this section of the verse. However, the measures addressing disputes between men and women in the latter part of the verse

⁸ al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Asbab al-Nuzul*, 151-152; Abū al-Qāsim Mahmūd Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf an hakā’iki ghawāmi al-tanzīl wa uyūni al-akāwīl fī wujūhi al-ta’wīl* (Beirut: Dāru al-Kitabi al-Arabi, 1407), 1/506.

⁹ Muslim, *Talaq*: 34 (No: 1479); Ibn Māja, *Niqāh (marriage)*: 51 (No: 1983); al-Tirmidhī, *Tafsīr*: 65 (No: 3318); Fakhr al-Dīn Muhammad b. ‘Umar b. Husayn ar-Rāzī, *Mefātiḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dāru al-Kutubi al-Ilmiyya, 1421), 10/73.

¹⁰ al-Nisā’ 4/ 32: But if you avoid the great sins you have been forbidden, We shall wipe out your minor misdeeds and let you in through the entrance of honour.

¹¹ Abū ‘Abdillāh Muhammad b. Abū ‘Abdullāh Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Khazrajī Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’ li-ahkāmī al-Qur’ān*, ed. Hishām Samīr al-Bukhārī (Riyadh: Dāru Ālemi al-Kutub, 2003), 5/169; Tahir b. Muhammad Ibn Ashūr, *al-Tahrīr wa al-tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tunusiyya, 1984), 5/40.

align more closely with the initial two narrations. Consequently, the inheritance-related narration indicates that it does not connect with the measures taken after disputes between spouses in al-Nisā' 4/34, which is the primary focus of our study.

1.2. Role Conflict between Spouses

One of the key factors that sheds light on the developments preceding the verses, and thus greatly aids in understanding them, is accurately knowing the history of the period in which they were revealed. The period of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* can be uncovered through the political, economic, and socio-cultural narratives of the 7th-century Hijaz Peninsula. As indicated in the narrations regarding the *asbāb al-nuzūl* of revelation, it becomes clear that with the migration to Medina, the women of the companions, influenced by the women in Medina, sought to assert dominance over the men. This led to conflicts between men who were reluctant to relinquish their authority and women striving for empowerment. Both women and men were affected by the differing socio-cultural dynamics in Mecca and Medina as they navigated authority within the family. This is significant because the incident in the first narration about this verse involved men and women from the Ansar. Just as the women of the Ansar could influence others, the men of al-Muhājirūn could also have an impact. Therefore, it's important to consider that Sa'd b. Rabī', who slapped his wife Ḥabībah bint Zayd b. Abī Zuhayr, may have been emulating the behaviors of men in Mecca. In summary, the Prophet intervened to address these issues, seeking to mitigate conflicts as illustrated in the narrations. With the revelation of al-Nisā' 4/34, the situation was brought under control by warning individuals whose actions threatened family unity and peace.

2. Events in the Medina Period after Revealing the 34th Verse of al-Nisā'

Another crucial aspect of correctly understanding the Qur'ān is recognizing the event and conditions that occurred after the verses were revealed. The behaviour of the Prophet and his companions following the revelation can even be characterized as a form of *tafsir*. In this context, the dynamics between spouses after verse al-Nisā' 4/34 will be analysed through the lens of family ethics. Additionally, the various interpretations and meanings attributed to verse al-Nisā' 4/34 will also be discussed.

2.1. Status between Spouses

One of the most important elements in the correct understanding of the Qur'ān is indeed clarifying the event and conditions that occurred after the verses were revealed. Particularly,

the events following the verses that have a constructive nature serve as a form of exegesis. The expressions in verse al-Nisā' 4/34. "Firstly, admonish the women who rebel against their husbands (فَعِظُوهُنَّ), if they continue, leave them alone in their beds (وَاهْجُرُوهُنَّ), and beat them as a last resort (وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ)" also embody this constructive feature.¹² Therefore, it is essential to examine whether any actions were taken after the revelation of these verses in disputes between spouses. Were there incidents where the Prophet, his companions, or later generations implemented two of the three stages suggested in the verse, and did the third option ever need to be applied? Finding answers to these questions will significantly aid in understanding the verse correctly.

Being aware of the events that transpired after the verses will indeed facilitate answering these questions. In the correct understanding of the Qur'ān, the events and conditions before the verses were revealed are as crucial as those that followed. Therefore, clarifying the situation after the verses is essential. Analyzing the circumstances that arose post-revelation and reaching a judgment will enable a more accurate evaluation of the verse and its implications.

Neither in the family life of the Prophet nor among the families of the companions did any incident of beating occur after the verse of al-Nisā' 4/34 was revealed.¹³ There is no narration indicating that any of the companions attempted to beat their wives in reference to verse al-Nisā' 4/34. The societal reception of this verse can also be understood by examining the language used by opponents of Islam. When Muslims diverged from prevailing practices, polytheists, Jews, and hypocrites often criticized them. This response highlights the societal context and the scrutiny faced by Muslims, further illuminating how the verse was interpreted and applied in practice. For example, when the principle of not fighting during the forbidden months was accidentally violated in the campaign of 'Abdullah b. Jahsh, the polytheists seized upon this event to criticize the Muslims.¹⁴ However, there was no criticism from the polytheists, hypocrites, or Jews regarding the expression "beating" in this verse.

In the 7th-century Arabian Peninsula, the act of beating one's wife carried a pejorative connotation, similar to contemporary views in discussions of family ethics. Despite its

¹² This verse was interpreted by the researcher himself.

¹³ Hüseyin Çelik, "Kadınların Dövülmesi Meselesi (Nisâ Suresi 34. Ayet Bağlamında Bir Tahlil)", *İslami İlimler Araştırmaları Dergisi* 11 (2022), 19, 22; Ekinci, "Nisâ 34. Âyette Hitap Açısından 'Darb' Meselesi", 253.

¹⁴ Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Malik b. Hishām al-Zuhaylī al-Meāfirī Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-nabawīyya*, ed. Mustafā al-Sakka et al. (Egypt: Mektebetu Mustafā al-Bābīl-Khalabī, 1955), 199-200; Mehmet Apaydın, *Siyer Kronolojisi* (İstanbul: Kuramer Yayınları, 2018), 374-378.

negative perception, such practices were prevalent in society at the time. This duality underscores the complex social norms surrounding marital relationships, where certain behaviors, though deemed unacceptable, were nonetheless commonly accepted. Comprehending this context is essential for accurately interpreting the implications of verses like al-Nisā' 4/34.¹⁵ Indeed, Prophet Muhammad made efforts to prevent the mistreatment of women by warning men against such behaviors. Although the practice was addressed with the revelation of verse al-Nisā' 4/34, and as highlighted in the narration regarding its context, the Prophet emphasized accountability by ruling that retaliation was warranted for a man who slapped his wife.¹⁶ In another incident in Medina, he asked the person who beat his wife to divorce his wife.¹⁷ The Prophet expressed his disapproval of the act of beating on every occasion: 'Do not beat the female servants of Allah'. 'Know that those who beat women are not the best of you'.¹⁸ The most striking statement about this issue is the following words of the Prophet: 'You will beat your wives and then shamelessly go to bed with them.'¹⁹ All this shows that the act of 'beating' is not the norm of that society.

Prophet Muhammad exemplified his teachings through both his words and actions. While there were occasional disagreements with his wives, he never responded with verbal or physical aggression. This is underscored by the words of his wife 'A'ishah, who stated, "The Messenger of Allah has never hit a servant or a woman." This statement reflects the Prophet's commitment to kindness and respect in his personal relationships, serving as a model for ethical conduct.²⁰ Even that he has forbidden what is lawful for him so that his wives would not be sad, and their hearts would be content. In this regard, the Prophet is warned in the Qur'ān not to forbid what Allah has made lawful.²¹

The final proposed measure for ensuring the protection of the family, "to beat women who disturb family peace", has not been reflected in practice. While the verse containing the command to "beat" exists, its primary function has been as a deterrent. The intent of this verse is not to promote the physical punishment of women but to prevent those exhibiting nushūz (disobedience) from disrupting familial harmony. Legal prohibitions intend to

¹⁵ Feyza Betül Köse, "Cahiliye'den İslâm'a Kadına Yönelik Şiddet", *Çukurova Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 18/1 (2018), 75-81.

¹⁶ al-Wahidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, 151-152.

¹⁷ al-Nasai, *Talaq*, 53 (No: 2146).

¹⁸ Abū Dâwud, *Niqah (marriage)*: 43 (No: 2146).

¹⁹ Muslim, *Jannah (paradise)*: 49 (2855).

²⁰ Ibn Mâja, *Niqah (marriage)*: 51 (No: 1983).

²¹ al-Taḥrīm 66/1: "Prophet, why do you prohibit what God has made lawful to you in your desire to please your wives? Yet God is forgiving and merciful."

prevent offenses rather than to impose absolute punishment. Thus, as evidenced by the narrations regarding its context, this verse served a deterrent role in the diverse cultural environments of Mecca and Medina, significantly contributing to the maintenance of family life and the preservation of family unity.

2. 2. Approaches of Exegetes to the Word 'Darb' in al-Nisā' 4/34

This section will examine the meanings attributed to this verse by exegetes from the time of the Prophet's passing to the present day. During this period, people have attempted to recite the Qur'ān and apply its teachings to life, while also striving to understand it as a means of gaining insight. The Qur'ān has been a source of scholarly research, intellectual issues and theological debates as well as a source of deeds.²²

The focus on the concepts within verse al-Nisā' 4/34 has increased due to a departure from the context in which the verse was revealed. Consequently, as the verse becomes detached from its external context, a literal interpretation has gained traction.²³ In this framework, commentaries typically provide detailed explanations of the terms found in al-Nisā' 4/34, such as *qawwām*, *kānitāt*, *ṣāliḥāt*, *nushūz*, and *darb*.²⁴ However, this study will only address explanations related to the term "darb."

When examining the history of exegesis, it can be seen that there are roughly two different approaches to this word: The first consists of those who have given it the meaning of 'beating' in a process that began in the early classical period and continues to this day. The second consists of interpretations other than the meaning of 'beating,' which we encounter from the 20th century onwards.

2. 2. 1. The Interpretation of the Word "Darb" in Surah al-Nisā' 34 as "To Beat" in the Exegesis Tradition

From the second century Hijri to the present, the majority of interpreters, including Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310/923),²⁵ Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Zajjaj (d. 311/923²⁶), Fakhr

²² Şevket Kotan, "Kur'an'ı Anlama Sorunu Üzerine Bazı Düşünceler", *Eskiye* 27 (2013), 131.

²³ Zakir Demir, "Enbiyâ Sûresinin 22. Âyeti Bağlamında Allah'ın Vahdâniyet Önermesine İlişkin Müfessirlerin Mülâhazaları ve Bunların Tahlili", *İlahiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi* 62/1 (2024), 208.

²⁴ Abū Mansūr Muhammad al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, ed. Majdī Bâsellūm (Beirut: Dāru al-Kutubi al-Ilmiyya, 2005), 3/159-160; Abū al-Hasan al-Māwardī, *al-Nuḡat wa'l-uyūn*, ed. Abd al-Maqsūd b. Abdurrahīm (Beirut: Dar al-Kutubi al-Ilmiyya, ts.), 1/481-483; al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-ghayb*, 10/72-74; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān*, 5/169-171.

²⁵ Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Tabarī, *Jāmi al-bayān fī ta'wīli āyi al-Qur'ān*, ed. Abdullāh b. 'Abdilmuhsin al-Turki (Beirut: Dāru Hijr, 1422), 6/708-713.

²⁶ Abu Ishāq al-Zajjāj, *Meān al-Qur'an wa i'rābuhū*, ed. Abd al-Jalil 'Abduh Shelabī (Beirut: Ālem al-Kutub, 1408), 2/48.

al-Din al-Razi (d. 606/1210),²⁷ Abu al-Barakat al-Nasafi (d. 710/1310),²⁸ Ibn Kathir (d. 774/1373),²⁹ Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (d. 864/1459) - Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505),³⁰ Ismail Haqqi Bursevi (d. 1137/1725),³¹ Muhammad Abduh (d. 1323/1905) and Rashid Rida (d. 1354/1935), Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır (d. 1361/1942),³² Hasan Basri Çantay (d. 1384/1964),³³ Muhammad Izzet Derveze (d. 1404/1984),³⁴ Muhammad Asad (d. 1412/1992),³⁵ and Süleyman Ateş,³⁶ have generally interpreted the word 'darb' to mean 'to beat'.

Almost all commentators have interpreted the term "beating" in a violent context, with the exception of the phrase "non-violent". Commentators such as Muqātil b. Suleimān (d. 150/767),³⁷ Imām Māturīdī (d. 333/944),³⁸ and Abūssuūd Efendi (d. 982/1574)³⁹ preferred the meaning of beating by adding the conditions of not disfiguring; Abū al-Hasan al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058)⁴⁰ recognized the meaning of not torturing; Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144)⁴¹ used the meaning of beating by adding the conditions of not splitting, breaking, and hitting the face. Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687-88)⁴² interpreted this word as hitting with a miswak.

Ibn Ashur took a different approach and stated that the permissibility of the order of beating can be evaluated according to customs and traditions. In this framework, he explained that beating can be applied depending on how it is received in society. Accordingly, Ibn Ashur stated that in societies where the act of beating is not considered shameful, the last measure mentioned in the verse al-Nisā' 4/34 may be applied.⁴³

²⁷ Rāzī, *Maḥāṭih al-ghayb*, 10/73.

²⁸ Mahmud Hafizuddīn al-Nafṣī, *Tafsīr al-Nafṣīr (Madārik al-tanzīl wa ḥaqāik al-ta'wīl)*, ed. Yusuf 'Ali Bedīwī (Beirut: Dar al-Kalīm al-Tayyib, 1419), 1/216.

²⁹ Abu'l-Fida Ismail b. 'Umar Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*, ed. Sāmi bin Muhammad Salāma (Beirut: Dāru Tayyibe, 1420), 2/295.

³⁰ Jalaluddin Abdurrahman b. Abi Bekr Suyuti - Jalaluddin Muhammad b. Ahmad Mahallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalāleyn* (Cairo: Dār al-Hadith, ts.), 106.

³¹ Ismail Haqqi Bursevi, İsmâ'il Hakkî b. Muṣṭafâ el-İstânbûlî el-Ḥaneḫî el-Ḥalvetî, *Rûḥu'l-Beyân*, (Beyrût: Dâru'l-Fikr, ts.), 2/202.

³² Elmalılı Muhammed Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili* (İstanbul: Yenda Dağıtım, 2001), 3/6-7.

³³ Hasan Basri Çantay, *Kur'an-ı Hakîm Meâl-i Kerîm* (İstanbul: Elif Ofset, 1990), 1/126.

³⁴ Muhammad Izzet Derveze, *et-Tefsîru'l-hadîs* (Beyrut: Dâru'l-Garbi'l-İslâmî, 2000), 8/103-105.

³⁵ Muhammad Asad, *Kur'an Mesajı*, trans. Cahit Koytak-Ahmet Ertürk (İstanbul: İşaret Yayınları, 1999), 1/143-144.

³⁶ Süleyman Ateş, *Kur'an-ı Kerîm Tefsiri* (İstanbul: Yeni Ufuk Neşriyat, ts.), 2/71.

³⁷ Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān*, ed. Ahmad Farīd (Beirut: Dar al-Kutubi al-Ilmiyya, 2003), 1/371.

³⁸ Māturīdī, *al-Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 3/161.

³⁹ Muhammed b. Muhammed Ebūssuūd Efendi, *İrşâdü'l-'akli's-selîm ilâ mezâyâ'l-Kur'āni'l-Kerîm* (Beyrut: Dâru İhyâi't-Türâsi'l-Arabî, ts.), 2/174.

⁴⁰ Māwardī, *al-Nuḡat wa'l-uyūn*, 1/483.

⁴¹ Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshāf*, 1/507.

⁴² Tabarī, *Jāmi al-bayān fī ta'wīli āyi al-Qur'ān*, 6/711.

⁴³ Ibn Āshūr, *al-Tahrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 5/41.

2. 2. 2. Other Meanings of the Word "Darb" Beyond "To Beat" in al-Nisā' 34 in the 20th and 21st Centuries

In addition to the fact that beating is regarded as uncivilized under all circumstances, the term has been increasingly replaced by expressions such as *separation, exile, release, expulsion, removal, sending away, suspension, and punishment*. This shift reflects a broader change in the perception of women and emphasizes the need for more respectful and constructive approaches to conflict resolution within relationships. Accordingly, the concept of *darb* in the verse al-Nisā' 4/34 has been given meanings such as 'trying to convince the interlocutor by giving examples,⁴⁴ short-term separation from the wives,⁴⁵ removal/sending away,⁴⁶ sometimes insisting the woman to stay at home, sometimes temporary separation from home,⁴⁷ separation of husband and wife from each other, putting distance between them'.⁴⁸ In addition to these, there are those who interpret the verse al-Nisā' 4/34 as an allowance for mild punitive sanctions, as well as those who consider it within the framework of the responsibilities of spouses.⁴⁹ It is also argued that the addressee of the expression (وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ - to beat) is the rulers rather than men.⁵⁰ This verse is also interpreted symbolically in the context of the Qur'an's translation of the Qur'an in Sūrat Šād⁵¹ as Eyyub striking his wife with a handful of grass so that his oath would be fulfilled.⁵²

Evaluation

After the Qur'ān became an object of understanding, the verse al-Nisā' 4/34 was generally interpreted as the beating of wives.⁵³ However, this act of beating is so restricted that the

⁴⁴ Karakuş, "Çokanlamlı Kelimeler İçeren Ayetlerde Bağlam ve Anlam İlişkisi: Nisâ Suresi 34'üncü Ayetin Anlamı", 1356-1357, 1367-1369.

⁴⁵ Aydın, "Nisâ Suresinin 34. Ayeti Bağlamında Evlilik Hayatında Kadının Geçimsizliği Durumunda Uygulanacak Çözümlerden 'Darb'a Dair", 98, 99; Şola, "al-Nisâ' 4/34. Ayeti Bağlamında 'Nuşûz' ve 'Darb' Kelimelerinin Anlam Kronolojisi", 169; Kara - Şahin Aynur, "Nisâ' Sûresi 34-35. Âyetler Özelinde Kur'an Âyetlerini Bağlamında Okumak", 490.

⁴⁶ Ziya Şen, *Kur'an-ı Kerim'in Türkçe Anlamı (Meâl)* (İzmir: Tıbyan Yayıncılık, 2020), 49.

⁴⁷ Okuyan, "Kadına Yönelik Şiddete Kur'an'ın Bakışı", 127.

⁴⁸ İrfan Çakıcı, "Kur'an'ın Kur'an'la Tefsiri Bağlamında Nisâ Sûresi 34. Âyetin Tahlil ve Değerlendirmesi", *Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 18 (2020), 42, 62.

⁴⁹ Çelik, "Kadınların Dövülmesi Meselesi (Nisâ Suresi 34. Ayet Bağlamında Bir Tahlil)", 1-3, 19, 26; Sümeyye Sevinç, "Nisâ 4/34. Ayetine Göre Sorumluluklar", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 23/1 (2023), 203, 207, 212, 226.

⁵⁰ Saqib Hussain, "The Bitter Lot of the Rebellious Wife: Hierarchy, Obedience, and Punishment in Q. 4: 34", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 23/2 (2021), 66-111; Ekinci, "Nisâ 34. Âyette Hitap Açısından 'Darb' Meselesi", 243, 254.

⁵¹ Šād 33/44: "Take a small bunch of grass in your hand, and strike [her] with that so as not to break your oath."

⁵² John Andrew Morrow, *Controversies in Islam: Religious Law, Qur'anic Ethical Imperatives, and Higher Moral Objectives* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023), 2.

⁵³ Rachel M. Scott, "A Contextual Approach to Women's Rights in the Qur'an: Readings of 4:34", *The Muslim World* 99/1 (2009), 61-62.

alleged order to beat is almost null and void.⁵⁴ In this case, we need to shift the focus away from the act of beating. It is understood that all these are warning measures to protect the family. Because these verses are constructive and require an action afterwards. However, when we look at the developments after the verses, we do not know of anyone who attempted to beat his wife with reference to the verse al-Nisā' 4/34.

In order to fully understand this verse, it is worthwhile to consider another verse with the same characteristic: The verse of al-Nisā' 4/34, like verse Tawbah 9/5,⁵⁵ is one of the verses in the Qur'an whose functionality remains as a warning and has no praxis. In fact, the Prophet sent Hazrat Ali to the polytheists to inform them of the first nine verses of Surah al-Tawbah, including verse 9/5. On this occasion, Hazrat Ali 'informed them that they could no longer circumambulate the Ka'bah naked. Accordingly, it was declared that the polytheists could not enter Masjid al-Haram and could not perform Hajj.⁵⁶ It is a known fact that apart from this warning statement, no other attempt was made against the polytheists with reference to the verse Tawbah 9/5. Likewise, after the Prophet's passing away, there was no actual struggle against the polytheists.⁵⁷ Therefore, these verses are in the nature of warnings and have assumed a deterrent role. Accordingly, after these verses, the polytheists did not commit any treachery against the Muslims and remained loyal to the previous treaties. Therefore, there was no need for a military action against them.

The verse al-Nisā' 4/34 was interpreted in a literal way until the period when modernism was dominant, and today it is interpreted in a way that is detached from its context based on modernist perceptions. However, when the traces of socio-cultural change before and after the verse are followed, it is observed that both approaches have dead ends. Accordingly, the purpose of this verse is not to punish, but to warn women who unjustly rebel against their husbands. Indeed, when we look at the life of the Prophet and the Companions, it couldn't be seen them practicing such a practice - such as beating their wives - after this verse was revealed.

Conclusion

⁵⁴ Shannon Dunn - Resemary B. Kellison, "At the Intersection of Scripture and Law: Qur'ān 4: 34 and Violence against Women", *Indiana University Press*, 26/2 (2010), 18; Wahyu Fahrul Rizki, "Qirā'ah Mubādalah Approach to the Qur'an: The Interpretation of q.s. al-Nisā' [4]: 34", *Ulul Albab* 21/2 (2020), 282-283.

⁵⁵ Tawbah 9/5: "When the [four] forbidden months are over, wherever you encounter the idolaters, kill them, seize them, besiege them, wait for them at every lookout post; but if they turn [to God], maintain the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, let them go on their way, for God is most forgiving and merciful."

⁵⁶ Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrat al-Nabawīyya*, pp. 484-486; *al-Wāqī*, *Kitab al-Meghazī*, II, 443-444, Şulul, *Son Peygamber Hz. Muhammed'in (sav) Hayatı*, s. 835-837.

⁵⁷ Muhammet Karaosman, *Medine Devlet Siyaset Cihad* (İstanbul: Cinius, 2020), 135.

Socio-cultural change is inevitable in people's lives. The most important and sensitive institution of society, the family, is affected by these changes. The Qur'ān, the life guide of Muslims, includes some of the problems faced by the family, offers suggestions for their solution, and takes precautions and warnings. However, the issue of the correct understanding of these verses continues to be important. Efforts to understand these verses without taking socio-cultural mobility into account result in two situations: The first is a fact that is mostly encountered in the classical period; giving literal meaning to the verses. The second is the forced interpretations made under the pressure of the current perception that is widespread today.

The articles of law within the scope of criminal law are enacted to prevent people from committing offences rather than to punish them. Therefore, the purpose of these verses is not to beat the spouses, but to prevent their possible bad thoughts and intentions from being put into practice. This indicates that the intended message was likely understood in a broader context, focusing on the promotion of harmony and respect within family relationships. Considering the preceding verse of al-Nisā' 4/34, it is evident that there is an intention to eliminate negative situations. This is because in al-Nisā' 4/34, women who have the trait of *nushūz* are warned. This situation continues in a manner that supports the warning in al-Nisā' 4/35. This is because inviting arbitrators after the warning is appropriate for individual and social psychology. Otherwise, the arbitration of the referees would be rendered meaningless after the act of 'beating.'

The interpretations that have no equivalent in the Sunnah, which can be called as the implementations of the verses to life or exegesis, stem from the literal point of view. This point of view leads to misinforming and misleading readers and researchers by manipulating the verses. When the verse al-Nisā' 4/34 is, hence evaluated in light of the event and conditions before and after it, it is understood that this verse has no abstract or practical application and that it was revealed as a warning.

In order to save the verses from the problem of attributing a literal meaning based on ideological and contemporary perceptions, emphasis should be placed on the information of the period of revelation. As a matter of fact, the obligation to take this information into consideration may be effective in preventing Qur'ānic researchers from acting arbitrarily while giving meaning to the verses. In addition to that to understand the verses about socio-

cultural changes correctly, it is necessary to take into account the developments before and after the verses and to make an analysis in this direction.

From a literal point of view based on the current perception, the expression 'beating' in the al-Nisā' 4/34 has a pejorative connotation. However, when the experiences and socio-cultural changes before and after the verse are taken into consideration, it is understood that this expression is used for deterrent purposes, as in the proverb 'make worse than beating'. In this respect, for a correct understanding, there is a need for research and readings that take into account not only the wording (*lafz*) of the verses but also the conditions that led to the wording and the developments after the wording.

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