

FROM DOMESTIC CONFINEMENT TO PUBLIC AGENCY: A CONTEXTUAL READING OF Q.S. AL-AḤZĀB [33]: 33 THROUGH ABDULLAH SAEED'S APPROACH

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Abstract: This study examines the interpretation of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, particularly the phrase *waqarna fi buyūtikunna* (remain in your homes), which has traditionally been used to restrict women's public participation. The research problem centers on the tension between literal readings that confine women to domestic spaces and the need for contextual interpretations responsive to modern social dynamics. The study aims to re-examine Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 through Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach, an analytical framework previously underexplored in existing scholarship. Using a qualitative methodology with Saeed's contextual framework, the analysis proceeds through six stages: classical to contemporary exegesis, linguistic analysis of three key terms (*qarna*, *tabarruj*, *ahl al-bayt*), micro and macro analysis, parallel textual examination, hierarchical value mapping, and contemporary contextualization. The findings reveal that Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, when analyzed linguistically, historically, and through Saeed's hierarchical value theory, falls under instructional values rather than obligatory values, making its directives historically contingent rather than universally binding. The study concludes that the verse emphasizes ethical conduct, dignity, and modesty rather than physical confinement, thereby affirming women's right to participate actively in public life. The significance of this research lies in offering a fresh interpretive framework that reconciles the verse's textual meaning with contemporary realities. The study is limited to textual analysis of a single verse without empirical research, and future studies are encouraged to conduct fieldwork and comparative analysis of related verses.

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Keywords: Contextual Approach, Gender, Qur'anic Exegesis, Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, Women's Freedom.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji penafsiran Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, khususnya frasa *waqarna fi buyūtikunna* (tetaplah di rumah-rumahmu), yang secara tradisional digunakan untuk membatasi partisipasi publik perempuan. Problematika penelitian berpusat pada ketegangan antara pembacaan literal yang mengurung perempuan di ruang domestik dan kebutuhan akan penafsiran kontekstual yang responsif terhadap dinamika sosial modern. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menafsirkan ulang Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 melalui pendekatan kontekstual Abdullah Saeed, sebuah kerangka analitis yang masih jarang digunakan dalam kajian sebelumnya. Menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dengan pendekatan kontekstual Saeed, penelitian ini menganalisis ayat melalui enam tahapan: penafsiran klasik hingga kontemporer, analisis linguistik tiga kata kunci (*qarna*, *tabarruj*, *ahl al-bayt*), analisis mikro dan makro, penelusuran ayat paralel, pemetaan hierarki nilai, dan kontekstualisasi kontemporer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, ketika dianalisis secara linguistik, historis, dan melalui teori hierarki nilai Saeed, termasuk dalam nilai instruksional (*instructional values*), sehingga arahnya bersifat kontekstual dan terikat waktu, bukan mengikat secara universal. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa ayat ini menekankan perilaku etis, martabat, dan kesopanan, bukan kurungan fisik, sehingga menegaskan hak perempuan untuk berpartisipasi aktif dalam kehidupan publik. Signifikansi penelitian ini terletak pada penawaran kerangka penafsiran baru yang merekonsiliasi makna tekstual ayat dengan realitas kontemporer. Penelitian terbatas pada analisis tekstual satu ayat tanpa kajian empiris, sehingga penelitian lanjutan disarankan untuk melakukan studi lapangan dan analisis komparatif terhadap ayat-ayat terkait.

Kata-kata Kunci: Gender, Kebebasan Perempuan, Pendekatan Kontekstual, Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, Tafsir Al-Qur'an.

Introduction

The interpretation of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 has undergone significant development. Initially, classical exegetes (*mufasssīrūn*) generally agreed that this verse was primarily addressed to the Prophet's wives as moral and ethical guidance, particularly concerning women's modesty and dignity. Ibn Kathīr highlighted the command to stay at home in relation to personal piety (Kathīr 1990, 408–14), while al-Tabarī (2009, 258–70) and al-Zamakhsharī (2006, 540–44) emphasized the special legal status of the Prophet's wives compared to other women, as well as the prohibition against emulating pre-Islamic (Jāhiliyyah) female behavior. Al-Qurṭubī (1971, 177–83) took a stricter stance, asserting that women must remain at home except in emergencies, supporting his argument with historical accounts. Al-Bayḍawī and Ibn Kathīr, though not detailing specific legal rulings, still emphasized the importance of Muslim women's etiquette in dress and public conduct (Alfani et al. 2025, 3). Collectively, these classical interpretations demonstrate that the verse was understood as a directive to Muslim women, especially the Prophet's wives, to uphold modesty, refrain from *tabarruj* (ostentatious display), and adhere to Islamic social and spiritual norms in daily life. Moreover, classical exegetes indicated that Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 applies to all women (Geissinger 2015, 207–47).

In contrast, modern-contemporary exegetes interpret Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 as emphasizing women's ethical conduct in social life rather than imposing an absolute prohibition on leaving the home. Scholars such as Sayyid Quṭb, al-Mawḍūdī, and Shaykh al-Jazairi stress the home as the primary sphere for women while permitting outdoor activities in cases of necessity or emergency (Quṭb 2004, 75; Jazairi 2007,

312; Mawdūdī 1972, 174). Meanwhile, progressive thinkers like Asghar Ali Engineer, Quraish Shihab, and Amina Wadud argue that the verse does not impose absolute restrictions on women's mobility but rather calls for ethical behavior, righteous intentions, and modesty in public spaces (Engineer 2005, 16; Wadud 1999, 38; Shihab 2012, 91). Thus, the core emphasis of the verse lies in modesty, dignity, and preserving moral integrity, not an absolute confinement of women (Addzaky et al. 2026, 104).

Previous studies on Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 have been conducted extensively. For instance, research by Asep Sulhadi and Izzatus Sholihah (2023, 1), employing a *maqāṣidī* (objectives-based) exegetical approach, concludes that the verse does not discriminate against women but highlights their primary role at home without precluding public engagement, provided it serves *maṣlaḥah* (public benefit) and avoids *mafsadah* (harm). Meanwhile, Mahfidhatul Khasanah's (2021, 1) study, using the *ma'nā-cum-maghzā* approach, focuses on the prohibition of *tabarruj*, concluding that it was a Jāhiliyyah practice that Islam forbade due to its degrading and exploitative nature; the ban aims to protect women, preserve Muslim identity, and instill ethical dignity in social life. Furthermore, Yuni Wahyuni's research (2023, 1), applying George J.E. Gracia's hermeneutics, interprets Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 as historically rooted in Arab patriarchal culture but argues that Islam does not forbid women from pursuing careers as long as they uphold ethics, granting them freedom to contribute actively according to their expertise. Another study by Mutiara Cahya Noviani and Azis Muslim (2023, 1), utilizing Fazlur Rahman's double-movement theory, concludes that women may work in public spaces provided it causes no harm, offers societal benefit, and prioritizes family roles. Spousal or parental consent is also a condition, and ethical and *sharī'ah*-compliant boundaries must be maintained.

Although prior studies have examined Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 through various approaches—such as *maqāṣidī* exegesis, *ma'nā-cum-maghzā*, Gracia's hermeneutics, and Fazlur Rahman's double-movement theory—none have specifically employed Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach as an analytical framework. This gap is particularly significant given that the classical and modern-contemporary interpretations surveyed above converge on the verse's core emphasis on modesty, dignity, and moral integrity, yet diverge considerably regarding the extent to which it restricts women's mobility and public participation. Such divergence indicates that the verse's ethical message has not been fully disentangled from the socio-historical circumstances of its revelation, nor has it been systematically reformulated in response to contemporary social dynamics. Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach offers a methodological remedy by emphasizing a Qur'anic reading that considers the socio-historical context of revelation while systematically examining its contemporary relevance, thereby enabling the recovery of meanings that are both textually grounded and contextually responsive. Accordingly, this study seeks to re-examine Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 through Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach (2005, 8), which is deemed essential for uncovering meanings more responsive to modern social dynamics,

particularly regarding Muslim women's roles and mobility in contemporary society.

Based on the foregoing discussion, a significant academic gap (research gap) exists in the study of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, in that classical and modern-contemporary interpretations have situated this verse within the framework of women's modesty, dignity, and social ethics, yet no study has specifically applied Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach as an analytical framework. Accordingly, the research questions of this study are formulated as follows. First, how has Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 been interpreted by classical and modern-contemporary *mufasssir*? Second, how can Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach be applied to Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33? Third, what is the relevance of the meaning of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 to Muslim women's roles and mobility in contemporary society? In line with these questions, this study aims, first, to map and analyze the development of the interpretation of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 from the classical to the contemporary period; second, to apply Abdullah Saeed's contextual analytical framework systematically to the verse; and third, to formulate a meaning that is more responsive to modern social dynamics, particularly concerning Muslim women's roles and mobility.

This study proceeds from several basic assumptions. First, the Qur'anic text cannot be divorced from the socio-historical context of its revelation; consequently, a comprehensive understanding requires consideration of the seventh-century Arabian cultural setting as the original context of revelation. Second, the meaning of the Qur'an is dynamic and continuously engages in dialogue with the context of its readers; therefore, an interpretation that remains confined to the textual dimension risks losing its ethical and applicative relevance for contemporary society. Third, Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach is regarded as capable of bridging the gap between the timeless nature of the text and an ever-changing social reality, particularly with respect to issues of gender justice, women's social roles, and their mobility in the public sphere. Fourth, Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 essentially contains universal ethical principles—such as modesty, dignity, and moral integrity—that are not limited to a particular historical context; hence, they can be reformulated contextually to address the challenges confronting modern Muslim society.

This study employs a qualitative methodology, drawing upon written references from diverse sources, including books, classical exegesis (*kutub al-tafsīr*), journal articles, and web-based materials pertinent to the research theme (Albi and Setiawan 2018, 1). The adoption of a qualitative approach is grounded in inquiry, which seeks to interpret meaning, process, and context underlying the digitization of the Qur'an rather than to measure numerical data. Through extensive library research, this study endeavors to construct a comprehensive understanding of how classical exegetical traditions interact with contemporary digital technological developments. Abdullah Saeed's (2016, 17) contextualization theory serves as the analytical framework, aiming to comprehend the Qur'anic message within its historical and cultural context while assessing its applicability to current social, political, and economic realities. This

approach is selected because it effectively bridges the gap between the timeless nature of the text and the ever-evolving context of modern readers, thereby ensuring that interpretation does not remain confined to textual dimensions alone but also addresses applicative and ethical dimensions in contemporary life.

Abdullah Saeed's (2005, 21) contextual analysis approach involves several interconnected steps. First, it begins with examining the interpretations of classical and contemporary *mufassir* to understand the evolution and consistency of exegesis over time. Second, this is followed by a linguistic analysis that focuses on vocabulary, sentence structure, and rhetorical style to capture the nuances of the original Arabic text. Third, micro-level analysis examines individual words or phrases, while macro-level analysis considers the broader thematic and structural context of the *sūrah* to ensure a balanced understanding. Fourth, parallel text analysis is conducted to compare the verse under study with other Qur'anic passages addressing similar themes, providing a more comprehensive and coherent interpretation. Fifth, hierarchical analysis assesses the priority and universality of the ethical and legal principles contained in the verse, often in light of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Sixth, the verse is contextualized within contemporary social, cultural, political, and economic conditions, allowing its moral and instructional guidance to be meaningfully applied in modern life.

Interpretation of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33

Understanding the verses of the Qur'an necessitates a comprehensive and multidimensional approach, given the complexity of their meanings and the diverse socio-historical contexts surrounding their revelation (Saeed 2005, 18). One verse that has consistently generated scholarly debate among classical and contemporary exegetes is Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, particularly concerning the directive *waqarna fī buyūtikunna* (remain in your homes). This verse not only serves as a legal foundation for restricting women's public participation but also harbors a wealth of semantic richness requiring thorough examination from multiple perspectives ranging from linguistic analysis and classical to modern exegesis, to the frameworks of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law) and the hierarchy of values theory. Consequently, a comprehensive discussion of this verse is essential to enable Muslims to grasp its moral message proportionally, without succumbing to a rigidly literal interpretation.

The subsequent discussion will systematically expound on the interpretation of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 through six principal approaches. First, it examines the views of classical to contemporary exegetes, demonstrating the plurality of interpretations surrounding this verse, from al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Qurṭubī to Quraish Shihab and Amina Wadud. Second, it undertakes a linguistic analysis of key terms—namely *qarna*, *tabarruj*, and *ahl al-bayt*—selected for their centrality to the verse's legal and ethical implications: *qarna* directly commands the conduct of the Prophet's wives, *tabarruj* addresses

the prohibition of ostentatious display, and *ahl al-bayt* delineates the intended addressees of the purification decree. Their etymological roots and semantic nuances will be elucidated to uncover layers of meaning often lost in translation. Third, it presents micro and macro analyses that explore the historical and socio-cultural context of Medina at the time of the verse's revelation, encompassing the prevailing political, economic, and cultural conditions. Fourth, it traces parallel Qur'anic verses sharing similar themes to enrich understanding through a thematic approach. Fifth, it maps the hierarchical value of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 according to Abdullah Saeed's theoretical framework to ascertain the verse's position within the spectrum of Qur'anic values. Finally, it contextualizes the verse in relation to women's freedom of expression in contemporary public spaces, while remaining grounded in the principles of justice and public welfare (*maṣlahah*).

1. Classical to Medieval Mufasssir

According to Ibn 'Abbās, Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 explains that the command *waqarna fī buyūtikunna* in the Qur'an carries three meanings: women are encouraged to stay at home with modest conduct, maintain the five daily prayers, and give *zakāt*. He also prohibits women from wearing revealing clothing but does not specify who is intended in the verse or the term *ahl al-bayt* (Fairūzābādī 2001, 186). Al-Ṭabarī (2009, 258–69) interprets that this verse is specifically directed at the Prophet's wives as a form of advice and a greater responsibility compared to other Muslim women. They would receive multiplied rewards for obedience but multiplied sin for disobedience. He does not elaborate on the legal ruling of this verse in detail.

Al-Zamakhsharī (2006, 536–37) emphasizes that this verse prohibits the Prophet's wives from imitating the lifestyle of Jāhiliyyah women, who dressed extravagantly and walked seductively. He does not forbid women from leaving their homes as long as they maintain a modest appearance and behavior in public. Al-Qurtubī (1971, 180) asserts that this verse relates to the simple lifestyle chosen by the Prophet Muhammad. He stresses that the best place for women is in their homes, except in cases of urgent necessity. He cites the story of 'Ā'ishah in the Battle of Jamal as an example, clarifying that she left her home not to wage war but to fulfill the people's request for peace.

2. Modern to Contemporary Mufasssir

Scholars hold diverse views regarding the meaning of the command to stay in your homes (*waqarna fī buyūtikunna*) in Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33. Some, such as Sayyid Quṭb, emphasize that the home is the primary place for women to maintain honor and tranquility, yet this does not mean women are completely forbidden from leaving their homes. Going out remains permissible as long as it aligns with necessity and maintains proper etiquette (Quṭb 2004, 75). Other scholars like al-Mawdūdī (1972, 312) and al-Jazairi (2007, 174) stress the importance of women staying at home and maintaining modesty, particularly in dress and behavior, so as not to resemble women of the Jāhiliyyah era.

However, figures such as Quraish Shihab (2012, 18) and Amina Wadud (1999, 52) offer a more contextual and inclusive interpretation, asserting that the verse does not prohibit women from engaging in activities outside the home as long as they uphold moral norms and Sharia principles. Meanwhile, Asghar Ali Engineer (2005, 48) even rejects views that confine women solely to the domestic sphere. He affirms that the Quran guarantees women’s right to participate in public life, including working and managing wealth. Thus, this verse is more accurately understood as an invitation to uphold honor and responsibility, rather than an absolute prohibition on activities outside the home.

Linguistic Analysis of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33

Furthermore, in understanding the historical meaning of a verse, it is necessary to analyze its linguistic aspects. Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 contains several important linguistic elements that require further examination, particularly the terms *qarna*, *tabarruj*, and *ahl al-bayt*. Before discussing these three key terms in greater depth, the author first presents a summary table outlining the main aspects of each term, including its root, basic lexical meaning, variant readings (*qirā’at*), implications in classical Qur’anic exegesis, and the development of its interpretation in contemporary approaches. This table is intended to provide a conceptual map that facilitates the reader’s understanding and examination of the linguistic arguments presented in the following subsection. Accordingly, the more detailed discussion of *qarna*, *tabarruj*, and *ahl al-Bayt* is not presented in isolation, but rather as an elaboration of the linguistic and historical framework briefly established above.

Table 1. Summary of Linguistic Analysis of Key Terms in Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33.

Key Term	Basic Meaning	Variant Readings	Classical Interpretation	Contemporary Interpretation
<i>Qarna</i>	To remain, settle, dignity, sobriety.	<i>Waqirna</i> (<i>kasrah</i>) command to stay at home; <i>Waqarna</i> (<i>fathḥah</i>) <i>composure</i> and dignity.	<i>Waqirna</i> : physical restriction of women; <i>Waqarna</i> : emphasis on ethical conduct and modesty.	Core meanings are <i>tamkīn</i> (steadfastness) and <i>ṣiyānah</i> (safeguarding); contextually oriented toward protection and dignity, not an absolute ban on women’s mobility.
<i>Tabarruj</i>	To emerge conspicuously, to display adornment.	No variant: <i>tafā’ul</i> form indicates intentionality.	Prohibition of ostentatious and seductive display, associated with practices of Jāhiliyyah women.	Prohibition encompasses physical, verbal, and behavioral self-exhibition; aims to prevent arrogance (<i>burj</i>) and heedlessness of <i>taqwā</i> ; forms are subject to <i>‘urf</i> (local custom).

<i>Ahl al-Bayt</i>	Family/inhabitants of a house.	No variant, but pro-nominal shift (feminine plural masculine plural) occurs.	Sunnī: includes the Prophet's wives and close relatives (<i>iltifāt</i>); Shī'ī: restricted to the five People of the Cloak (<i>Ahl al-Kisā</i>).	Academically: a symbolic construct reinforcing prophetic authority and communal identity; requires an interdisciplinary approach (philology, history, theology).
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Having examined the summary table above, the following discussion will elaborate on each term in greater detail. The order of presentation begins with *qarna*, as it carries the most extensive debate concerning variant readings and jurisprudential implications. It is then followed by *tabarruj*, which demands morphological and ethical scrutiny, and finally *ahl al-bayt*, which exemplifies semantic and theological complexity within the Islamic exegetical tradition. Each term will be analyzed from the perspectives of classical lexicography, monumental works of *tafsīr*, and contemporary hermeneutical approaches, as already indicated in the table.

1. *Qarna*

A closer examination of the root *qarna* reveals that its dual canonical readings (Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33) are not merely phonetic variants but carry distinct theological and jurisprudential connotations. The reading *waqirna* (with *kasrah* on the *qāf*), which is transmitted by several Kufan reciters, is morphologically derived from *aqrarna* through the process of *idghām* (phonetic assimilation) and conveys the imperative to remain or settle, suggesting a literal restriction on women's mobility. By contrast, the Medinan reading *waqarna* (with *fathah*), attributed to 'Āṣim and mainstream scholars of Medina, traces its root to *qarra* (to settle) or *al-wiqār* (dignity and sobriety), thereby shifting the emphasis from physical confinement to an ethical disposition of composure and modesty. Classical lexicographers such as Ibn Manẓūr (1985, 85) in *Lisān al-'Arab* note that both forms ultimately converge on the semantic field of stability, yet the choice of vocalization opens a spectrum of interpretive possibilities that have been exploited by later exegetes to either prioritize domestic seclusion or underscore behavioral decorum as the primary objective of the divine address.

Modern contextual approaches to Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 have questioned rigidly literal interpretations of *qarna* that treat the command to remain in the home as an absolute restriction on women's mobility and public participation. Such approaches emphasize the importance of considering the historical and social circumstances surrounding the revelation, including the protection of women's dignity and social security in the context of pre-Islamic Arabian society (Scott 2009, 78). From this perspective, the imperative to remain in the home can be understood as a context-specific measure intended to regulate social conduct and protect women from forms of exploitation and public harassment, rather than as an eternal prohibition against

women's participation in public life (Afidah 2023, 252–70).

The broader ethical principles of dignity, modesty, and responsible conduct can therefore remain relevant even when the specific social circumstances addressed by the verse have changed. This hermeneutic shift is substantiated by the fact that the same verse explicitly addresses the wives of the Prophet (*azwāj al-nabi*) as figures of moral authority, implying that their primary role is to exemplify piety, not to be confined to private spaces (Chaudhry 2013, 69). Consequently, contemporary linguists argue that the semantic core of *qarna* lies in the concept of *tamkīn* (steadfastness) and *ṣiyānah* (safeguarding), which can be fulfilled both within and beyond the domestic sphere, provided that the underlying ethical imperatives of dignity and self-restraint are observed (Dāmighānī 1983, 174). This nuanced understanding demonstrates that the linguistic analysis of *qarna* cannot be divorced from its socio-historical setting, and that the variant readings collectively enrich rather than constrain the interpretive horizons of the verse.

2. *Tabarruj*

The term *tabarruj* in Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 is etymologically derived from the triliteral root *b-r-j*, which conveys the notion of becoming manifest or emerging conspicuously; the word takes the form of the fifth verbal measure (*tafā'ul*), which in Arabic grammar often implies deliberate self-assumption of a state or action.

Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (2008, 358), in his *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān*, defines *tabarruj* as the intentional exposure of one's hidden charms and ornaments in a manner that transgresses socially accepted boundaries, contrasting it directly with *taḥaṣṣun* (self-concealment and chastity). This paradigmatic opposition is crucial because it indicates that the Qur'anic condemnation is not directed against visibility per se, but against a specific mode of visibility that is ostentatious, seductive, and devoid of moral purpose. Classical commentators such as al-Ṭabarī (1954, 310–15) and al-Qurṭubī (1973, 243) further specify that the practice of *tabarruj* was prevalent among women of the Jāhiliyyah, who would walk proudly while exposing their bosoms and fine garments, thereby destabilizing the social fabric through competitive display.

In contemporary Qur'anic hermeneutics, the semantic field of *tabarruj* has been expanded to encompass not only physical adornment but also verbal and behavioral forms of self-exhibition that unduly attract attention in public spaces (Chaudhry 2013, 25). Scholars like Quraish Shihab (2010, 19) have emphasized that the prohibition must be understood in light of the broader Qur'anic ethos of *iffah* (modesty) and *taqwā* (God-consciousness), rather than as a static dress code applicable across all times and places. This interpretive trajectory is reinforced by the linguistic observation that *tabarruj* shares its root with *burj* (tower or lofty structure), implying an act of raising oneself above others in a self-aggrandizing fashion (Habibillah and Miski 2023, 21–28).

Thus, the prohibition targets the underlying disposition of arrogance and

heedlessness, which contradicts the Qur'anic call for humility and mutual respect among believers (Wati and Saputra 2018). Moreover, modern jurists argue that the specific forms of adornment considered *tabarruj* are subject to *'urf* (local custom) and historical contingency, as long as the essential values of dignity and social harmony are preserved (Hosna and Zayyadi 2026, 163–90). This dynamic reading of *tabarruj* illustrates how linguistic analysis, when combined with contextual reasoning, can yield ethical guidelines that remain relevant without being reductionist or anachronistic.

3. *Ahl al-Bayt*

The compound noun *ahl al-bayt* in Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 presents a remarkable case of semantic polysemy, where the interpretive ambiguity arises from the dual denotation of both *ahl* and *bayt* within the Arabic linguistic tradition. The term *ahl* fundamentally signifies the people of or those associated with a particular entity, encompassing a wide range of relationships including kinship (*nasab*), cohabitation, religious affiliation, or professional guild. In classical lexicography, as recorded in *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* by Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (1986, 437), the meaning of *ahl* is context-dependent, shifting from family members to inhabitants and even to those who share a common cause or quality. Similarly, *bayt* literally denotes a physical dwelling or tent, but in Qur'anic usage, it is frequently employed metaphorically to signify a place of spiritual significance, such as *Bayt Allāh* (the House of God) or *al-bayt al-ma'mūr* (the frequented house).

The interpretation of *ahl al-bayt* in Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 remains a major point of divergence between Sunnī and Shīʿī traditions, rooted in their respective approaches to linguistic and prophetic evidence. Shīʿī exegetes restrict the phrase exclusively to the five individuals of *Ahl al-Kisāʾ*, citing the pronominal shift from feminine plural pronouns in the preceding verses to the masculine plural in the purification clause (*li-yudhhibha ʿankumu al-rijsa*) as grammatical proof that the address has changed, thereby excluding the Prophet's wives (Stewart and Kuenkler 2021, 64). Sunnī scholars, by contrast, interpret this shift as *iltifāt*—a stylistic rhetorical device in Arabic—and maintain that the wives remain included within the household, though with a distinct status (Christiansen 2018, 397–422).

Contemporary academic scholarship, employing literary and historical-critical methods, views *ahl al-bayt* as a potent symbolic construct that reinforces prophetic authority, familial piety, and communal identity in early Islam (Ali 2016, 84; Roald 2003, 64). This case illustrates that ostensibly straightforward Qur'anic terms are semantically layered, necessitating an interdisciplinary approach—integrating philology, history, and theology—for a balanced understanding of their original meaning and ongoing relevance.

Micro and Macro Analysis

A comprehensive understanding of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 necessitates two complementary analytical approaches. The micro-analysis examines the textual

aspects of the verse, its *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation), and its specific historical context, whereas the macro-analysis considers the broader social, economic, and cultural conditions of Medina at the time of its revelation. Through this integrative approach, the verse can be interpreted holistically not merely textually, but contextually and in alignment with the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* (the higher objectives of Islamic law). The following discussion presents both the micro and macro analyses of the verse.

1. Micro Analysis of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33

Surah Al-Aḥzāb consists of 73 verses and is unanimously classified as a Madaniyyah surah, revealed after the Hijrah to Medina. The name al-Aḥzāb, meaning the Confederates, refers to the coalition of tribes that besieged Medina in the fifth year of Hijrah, an event known as the Battle of the Trench (*Ghazwat al-Khandaq*) (Ünsal 2016, 62). This surah addresses various legal, social, and ethical matters that arose during that period, including regulations concerning the Prophet’s household, marital laws, and communal defense (Hārūn 2015, 199–270).

Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 is among the verses that have a specific *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasion of revelation), a feature not shared by all Qur’anic verses. According to a narration transmitted by Ibn ‘Abbās, this verse was revealed specifically concerning the wives of the Prophet Muhammad. The pronominal shifts within the verse—from the feminine plural address in the earlier part (*waqarna fī buyūtikunna, lā tabarrajna, aqimna al-ṣalāh, ātīna al-zakāh, wa-aṭīna Allāh wa-rasūlahu*) to the masculine plural in the purification clause (*li-yudhhibah ‘ankumu al-rijsa ahl al-bayti*)—have prompted extensive scholarly discussion. Classical exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī interpret this shift as a rhetorical device (*iltifāt*) that does not change the primary addressees, while Shī‘ī scholars argue it indicates a distinct group (*Ahl al-Kisā*) separate from the Prophet’s wives (Suyūṭī 2002, 271).

Textually, the verse contains several imperative constructions that form the core of its legal and ethical injunctions. The command *waqarna* (remain/settle) appears in two canonical readings: *waqirna* (with *kasrah* on the *qāf*), transmitted by certain Kufan reciters, which linguistically derives from *aqarna* (to settle down), and *waqarna* (with *fatḥah*), attributed to ‘Āṣim and the Medinan tradition, which roots in *qarra* (to be still) or *al-wiqār* (dignity and sobriety). This variant reading demonstrates that the textual transmission itself accommodates a spectrum of meaning, ranging from physical stability to ethical composure, without necessitating a singular literal interpretation.

Furthermore, the prohibition *lā tabarrajna tabarruja al-jāhiliyyah al-ūlā* (do not adorn yourselves like the former Jāhiliyyah) is textually significant because it situates the verse within a broader Qur’anic critique of pre-Islamic customs, contrasting Islamic moral conduct with the ostentatious behavior of the Age of Ignorance. The verse concludes with a declaration of divine intent: “*innamā*

yuridu Allāhu li-yudhhibha ‘ankumu al-rijsa ahl al-bayti wa-yuṭahhirakum taḥīran (Allah only desires to remove impurity from you, O People of the Household, and to purify you thoroughly).” This clause functions as a theological justification for the preceding commands, linking ethical conduct with spiritual purification (Hosna and Zayyadi 2026, 374–95).

Significantly, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature specifies that this verse was revealed in response to certain behaviors or circumstances involving the Prophet’s wives, though the exact occasion is narrated with slight variations. What remains consistent across reports is that the verse was not revealed as a general or universal decree for all women but as a specific address to a particular group—the *azwāj al-nabī*—whose unique status carried heightened responsibilities and corresponding ethical expectations. This textual specificity is crucial for interpretation, as it grounds the verse’s directives in a particular historical addressee rather than an abstract, timeless legal maxim.

Thus, the micro-analysis of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 reveals that its textual features—its Madani context, its specific *asbāb al-nuzūl*, its pronominal shifts, its variant readings, and its grammatical constructions—collectively indicate a verse deeply embedded in a particular historical moment and directed at a specific audience. These textual particularities must be taken into account before any broader application of the verse to general Muslim women or to contemporary contexts can be justified. The verse does not present itself as a universally binding legal code but as a context-sensitive ethical address, the interpretation of which requires careful attention to its internal textual dynamics and revelatory circumstances.

2. Macro Analysis of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33

Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 was revealed during the Battle of the Trench, a period when Medina’s social conditions were highly dynamic and complex. The city was a melting pot of various ethnic and religious groups, including the Muhājirūn (Emigrants), Anṣār (Helpers), and Jewish tribes such as the Banū Qurayzah, Banū Naḍir, and Banū Qaynuqā’. Although the Constitution of Medina, established by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), aimed to create a just and peaceful society, intergroup relations remained marked by suspicion and tension (Hārūn 2015, 201–67). Some Jewish tribes violated treaties and committed betrayals, exacerbating political and social unrest in Medina (Ridoi, 2024, 361–84).

Externally, pressure from the Quraysh and their allies, who felt threatened by Islam’s growth, further worsened the social climate. In this context, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) played a crucial role in maintaining stability by fostering *ukhuwah Islāmiyyah* (Islamic brotherhood) between the Muhājirūn and Anṣār and strengthening Muslim solidarity against external threats (Mariyono 2024, 19).

Economically, the Muslim community in Medina was far from prosperous. Many Muhājirūn had lost all their possessions during the migration from Mecca and relied heavily on the generosity of the Anṣār. Meanwhile, Medina's economy, which depended on agriculture and trade, was disrupted by external pressures, including economic boycotts and military threats from the Quraysh. Trade became unsafe, agricultural yields were insufficient, and during the Battle of the Trench, Muslims faced severe hardships, limited supplies, food shortages, and days of hunger. Yet, it was during this crisis that the spirit of communal solidarity and mutual aid, characteristic of Medina's society at the time, emerged (Kulsum 2021, 37).

Culturally, Medina was in a transitional phase. Pre-Islamic Arab traditions, Jewish teachings, and Islamic values coexisted and influenced one another. Tribal-based social structures remained strong, with loyalty to one's clan often superseding commitment to the state or religion (Fahrurroji and Setiawan 2020, 82). However, the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) presence gradually shifted societal mindsets toward a more inclusive and just system. Values such as brotherhood, moral leadership, and spiritual virtue began replacing old norms. Oral traditions like poetry, storytelling, and speeches remained vital in daily life as educational tools, wartime motivation, and da'wah (preaching) propaganda. During the digging of the Trench, the Islamic values of cooperation and collective effort became a social force that strengthened Muslim defenses against external threats (Rokan and SHI 2013, 1).

The revelation of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 is closely tied to the social, economic, and cultural conditions during the Battle of the Trench, particularly in regulating Muslim women's roles and maintaining internal stability amid external threats. While the verse was addressed to the Prophet's wives, it also serves as general guidance for Muslim women to exercise caution and avoid leaving home without urgent necessity during crises, acting as a form of social protection. The verse also critiques remnants of Jāhiliyyah culture, such as ostentatious dress and unrestrained behavior, which contradicted Islamic modesty. Additionally, Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 reflects a cultural shift from tribalism toward Islamic values emphasizing moral purity, spiritual responsibility, and women's roles in religious and social life.

Parallel Texts of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33

This section presents parallel texts of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 by referring to other Quranic verses that share similar themes, wording, or meanings with the interpreted verse. The purpose is to help interpreters understand the meaning of a verse more comprehensively through comparison with other verses addressing the same or relevant issues (Ridwan 2016, 1–7).

The following analysis examines three distinct Qur'anic passages—Q.S. An-Naml [27]: 23, Q.S. At-Taḥrīm [66]: 11–12, and Q.S. Al-Qaṣṣaṣ [28]: 23—each

of which offers salient parallels to Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, albeit from different thematic angles. Q.S. An-Naml [27]: 23 presents the figure of Queen Bilqīs of Sheba, a female sovereign whose political authority and wise governance are implicitly acknowledged by the Qur'an, thereby challenging any reading of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 that would categorically exclude women from public leadership. Q.S. At-Taḥrīm [66]: 11–12 introduces two paragons of female piety—Āsiyah, the wife of Pharaoh, and Maryam bint 'Imrān—who exemplify unwavering faith and moral integrity under oppressive conditions, demonstrating that spiritual excellence is not contingent upon external circumstances but upon inward devotion (Al Fahdawi et al. 2026, 328). Finally, Q.S. Al-Qaṣṣa [28]: 23 recounts the encounter of Prophet Mūsā with the two daughters of Shu'ayb in Madyan, highlighting the active participation of women in the public sphere and their capacity to fulfil familial responsibilities whilst maintaining modesty and caution (Fathiyaturrahmah et al. 2024, 202). Collectively, these parallel texts furnish a rich intertextual framework that underscores the Qur'an's recognition of women's multifaceted roles—as leaders, as devotees, and as active members of society—thereby complicating any monolithic or reductionist interpretation of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 and affirming the profound compatibility between female agency and religious piety within the Qur'anic worldview (Koburtay and Abuhussein 2021, 181).

1. Female Leadership in the Kingdom of Sheba

إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ

"Indeed, I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given of all things, and she has a magnificent throne."

The Qur'anic portrayal of Bilqīs presents her as a female sovereign endowed with substantial political authority and material resources. In Q.S. An-Naml [27]: 23, the Queen of Sheba is explicitly described as a woman ruling over her people, possessing everything and a magnificent throne. Rather than portraying her authority as inherently problematic, the narrative subsequently emphasizes her capacity for deliberation, political judgment, diplomacy, and concern for the welfare of her people (Stowasser 1994, 165). Recent scholarship has therefore highlighted Bilqīs as an important Qur'anic representation of female political agency and sovereignty, while also noting that later interpretations sometimes reframed her leadership through prevailing gender norms (Lala 2022, 47–58).

Implicitly, this verse affirms that the Qur'an acknowledges the legitimacy of female leadership in the public sphere, including at the highest political level. This is significant because it demonstrates that Islam does not *a priori* reject women's authority; rather, it evaluates leadership on the basis of justice, wisdom, and piety—qualities that Bilqīs clearly possessed, as she later submitted to the monotheistic faith after her encounter with Sulaymān. Moreover, this verse signals that women

during the Prophet Muhammad's time lived in a society already familiar with female sovereigns, thereby complicating any reading of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 that would categorically confine women to domestic spaces. In this light, Q.S. An-Naml [27]: 23 serves as a foundational text for understanding that the Qur'an does not regard gender as an inherent barrier to public leadership, provided that the individual possesses the requisite capacity and moral integrity.

2. Exemplary Pious Women Amidst Adversity

وَصَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا لِّلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا امْرَأَتَ فِرْعَوْنَ إِذْ قَالَتْ رَبِّ ابْنِ لِي عِنْدَكَ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَنَجِّنِي
مِنْ فِرْعَوْنَ وَعَمَلِهِ وَنَجِّنِي مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ

“And Allah presents an example for those who believed: the wife of Pharaoh, when she said, ‘My Lord, build for me a house near You in Paradise, and save me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and save me from the wrongdoing people. And (the example of) Maryam, the daughter of ‘Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her (womb) through Our spirit [i.e., Angel Jibrīl], and she believed in the words of her Lord and His scriptures, and she was among the devoutly obedient.’”

These two verses present two female figures as exemplary models of piety and steadfast faith under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Q.S. At-Taḥrīm [66]: 11 recounts the prayer of Āsiyah, the wife of Pharaoh: *“My Lord, build for me a house near You in Paradise, and save me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and save me from the wrongdoing people.”* The verse portrays Āsiyah as a woman who maintains her faith despite living within an oppressive political and domestic environment. Her supplication demonstrates a clear separation between spiritual allegiance and worldly power, as she seeks proximity to God while explicitly distancing herself from Pharaoh and his actions. Her request for a house “near You in Paradise” further foregrounds her orientation toward divine proximity and eternal salvation rather than dependence on worldly security (Lahmar 2024, 198). In this sense, Āsiyah can be read as a representation of female spiritual agency, demonstrating that moral integrity and religious commitment can be maintained even within structures of political and familial oppression. Read alongside Q.S. At-Taḥrīm [66]: 12, which presents Maryam as another exemplary woman distinguished by chastity, faith, and spiritual integrity, Q.S. At-Taḥrīm [66]: 11–12 establishes a Qur'anic paradigm in which spiritual excellence is grounded in individual faith and ethical conduct rather than social position, marital affiliation, or worldly privilege (Vojdani and Heidari 2023, 147–62).

Q.S. At-Taḥrīm [66]: 12 presents Maryam bint ‘Imrān as a paradigmatic figure of chastity, faith, and spiritual integrity. She is described as one who guarded her chastity (*aḥṣanat farjahā*), while God affirms her faith and grants her a unique status through the divine act associated with the conception of Jesus. The verse thus foregrounds Maryam's moral and spiritual qualities rather than her lineage or social position (Haleem 2020, 108). Read together with Q.S. At-Taḥrīm [66]:

11, which presents the wife of Pharaoh as another exemplary believing woman, the passage constructs a broader Qur'anic paradigm in which spiritual excellence is determined by faith, moral integrity, and devotion to God rather than by familial, political, or social status. Āsiyah and Maryam therefore represent two distinct forms of female spiritual agency: Āsiyah demonstrates steadfast faith and resistance within an oppressive household, whereas Maryam embodies chastity, trust in God, and perseverance in the face of social vulnerability (Lala 2026, 59). Taken together, Q.S. At-Taḥrīm [66]: 11–12 emphasizes that proximity to God is grounded in faith and ethical conduct rather than worldly privilege or familial affiliation.

3. Women's Active Participation in the Public Sphere

وَلَمَّا وَرَدَ مَاءَ مَدْيَنَ وَجَدَ عَلَيْهِ أُمَّةٌ مِّنَ النَّاسِ يَسْقُونَ^ط ۖ وَوَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهِمُ امْرَأَتَيْنِ تَذُودَنِ قَالَ
مَا خَطْبُكُمَا قَالَتَا لَا نَسْقِي حَتَّى يُصْدِرَ الرِّعَاءَ وَأَبُونَا شَيْخٌ كَبِيرٌ

“And when he arrived at the water of Madyan, he found there a crowd of people watering (their flocks), and he found aside from them two women holding back (their flocks). He said, ‘What is your situation?’ They said, ‘We cannot water (our flocks) until the shepherds depart, while our father is an elderly man.’”

Q.S. Al-Qaṣṣa [28]: 23 depicts Mūsā's encounter with two women at the watering place of Madyan after his departure from Egypt. Upon arriving at the well, Mūsā observes a large group of people watering their flocks, while two women remain apart, holding back their animals (Mujahidin et al. 2024, 231–40). When asked about their situation, they explain that they cannot water their flocks until the other shepherds have finished, and that their father is an elderly man who is unable to undertake the task himself. The narrative therefore portrays the two women as actively engaged in managing their family's livestock and undertaking responsibilities necessary for the household's livelihood. Their presence in a public space is presented without explicit condemnation, while their interaction with Mūsā is characterized by restraint, purposeful communication, and a clear concern for maintaining appropriate boundaries (Stowasser 1994, 116). The episode thus provides a Qur'anic representation of women exercising practical agency and contributing directly to family welfare within a challenging social and economic environment.

Analysis of this verse reveals several important points. First, the Qur'an implicitly acknowledges that women have the right and even the obligation to engage in public employment when circumstances require it, as illustrated by the daughters of Shu'ayb who took on their elderly father's duties (Syed 2010, 159). Second, the verse shows that interaction between men and women in public spaces is permissible, provided that modesty and caution are maintained—this is evident from the women's restrained demeanor and their avoidance of unnecessary contact

with the male shepherds (Nasir et al. 2022, 60). Third, this narrative indicates that women's work outside the home was neither unusual nor reprehensible in prophetic tradition; rather, it was a recognized social reality that even received divine assistance through the arrival of Mūsā, who helped them and subsequently married one of them (Fahdawi et al. 2026, 321). Therefore, Q.S. Al-Qaṣṣaṣ [28]: 23 serves as additional evidence that Islam does not confine women exclusively to the domestic sphere, but grants them space for social contribution, as long as the values of modesty and prudence are upheld.

Hierarchy of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33

According to Abdullah Saeed's (Saeed 2016, 1–38) theory of hierarchy, there are five main categories. First, obligatory values are fundamental principles that remain fixed, unaffected by time or socio-cultural context, such as pillars of faith, worship practices, and verses explicitly mentioning halal and haram. Second, fundamental values encompass universal values frequently reiterated in the Qur'an that support the welfare of the community, like the protection of life, family, and property, based on *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*. Third, protectional values safeguard fundamental values, such as prohibitions against usury and theft as forms of property protection, where punishments for violations are contextual. Fourth, implementational values concern the technical application of laws, such as variations in punishments for theft that can be adjusted to situations, indicating their temporal nature. Fifth, instructional values refer to guidance or advice tied to specific circumstances or customs during the revelation period, like marital advice or commands to honor parents. This theory helps clarify that not all verses hold equal weight, and some are contextual and open to reinterpretation.

In the context of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, within Abdullah Saeed's hierarchy of values, this verse falls under Instructional Values. These values are contextual and closely tied to the socio-historical circumstances of revelation, where the verse was specifically directed at the Prophet Muhammad's wives to preserve their honor and the dignity of the Prophet's household amid the unstable socio-political conditions of Medina. The command to remain in your homes was not an absolute prohibition against women's public activities but a moral guideline aligned with the social norms of that era. Thus, the value in this verse is temporal and not categorized as obligatory or fundamental. By classifying it as an instructional value, the verse can be read more contextually and flexibly today, allowing its moral essence-maintaining honor, modesty, and personal integrity to be actualized in various forms of women's roles in modern public spaces.

Understanding Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 as an instructional value also opens space for reinterpreting women's roles in contemporary Islamic society. This verse should not be taken literally as a restriction on women's mobility but as ethical guidance emphasizing dignity and decorum in social interactions. In modern contexts, women can remain active in education, politics, economics, and social

sectors as long as moral values like responsibility, honor, and self-awareness are upheld. This approach reflects the spirit of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, prioritizing welfare and justice, while demonstrating Islam's flexibility to remain relevant across time and societal needs.

Contextualization of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 on Women's Freedom of Expression in Public Spaces

The contextualization of Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 regarding women's freedom of expression in public spaces requires a hermeneutical approach that integrates linguistic analysis, historical precedent, and the overarching ethical objectives (*maqāṣid*) of Islamic law (Alfani 2026, 16). While the phrase *waqarna fī buyūtikunna* (remain in your homes) is often literally interpreted as physical confinement, its root *waqar* (dignity and composure) points primarily to an inner moral disposition rather than a spatial restriction. Linguistically and semantically derived from the root *waqar*, meaning calmness, dignity, and poise, the command to stay at home need not be rigidly understood as confinement but as an exhortation for women to embody composure, respectability, and self-worth—whether indoors or outdoors. This approach emphasizes inner attitude and morality over physical space (Najjah et al. 2025, 72–84). Thus, women in public can still reflect *waqar* by upholding moral values, modesty, and professionalism, enabling healthy participation across all spheres of life.

Historical evidence from the Prophetic era further challenges any monolithic reading of the verse that would categorically confine women to domestic spaces. Islamic history demonstrates that women were not wholly restricted to traditional roles; numerous female figures made significant societal contributions during the Prophet's time (Keddie and Baron 2008, 77). Khadījah bint Khuwaylid was a successful merchant who managed a vast trading enterprise, 'Ā'ishah bint Abī Bakr was a renowned hadith scholar who taught male companions and even engaged in political and military leadership, and Nusaybah bint Ka'b fought valiantly in the Battle of Uḥud to defend the Prophet. These examples demonstrate women's active public roles without neglecting modesty and honor. Using Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 to justify absolute restrictions on women in modern society thus reduces early Islamic history and contradicts its spirit of social engagement and intellectual contribution (Hidayatullah 2014, 64).

Within the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, freedom of expression is integral to protecting human intellect and dignity (Aulia et al. 2025, 549). Islam emphasizes the preservation of five essentials: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property (Malik 2017, 94). Freedom of expression, including voicing opinions, public discourse, artistic and cultural work, and socio-political engagement, is part of safeguarding intellect and human dignity (Kusmana 2015, 21). Denying women these rights stifle their intellectual potential and strategic role in civilization. In this framework, Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 should not obstruct freedom but remind

women to express themselves ethically, with dignity, and constructively (Chaoui 2023, 32). The verse thus functions as a moral guideline rather than a legal impediment, encouraging women to participate in public life while maintaining Islamic values of modesty and responsibility.

Finally, Abdullah Saeed's concept of Instructional Values provides a valuable analytical tool for distinguishing between time-bound injunctions and universal ethical imperatives, enabling contemporary Muslims to reinterpret Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 as ethical guidance rather than physical restriction (Nurani 2021, 159–64). These Instructional Values clarify that some Qur'anic verses address specific historical-social contexts, and these temporal values evolve with societal progress. Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, directed at the Prophet's wives, does not literally apply to all women across time in a restrictive sense. In modern societies demanding active participation in education, law, technology, and media, this verse can be reread as ethical guidance emphasizing dignity, moral responsibility, and constructive contribution. Women can engage publicly, voice opinions, and contribute to all sectors while grounded in moral and social responsibility. By interpreting Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33 through the lenses of Instructional Values and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, we see that it does not aim to absolutely confine women. Instead, it offers moral guidance for dignified social interaction. In an evolving world, Muslim women have the right to express themselves and participate actively in public life while upholding noble Islamic values. This contextual approach is fairer and ensures Islamic teachings remain relevant and vibrant in modern life (Barsihannor et al. 2023, 120–30).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33, when examined through Abdullah Saeed's contextual approach, offers a more nuanced understanding of women's roles than literalistic readings allow. Through linguistic analysis, exegetical examination, micro-macro contextualization, parallel textual comparison, and hierarchical value mapping, the verse emerges not as an absolute prohibition on women's public participation but as ethical guidance emphasizing dignity, modesty, and moral responsibility. Classified as an Instructional Value within Saeed's hierarchy, its directives appear historically contingent rather than universally obligatory, opening interpretive space for Muslim women to engage actively in education, politics, economics, and social life while upholding Islamic ethical principles.

The primary contribution of this research lies in its application of Saeed's contextual theory to Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33. While previous studies have examined this verse through various methodologies—including *maqāṣidī* exegesis, *ma'nā-cum-maghbzā*, Gracia's hermeneutics, and Fazlur Rahman's double-movement theory—the specific framework of Abdullah Saeed has remained relatively underexplored in existing scholarship on this particular verse. This study thus

contributes a fresh hermeneutical lens that may help reconcile the verse's textual meaning with contemporary realities. However, the interpretive shift proposed here does not automatically translate into widespread acceptance among traditional exegetical circles or Muslim communities at large, as the transformative potential of Saeed's framework remains a theoretical proposition requiring empirical verification.

This study is limited to textual and hermeneutical analysis of a single verse (Q.S. Al-Aḥzāb [33]: 33) without incorporating fieldwork or examining other related verses such as Q.S. An-Nūr [24]: 30–31 and Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]: 34. It relies exclusively on Abdullah Saeed's contextual framework, and findings may differ if alternative methodologies such as feminist exegesis or socio-legal analysis were employed. Additionally, the study does not extensively engage with jurisprudential (*fiqh*) dimensions or intra-Sunni legal debates. Future research is encouraged to address these gaps through interdisciplinary approaches, including empirical fieldwork—such as surveys of religious educators, interviews with female Muslim professionals, or case studies of Islamic legal rulings in different national contexts—comparative legal analysis, and reception studies that investigate how contextual interpretations are actually received by diverse Muslim audiences.

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