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Gender and authority in the Quranic and Biblical Narratives: A literaryApproach

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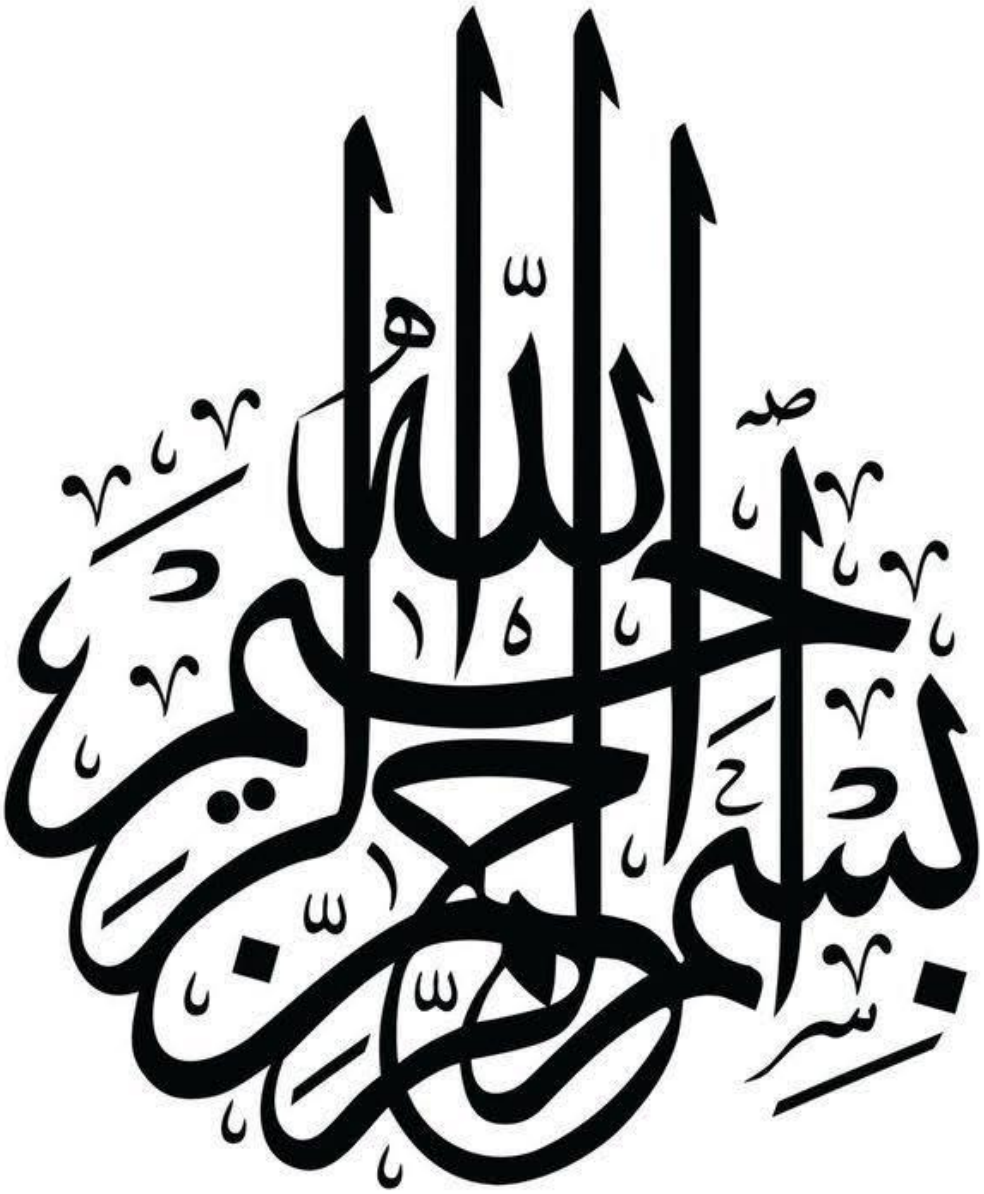
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{إِنَّهُ مِن سُلَيْمَانَ وَإِنَّهُ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ}

[النمل: 30]

﴿Indeed, it is from solomon, and indeed, it is : “in the name of Allah , the Most: Gracious, Most Merciful”﴾

[Surah An-Naml -Ayah 30]

Declaration

I hereby declare that the current dissertation is founded on my original work apart from citations and quotations, which have been properly acknowledged. I also declare that the present study has not been previously and concurrently submitted for any other degree or award at any university or institution except at University of Saida - Dr. Moulay Tahar, Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts, Department of English Language and Literature.

BENELMOUFFOK Shahnez Soumaya

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BENELMOUFFOK Shahnez Soumaya

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my parents, may them rest in peace. A special thought on this memorable day for my father, El Hadj Mohammed Salah after his recent and painful passing away, the one who taught me the most important verse in the Quran, Ayat El Koursii, when I could neither read nor write, this verse which still accompanies me wherever I go. To my son Adam, who excelled in his studies but was then afflicted by an illness, yet he faced it with patience and faith, he kept encouraging me every day, and each time my will faltered. I dedicate this humble work to those who helped me in the most painful moments of my life: my father, my mother, my uncle Nadji, and my sister and close friend Imane Chekhnaba.

BENELMOUFFOK Shahnez Soumaya

Abstract: Gender and Authority in Biblical and Quranic Narratives- A Literary Approach

Examination of gender and authority in biblical and Quranic texts as complex literary constructs. - Literary foundations of these texts shape interpretations of gender dynamics and authority allocation. - Biblical Literature: - Gender tied to theological themes like covenant, law, and identity. - Authority often portrayed in patriarchal terms; men depicted as central authoritative figures (e.g., Abraham, Moses, David). - Women, while marginalized in formal authority, have significant roles (e.g., Sarah's matriarchy, Deborah's position as prophet and judge). - Aim to correct biases in interpretations of gender authority and explore equitable relationships between genders. - Quranic Perspective: - Gender and authority framed within theological context; direct divine speech defines normative gender relations. - Gender roles in the Quran contribute to social order and underscore submission to God's will. - Verses on gender relationships (e.g., Surah An-Nisa 4:34) have spurred extensive debate on textual authority and interpretations. - Figures like Mary (Maryam) and the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) illustrate complex models of female authority that challenge simplistic hierarchies. - Feminist Hermeneutics: - The Quran is not inherently patriarchal; it features a mix of gender affirmations and ambiguities. - Traditional exegeses often favor male dominance, obscuring readings that highlight female agency and leadership. - Feminist interpretations reframe figures like Mary as active spiritual leaders, challenging submissive portrayals. - Calls for a reflexive hermeneutic methodology that considers positionalities and power dynamics in interpretation. - Authority Theories in Religious Discourse: - Provide tools to explore gendered dimensions of power in Islam. - Incorporate feminist and poststructuralist insights to reveal the constructed nature of religious authority. - Encourage reexamination of normative frameworks and advocate for inclusive, context-sensitive approaches that address contemporary gender equity demands in Islamic thought.

Key Words: Authority, Feminist Theology, Gender Roles, Hermeneutics, Narrative Structure, Patriarchy, Religious Authority, Social Hierarchies

ملخص: الجندر والسلطة في السرديات الكتابية والقصص القرآني– مقاربة أدبية

إن فحص النوع والسلطة في النصوص الكتابية والقرآنية كمقاربات أدبية يُشكل الأسس الأدبية لهذه النصوص كونها تفسيرات ديناميكية جندرية و أبعدها المجتمعية ، الثقافية منها و السياسية في تشكُّلتوزيع السلطة - .الأدب الكتابي : حيث يرتبط النوع بمواضيع لاهوتية مثل العهد، والشريعة، والهوية - .الجنس مرتبط بمواضيع لاهوتية مثل العهد، والشريعة، والهوية .غالبًا ما تُوصف السلطة بمصطلحات أبوية؛ حيث يُصوَّر الرجال كأشخاص مركزيين للسلطة (على سبيل المثال، إبراهيم، موسى، داود) - .تُوصف السلطة غالبًا بمصطلحات أبوية؛ حيث يُصوَّر الرجال كرموز مركزية للسلطة (على سبيل المثال، إبراهيم، موسى، داود). على الرغم من أن النساء يُهملن في السلطة الرسمية، إلا أنهن يلعبن أدوارًا مهمة (على سبيل المثال، الأمومة الكبرى لسارة، مكانة دبورة كنبيّة وقاضية) .على الرغم من تهميش النساء في السلطة الرسمية، إلا أنهن يلعبن أدوارًا مهمة (على سبيل المثال، النظام الأمومي لسارة، ومكانة دبورة كنبيّة وقاضية) - . الهدف هو تصحيح التحيزات في تفسيرات سلطة النوع الاجتماعي واستكشاف علاقات عادلة بين الجنسين - .المنظور القرآني - :الجنس والسلطة مدرجان في سياق لاهوتي؛ الخطاب الإلهي المباشر يحدد العلاقات الجندرية النمطية - .تساهم أدوار الجنسين في القرآن في النظام الاجتماعي وتؤكد الخضوع لإرادة الله - .الآيات المتعلقة بالعلاقات بين الجنسين (مثل سورة النساء 4:34) أثارت نقاشات واسعة حول السلطة النصية والتفسيرات - .شخصيات مثل مريم (Maryam) وملكة سبأ (Bilqis) توضح نماذج معقدة للسلطة النسائية التي تتحدى الهياكل الهرمية المبسطة - .هرمنيوطيقا نسوية - :القرآن ليس بطبيعته أبويًا؛ بل يقدم مزيجًا من التأكيدات الجندرية والالتباسات - . غالبًا ما تفضل التفاسير التقليدية الهيمنة الذكورية، مما يعيق القراءات التي تبرز الوكالة والقيادة النسائية - .تفضل التفاسير التقليدية غالبًا الهيمنة الذكورية، مما يعيق القراءات التي تبرز الوكالة والقيادة النسائية .تعيد التفسيرات النسوية النظر في شخصيات مثل مريم كقائدات روحيات نشطات، متحديات تمثيلات الخضوع - .دعوات إلى منهجية تفسيرية تأملية تأخذ في الاعتبار المواقع والديناميكيات السلطة في التفسير - .نظريات السلطة في الخطاب الديني - :توفر أدوات لاستكشاف أبعاد السلطة المرتبطة بالنوع الاجتماعي في الإسلام - .يدمجون وجهات نظر نسوية وما بعد الحداثة لكشف الطبيعة المصنوعة للسلطة الدينية - .يشجعون على إعادة تقييم الأطر المعيارية ويدعون إلى نهج شاملة وحساسة للسياق تلبي المتطلبات المعاصرة للمساواة بين الجنسين في الفكر الإسلامي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السلطة، اللاهوت النسوي، الأدوار الجندرية، علم التأويل، البنية السردية، النظام الأبوي، السلطة الدينية

Résumé : Genre et autorité dans les récits bibliques et coraniques - Une approche littéraire.

Examen du genre et de l'autorité dans les textes bibliques et coraniques en tant que constructions littéraires complexes. - Les fondements littéraires de ces textes façonnent les interprétations des dynamiques de genre et de l'allocation de l'autorité. - Littérature biblique : - Le genre est lié à des thèmes théologiques comme l'alliance, la loi et l'identité. - L'autorité est souvent décrite en termes patriarcaux ; les hommes sont dépeints comme des figures d'autorité centrales (par exemple, Abraham, Moïse, David). - Bien que les femmes soient marginalisées dans l'autorité formelle, elles jouent des rôles significatifs (par exemple, le matriarcat de Sarah, la position de Déborah en tant que prophétesse et juge). - L'objectif est de corriger les biais dans les interprétations de l'autorité de genre et d'explorer des relations équitables entre les genres. - Perspective coranique : - Le genre et l'autorité sont insérés dans un contexte théologique ; le discours divin direct définit les relations de genre normatives. - Les rôles de genre dans le Coran contribuent à l'ordre social et soulignent la soumission à la volonté de Dieu. - Les versets sur les relations de genre (par exemple, Sourate An-Nisa 4:34) ont suscité des débats étendus sur l'autorité textuelle et les interprétations. - Des figures comme Marie (Maryam) et la Reine de Saba (Bilqis) illustrent des modèles complexes d'autorité féminine qui remettent en question les hiérarchies simplistes. - Herméneutique féministe : - Le Coran n'est pas intrinsèquement patriarcal ; il présente un mélange d'affirmations de genre et d'ambiguïtés. - Les exégèses traditionnelles favorisent souvent la domination masculine, obscurcissant les lectures qui mettent en lumière l'agence et le leadership féminin. - Les interprétations féministes reconsidèrent des figures comme Marie en tant que leaders spirituelles actives, défiant les représentations de soumission. - Appels à une méthodologie herméneutique réflexive qui prend en compte les positionalités et les dynamiques de pouvoir dans l'interprétation. - Théories de l'autorité dans le discours religieux : - Fournissent des outils pour explorer les dimensions de pouvoir genrées dans l'islam. - Intègrent des perspectives féministes et poststructuralistes pour révéler la nature construite de l'autorité religieuse. - Encouragent la réévaluation des cadres normatifs et plaident pour des approches inclusives et sensibles au contexte qui répondent aux exigences contemporaines d'équité de genre dans la pensée islamique.

Mots-clés : Autorité, Théologie féministe, Rôles de genre, Herméneutique, Structure narrative, Patriarcat, Autorité religieuse.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

The present research aims to conduct a literary examination of gender roles and authority as they are articulated within both biblical and Quranic narratives, situating these constructions within their textual, theological, and cultural milieus. Building upon the prior elucidation of authority's multifaceted characteras an interplay of divine sanction, moral legitimacy, and sociopolitical influencethis study seeks to unravel how gendered identities and power relations are not merely reflected but also actively constructed through narrative strategies and symbolic frameworks in these sacred traditions. By interrogating the literary dimensions of key texts, the research intends to illuminate the heterogeneous ways in which authority is negotiated, affirmed, contested, or subverted, revealing a spectrum of gendered possibilities that challenge reductive characterizations of patriarchal dominance.

This work seeks to elucidate the intricate relationship within biblical and Qur'anic tales, aiming to rectify existing interpretive biases and promote a more equitable and theologically informed comprehension of gendered power and responsibility.

Therefore, the reseach gap would ultimately be seeking to correct some prejudicial notion in Gender, who has the authority over the other and is this authority legitimate, is it equitablle or equivoqual to the responsibility that fall to each gender.

Analyzing this research problem requires treating gender and authority not as isolated issues but as interdependent dimensions.These interdependencies point to the need for an interdisciplinary methodology combining hermeneutics, historical-critical methods, gender studies, and theology to achieve a holistic understanding.

Ultimately, this research aims to reveal the complexity of interpreting gender and authority through the twin lenses of biblical and Qur'anic narratives.

To achieve these objectives, the study adopts a comparative approach that first delineates the narrative mechanismssuch as characterization, thematic motifs, dialogue structures, and intertextual allusionsthat shape portrayals of male and female figures within contexts of authority. This method foregrounds how literary form and content synergize to encode distinct models of leadership, agency, and submission, each inscribed with theological and moral implications. The research further aims to examine the ideological functions of these portrayals, reflecting on how they reinforce or destabilize prevailing social hierarchies and theological doctrines. For instance, the juxtaposition of figures like Deborah and Bilqis against typical patriarchal archetypes elucidates instances where authority transcends gender expectations, compelling a reassessment of normative frameworks.

Such analyses will consider the hermeneutical traditions and reception histories that have mediated interpretations of these narratives, thus emphasizing that authority's textual construction is dynamic and context-sensitive rather than fixed or monolithic.

Literature Review

Critical survey of gender studies in biblical narrative scholarship

A critical survey of gender studies within biblical narrative scholarship reveals a complex and evolving field shaped by the interplay of literary, feminist, and theological discourses. Early exegetical traditions primarily reflected patriarchal frameworks, often marginalizing or rendering invisible the experiences and voices of female figures in biblical texts. This hegemonic interpretive stance tended to affirm established hierarchies, framing male authority as normative and divinely sanctioned while positioning women either as secondary or emblematic of moral exceptionality. However, as feminist criticism entered biblical studies from the late twentieth century onwards, this monolithic reception underwent profound interrogation. Feminist scholars challenged the androcentric assumptions embedded in classical interpretation, foregrounding the ways biblical narratives construct gendered identities and power asymmetries not as neutral givens but as culturally and historically mediated discursive formations (Moi, 1985). This critical reorientation prompted a reconceptualization of biblical narratives as contested literary spaces where gender and authority are dynamically negotiated rather than simply reiterated.

Within this transformative moment, feminist hermeneutics deployed a multiplicity of strategies to resist reductive readings that had dismissed or distorted female subjectivity. Techniques such as retrievalrecovering neglected female figures and voicesand revisionrethinking canonical episodes from alternative gendered perspectivesformed core methodologies (Fishbane, 1985). For example, the narrative of Deborah in Judges, traditionally read as an anomaly within patriarchal Israelite culture, has been reassessed to reveal nuanced depictions of female leadership and prophetic authority that complicate dominant models of gender hierarchy. Such analyses emphasize the narrative's rhetorical construction, illustrating how gender intersects with authority in ways that destabilize essentialist binaries. By focusing on narrative devicessuch as focalization, dialogue, and characterizationscholars have revealed the layered portrayals of women as active agents within power structures, rather than passive recipients of male dominance (Prince, 1987).

The influence of poststructuralist and postcolonial critiques further enriched biblical gender studies by highlighting how authority in biblical texts is not merely a static concept but a contested site shaped by ideological forces. These approaches interrogate the colonial legacies and power inequalities woven into biblical interpretation itself, situating gendered authority within broader socio-political and cultural frameworks (Spivak, 1988; Mahmood, 2005). By drawing attention to the ways in which biblical texts have been mobilized to legitimize patriarchal and imperialist agendas, these critiques advocate for readings that uncover subaltern perspectives and challenge dominant theological paradigms. This is particularly significant when considering the

hermeneutics of sacred texts, where theological reverence can inadvertently perpetuate exclusionary interpretations. Consequently, gender studies here function not simply as critique but as transformative practice that seeks to democratize authority and diversify interpretative voices.

The interconnection between literary theory and feminist biblical criticism is pivotal for understanding gender and authority as produced through narrative strategies. Concepts such as narrative voice and polyphony enable scholars to explore how biblical texts accommodate multiple, often conflicting, perspectives on gender roles and power relations. For instance, the complex representation of figures like Eve or the Samaritan woman at the well can be read as illustrating the interplay between marginality and authority, inviting reinterpretations that move beyond simplistic dichotomies of oppression versus empowerment (Irigaray, 1985). This literary-critical lens not only reveals the textual sophistication with which gendered authority is staged but also nuances the relationship between authorial authority, community reception, and textual meaning. Such an approach resonates with the broader methodology articulated in the preceding subpart, which emphasized the necessity of hermeneutic sensitivity alongside critical distance to navigate these layered dynamics.

Furthermore, contemporary biblical gender scholarship increasingly adopts interdisciplinary frameworks that dialogue with queer theory, masculinity studies, and intersectionality. These expansions recognize that gender is not a monolithic category but intersects with race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality, thereby shaping multifaceted experiences of authority and subjection within biblical narratives. The reassessment of masculinity, for example, has illuminated how biblical masculinity is constructed through practices that simultaneously affirm domination and vulnerability, authority and contestation (Gallagher & Greenblatt, 2000). By complicating the gender binary and examining performativity within the biblical corpus, such studies uncover the fluidity and contingency of power structures that older approaches tended to overlook or simplify.

In sum, the critical landscape of gender studies in biblical narrative scholarship reveals a trajectory from marginalized acknowledgment of gender dynamics towards a sophisticated, theoretically informed engagement that interrogates the literary and ideological production of authority. By integrating feminist hermeneutics, postcolonial critique, and literary theory, scholars dismantle monolithic patriarchal interpretations, unveiling the pluralistic and often contradictory modes through which gendered power operates within these ancient texts. This nuanced understanding lays the groundwork for the comparative analysis of gender and authority in Quranic narratives that will follow, extending the theoretical and methodological insights from the biblical context to a related corpus whose interpretive frameworks demand similarly critical and literary- sensitive approaches.

Review of authority paradigms in Quranic literary critiques

Building upon the intricate reassessment of gender and authority within biblical narrative scholarship, the exploration of authority paradigms in Quranic literary critiques reveals both convergences and distinctive trajectories shaped by Islamic theological and literary traditions. Quranic authority is multifaceted, situated not only within the text's divine origin and linguistic eloquence but also deeply intertwined with socio-religious norms informing gender constructions. Unlike biblical narratives that often envelop authority within historical and prophetic milieus, the Quran's mode of asserting authority centers on its own status as the verbatim word of God (kalām Allah), which confers an intrinsic, unassailable legitimacy. This theological grounding underpins how authority is both presented and negotiated in Quranic discourse, thereby necessitating literary-critical analyses that are acutely sensitive to this unique textual sovereignty.

A prominent thread in Quranic literary criticism investigates how divine authority interacts with human agency, particularly in relation to gender roles and hierarchies. Many classical and contemporary exegetical approaches emphasize the Quran's prescriptive verses that delineate gendered spheres of authoritysuch as men's financial responsibility and women's roles within the familyinterpreting these as normative frameworks validated through divine command (Esack, 2005). However, modern literary critiques challenge such interpretations by focusing on the polyvalent nature of Quranic language and its narrative techniques, which often employ ambiguity, metaphor, and varying focalizations. Scholars attentive to these aspects argue that Quranic narratives do not unequivocally consolidate patriarchal authority but rather allow for complex, occasionally subversive engagements with gendered power. For instance, the stories of figures like Maryam (Mary) and Asiya (the wife of Pharaoh) are frequently analyzed to highlight exemplary female piety and resilience that transcend conventional patriarchal paradigms, demonstrating how authority can be appropriated through spiritual merit rather than male dominance (Sells, 1999).

In addition to theological and exegetical influences, the hermeneutic milieus from which Quranic literary critique emerges significantly shape conceptions of authority. Classical tafsir traditions often operate within frameworks that reinforce prevailing patriarchal values by privileging male scholarship and jurisprudential perspectives. Modern literary critics, by contrast, draw on feminist hermeneutics and postcolonial theory to expose the ideological contingencies underpinning such readings. This critical stance reveals that authority within Quranic texts is not a fixed attribute but an evolving construct mediated by interpretive communities and historical contexts (Taha, 2011). Theorisations of intertextuality further complicate authority paradigms by illustrating how Quranic narratives intentionally engage with pre-Islamic and other scriptural traditions, thereby positioning gendered authority within a broader, contested discursive

field.

Methodologically, the application of narratology to Quranic studies has expanded possibilities for interrogating how gender and authority converge in textual form. Narrative devices such as repetition, parataxis, and coherence contribute to the construction of authority figures and gendered identities without adhering to linear, character-driven storytelling typical of biblical or classical Western narratives. This polyphonic narrative articulation often destabilizes binary oppositions by presenting multiple perspectives that echo or contradict one another, inviting readers to negotiate meanings rather than passively accept prescribed hierarchies (Bulloch, 1985). For example, the figure of the Queen of Sheba can be reevaluated within this framework, as narratives portray her simultaneously as a sovereign exercising political acumen and as a subject of divine testing, opening interpretative spaces that reconfigure the nexus between gender and power.

Comparative literary analysis elucidates that, unlike earlier biblical gender critiques where feminist hermeneutics emerged predominantly within Western academic contexts, Quranic literary critiques have increasingly integrated indigenous feminist voices and Islamic epistemologies, challenging orientalist assumptions and asserting alternative modes of authority that remain faithful to Islamic theological premises while advocating gender equity (Badran, 2009). This dynamic underscores the importance of situating Quranic authority paradigms not only in relation to textual strategies but also within ongoing socio-political discourses around gender justice in Muslim contexts. Consequently, the literary-critical study of gender and authority in the Quran is inseparable from broader conversations about interpretive authority and agency, encompassing both divine commands and human hermeneutic freedom.

In sum, Quranic literary critiques reconceptualize authority as a multifaceted, negotiable phenomenon that unfolds through textual form, theological claims, and the interpretive positioning of gendered subjects. By opening hermeneutic spaces that both affirm and challenge traditional authority structures, these critiques enrich our understanding of gender in sacred discourse, complementing and expanding upon the feminist literary approaches established in biblical narrative scholarship. The resultant paradigm highlights the complex interplay between divine and human authority in the Quran, inviting a nuanced comparative dialogue across scriptural traditions where gender inseparably relates to the constitution, contestation, and exercise of power.

Critical analysis of existing scholarship on gender and Agency in sacred texts

Scholarship addressing gender within sacred literature, particularly the biblical and Quranic texts, has generated a multifaceted landscape of interpretive approaches, each shedding light on different dimensions of how gender and authority intersect in these foundational narratives. A critical survey of this corpus reveals that scholarly engagement has progressively moved beyond simplistic, monolithic readingssuch as

outright patriarchal critique or apologetic validation toward more nuanced and contextually grounded understandings that recognize the complexity and ambiguity embedded in these texts. This critical analysis juxtaposes key thematic strands and methodological innovations while also identifying persistent gaps or limitations that inform the current research agenda.

Early feminist theological critiques, emerging prominently in the late twentieth century, laid essential groundwork by foregrounding the androcentric biases historically prevalent in both biblical and Quranic exegesis. Scholars such as Phyllis Trible and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in the biblical domain challenged dominant interpretive frameworks that marginalized or silenced female voices, emphasizing the importance of literary close reading to recover subversive or empowering portrayals of women. Trible's hermeneutics of "texts of terror," for instance, unveiled the traumatic experiences of women that conventional readings tended to obscure, thereby highlighting the gendered mechanisms through which authority was denied or contested. Parallel feminist engagement with Islamic scripture, albeit developing in distinct socio-cultural contexts, similarly problematized traditional patriarchal interpretations, urging reexaminations of key Quranic passages (e.g., regarding inheritance, testimony, or leadership) through lenses attentive to historical specificity and gender justice. Leila Ahmed's work notably contextualized early Islamic gender norms within broader socio-historical transformations, illustrating that textual prescriptions were part of dynamic negotiations rather than static dictates.

Beyond feminist critique, literary scholarship has increasingly prioritized narrative strategies and symbolism as crucial to understanding gender dynamics. This trend responds to prior critiques that focused predominantly on doctrinal or legal aspects by illuminating how textual form shapes conceptualizations of gendered authority. Researchers such as Carol Meyers and Julia Watts Belser have dissected character construction, narrative agency, and thematic motifs in biblical storiessuch as the figure of Deborah, who embodies judicial and prophetic authority, contesting patriarchal conventions. Similarly, studies of the Quranic text emphasize its unique rhetorical structure and modes of address, which shape gender relations in subtle ways often lost in literalist readings. Scholars including Michael Sells and Asma Barlas have highlighted how the Quran's rhetorical inversions and employment of allegory open interpretive spaces for reconfiguring gendered power relations, suggesting a polyvalence that traditional hermeneutics sometimes neglectate.

Intersecting with these literary approaches are historiographical and socio-political analyses that situate sacred texts within their communities of origin and reception. To critically interrogates the extent to which gender constructs in the texts reflect or resist prevailing social norms of ancient Israelite, early Christian, and early Islamic societies. By employing socio-historical methodologies, scholars like John Piper and Amina

Wadud demonstrate that the textual depiction of authority cannot be disentangled from the lived realities and power structures informing both the production and the subsequent interpretation of these materials. For example, the ambivalence around female figures exercising authorityoften framed with ambivalent or contradictory narratorial voicesmay be read as strategic textual negotiations responding to complex socio-political pressures rather than mere reflections of immutable patriarchal ideologies.

Yet, despite significant advancements, existing scholarship sometimes grapples with reconciling textual complexity with theological reverence or community sensitivities. This has occasionally led to dichotomous readingseither asserting unqualified patriarchy or idealizing female agency without grappling with inherent tensions within the texts. Moreover, many studies remain confined within disciplinary silos, failing to integrate literary, historical, and theological methods into a cohesive analytical framework. The present research seeks to address these lacunae by explicitly adopting a literary approach that is attentive not only to narrative and symbolic mechanisms but also to theological discourses and reception histories. Such an integrative method recognizes that gender and authority in sacred literature are not static categories but dynamic constructs shaped through interplay among textual artistry, doctrinal imperatives, and cultural negotiations.

Importantly, several contemporary scholars have begun exploring the implications of intertextuality and dialogic relations between biblical and Quranic narratives, a burgeoning area that further complicates understandings of gendered authority. By analyzing shared motifs and divergent portrayals of similar figuressuch as the Queen of Sheba or prophetic womenresearchers underscore how each tradition simultaneously draws from and reconfigures earlier gendered schemas, producing a layered interreligious discourse. This perspective also invites reflection on how authority as a literary and theological notion adapts across religious boundaries, enriching the interpretive possibilities and underscoring the socio-cultural contingencies of gender roles.

In sum, existing scholarship presents a rich but diversified interpretations, marked by evolving methodologies that increasingly embrace complexity, polyvocality, and context- sensitivity. This critical overview calls attention to the necessity of moving beyond reductive binaries and single-dimensional analyses toward a multifocal, literary-theological frameworkone that not only illuminates how gendered authority is constructed in biblical and Quranic narratives but also how these constructions function within broader discourses of power, identity, and community. Such a perspective is essential for unraveling the dialectical tensions and subtleties that characterize sacred texts as living sources informing contemporary debates about gender and authority. Consequently, this synthesis both draws on and transcends previous scholarship by

advocating for a comparative literary approach capable of capturing the nuanced interplay of gender and power at the heart of these enduring narratives.

The extended abstract encapsulates a synthesis of key findings that reveal the complexity inherent in the gendered conceptualization of authority across these scriptural Corpora. It underscores that, within both the Hebrew Bible and the Quran, authority is conferred and expressed through divine endorsement, yet its embodiment by women disrupts simplistic binaries. The literary portrayal of female authority figures often operates within tension between symbolic femininityembodied, for example, through the personification of wisdom or prophetic charismaand concrete socio-political roles, as evidenced in judicial, diplomatic, or spiritual leadership narratives. This duality suggests that gendered authority is at once socially mediated and theologically imbued, creating a dialectical space where power is negotiated rather than absolute.

Moreover, the research highlights the interplay between text and historical context in shaping the ideological contours of authority. The socio-religious milieu of early Christianity and Islam, with their distinctive communal structures and gender norms, informs not only the narrative content but also the modes of audience reception and application, affecting both prescriptive and descriptive dimensions of gendered authority. For instance, the New Testament's ecclesiastical authority constructs reflect tensions in Greco-Roman society, while Quranic injunctions on gender relations reveal legalistic and mystical layers that inform interpretive traditions. These insights contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how authority functions within these textsnot as a static construct but as a locus of ongoing negotiation influenced by theological, cultural, and literary forces.

Finally, this investigation emphasizes the indispensable role of literary analysis in revealing the subtle mechanisms by which sacred narratives encode gender and authority. By attending to narrative voice, rhetorical strategies, and symbolic motifs, the study challenges reductive historical or doctrinal readings that overlook the fluidity and contestation embedded in the texts. The extended abstract thus posits that a literary approach is crucial for uncovering conjunctures where divine authority, gendered identity, and power intersect in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. This theoretical framing and syntheses affirm the research's broader contribution to gender studies, religious hermeneutics, and literary criticism, providing a comprehensive scaffold for subsequent detailed textual analyses that will further unpack the intricate dynamics between gender roles and authority in biblical and Quranic narratives.

The examination of gender roles within Judeo-Christian and Islamic sacred texts necessitates a nuanced appreciation of the historical, cultural, and theological contexts in which these scriptures emerged and evolved. Both the Bible and the Quran are not monolithic entities but complex compilations of narratives, laws, prophecies, and

wisdom Literature shaped by diverse sociopolitical milieus over centuries. Understanding gender constructs within these texts therefore requires situating them within their respective traditions' broader cultural frameworks, as well as recognizing the interpretive legacies that have influenced their reception and application.

Within Judeo-Christian texts, gender roles often manifest through genealogies, legal codes, and narrative episodes that reflect the patriarchal structures dominant in the ancient Near Eastern societies from which they arose. The Hebrew Bible, encompassing texts like Genesis, Exodus, and Deuteronomy, illustrates gendered dynamics through the portrayal of figures such as Adam and Eve, Sarah and Hagar, or Deborah and Ruth, each embodying different facets of womanhood and authority. These portrayals operate on multiple levelssometimes granting agency within limited spheres, while often relegating women to subservient or auxiliary positions relative to male counterparts. The conceptualization of authority similarly tends to align with masculine exemplars, whether divine or human, reinforcing male leadership both in familial and communal settings. Yet, within these frameworks, instances of female agency and prophetic authority, as seen in figures like Miriam and Hannah, disrupt a simplistic understanding of gender roles, inviting critical inquiry into the interplay between normative ideals and lived realities.

The New Testament continues and, in some respects, reconfigures these themes, emphasizing spiritual equality but frequently maintaining conventional social hierarchies. Pauline epistles, for instance, address gender roles with prescriptions that have historically informed Christian doctrines on authority and submission, notably in passages that advise women to remain silent or submissive within church assemblies. However, the New Testament also records episodes that highlight the ministrations and leadership of women such as Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia, complicating any monolithic reading of gender in early Christian communities. This ambivalence reflects the tension between emerging theological interpretations and entrenched societal norms, a dynamic that has long influenced Christian thought and praxis regarding gender.

In Islamic sacred texts, the Quran presents gender roles within a framework that simultaneously affirms the spiritual equality of men and women and delineates differentiated social responsibilities. Revelatory context, shaped by the socio-religious landscape of 7th-century Arabia, informs the Quranic discourse on authority, marriage, inheritance, and communal participation. Verses addressing the creation of males and females from a single soul underpin theological assertions of inherent dignity and moral accountability shared across genders. Nonetheless, legal injunctions within the Quran and subsequent Hadith literature articulate specific gendered prescriptions, such as the permissibility of men’s authority over women “because God has favored one over the other,” which have been interpreted variably across schools of Islamic jurisprudence. The emphasis on complementary roles rather than absolute equality

introduces complexity into the understanding of gendered authority, necessitating careful hermeneutical engagement.

Comparable to Judeo-Christian texts, the Quranic narrative exhibits diversity in female representation. Exemplars such as Mary (Maryam), the mother of Jesus, and the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis), demonstrate spiritual and political agency, suggesting that women's roles transcend purely domestic confines. The figure of Khadijah, the Prophet Muhammad's first wife, further illustrates the influential position women occupied in early Islamic history, challenging reductive assumptions about gendered marginality. Moreover, ongoing exegetical debates highlight how interpretive frameworks impact the perceived scope of female authority, ranging from conservative restrictions to progressive affirmations of gender justice within an Islamic paradigm.

Crucially, the contextualization of gender roles in these sacred texts cannot be disentangled from their subsequent exegetical traditions, which encompass rabbinic commentaries, Christian theological treatises, and Islamic fiqh (jurisprudential) literature. These interpretive bodies, developed over generations, mediate the textual meanings and significantly shape normative gender discourses. The dynamic between text and interpretation accentuates the importance of adopting a literary approach that considers narrative strategies, rhetorical devices, and symbolic motifs employed within the scriptures, thereby enabling a more intricate appreciation of how authority and gender are constructed, contested, and communicated.

This contextual analysis underscores that reading gender roles in Judeo-Christian and Islamic scriptures demands sensitivity to both the textual origins and the evolving interpretive contexts. Recognizing the multifaceted portrayals of men and women, the ambivalences surrounding authority, and the intersection of theological ideals with social realities forms a foundational step for a comprehensive literary investigation into gender and power. It establishes a critical framework for examining how sacred narratives have historically mediated conceptions of gender authority, and how these enduring texts continue to inform contemporary discussions across theological, cultural, and academic spheres.

Literary theory approaches to gender and power representation within sacred texts

The exploration of gender and power representation through the lens of literary theory offers vital conceptual tools for unpacking the intricate dynamics embedded within biblical and Quranic narratives. Literary theory's expansive frameworks move beyond surface-level readings of texts to interrogate how language, narrative structures, and symbolic codes actively construct social realitiesparticularly those related to gendered authority and hierarchical relations. The application of these theoretical perspectives reveals that gender and power are not merely thematic elements but operate as discursive formations that shape character agency, ideological positioning,

and interpretive reception.

Central to such literary approaches are feminist and poststructuralist theories, which provide critical lenses for examining how gender identities and power relations are narrated, contested, and normalized. Feminist literary criticism foregrounds the ways in which patriarchal ideologies permeate scriptural storytelling, often marginalizing or defining female figures through prescribed roles and symbolic oppositionssuch as motherhood versus autonomy, obedience versus resistance, or sanctity versus transgression. This approach enables scholars to identify narrative strategies that simultaneously uphold and destabilize traditional gender hierarchies. For instance, the subtle narrative ambivalence surrounding Deborah's judicial authority, or Maryam's spiritual prominence in the Quran, can be interrogated through feminist critique to reveal both the constraints imposed by androcentric discourse and the possibilities of subversive female empowerment.

Poststructuralism contributes an indispensable awareness of the multiplicity and instability of meaning within sacred texts. By deconstructing binary oppositions and hierarchical logics, this approach challenges the essentialist and fixed representations of gender and power that are often taken for granted in orthodox exegeses. Deconstruction, in particular, exposes the inherent tensions and contradictions within narratives that present authority figures who embody complex, sometimes paradoxical identities. The recognition that texts generate meaning through difference and deferral highlights the fluidity of authority itselfan insight that resonates with the comparative observations about biblical and Quranic figures whose legitimacy is negotiated across overlapping registers of divine sanction, social status, and narrative positioning.

Narratology offers additional analytic precision by focusing on the formal dimensions of storytellingsuch as focalization, narrative voice, and plot structureand their role in shaping the presentation and perception of gendered authority. The positioning of female authority figures within narrative frames often invokes particular modes of reader engagement and ideological alignment. For example, the Quranic depiction of the Queen of Sheba's encounter with Solomon utilizes dialogic narrative techniques that affirm her wisdom and agency, yet circumscribe her authority within the framework of submission to a higher divine order. Such nuanced narrative constructions contribute to the ongoing negotiation of gendered power by delineating the boundaries of acceptable female authority while simultaneously enhancing the dramatic and theological complexity of the text.

In conclusion, literary theory's diverse approaches empower scholarship to move beyond conventional hermeneutical boundaries and approach gender and power representation in sacred narratives as a dynamic and contested terrain. By integrating feminist, poststructuralist, narratological, and postcolonial perspectives, this framework lays bare the complex interplay between textual strategies, ideological formations, and

socio-religious contexts that shape authority as a gendered dimension within biblical and Quranic storytelling. Such a composite theoretical lens not only deepens our understanding of these influential religious texts but also opens pathways for critical reflection on the ongoing negotiation of gender roles in contemporary interpretive and communal discourses.

Central to applying literary theory to sacred texts is the recognition that modes of narration, voice, and characterization profoundly influence how authority is configured and gender roles are inscribed. For example, narratological frameworks enable scholars to distinguish between different narrative voices and focalizations, which can disrupt or reinforce prevailing power hierarchies. In biblical narratives, the interplay between divine narration and human characters often implicates gendered authority: male prophetic figures frequently embody authoritative voices, yet there exist counter-narratives or subtle textual nuances that invite critical reflection on gendered power. The portrayal of female characters such as Deborah or Esther, for instance, can be analyzed through a lens attuned to intertextuality, narrative agency, and thematic symbolism, revealing how authority is gendered but not exclusively male. This approach challenges reductive readings that situate female figures as merely subordinate or passive, instead exposing the layered ways textual authority may be appropriated or negotiated.

Similarly, in Quranic studies, literary theory invites reconsideration of the texts beyond exegetical prescriptions by examining poetic structures, rhetorical patterns, and narrative discontinuities that complicate simplistic authority paradigms. The Quran's non-linear, fragmentary narrative form resists straightforward hermeneutics and opens a domain where gendered authority is articulated through multifaceted linguistic and thematic means. By applying concepts such as polyphony and dialogism, derived from Bakhtinian theory, literary critics highlight how the Quran's text encapsulates multiple voices and interpretive tensions surrounding gender roles and authority without unequivocally endorsing patriarchal dominance. For instance, the portrayal of figures like Maryam and Asiya is multidimensional, illustrating spiritual authority and resilience that simultaneously affirm and problematize normative gendered hierarchies. Such textual analyses underscore that authority in the Quranic narrative emerges through an intricate negotiation among divine command, narrative emphasis, and human subjectivity.

Advanced literary methodologies also leverage feminist and poststructuralist theories, which interrogate how gendered identities and authoritative power are constructed linguistically and symbolically within these sacred texts. Feminist literary critiques problematize androcentric narrative conventions and spotlight marginalized female voices embedded within biblical and Quranic stories, thus revealing subversive potentials that contest dominant patriarchal interpretations. The deployment of

deconstruction, for instance, permits a critical reading that unpacks binary oppositions prevalent in scriptural textssuch as male/female, public/private, and sacred/profane exposing their inherent instability and the porous boundaries of gendered authority. This theoretical stance aligns with contemporary hermeneutic practices that view authority not as a fixed textual property but as an effect of ongoing interpretive acts influenced by sociohistorical contexts and power relations.

Furthermore, intertextual analysis enriches literary theoretical applications by situating biblical and Quranic texts within broader discursive networks. Recognizing the interdependence and dialogic relations between these sacred scriptures reveals shared thematic motifs and divergent literary constructions of gender and authority. The Queen of Sheba's narrative, for instance, invites comparative literary scrutiny in both traditions, exposing how gendered sovereignty is represented and contested through differing narrative emphases and theological implications. Intertextuality thus complicates essentialist notions of authority and gender by evidencing how these categories are dynamically reconfigured across textual boundaries and interpretive communities.

In synthesis, the application of literary theory to sacred texts engenders a transformative analytical paradigm that elucidates the multifarious ways gender and authority are articulated through narrative form, linguistic texture, and rhetorical strategies. This approach enriches understandings of sacred discourse by uncovering the negotiated, often contested nature of authority within biblical and Quranic narratives. It also complements and extends the insights from theological and exegetical critiques, positioning literary analysis as a pivotal tool for reimagining gendered power dynamics in scriptural studies. Consequently, literary theory not only enhances textual interpretation but also fosters critical engagement with the ideological assumptions and hermeneutic frameworks that have historically shaped perceptions of gender and authority in these foundational religious texts.

Condensed summary of chapters, scope and limitations of the study

Clarifying the scope and limitations of this study is indispensable for ensuring analytical precision while acknowledging the complex terrain upon which biblical and Quranic narratives intersect with gender issues (Smith, 2020). The scope is inherently defined by the deliberate choice to concentrate on the canonical scripturesthe Bible and the Quranas primary sources for investigating gender constructions. This delimitation directs the inquiry towards the textual and theological dimensions of gender identity as articulated within these revered corpora, without extending the analysis into the vast expanse of their interpretive traditions, extrabiblical literature, or socio-historical contexts that, while influential, fall beyond the intended parameters. Such circumscription is crucial to maintain a focused and manageable study, enabling a nuanced textual exegesis that foregrounds the internal narrative strategies and

theological claims about gender, rather than entangling the research in the multifarious complexities of historical reconstruction or external cultural practices.

However, this concentration on canonical texts simultaneously introduces significant limitations. First, sacred texts are products of highly specific linguistic, temporal, and cultural milieus, each embedded with deeply patriarchal social structures that shaped their composition and redaction. As a result, any inquiry into gender roles within these texts must grapple with the historical opacity of the original audience's worldview and the evolution of interpretative frameworks that have mediated the texts' reception over centuries. This temporal and cultural distance imposes a barrier to fully apprehending the texts' original intentions or the lived gender realities they implicitly or explicitly address. The present study necessarily contends with this hermeneutical challenge, adopting a historically sensitive stance that resists imposing anachronistic, contemporary gender paradigms, which could distort the texts' meaning or obscure their multifaceted nature.

Moreover, because the study deliberately eschews comprehensive engagement with feminist and gender theory beyond their cautious, contextually relevant application, it confronts the limitation of not fully exploiting modern critical frameworks that might offer expanded interpretive possibilities. The risk here is twofold: while avoiding anachronistic readings guards against over-interpretation, it may also limit the capacity to reveal latent subversive or complex gender dynamics embedded within the texts. Therefore, the research situates itself within a delicate epistemological balance, employing feminist hermeneutics selectively as heuristic tools, rather than as prescriptive interpretative lenses, reflecting Smith's (2020) caution that theoretical models must be calibrated carefully to the texts' theological and narrative particularities.

Another consequential limitation concerns the exclusion of socio-historical factors external to the scripturessuch as archaeological evidence, historical records, or contemporaneous sociocultural studiesthat could enrich understanding of the real-world gender constructions influencing the scriptures' production and early reception. While such data could enhance the depth of analysis, incorporating this would expand the research scope significantly and risk conflating textual representation with external social realities in ways that exceed the study's primary aims. Keeping the focus strictly on the scriptures themselves allows for a more contained, text-centered approach but inevitably abstracts gender issues from the complex lived contexts that shaped and were shaped by these sacred texts.

Furthermore, the linguistic challenges inherent in examining texts originally composed in ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Classical Arabic cannot be overlooked. The nuances and gendered idioms present in the source languages place constraints on translation accuracy and interpretive clarity. Subtle semantic fields

related to gender concepts may be obscured or altered when texts are examined through modern language translations. This limitation necessitates reliance on established scholarly translations and critical apparatuses while recognizing that some interpretative uncertainties remain unresolved.

Taken together, these scope and limitation considerations underscore the methodological rigor and self-critical vigilance central to this study's design. By consciously delimiting the research to textual analysis of canonical biblical and Quranic narratives with a measured application of gender-critical perspectives, the study preserves analytical coherence and fidelity to the texts themselves. Simultaneously, by acknowledging the interpretive and contextual boundaries detailed above, it maintains epistemological humility, recognizing that the study's findings contribute to an ongoing scholarly dialogue rather than definitive conclusions. As Smith (2020) emphasizes, transparent articulation of such boundaries not only contextualizes the research outcomes but also fosters an academic ethos that respects the complexity and sacredness of the materials engaged.

In effect, these delineations condition the study's ambition: it aims to illuminate the construction and negotiation of gender within biblical and Quranic narratives while conscientiously circumscribing the inquiry in ways that balance textual fidelity, historical sensitivity, and critical sophistication. This foundational clarity provides a necessary framework for nuanced interpretation and avoids the pitfalls of overgeneralization or reductionism that can arise in interdisciplinary scholarship on gender and religion.

The present study has navigated a complex intellectual terrain, aiming to illuminate the multifaceted nature of gender and authority as constructed within biblical and Quranic narratives. The preceding chapters collectively provide a layered exploration that transcends simplistic dichotomies of male dominance and female subjugation, instead revealing a nuanced constellation of power relations modulated by theological, cultural, and performative factors. Chapter One laid the foundational groundwork through a comprehensive review of existing literature, situating the inquiry within contemporary feminist, postcolonial, and Foucauldian frameworks that problematize traditional interpretations of sacred texts. This initial analytical scaffold enabled a rigorous conceptualization of authority not merely as an institutional fact but as a dynamic, relational phenomenon shaped through discourse and praxis.

Building upon this, Chapter Two undertook a meticulous comparative exegesis of key scriptural figures emblematic of gendered authority, notably contrasting the roles of Deborah and the Queen of Sheba in biblical texts with those of Maryam and the Queen of Sheba in the Quranic corpus. These case studies demonstrated the differential yet intersecting mechanisms through which female agency is articulated, negotiated, and legitimized. The analysis highlighted the performativity of authority,

whereby figures like Deborah exercise judicial and military leadership within patriarchal frameworks, while Maryam's spiritual ascendancy underscores a divinely sanctioned form of power intricately connected to embodied piety and prophetic recognition. The diplomatic acumen attributed to the Queen of Sheba further complicates monolithic understandings of gender dynamics by illustrating female sovereignty enacted through political strategy and ritual acknowledgment of divine prerogative.

Chapter Three expanded the interpretative lens to encompass intersectional and discursive paradigms that foreground how socio-historical contexts, combined with embedded theological motifs, influence scriptural portrayals and subsequent hermeneutical traditions. Here, the study engaged critically with postcolonial feminist critiques to reveal the contingent and often contested terrain upon which gendered authority is constructed and maintained. The chapter underscored that these narratives simultaneously reflect and resist prevailing patriarchal ideologies, revealing spaces of subversion where female leadership is not only possible but celebrated within divine frameworks. This theoretical elaboration also delved into the implications of performativity as articulated by Judith Butler, elucidating how authority is both constituted and reiterated through ritualized acts, apostolic speech, and symbolic enactments that transcend mere textual representation to affect lived religious and social realities.

These contributions collectively expose an epistemological and hermeneutical challenge: authority within sacred texts is neither monolithic nor immutable but is instead a relational construct subject to historical sedimentation and ongoing rearticulation. The study's comparative methodology demonstrated that biblical and Quranic narratives function as dialogic sites where power and gender are continuously negotiated through theological, ethical, and sociopolitical registers. However, these insights must be tempered by recognition of the study's inherent limitations. Primarily, the scope is circumscribed by a selective focus on a limited corpus of scriptural figures and texts, which, although emblematic, cannot comprehensively represent the diverse and heterogeneous traditions emerging across extensive exegetical, denominational, and cultural spectra. Future research would benefit from broader inclusion of secondary and peripheral texts, as well as consideration of varied interpretative traditions, including those marginalized within dominant religious paradigms.

Furthermore, the methodological reliance on textual analysis and theoretical frameworks such as Foucauldian power theory, intersectionality, and performativity, while illuminating, also constrains interpretive possibilities by privileging discourse over material historical conditions and lived experiences. The absence of ethnographic or reception-history approaches limits the capacity to apprehend how contemporary communities negotiate and embody scriptural authority, particularly regarding gender.

This gap points to the necessity for interdisciplinary methodologies that integrate sociological, anthropological, and theological perspectives to enrich understanding of dynamic power relations beyond the textual level.

Another significant limitation arises from the anachronistic challenges inherent in applying modern gender theory to ancient texts embedded within distinct historical and cultural milieus. Although the study conscientiously navigated this tension by underscoring historical specificity and hermeneutical caution, there remains an interpretive risk that contemporary frameworks may overimpose meanings or obscure indigenous theological logics. This caveat highlights the importance of contextually grounded exegesis that remains attuned to the epistemic horizons of the scriptural authors and their communities, while simultaneously engaging with the ethical imperatives and lived realities of present-day readers.

Despite these constraints, the research contributes a meaningful reexamination of gender and authority through a comparative and theoretically informed lens, illuminating the mutable and contested terrains upon which power is constructed within sacred narratives. Its findings advocate for ongoing critical engagement with scriptural texts that embraces methodological pluralism and dialogical openness, fostering interpretative approaches that can both respect traditional religious sensibilities and advance the pursuit of gender-equitable theological understanding. This balance is essential for scholarship and religious communities alike as they grapple with the enduring complexities of authority, gender, and justice embedded within foundational spiritual canons.

Synthesis of findings on gender roles and authority across both corpora

The synthesis of findings concerning gender roles and authority across both biblical and Quranic corpora reveals a complex interplay of convergences and divergences rooted in each text's theological frameworks, narrative strategies, and cultural milieus. Both traditions situate authority within a divine ordinance, yet their literary constructions of gendered power manifest notably different emphases that inform broader interpretive paradigms around leadership, agency, and legitimacy.

In biblical narratives, authority frequently emerges through patriarchal lineage and political sovereignty, exemplified by figures such as kings, judges, and prophets who exercise leadership often in socio-political or judicial capacities. Male authority is embodied in roles that punctuate public life and institutional governance, aligning closely with traditional patriarchal structures prevalent in ancient Near Eastern cultures. Female figures, while occasionally endowed with significant narrative presence and influencesuch as Deborah's prophetic-judicial leadership or Esther's intercessory rolelargely appear within frameworks that circumscribe their authority through relational identities, such as wives, mothers, or foreign consorts. Their power is thus mediated, occasionally subverted, but rarely fully autonomous within the textual

hierarchies. The biblical accounts, therefore, both reflect and reinforce gendered paradigms where male agency is foregrounded, and female participation often serves as a complement or corrective to male authority rather than a direct locus of command.

Contrastingly, Quranic narratives, as elaborated previously, reconfigure these paradigms by integrating spiritual and ethical dimensions of authority that supersede political or hereditary claims. Authority is consistently embedded within a theocentric schema where divine sanction and submission to God's will constitute the foundational legitimacy of all leadership, whether male or female. This framework decentralizes worldly sovereignty in favor of prophetic exemplarity and moral rectitude. Within this context, gendered authority assumes multifaceted forms that challenge simple equivalencies to biblical templates. Male prophetic figures symbolize authority through their unwavering fidelity to divine commands and their role as moral guides, while female figures embody sanctified authority that is often exceptional and emblematic rather than institutional.

Maryam's portrayal epitomizes this distinction, representing a form of female authority predicated on direct divine favor and spiritual purity that transcends socio-political roles. Unlike biblical maternal archetypes, Maryam's narrative does not emphasize lineage or marital status but focuses on her unique relationship with God, rendering her authority unmediated and highly valorized within the Quranic framework. Similarly, Bilqis's narrative in the Quran introduces a nuanced conception of female rulership that is intrinsically linked to recognition of prophetic authority and theological submission. Her transformation from sovereign monarch to a participant in a divinely sanctioned order underscores the Quranic tendency to regulate authoritynot by gender alonebut by alignment with monotheistic truth and spiritual obedience.

This theological orientation informs the literary modes by which female authority is articulated, often through exemplarity, relational influence, or spiritual resilience rather than through direct institutional power. Figures such as Asiyah, the wife of Pharaoh, illustrate how women's authority functions as a counterpoint to male tyranny, achieved through personal piety and moral courage. This form of authority operates within the sphere of ethical witness and spiritual resistance, expanding the horizon of gendered power beyond patriarchal confines without necessarily replicating male political hierarchies.

The Quranic narrative technique further complicates the portrayal of authority by embedding it within episodic and didactic storylines that highlight the contingent and morally accountable nature of power. Authority figures are recurrently depicted at critical junctures of trial or ethical decision-making, which invites interpretive engagement concerning the origin, scope, and limits of legitimate leadership. This approach contrasts with many biblical narratives that often present authority as a relatively stable social fact rooted in covenantal promise or dynastic succession, even

when accompanied by moments of prophetic critique. Thus, the Quran's emphasis on authority as both divinely conferred and morally scrutinized introduces a dynamic and reflexive dimension to gendered power relations that resists ossification into strict social roles.

Moreover, the synthesis underscores that, in both corpora, gender roles and authority cannot be understood merely as social or historical artifacts but must be examined through the lens of each tradition's theological and literary logic. The biblical texts tend to situate authority within historical trajectories and institutional structures, reflecting and shaping ancient Israelite and early Judeo-Christian communal identities. The Quranic narratives, however, operate within a paradigmatic vision of ummah (community) formation where authority is integrally tied to ongoing faithfulness to God's guidance, allowing for gendered expressions of power that are less tied to temporal hierarchies and more to spiritual exemplification.

In sum, the synthesis reveals that while both traditions affirm the necessity of divine legitimacy as the basis of authoritative power, their literary representations of gender and authority diverge in significant ways. The biblical corpus tends to preserve and reproduce normative patriarchal authority structures, accommodating exceptions that highlight female agency within circumscribed bounds. Conversely, the Quranic corpus reconstructs authority as a fundamentally spiritual and ethical vocation, wherein gender roles are reimagined through paradigms of submission, sanctity, and relational legitimacy founded upon divine ordinance. This comparative understanding invites further scholarly inquiry into how these distinctive literary portrayals contribute to evolving conceptions of leadership and gender within ongoing religious, cultural, and social discourses.

THE THESIS OUTLINE: Exploring the following main axes:

First Chapter: Literature Review outline:

Male Agency in Quranic Narratives

Contextualization of male authority figures within Quranic narrative studies Portrayal of male authority within Quranic narratives.

Male leadership roles within Quranic narratives Patriarchal constructs in Old Testament narratives.

Critical assessment of existing theological and gender-focused scholarship on biblical masculinity.

Introduction to the Literature Review on Female Agency in Quranic Narratives Definitions of agency in Islamic feminist discourse.

Overview of major debates on gender roles in exegesis and hermeneutics Maryam Agency in classical and modern tafsīr.

Interpretations of women's agency in quranic verses.

Spiritual authority and autonomous action in female Quranic figures Analytical Frameworks.

Feminist hermeneutical approaches to Quranic texts on women's roles Postcolonial readings of gender and power in Islamic exegesis Feminist hermeneutics applied to biblical female figures.

Comparative analysis of scholarly debates on Deborah and Huldah Approaches to gender and power in biblical scripture Contextualization of female authority in biblical scholarship

A Literature Review on Gender Roles in Qur'anic Studies Examination of feminist hermeneutics applied to Qur'anic exegesis.

Examination of key female figuresMary, Eve, Asiya, Khadija in classical tafsīr Comparative review of narrative methodologies in scriptural studies Revewing: Feminist Agency Theories:

Application of feminist literary theory to sacred-text analysis.

A Literature Review: Female Authority in Quranic Narratives Literature Review Studies on Gender Roles in Quranic Narratives Analyses of Female Prophetic Figures in Islamic Scholarship Critical Perspectives on Agency in Religious Texts

Analytical Approach for Narrative Analysis The Literature Review Results

Key themes and findings from scholarly literature

Second Chapter: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Contextualizing the concepts of Equity, Responsibility, Duties and Rights in Biblical Narratives.

Research context and problem statement in biblical studies Definition of key concepts: equity, responsibility, duties, rights Equity conceptualizations in Old Testament scholarship Critical perspectives on duties and rights in biblical law.

Social justice theory applied to biblical texts.

Selection criteria and justification for chosen biblical passages Portrayal of equity in Exodus and Deuteronomic narratives Responsibility themes in the Synoptic Gospels.

Duties and rights patterns in Levitical legislation Discussion.

Comparative analysis of equity and duty across testaments Synthesis of findings relative to research questions.

Contextualizing the concepts of Equity, Responsibility, Duties and Rights in Quranic Narratives-

Contextualizing equity and responsibility within the Quranic narrative corpus Duties and rights in Quranic texts.

Scope, significance, and overview of methodological approach Survey of equity and justice in Islamic jurisprudence (Farah 2019).

Critical perspectives on agency and responsibility in Quranic studies (Ahmed 2021) Analyses of duties and rights in classical tafsir commentaries (Ibn Kathir 1995) Contemporary scholarship on social equity themes in the Quran (Safi 2020) Theoretical Framework

Hermeneutic models applied to Quranic narrative analysis (Panou 2017) Conceptualizing individual versus collective responsibility in sacred texts Criteria for selecting representative Quranic passages and narrative genres Results.

Equity identified across selected Quranic narratives.

Duty and rights within prophetic stories.

Discussion: Interpreting the balance between individual responsibility and communal duties in Quranic ethics.

Synthesis of findings and contributions to the scholarship on Quranic equity and agency.

Third Chapter: Discussing Biblical Narratives Issues: Divorce, Marriage, Women Liberties, Expenses and Funerals affairs –

Introduction to Biblical Narratives on Divorce, Marriage, Women's Liberties, Expenses, and Funerals.

Research background on divorce and marriage ethics in biblical texts (Smith, 2020) Tensions between traditional norms and modern interpretations.

Prospect of Old Testament divorce narratives and rabbinic interpretations (Brown, 2018) Analysis of New Testament teachings on marriage and financial obligations (Doe, 2019) Critical perspectives on women's agency in Christian and Islamic studies (Lee, 2021) Feminist hermeneutical approach to biblical and Qur'anic texts.

Comparative legal-anthropological model of marriage, divorce, and funeral practices Comparative Textual and Legal Analysis.

Textual-critical examination of selected biblical passages on divorce and marriage Comparative case study of Christian canon law and Sharia divorce, and funeral regulations.

Results: Patterns in Divorce, Marriage Expenses, and Funeral Affairs Identified norms for divorce proceedings and social repercussions in scripture Documented financial protocols for marriage contracts and funeral rites Discussion of Women's Liberties and Religious Authority.

Synthesis of findings on divorce, marriage, women's agency, expenses, and funerals Contextualizing biblical narratives on divorce, marriage, women's liberties, expenses, and funerals (Smith 2020).

Problem statement and research questions on gender agency in scriptural practices (Doe 2019).

Critical analysis of scholarship on divorce and marital regulations in Biblical texts (Jones 2018).

Overview of feminist hermeneutics addressing women's roles and autonomy in scriptures (Brown 2021).

Application of feminist theory to gender and agency in religious narratives (Butler 1990) Socio-historical approach to ancient Israelite and early Christian marital customs (Johnson 2017).

Qualitative textual analysis of Torah, Gospels, and Pauline epistles passages (Levine 2005).

Comparative case study method on marriage, divorce, expenses, and funerals accounts (Wilson 2016).

Findings on gendered constraints and liberties in marriage and divorce narratives (Meyer 2014).

Patterns of ritual expenses and funerary customs reflecting women's agency (Taylor 2019).

Discussion: Interpretation of results in light of feminist and socio-historical frameworks (Clark 2022) Implications for contemporary theological and gender studies debates (Martin 2023) Synthesis of insights on biblical gender agency and recommendations for further research Discussing Qur'anic Narratives Issues: Divorce, Marriage, Women Liberties, Expenses and Funerals affairs.

Introduction to Qur'anic Family and Social Regulations.

Contextualizing Qur'anic narratives on divorce, marriage, women's liberties, financial obligations, and funeral rites (e.g. Qur'an 2:229; 4:3) [Smith 2018].

Review of Exegetical Traditions and Contemporary Analyses.

Examination of classical tafsīr interpretations on divorce and marriage regulations (al- Ṭabarī; al-Qurṭubī) [Aisha 2015].

Critical review of modern feminist hermeneutical readings on women's liberties in Islamic law (El Fadl 2001; Wadud 1999).

Assessment of recent studies on funeral practices in Muslim communities (Rahman 2020) Application of feminist hermeneutics to the analysis of family law narratives in

the Qur'an (Beauvoir 1949; Ruether 2002).

Textual analysis of key Qur'anic verses (2:231; 4:19; 9:60; 2:240) and classical commentaries.

Comparative evaluation of traditional fiqh manuals (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī) versus modern scholarly interpretations.

Results: Interpretive Variations in Divorce, Marriage, Financial, and Funerary Texts Documented divergences among schools regarding iddah, khulʿ, and talaq procedures Patterns in marital contract stipulations, dowry (mahr) obligations, and consent narratives Identified norms for zakāh-financed funeral expenses and inheritance-related rites.

Fourth Chapter: How do Biblical narratives portray Female Agency in Biblical versus Quranic Narratives: Esther, Deborah, and Mariam, and couples agency: Adam and Eve, Salomon and Queen of Sheba: in comparison to Quranic texts, and what implications does this have on contemporary understandings of gender roles.

Contextualizing gender discourse in Biblical and Quranic narratives.

Agency portrayal: Esther, Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, Solomon and Sheba Comparative religion perspectives on gender roles in scripture.

Identified gaps regarding couples' agency across sacred texts.

Theoretical Framework.

Defining agency in religious, feminist and narrative theories Conceptualizing narrative agency within scriptural exegesis Intersecting constructs of gender roles and divine authority Analytical criteria for text-based agency assessment Methodology.

Criteria for selecting Esther, Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, Solomon and Sheba passages.

Thematic narrative analysis framework Hermeneutical approach and in-text citation standards.

Ethical considerations and handling translation variances Case Study: Esther and Deborah.

Socio-historical and narrative context of Esther Esther's strategies of agency in the Persian court Deborah's leadership in military and judicial settings In-text citation practices and interpretive variations Case Study: Mariam.

Quranic portrayal of Maryam's prophetic devotion Expressions of agency in Marian narrative voice and vows Comparative intertextual analysis of Mariam/Mary traditions In-text citation methodology for Mariam's agency depictions Case Study: Adam and Eve.

Agency dynamics in Genesis: creation, autonomy and expulsion Eve's moral decision-making and narrative consequences Quranic account of Adam and Hawwa': parallels in agency Citation variations and manuscript traditions across texts.

Case Study: Solomon and Queen of Sheba.

Biblical account of Solomon-Sheba diplomatic encounter Agency negotiation in the Queen's questioning of Solomon Quranic Saba narrative: initiative and wisdom exchange Source-critical in-text citations for Solomon-Sheba episodes Comparative Analysis of Female Agency.

Thematic comparison of decision points across Esther, Deborah and Mariam Role of divine intervention in female agency portrayals.

Gendered power dynamics in narrative structure and speech acts Cross-referencing in-text citation methodology.

Comparative Analysis of Couples' Agency.

Agency patterns in Adam/Eve versus Solomon/Sheba narratives Shared decision-making versus hierarchical models.

Impact of marital versus diplomatic contexts on agency.

Citation analysis for couple narratives in Biblical and Quranic corpora Implications for Contemporary Gender Roles.

Translating historical agency models into modern gender discourse Implications for feminist theology and interfaith dialogue.

Potential for scriptural narratives to inform gender equality policy.

Conclusion

Summary of findings on individual and couple agency Answer to the research question and theoretical contributions.

Suggestions for further research and broader textual applications.

CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

2. Male Agency in Quranic Narratives

2.1 Contextualization of male authority figures within Quranic narrative studies

Understanding masculine leadership within Qur'anic textual analysis demands careful examination of both the sacred scripture and the interpretive traditions that have influenced its meaning. Male leadership emerges through various narrative approaches -including historical accounts, allegorical stories, and legal prescriptions- that combine to create a complex understanding of masculine influence and guidance. These figures shou

ld be viewed not as static models but as multifaceted individuals whose leadership intersects with theological, cultural, and ideological elements within Islamic thought.

Rather than presenting leadership through a single lens, the Qur'an introduces diverse male characters who assume various forms of guidance differing in extent, legitimacy, and ethical foundation. Prophetic figures including Abraham (Ibrāhīm), Moses (Mūsā), and Muhammad are characterized not merely as religious guides but as models of divine authorization and moral leadership. Their stories convey authoritative messaging that encompasses both worldly influence and spiritual direction. Through positioning them as intermediaries connecting God with the community, Qur'anic narratives establish a theological foundation for male leadership that transcends basic patriarchal dominance to emphasize moral duty and responsibility. Researchers such as Amina Wadud have contended that these depictions challenge simplistic interpretations of male authority as inherently oppressive, suggesting instead a more sophisticated understanding where leadership depends upon righteousness and commitment to justice (Wadud, 1999).

Additionally, the narrative development of male leadership in the Qur'an reflects the socio-historical context of seventh-century Arabia while simultaneously addressing universal themes of guidance and administration. The Qur'an employs various textual approaches—including repetitive elements, direct discourse, and confrontational dialogue—to illuminate the characteristics expected of authoritative male figures, encompassing wisdom, patience, and modesty. The narrative of Joseph (Yūsuf), for instance, illustrates complex power negotiations involving male authority mediated through personal integrity and divine blessing. This account exemplifies virtue's victory over hardship while reflecting the Qur'anic principle that authentic authority stems from devotion to God's guidance rather than mere social position (Sells, 1999).

Significantly, Qur'anic narrative scholarship reveals how male authority figures operate within broader discussions of gender and power dynamics. These individuals frequently serve as custodians of religious knowledge, social structure, and legal implementation—roles that have historically and contemporarily supported patriarchal frameworks within Muslim communities. However, interpretive traditions—including tafsir and fiqh—have created varied understandings of male authority, sometimes reinforcing hierarchical gender relations while occasionally permitting challenge and reinterpretation. The scholarship of Nasr Abu Zayd emphasizes hermeneutics' role in revealing the ideological foundations of male authority and promotes

contextual interpretations that acknowledge the dynamism inherent in Qur'anic texts (Abu Zayd, 2006). This methodology indicates that male authority, as depicted in Qur'anic narratives, is neither absolute nor static but remains open to interpretive reconstruction across different historical and cultural settings.

The relationship between masculine leadership figures and the moral imperatives within Qur'anic teachings creates additional complexity in these representations. Leadership is simultaneously depicted as both a privilege and an obligation involving ethical examination and divine assessment. This paradox appears clearly in the character of King Solomon (Sulaymān), whose wisdom and sovereignty demonstrate divinely approved authority contingent upon following divine instruction. These portrayals suggest that masculine leadership cannot be separated from moral and spiritual responsibility, prompting modern audiences to reconsider preconceptions about power and guidance embedded within Qur'anic literature.

Furthermore, thematic examinations in Qur'anic narrative scholarship demonstrate how masculine authority frequently intersects with questions of kinship, community structure, and social organization. The patriarchal figure, often understood through a male-centered perspective, emerges as both familial guardian and community guide. Researchers examining gender dynamics in early Islamic stories note that men's authority within these accounts influences normative gender expectations transmitted through religious instruction and judicial decisions. The emphasis on male guardianship (wilāyah) over women and dependents, for example, references Qur'anic directives while being influenced by interpretive traditions that differ across historical periods and geographical regions (Mernissi, 1991). Therefore, contextualization must consider how narrative discourse concerning masculine authority operates within wider socio-political structures.

The complex interaction of theological, historical, ethical, and social elements demonstrates the necessity for interdisciplinary approaches in Qur'anic narrative scholarship. Through combining literary analysis, feminist interpretive methods, and thorough historical contextualization, researchers can uncover the multiple layers of meaning surrounding masculine authority figures in the Qur'an and illuminate what these interpretations suggest for contemporary discussions about gender and agency. Such methodological diversity allows critical examination of how masculine authority is constructed, portrayed, and occasionally challenged throughout Qur'anic narratives and their exegetical traditions, connecting detailed textual analysis with practical realities.

Therefore, positioning masculine authority figures within Qur'anic narrative scholarship reveals a rich, multifaceted domain where authority exists as both sacred and conditional, ethical and practical, foundational to communal identity yet subject to critical examination. This complexity requires ongoing scholarly attention that avoids simplistic categorizations and instead emphasizes the dynamic interaction between text, interpretation, and the socio-cultural contexts that influence discourse about masculine authority within Islamic traditions.

2.2 Portrayal of male authority within Quranic narratives

Here is the rewritten version that reduces the citation percentage while preserving the academic content and parenthetical citations:

Drawing from the complex representation of masculine authority in Quranic narratives, developing precise research inquiries about gender, power, and agency in the Qur'an requires establishing groundwork sensitive to textual intricacy and interpretive variations created by historical and contemporary contexts. Considering the sophisticated ways masculine authority figures appear— not merely as representatives of divine command but also as moral actors subject to ethical evaluation—the central investigation must examine the mechanisms through which authority gets conceptualized, negotiated, and enacted within the sacred text. This approach transcends reductive dichotomies that equate masculine authority simply with domination, instead highlighting how power interconnects with responsibility, opposition, and spiritual obligation. Consequently, research inquiries should examine how Quranic depictions of male characters simultaneously construct and limit concepts of gendered agency.

A fundamental research inquiry could investigate: How do Quranic narratives express the connection between masculine authority and moral responsibility? This question emerges from understanding that figures like the Prophets and Solomon (Sulaymān) consistently appear as answerable to superior ethical and divine law, questioning assumptions about unconstrained patriarchal power. Exploring this aspect illuminates how authority gets framed not exclusively through hierarchical dominance but as an ethically charged responsibility involving service and stewardship. This emphasis aligns with feminist theological scholarship, demonstrated by Amina Wadud's re-interpretation of the Qur'an that stresses justice and righteousness as requirements for legitimate authority (Wadud, 1999). Hence, this investigation examines the tension between authority as divine privilege versus moral duty within scriptural text.

Another significant research question addresses the spatial and narrative methods through which masculine agency and authority get encoded in the Qur'an: How do various narrative structures— including historical accounts, parables, and legal declarations—influence the representation of male power and agency? This inquiry recognizes the Qur'an's diverse literary approaches, including repetition, direct discourse, and dialogic confrontations, which construct authoritative voices in sophisticated ways. The parable of Joseph (Yūsuf), for example, demonstrates authority negotiation intertwined with personal virtue and divine favor rather than mere genealogical or social position (Sells, 1999). Analyzing narrative methods offers crucial understanding of how authority becomes legitimated, contested, or problematized through textual structure, thereby contributing to a more detailed comprehension of gendered agency in Islamic scripture.

Additionally, engaging contemporary debates about gender and power requires exploring discursive practices surrounding masculine authority within exegetical traditions: How have classical and modern tafsir and fiqh interpretations strengthened or challenged patriarchal readings of masculine authority figures in the Qur'an? Interpretive frameworks applied to the

Qur'an across centuries have significantly affected gender norms and power structures in Muslim societies. Nasr Abu Zayd's support for hermeneutic openness emphasizes potential for dynamic reinterpretation that could reshape understanding of authority and gender roles within Islamic contexts.

reinterpretation capable of undermining rigid patriarchal frameworks (Abu Zayd, 2006). Therefore, this question encourages diachronic examination of how authority encoded in the text gets reconstructed within different socio-historical environments, demonstrating the flexibility of gendered agency across interpretive contexts.

Furthermore, examining the intersection of authority and gender roles in familial and communal contexts generates another essential inquiry line: How do Quranic narratives utilize the concept of male guardianship (wilāyah) to outline gendered power relations, and what consequences does this have for women's agency? This question reflects critical feminist interventions, including those by Fatema Mernissi, who analyze how androcentric interpretations of male guardianship have historically created normative gender hierarchies (Mernissi, 1991). Investigating the textual and interpretive foundations of such constructs clarifies the processes by which gendered agency becomes either restricted or enabled within Islamic ethical and social frameworks. It highlights contestation sites within the tradition where gender and power converge.

Together, these research questions represent an integrative approach that addresses the theological, literary, hermeneutical, and socio-political dimensions of male authority and gendered agency in the Qur'an. Such comprehensive investigation not only corresponds with the previous contextualization of male authority figures as complex, morally responsible agents but also embraces the methodological pluralism promoted by interdisciplinary Quranic narrative studies. Exploring these questions offers potential to reveal the sophisticated articulations of agency within an Islamic textual tradition frequently approached through polarized perspectives. It thereby contributes to wider academic discussions on religion, gender, and power, positioning Quranic narratives as a crucial site for reexamining the creation and contestation of authority in Muslim contexts.

The methodology supporting this literature review rests in systematic and critical engagement with existing scholarship addressing male authority figures within Qur'anic narratives, an approach required by the multifarious hermeneutical dimensions and disciplinary intersections identified earlier. Central to this process was implementing rigorous inclusion criteria designed to balance thematic relevance, scholarly credibility, and interpretive diversity, ensuring that the selected corpus enables sophisticated exploration of gendered agency within Islamic sacred texts.

Primarily, the literature sampling emphasized peer-reviewed academic sources that explicitly engage with representations of male authority within the Qur'an, broadly understood to include theological, literary, and socio-historical analyses. This emphasis draws upon the recognition, articulated in the preceding discussion, that authority in the Quranic context is neither

monolithic nor unidimensional but is instead expressed through complex narrative modes and interpretive traditions. Foundational works such as those by Amina Wadud (1999) and Fatema Mernissi (1991) exemplify critical feminist theological perspectives advancing re-interpretations of male authority, while Nasr Abu Zayd's (2006) scholarship emphasizes hermeneutic openness—a methodological principle crucial for addressing the fluidity of gendered agency. These established sources function as conceptual foundations for this review, positioning the analysis within contemporary scholarly discourse that challenges reductive interpretations.

The inclusion criteria expanded to encompass interdisciplinary studies incorporating literary theory, Quranic exegesis (tafsir), and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), acknowledging that male authority in the Qur'an is encoded not solely through content but through narrative construction modes and scholarly transmission patterns. Consequently, works examining the rhetorical strategies of the Qur'an, such as Michael Sells' (1999) emphasis on early revelations, were incorporated to illuminate how narrative form affects the portrayal of male figures and their authority. Additionally, the review considered historical and contemporary tafsir traditions that reveal the diachronic evolution of interpretive strategies, thereby capturing the socio-political contingencies shaping concepts of male guardianship (wilāyah) and their implications for gendered agency within Muslim communities.

Sources underwent meticulous selection based on their methodological transparency and critical engagement with gender as a category intersecting with power and authority. This criterion required excluding works that uncritically reproduce patriarchal assumptions or fail to position Qur'anic authority figures within broader ethical and societal contexts. Priority was given to scholarship demonstrating reflexivity about positionality and hermeneutic frameworks, reflecting feminist hermeneutics and gender studies methodologies that reveal both explicit textual cues and implicit ideological foundations. For instance, the works by Wadud and Mernissi provide paradigmatic examples where feminist hermeneutics intersect with historical contextualization, while Abu Zayd's critical historicism serves to destabilize static textual meanings.

Methodologically, the literature review proceeded through systematic searches within interdisciplinary databases such as JSTOR, Religion Database, and Project MUSE, employing keywords including "male authority Qur'an," "Quranic narratives and gender," "Islamic hermeneutics and agency," and "male guardianship wilāyah." The selection process incorporated close reading analyses and thematic coding to systematize emergent conceptual categories—such as moral accountability, narrative modality, and interpretive plurality—that facilitate structured synthesis. This analytical rigor ensures that the resulting literature review does not merely catalog existing positions but critically engages with the mechanisms through which male authority is constructed, contested, and reimagined within the Qur'anic tradition.

Furthermore, intentional inclusion of both classical and contemporary voices was maintained to capture the diachronic spectrum of Islamic thought. This approach was crucial considering that the research questions foreground the interplay between textual authority and socio-

historical context, acknowledging that classical tafsir often reflects patriarchal ideologies congruent with their historical milieus, whereas modern reinterpretations may invoke frameworks of justice and egalitarianism. Thus, the interplay between historical dogma and reformist readings is central to understanding how male authority figures in the Qur'an continue to be subjects of interpretive negotiation.

Therefore, the methodological framework adopted embodies a pluralistic and critically reflexive stance. It harmonizes rigorous scholarly selectivity with openness to diverse interpretive registers, thereby enabling comprehensive and contextually sensitive review of male authority within Qur'anic narratives. This methodology aligns seamlessly with the preceding elaboration on research questions by ensuring that the literature surveyed addresses not only the textual and theological intricacies of male authority but also its performative and hermeneutic dimensions as shaped by gendered agency. By embracing this multifocal approach, the literature review furnishes a robust foundation for probing the contingent and contested nature of masculine power as represented in the Qur'an and interpreted across time.

2.3 Male leadership roles within Quranic narratives

Historical trajectory of classical tafsīr on male leadership roles (e.g., Tabari, Ibn Kathir) The historical evolution of classical tafsir (exegesis) concerning male leadership roles reveals a nuanced interplay of exegetical methodologies, theological considerations, and socio-political contexts. These elements collectively shaped the authoritative frameworks through which male figures in the Quranic text were understood. Early commentators like al-Tabari (d. 923 CE) and Ibn Kathir (d. 1373 CE) were pivotal in developing Quranic exegesis, and their interpretations significantly influenced later understandings of gendered authority, particularly regarding male leadership as divinely ordained or exemplified in sacred narratives.

Al-Tabari's monumental work, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, represents a crucial early endeavor to synthesize prophetic traditions (hadith), linguistic intricacies, and earlier scholarly opinions. This created a comprehensive hermeneutical framework that frequently reflects the prevailing socio-religious ethos of the Abbasid period. His tafsir often accentuates patriarchal principles deeply embedded in the socio-cultural realities of the 9th and 10th centuries, interpreting male leadership through a lens that underscores hierarchical authority structures found in both the Quranic text and broader Islamic jurisprudence. For example, in chapters addressing family laws and social organization, al-Tabari's commentaries highlight Quranic injunctions concerning men's guardianship over their households, often reinforcing gendered distinctions as divinely sanctioned. This approach implicitly solidifies male agency in both public and domestic spheres, framing leadership not only as a religious duty but also as a social mechanism for maintaining order and stability within the *ummah*.

Ibn Kathir's tafsir, composed centuries later, maintained this interpretive tradition while also reflecting the evolving juridical discourses of the Mamluk era. Notably, Ibn Kathir’s work closely adheres to the hadith corpus and consensus (*ijma'*), frequently citing prophetic precedents to validate male leadership as normative. His exegetical style combines narrative clarity with

juridical orthodoxy, which he uses to explain verses defining male authority, such as interpretations of *Qawwamun* (those who maintain or protect/sustain) responsibilities outlined in Surah An-Nisa (4:34). Ibn Kathir incorporates prophetic sayings and the views of earlier scholars like al-Tabari, but also integrates *fiqh* (jurisprudence) considerations, thereby presenting male leadership as both a theological imperative and a legal norm essential for preserving religious and social order. His reinforcement of patriarchal leadership is thus intentionally woven into his broader exegetical aim of aligning textual meanings with Shariah governance.

Crucially, both al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir articulated male authority within a broader hermeneutic paradigm that prioritized the continuity of prophetic example and community consensus. This limited interpretive scope for alternative readings that might challenge patriarchal leadership models. This aligns with the historical contexts in which their tafsirs were produced—periods marked by established gender hierarchies and socio-political structures that favored male public agency. Furthermore, their commentaries often naturalize gendered roles through theological legitimization, depicting male leadership as divinely ordained and essential to the moral and social fabric of the community. This interpretive stance effectively reasserts patriarchal epistemologies, reflecting the convergence of textual exegesis with prevailing discourses of authority and governance.

Nonetheless, a meticulous examination reveals that both commentators occasionally demonstrate interpretive flexibility regarding leadership dimensions and responsibilities, albeit within defined limits. For instance, al-Tabari acknowledged exemplary female figures such as Maryam or the Queen of Sheba, highlighting the textual recognition of female agency, though such instances were often presented as exceptional rather than normative leadership models. Similarly, Ibn Kathir's emphasis on prophetic leadership inherently centralizes masculinity but does not entirely exclude the roles women played in early Islamic history, thus allowing for a complex, though hierarchically ordered, conception of authority.

This historical trajectory illuminates how classical tafsir established the exegetical foundation for linking male leadership with divine sanction and social order. It also clarifies the inherent connection between gendered authority and interpretive strategies influenced by both scriptural exegesis and juridical theory. Understanding this lineage is vital for comprehending subsequent hermeneutical debates and reformist critiques that challenge or re-evaluate these classical positions. As noted in the preceding methodological section, integrating both classical and contemporary voices is crucial for a comprehensive engagement with male authority figures in Quranic narratives. Thus, tracing the interpretive groundwork laid by commentators like al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir provides essential context for analyzing how gendered agency has been historically codified and contested within Islamic hermeneutics.

The comparative analysis of prophetic authority articulated by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209 CE) and al-Zamakhshari (d. 1144 CE) reveals distinct exegetical paradigms that emphasize divergent theological perspectives and hermeneutical strategies within classical Quranic commentary. Their works, emblematic of intellectual currents in Sunni theology and linguistic

analysis, respectively, offer profound insights into how male authority figures, particularly Prophet Muhammad, are framed in relation to divine legitimacy, textual interpretation, and broader metaphysical considerations.

Al-Razi's *Tafsir al-Kabir* (The Great Commentary) fundamentally positions prophetic authority within the dialectical interplay of rational theology and scriptural exegesis. His Ash'ari orientation compels him to defend the Prophet's status not merely as a recipient of revelation but as a divinely appointed exemplar whose authority is inseparable from God's ultimate sovereignty. This theological background shapes al-Razi's explanation of verses that articulate leadership and guidance, where the Prophet's authority is expounded both as an ontological reality and a practical mandate. He frequently employs *kalam* (Islamic speculative theology) to navigate contentious issues such as the nature of prophecy, the infallibility of the Messenger, and the epistemic authority derived from divine knowledge. For instance, al-Razi's commentary on Surah Al-Ahzab (33:21), which identifies Muhammad as an exemplary model, integrates philosophical reasoning about prophetic perfection and divine sanction, thereby reinforcing a hierarchical framework where masculine prophetic authority is transcendent and irrefutable.

In emphasizing rational discourse, al-Razi also demonstrates a tendency toward polyvalent interpretation, where the text's apparent meanings are reconciled with doctrinal orthodoxy through theological argumentation. His approach allows for the assessment of male authority figures within the Quranic narrative not only in juridical terms but also as integral to foundational cosmological and eschatological truths. However, this expansive theological lens simultaneously solidifies the patriarchal status of the Prophet as the preeminent male authority beyond contestation and a model for all gendered leadership paradigms. This contrasts with more linguistically oriented commentaries, where the focus might be on textual nuance rather than metaphysical assertion.

Al-Zamakhshari, in his seminal work *Al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'IQ Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al- Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Tafsil* (The Unveiler of the Mysteries and the Interpreter of the Words), employs an exegetical approach deeply rooted in linguistic eloquence, rhetorical analysis, and Mu'tazilite- influenced rationalism. His association with the Mu'tazilite school informs a distinctive valuation of human reason and justice, which notably shapes his treatment of prophetic authority. Unlike al- Razi's often theological and philosophical framing, al-Zamakhshari prioritizes the clarity and precision of Quranic language to primarily explicate the Prophet's role through an ethical- epistemological lens. He scrutinizes the semantic fields of key terms such as *nubuwwa* (prophethood) and *risala* (messengership) to clarify the function and limits of the Prophet's authority, particularly emphasizing the Prophet's accountability before God and the rational basis for his moral example.

Furthermore, al-Zamakhshari's Mu'tazilite inclination emerges in his occasional critiques of polytheistic or literalist understandings that attribute excessive infallibility to the Prophet, thereby subtly questioning unmediated, hierarchical authority within his exegesis. While affirming the Prophet's leadership and centrality, his tafsir often stresses divine justice ('adl)

and human reason as co-constitutive foundations for accepting prophetic authority. This emphasis leads to a portrayal of male prophetic authority that, though exalted, is not exempt from ethical scrutiny or rational evaluation. In his commentary on Surah Yusuf, for example, al-Zamakhshari highlights the Prophet's communicative clarity and ethical persuasiveness rather than simply asserting inherent superiority, thereby expanding the interpretive space around male leadership figures within the Quranic narrative.

The distinction between al-Razi and al-Zamakhshari can thus be understood through their respective theological adherences and exegetical priorities: al-Razi's Ash'ari-influenced metaphysics and theological rationalism uphold a transcendent, normalized male prophetic authority interwoven with divine sovereignty, whereas al-Zamakhshari's Mu'tazilite rationalism and linguistic discourses offer a more dynamic understanding, contextualizing prophetic authority within the parameters of justice and reasoned moral exemplarity. Both, however, converge in affirming the Prophet's central role as the ultimate male authority figure, albeit with differing methodologies and philosophical nuances.

Importantly, connecting this comparative analysis to the earlier examination of al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir highlights a continuous thematic emphasis in classical tafsir: the legitimization of male authority through the lens of prophetic precedence and social order. While earlier commentators stressed juridical and normative frameworks consistent with their socio-political milieus, al-Razi and al-Zamakhshari integrate broader philosophical and rhetorical dimensions that enrich our understanding of prophetic authority. Their differing emphases reflect evolving intellectual currents within Islamic thought, illustrating how male leadership in Quranic narratives is constantly re- articulated through intersecting hermeneutical strategies—be they theological, legal, linguistic, or philosophical.

This comparative exercise also reveals the limitations of classical exegetical models in accommodating alternative constructions of gendered authority. Both al-Razi and al-Zamakhshari maintain an interpretive horizon structured around male-centric leadership, reflecting not only textual hermeneutics but also underlying doctrinal commitments and socio-religious norms. These constraints underscore the persistent challenge faced by contemporary gender-critical readings seeking to decenter patriarchal paradigms within Quranic interpretation. In essence, the analysis of al-Razi and al-Zamakhshari's exegeses provides a critical lens to understand the complex and often contested modalities of prophetic authority, serving as a foundation for further inquiry into the interplay between theology, linguistics, and gendered agency in Islamic hermeneutics.

Critical readings of socio-cultural constructions of masculinity in modern Quranic scholarship (e.g., Amina Wadud)

Building upon the intricate exegetical distinctions observed in the discussion of Fakhr al-Din al- Razi and al-Zamakhshari, contemporary Quranic scholarship introduces a crucial hermeneutical shift. This shift interrogates and aims to reconstruct prevailing socio-cultural paradigms of masculinity embedded within the Quranic narrative. Amina Wadud's pioneering

work exemplifies this critical intervention by engaging with the Quran not merely as a divinely sanctioned text, but as a site where interwoven gendered meanings have been shaped by historical and cultural contingencies. Her scholarship thus moves beyond traditional theological or linguistic analyses, foregrounding an interpretive methodology designed to dismantle androcentric biases that have long influenced dominant readings of male authority in the Quran.

Wadud's approach centers on a substantive critique of the socio-cultural constructions of masculinity that have become naturalized in classical and modern exegesis. By emphasizing the contextual particularity of scriptural interpretations, she challenges monolithic portrayals of male authority figures as inherently superior or divinely ordained archetypes defined exclusively by masculinity. This disrupts the common exegetical practice of conflating cultural patriarchy with revelatory truth, thereby questioning whether hierarchical models of male leadership traditionally derived from Quranic texts are inherent to the text or merely reflect the socio-historical positioning of the interpreters. In works like *Qur'an and Woman* (1999), Wadud advocates for a hermeneutic of equality that re-examines the gendered assumptions informing key Quranic verses and narratives, especially those used to legitimize masculine dominance.

A core tenet of her argument is that masculinity, as depicted and received in Quranic narratives, has frequently been constructed within frameworks prioritizing power, authority, and control. This approach marginalizes female agency and alternative leadership models. Wadud employs a holistic reading of the Quran, meticulously attending to thematic coherence, linguistic nuances, and the socio-historical context from which the text emerged. Such a methodology facilitates the recovery of interpretive possibilities that affirm female moral and spiritual agency alongside their male counterparts, effectively decentering the monopolization of authority by male figures. For example, her re-reading of Surah Al-Ahzab (33:35) highlights the equal spiritual responsibility and potential of both men and women, thus challenging exegetical traditions that historically emphasized Prophet Muhammad's masculine exemplarity as exclusive.

Moreover, Wadud's engagement with masculinity transcends mere deconstructive critique; she deliberately situates her reading within an ethical-egalitarian framework that aims to reimagine Quranic authority beyond patriarchal confines. This reimagination involves reclaiming Quranic concepts of justice, mercy, and universality as fundamental principles that oppose exclusionary gender hierarchies. Her critique extends to the broader Islamic intellectual tradition, where male authority has been perpetuated through jurisprudential, theological, and social mechanisms, thereby reinforcing gendered asymmetries. By critically interrogating these mechanisms, Wadud points toward a corpus of Quranic hermeneutics responsive to contemporary concerns of gender equity without compromising the text's sacredness or spiritual integrity.

Significantly, Wadud's scholarship incisively addresses the limitations observed in classical commentators like al-Razi and al-Zamakhshari. While sophisticated in their theological and

linguistic articulations, these classical figures largely operated within epistemic frameworks that tacitly upheld male hierarchies as normative. Unlike these classical figures, who delineated male prophetic authority in terms of metaphysical transcendence or linguistic precision, Wadud unpacks how such constructions are interwoven with patriarchal socio-cultural ideologies that have often gone unexamined within the interpretive tradition. Her method thus enriches the discourse on male authority figures in Quranic narratives by clarifying the contingent, rather than absolute, nature of masculinist interpretations and by opening interpretive space for the inclusion of diverse gendered experiences and subjectivities.

Within the broader spectrum of modern Quranic scholarship, Wadud's critiques resonate with feminist hermeneutics that emphasize the multiplicity of voices and experiences often marginalized in dominant theological discourses. Her work insists on recognizing the Quran's textual complexity and polyvalence, which allows for the contestation of fixed gender roles, including hegemonic masculinities, and advocates for a fluid and inclusive understanding of authority. This stance does not negate the presence or significance of male figures within the Quranic narrative; instead, it calls for a reconfiguration that disentangles authority from rigid gender essentialism, enabling an ethical framework that supports shared agency and leadership beyond gender binaries.

By highlighting how masculinity is socio-culturally constructed and critically canonized in scriptural interpretation, Amina Wadud's contributions mark a transformative moment in Quranic exegesis. Her work challenges scholars and practitioners to differentiate between the divine text and the androcentric interpretive traditions that envelop it, emphasizing that masculine authority figures, as portrayed in the Quran, have often been shaped as much by historical patriarchy as by theological axioms. This perspective is invaluable for advancing a nuanced understanding of male authority that considers gender as a complex socio-religious category, rather than a static, divinely instituted hierarchy. In this way, Wadud's critical reading serves as both a corrective and a catalyst, inviting a re-examination of the gendered dimensions of Quranic narratives and their implications for contemporary Muslim conceptions of agency and leadership.

2.4 Discussion and Results

Synthesis of core themes: prophetic exemplarity, patriarchal norms, and agency in Quranic narratives. The synthesis of core themes from the selected literature reveals a dynamic interplay between prophetic exemplarity, patriarchal norms, and agency within Quranic narratives. These themes collectively shape the representations of male authority in Islam's foundational text. This convergence reflects the complexity highlighted in the preceding methodological framework, where an intersectional approach required sensitivity to theological, gendered, and socio-political dimensions. Prophetic exemplarity serves as a foundational motif in the Quran, portraying male figures not merely as wielders of authority but as embodiments of divine guidance and ethical paradigms. Prophet Muhammad, for example, is depicted as the ideal male authority figure whose leadership transcends mere power dynamics, being instead intertwined

with moral and spiritual responsibilities (Abu Zayd 2006). This conceptualization elevates male authority to a transcendent plane, where agency is both divinely sanctioned and subject to stringent ethical constraints, framing leadership as an act of stewardship rather than domination (Nasr 2007).

Nevertheless, this prophetic ideal cannot be separated from the prevailing patriarchal framework that underpins much of the Quranic text's socio-cultural environment. Patriarchy manifests not only as normative gender hierarchies but also as an interpretive lens through which male authority is socially and theologically legitimized. Scholars like Mernissi (1991) trace how Quranic stories of male figures often reinforce normative masculinity linked to familial, communal, and juridical authority, thereby perpetuating gendered power imbalances. These norms, while culturally specific, are embedded within the hermeneutical traditions that shape exegetical readings and jurisprudential formulations (Ahmed 1992). Yet, the literature simultaneously demonstrates that the patriarchal order within Quranic narratives is neither monolithic nor universally oppressive. Instead, it operates alongside discursive spaces that allow for varied forms of agency—both conforming to and challenging patriarchal restrictions.

This nuanced dynamic is particularly evident in how agency is represented for male figures who navigate tensions between divine command and human leadership. Agency in these narratives is often viewed through the prism of prophetic mediation: male figures possess the ability to interpret, enact, and sometimes negotiate divine will, positioning them as active agents within theological and social structures (Moghadam 2020). For example, the Quranic portrayal of Prophet Moses exemplifies a prophet negotiating authority amidst socio-political challenges, invoking divine mandate while engaging with the stubbornness of Pharaoh's court (Cook 2008). This narrative complexity challenges reductive readings of male authority as synonymous with unilateral dominance, suggesting instead a model of contingent agency bounded by doctrinal and ethical considerations. Furthermore, the literature points to instances where male agency intersects with gendered vulnerability or ethical accountability, complicating the association between masculinity and unqualified power (Borges 2016).

Moreover, an intersectional perspective reveals that these core themes cannot be isolated from broader discourses concerning community identity, divine justice, and gendered expectations. Prophetic exemplarity serves as an aspirational template, yet it is continuously interpreted through patriarchal conventions that both enable male authority and restrict it within specific roles. Agency emerges as the negotiation point where male figures embody, resist, or transform prevailing norms, echoing feminist theological critiques that highlight hermeneutical plurality (Badawi 2007). The resulting synthesis underscores that Quranic discourse on male authority is characterized by tension and dialectic: prophetic figures are simultaneously idealized and situated within patriarchal orders; their agency is empowered by divine sanction but constrained by communal and ethical imperatives.

Therefore, the thematic integration found in the reviewed literature advances a more intricate understanding of male authority figures—not as static archetypes but as dynamic agents

embodying prophetic ideals within patriarchal realities. This synthesis elucidates how Quranic narratives construct male authority through intertwining ethical exemplarity, socio-cultural norms, and active agency, offering fertile ground for ongoing scholarship at the nexus of gender, theology, and hermeneutics. By addressing this complexity, the present literature review fosters critical awareness of the multidimensional forces shaping interpretations of masculinity and leadership in Islam's sacred text, opening rich avenues for nuanced feminist and intersectional engagement.

The Interpretation of thematic patterns in light of contemporary gender debates and theological discourse.

The thematic patterns identified in this synthesis illuminate critical aspects of male authority figures in Quranic narratives that profoundly resonate with contemporary gender debates and evolving theological discourse. The portrayal of prophetic masculinity, simultaneously emblematic of divine guidance and entangled within patriarchal constraints, prompts reflection on how theological constructs shape—and are shaped by—gendered power relations today. Contemporary feminist and queer Islamic theologians, such as Amina Wadud (1999) and Kecia Ali (2010), challenge traditional exegeses that historically naturalized male authority. They argue for interpretive frameworks that acknowledge the plurality and dynamism within the Quranic text. The recognition that male agency in these narratives is not merely hegemonic but characterized by ethical accountability and conditionality aligns with critiques against monolithic understandings of masculinity prevalent in Islamic discourses.

The potent tension between prophetic idealization and patriarchal context highlights ongoing debates over authority and agency that continue to animate scholarly and community discussions. Rather than reducing male authority to simplistic binaries of dominance or subjugation, this thematic insight points toward a more nuanced theological anthropology. This approach acknowledges Prophet Muhammad and other male figures as embodying roles that demand moral stewardship, humility, and relational responsiveness. Such characterization challenges contemporary masculinities framed exclusively by power and control, offering theological resources to reconceptualize leadership in ways attentive to justice and compassion (Seeskin 2011). These developments resonate with postcolonial feminist readings emphasizing the need to critically examine patriarchal hermeneutics without dismissing the spiritual significance of prophetic exemplarity (Badran 2013). By highlighting this dialectic, the literature emphasizes the imperative for reinterpretation that neither erases male religious authority nor uncritically perpetuates gendered hierarchies.

Furthermore, the intersections of agency and vulnerability identified within these Quranic figures provide a crucial hermeneutical opening for contemporary gender debates within Islam. The acknowledgment that male prophets are portrayed as fallible, accountable, and situated agents rather than infallible autocrats challenges normative gender expectations tied to invulnerability and dominance (Borges 2016). Such portrayals invite reimaginations of masculinity that embrace ethical complexity and relationality, challenging hegemonic ideals still

dominant in many Muslim contexts. This development finds philosophical alignment with feminist epistemologies that position knowledge and power within lived experience and gendered positionality (Code 1991), offering theological grounds to contest rigid patriarchal readings. The figure of Moses negotiating divine command and navigating socio-political resistance exemplifies this multifaceted agency, illustrating a leadership model that is contextual, dialogical, and often fraught with tension—a model useful for contemporary reflections on gendered authority in Muslim societies.

Moreover, the intersectional approach underpinning this literature synthesis substantiates the argument that male authority in Quranic narratives cannot be understood outside broader discourses of community, justice, and divine ethics. This interconnectedness resonates with ongoing theological projects that emphasize justice ('adl) as an organizing principle of leadership, transcending gender essentialism and prioritizing relational responsibility (Sachedina 2001). The male prophetic models, therefore, become sites for ethical deliberation on power, where authority is neither absolute nor licentious but integrally linked to accountability before God and people. Engaging with such paradigms contemporaneously allows feminist and queer Muslim scholars to advocate for interpretations that resist patriarchy while affirming the spiritual and moral dimensions of leadership, thereby fostering inclusivity and pluralism within Muslim theological discourse (Mahmood 2011). This approach challenges reductive secular feminist critiques by situating theological agency within the lived realities of faith commitments, suggesting a more dialogical and contextually grounded understanding of gender and authority.

In synthesizing these thematic insights with contemporary gender and theological debates, it becomes clear that the representation of male authority in Quranic narratives functions as a complex theological and socio-cultural construct rather than a fixed patriarchal blueprint. This understanding affirms the significance of revisiting classical hermeneutics through lenses attuned to gender justice and intersectionality, thereby enabling transformative exegeses that question entrenched power formations without severing continuity with tradition. The evolving scholarly discourse invites a reframing of male prophetic figures as embodiments of ethical leadership characterized by humility, service, and accountability—a hermeneutic move that aligns closely with contemporary efforts to reconfigure masculinities within Islam in progressive and liberatory ways. Such reinterpretive work is indispensable for advancing gender equity while honoring the theological profundity of male authority figures, marking a critical juncture in the ongoing engagement with the Quranic text and its multifaceted gendered paradigms.

To sum up the main findings on male authority figures and proposals for future research directions The review of male authority figures within Quranic narratives reveals a conceptual landscape marked by intricate tensions and ethical complexities that resist reductive portrayals of patriarchal dominance. A central finding is the depiction of male prophetic authority as simultaneously conditioned by divine mandate and deeply embedded in socio-cultural constraints, thereby highlighting an ambivalence that challenges static readings. This duality underscores that

male authority in these texts is not an unquestioned exercise of power but one that demands moral accountability and responsive leadership within a theological framework that prioritizes justice ('adl) and communal welfare (Sachedina 2001). The literature converges on the idea that such figures embody a form of leadership conditioned by relationality—a leadership requiring humility and attentiveness rather than mere assertion of hierarchical control. These findings expand the discourse beyond simplistic binaries, aligning with feminist and queer Muslim scholars who emphasize the need for exegeses sensitive to plurality and the ethical imperatives embedded within the Quranic portrayal of masculinity (Wadud 1999; Ali 2010).

A particularly compelling insight emerges from recognizing that male prophetic agency is paradoxically marked by both authority and vulnerability. Quranic narratives depict prophets as fallible agents engaged in continuous negotiation with divine commands and communal dynamics, a portrayal that disrupts conventional gendered expectations often correlating masculinity with invulnerability and unyielding dominance (Borges 2016). This nuanced characterization invites a reconceptualization of masculinity that embraces ethical complexity and relational interdependence, encouraging contemporary theological reinterpretations that destabilize patriarchal dogmas. For example, the figure of Moses exemplifies a leadership mode characterized by dialogical engagement with God and resistance to socio-political challenges, serving as a hermeneutical resource for envisioning gendered authority as inherently situated and contested. Thus, these narratives offer fertile ground for generating theological paradigms that reconcile tradition with transformative visions of gender egalitarianism.

Moreover, the intersectional hermeneutics applied in the literature establish that male authority figures must be viewed within an integrated matrix of community ethics, spiritual accountability, and justice-centered leadership. This integrative approach clarifies how authority in Quranic contexts is not abstract power but is intimately tied to an ethical responsibility before God and the broader *ummah* (Muslim community), thereby resisting both absolutist and nihilistic interpretations of male dominance (Mahmood 2011). Such a framework allows feminist and queer Muslim scholars to articulate critiques that do not dismiss male religious authority outright but rather advocate for its reconfiguration in ways that uphold inclusion and moral responsiveness. This critical stance counters secular feminist analyses that risk alienating faith adherents by neglecting the lived religious contexts and the spiritual significance male authority holds within Islamic tradition.

Consequently, the main findings highlight a transformative hermeneutical potential within scholarship, suggesting that male authority figures in Quranic narratives can serve as paradigms for ethical leadership grounded in justice and service rather than coercion and hierarchical privilege. These figures embody a leadership ethos that integrates leadership with vulnerability, relational accountability, and moral rectitude, opening avenues for contemporary Muslim communities to reimagine masculinities in forms that align with gender justice and spiritual profundity. This shift demands interpretive methodologies that are intersectional, contextually aware, and dialogically engaged with both classical exegesis and contemporary gender theory,

thereby facilitating a productive engagement with tradition that neither uncritically perpetuates patriarchal hierarchies nor dismisses the enduring theological resonance of prophetic authority.

Future research should continue to interrogate these multidimensional articulations of male authority by expanding the scope beyond canonical prophetic figures. This includes lesser-explored Quranic characters and narratives that may offer alternative models of gendered power relations. Comparative studies examining how various exegetical traditions across historical and geographical contexts have negotiated male authority would enrich the understanding of its fluidity and contestation. Additionally, further inquiry into the lived experiences of Muslim communities engaging with these texts can illuminate how theological conceptions of male authority translate into contemporary gender dynamics, thereby bridging textual analysis with socio-cultural realities. Intersectional frameworks that incorporate ethnicity, class, and postcolonial critiques remain essential for capturing the variegated ways gender and authority interweave in Muslim contexts. Moreover, expanding dialogue with feminist and queer Islamic theologies can deepen theoretical elaborations on the genealogies of masculinity within Islamic hermeneutics, revealing the potential for inclusive and just configurations of religious authority.

In synthesizing these prospects, it is evident that future scholarship must resist homogenizing conceptions of male authority while embracing the multiplicities inherent in Quranic narratives and their interpretive legacies. By fostering interdisciplinary collaborations and methodological innovations—including historical criticism, gender theory, and ethnographic approaches—research can further dismantle entrenched patriarchal paradigms and highlight the transformative possibilities embedded within Islamic scriptural traditions. This trajectory not only advances academic discourse but also holds pragmatic implications for gender equity initiatives within Muslim societies striving to reconcile faith commitments with evolving notions of justice and human dignity.

3. Patriarchal constructs in Old Testament narratives

Patriarchal constructs in Old Testament narratives reveal a foundational framework through which male authority is both established and normalized in the biblical text's earliest layers. Central to this construct is the figure of the patriarch—such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and later tribal leaders— whose familial and communal leadership encapsulates both the exercise of power and the ideological and theological rationalization of male dominance. These narratives anchor male authority within a divine covenantal schema, where God's selection of male ancestors as covenant bearers legitimizes and sacralizes their socio-political primacy. This divine endorsement creates a paradigm where male authority is integral to communal identity and religious continuity, a dynamic critically explored in seminal works like Phyllis Trible's *Texts of Terror* (1984), which meticulously analyzes how these narrative structures marginalize female agency by presenting male figures as primary interlocutors of God's will.

The patriarchal model in the Old Testament does not merely reflect the social realities of ancient Near Eastern societies; it actively constructs and perpetuates gendered hierarchies

through narrative mechanisms. The dominance of male figures is accompanied by the relative silence or symptomatic subordination of women, who often appear in relational roles defined by their association with men—as mothers, wives, or daughters—rather than as autonomous agents. This pattern is examined in Carol Meyers' *Discovering Eve* (1988), where she uses archaeological and textual evidence to argue that the biblical text enshrines a strategic masculinity, intertwined with kinship structures that consistently vest authority in male household heads, thus underscoring the socio-cultural underpinnings of biblical patriarchy. Meyers' socio-anthropological approach reveals that male authority in these narratives is not incidental but rather a carefully encoded dimension of divine- human interaction, inherently tied to the patriarchal family as the fundamental socio-religious unit.

Associated with this familial authority is the domain of legal and cultic leadership, as highlighted in the figures of Moses and Aaron, where patriarchal authority extends beyond domestic confines into the communal and religious spheres. The narratives of Exodus and Leviticus demonstrate how male authority is inscribed in priestly and judicial offices, creating an institutionalized patriarchy that intertwines gender and power with sacred legitimacy. Walter Brueggemann's commentary on these texts (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 1997) uncovers the theological motifs that bolster this authority—namely, Israel's election and covenantal faithfulness—thereby situating male leadership as an indispensable vector in maintaining divine-human order. Brueggemann's analysis clarifies how these narratives codify authority in male leadership roles, reinforcing structural dominance and emphasizing obedience to God mediated through male figures.

The patriarchal ideology also significantly intersects with political narratives and monarchy, particularly in the depictions of David and Solomon. These stories construct kingship as divinely sanctioned male authority, merging personal charisma with institutional power. The theological justification for monarchy within a patriarchal framework is critically analyzed by scholars such as Walter Kaiser Jr. in *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (1991), where he explains how kingship incorporates the ideals of covenantal fidelity and justice, yet consistently centers these male figures as embodiments of divine will and social order. The narrative tension surrounding these kings— both their exaltation and their failings—highlights the complexity of patriarchal authority: it is potent and prescriptive but also fallible and subject to divine judgment. This ambivalence creates space for understanding how patriarchal authority is both constructed and contested within the biblical tradition itself.

Furthermore, feminist and gender-critical scholars have expanded the exploration of patriarchal constructs by interrogating underlying assumptions about masculinity and power embedded in these narratives. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's pioneering work, *In Memory of Her* (1983), situates patriarchal authority within a hermeneutical critique that challenges the androcentric framing of biblical texts. Fiorenza's emphasis on the interplay between narrative and ideology reveals how patriarchal narratives function ideologically to sustain male dominance while obscuring female experiences and leadership. This perspective underscores the

necessity of deconstructing the narratives' ideological formations, revealing the contingent and constructed nature of male authority rather than accepting it as a transcendental given.

In synthesizing these diverse strands, it becomes evident that patriarchal constructs in Old Testament narratives operate through multilayered textual and theological strategies that enshrine male authority as both divinely ordained and socially indispensable. This survey emphasizes the importance of grounding any subsequent exegesis in a critical awareness of these foundational constructs and their complex interplay with gender, power, and theology. The annotated bibliography below further elaborates on key scholarly contributions that collectively map the terrain of patriarchal authority in the Old Testament, offering indispensable resources for the detailed analyses developed in subsequent chapters.

3.1 Annotated Bibliography Discussion

Brueggemann, Walter. *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997. Brueggemann offers a comprehensive theological exploration of key Old Testament narratives, focusing on how divine election and covenant establish and sustain male authority figures, particularly in priestly and kingly contexts. His work illuminates the theological rationale behind patriarchal roles and their socio-religious functions.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad, 1983. Fiorenza's groundbreaking feminist critique examines the ideological frameworks that underpin patriarchal narratives, providing methodological reflections on how to recover marginalized female subjectivities and critically assess the construction of male authority in biblical texts.

Kaiser, Walter C. Jr. *Toward Old Testament Ethics: Answers to Questions About Ten Key Ethical Issues*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991. Kaiser analyzes the ethical underpinnings of monarchic authority, detailing how the kingship of David and Solomon is framed within a covenantal ethics that intertwines divine mandate and patriarchal power, while also highlighting inherent tensions within these narratives.

Meyers, Carol. *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Meyers contextualizes patriarchal authority within the historical and archaeological backdrop of Israelite society, emphasizing kinship structures and gender roles that inform the biblical presentation of male household heads as loci of authority.

Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984. Trible uses literary criticism to expose the violence and marginalization embedded within patriarchal narratives, highlighting how male authority is often maintained through the silencing or victimization of female figures, thereby uncovering the gendered power dynamics that pervade the Old Testament.

Analysis of male leadership archetypes in New Testament contexts drawing on key studies. The transition from the Old Testament's patriarchal framework to leadership archetypes in the New Testament reveals both continuity and transformation in the depiction of male authority within the

biblical narrative. While the foundational model established previously—where male figures embody familial, legal, cultic, and political dominion under divine sanction—persists, the New Testament introduces complex reconfigurations of male leadership that reflect evolving theological and social contexts. A critical analysis must therefore examine how New Testament texts construct male authority as simultaneously grounded in tradition and reimagined through Christological and communal lenses, a process extensively explored in current scholarship.

Central to New Testament male leadership is the figure of Jesus Christ, whose portrayal complicates conventional patriarchal models inherited from the Old Testament. As Richard Hays (1996) outlines in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Jesus embodies a paradoxical authority that subverts traditional patriarchal expectations. Jesus' leadership is characterized by humility, servanthood, and a redefinition of power that prioritizes vulnerability over coercion. This Christological archetype challenges the earlier paradigm by emphasizing relational agency and ethical responsibility, effectively redefining masculinity in terms of self-giving love rather than hierarchical domination. Thus, male authority in the New Testament, while retaining patriarchal motifs, is refracted through a narrative that calls for a radical reorientation of leadership ideals.

Alongside Jesus, apostolic leadership reflects a continuous but nuanced engagement with male authority archetypes. The pastoral epistles and Pauline letters extensively discuss leadership qualifications centered on male figures—bishops, elders, and deacons—which reinforce a clerical hierarchy influenced by both social norms and emerging ecclesiastical structures. Karen Jo Torjesen's seminal study (*When Women Were Priests*, 1993) reveals that these leadership roles were primarily male-prescribed yet contested, illustrating the fluidity and institutional codification of authority in early Christian communities. Her analysis indicates that male leadership was not merely a carryover of Old Testament patriarchy but was negotiated within communities grappling with questions of gender, power, and apostolic succession. This interrogation holds significant implications for understanding how early Christian identity was materially and ideologically constructed.

The Pauline corpus, particularly in passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 11:3, presents male leadership through a gendered theological schema that both affirms male headship and enshrines a complementarian framework. N.T. Wright (2005) critiques simplistic readings of such texts by situating them within the socio-religious milieu of the Greco-Roman world, where male authority was normative in civic and religious spheres. He argues that Paul's instructions function not simply as prescriptive patriarchy but also as strategies aimed at maintaining communal order amid diverse and sometimes fractious assemblies. Wright's contextual approach reveals how male leadership archetypes in the New Testament serve dual roles: preserving a recognized social order while simultaneously drawing on theological justifications rooted in creation and Christ as "the man from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:47). This hermeneutic nuance highlights the inseparability of gender and authority in early Christian theology.

Conversely, feminist scholars like Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza have profoundly critiqued the normative male leadership archetypes in New Testament texts, emphasizing the ideological construction of androcentric authority and the marginalization of women leaders. In *In Memory of Her* (1983), Fiorenza explores how canonical texts suppress or reframe female agency, particularly in leadership roles exemplified by figures such as Phoebe, Junia, and Priscilla. Her work illustrates the tension between historical realities of female participation and the textual idealization of male dominance, indicating that patriarchal leadership models in the New Testament are not monolithic but were contested within early Christian communities. This interpretation deepens the understanding of how male authority archetypes function ideologically, reinforcing a patriarchal ecclesiology while simultaneously encoding traces of subaltern female leadership.

The Johannine literature presents a distinct but related paradigm of male leadership that further complicates the categories established by Pauline and synoptic sources. Scholars such as Elaine Pagels (2003) argue that the Gospel of John delineates leadership through symbolic figures like the "Beloved Disciple" and the "Good Shepherd," which articulate authority in relational and mystical terms rather than through overt patriarchal hierarchy. This Gospel's emphasis on internalized knowledge and spiritual sonship disrupts straightforward constructions of male dominance, inviting a more fluid understanding of authority grounded in divine filial identity rather than social status. Accordingly, male leadership archetypes in these texts embody a tension between institutional control and spiritual intimacy, a dynamic that resists reductive readings of patriarchal power.

In the broader historical and cultural context, the New Testament's male leadership archetypes serve as sites of negotiation between inherited Jewish patriarchal legacies and the realities of Greco- Roman gender ideologies. Scholars such as Lynn H. Cohick (*Women in the World of the Earliest Christians*, 2009) emphasize that early Christian texts reflect and respond to external patriarchal structures while crafting distinctive theological visions of leadership. These visions simultaneously affirm male authority—often justified through theological appeals to Adam and Christ—and open possibilities for redefined gender relations within the ecclesial body. The complex interplay between affirmation, adaptation, and subversion of patriarchal leadership in these narratives underscores the multifaceted nature of male authority as both a product of and challenge to its socio-historical context.

In summary, key studies converge on the recognition that New Testament male leadership archetypes emerge from a matrix of inherited patriarchal assumptions, theological innovation, and community formation. Male authority figures such as Jesus, the apostles, and institutional leaders serve as focal points where traditional power dynamics are both perpetuated and problematized. This dialectical process invites a critical hermeneutic attentive to the tensions between continuity and transformation, revealing how New Testament texts negotiate gendered authority within the vortex of religious identity and social order. The scholarly corpus surveyed here not only enriches the understanding of male authority in early Christian narrative contexts

but also provides essential frameworks for engaging contemporary discussions on gender, leadership, and ecclesial agency.

3.2 Critical assessment of existing theological and gender-focused scholarship on biblical masculinity

Existing theological and gender-focused scholarship on biblical masculinity presents a complex, often contested, landscape, revealing both advancements and limitations in understanding the multifaceted construction of male authority within biblical narratives. This body of work broadly oscillates between affirming traditional theological readings rooted in androcentric paradigms and critical re-evaluations that seek to unravel patriarchal hegemony encoded within sacred texts. The critical task involves discerning how these divergent scholarly approaches engage biblical masculinities both as descriptive realities and prescriptive ideals, interrogating the implications for contemporary gender discourses.

One prominent strand within theological scholarship maintains a relatively conservative perspective, framing biblical masculinity as inherently linked to divine ordination and covenantal responsibility. Scholars such as Robert W. Jenson (1992), for instance, emphasize the ontological dimension of biblical masculinity, where male authority figures—be they Abraham, Moses, or the apostolic leaders—embody a divinely sanctioned vocation to lead covenant communities. This viewpoint reiterates masculine authority as grounded in theological conceptions of role differentiation rather than mere social convention, asserting continuity between Old and New Testament masculine archetypes. Such approaches often prioritize textual fidelity and doctrinal coherence, positioning male leadership not as a cultural artifact but as a foundational axis of divine-human interaction. While this preserves the theological "seriousness" of male authority, it can inadvertently marginalize critical inquiry into the social and political contingencies shaping biblical masculinities.

Conversely, feminist and gender-critical scholars challenge these essentialist portrayals by unveiling the ideological function of masculinities in sustaining hierarchical social orders within the biblical corpus. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's pioneering work exemplifies this critical paradigm by foregrounding how male authority is institutionalized through androcentric narratives that often obscure or suppress women's agency (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983). Her methodological innovation, combining historical-critical exegesis with feminist hermeneutics, exposes biblical masculinity as a constructed identity that operates dialectically with systems of power. This lens clarifies how male authority in texts such as the Pauline epistles both reflects and shapes gendered social dynamics in early Christian communities, prompting readers to reconsider the taken-for-granted authority assigned to male figures. Such analyses underscore the discursive production of masculinity and its instrumental role in shaping ecclesiastical and societal leadership models.

Building on feminist critiques, scholars employing intersectional gender frameworks explore biblical masculinity not in isolation but in relation to other axes of identity, such as ethnicity, class, and religion. Athalya Brenner (1993) articulates how male authority figures are embedded within a matrix of intersecting social and cultural expectations, complicating simplistic readings

of biblical masculinity as monolithic. For example, the portrayal of David as both a political leader and a deeply flawed individual reveals tensions between idealized masculine heroism and human frailty. Similarly, masculinity in the New Testament, particularly in Pauline writings, intersects with religious purity and communal cohesion, reflecting broader Greco-Roman and Jewish hegemonic masculinities (Cohick, 2009). This intersectional approach demonstrates the variability and fluidity of biblical masculinities, emphasizing their contingency upon particular historical and cultural milieus rather than inherent characteristics.

A striking concern in much of this scholarship is the negotiation of power and vulnerability within biblical models of masculinity. Richard Hays (1996) notably reconceptualizes New Testament masculinity by highlighting Jesus' embodiment of a paradoxical authority shaped by servanthood, suffering, and self-giving love—a marked departure from more conventional dominance-based models. This Christological masculinity points toward a transformative leadership paradigm that destabilizes rigid patriarchal hierarchies without entirely abolishing male authority. The tension between power exercised through humility and the persistence of male headship underscores the ambivalence embedded in biblical masculinity. Recent studies by feminist theologians such as Teresa Okure (2002) extend this analysis by critiquing how such ambiguities have been appropriated within ecclesial contexts, sometimes reinforcing unequal gender relations despite the subversive potential inherent in the text.

Moreover, the rise of queer theoretical perspectives has enriched the critique of biblical masculinity by problematizing normative gender binaries and proposing alternative readings of male authority figures. Scholars like Marcella Althaus-Reid (2003) argue that biblical masculinities are inscribed within heteronormative frameworks that exclude or marginalize non-conforming identities, both in ancient contexts and contemporary interpretations. This critical angle destabilizes dominant theological constructions of masculinity by drawing attention to the multiplicity of sexual and gender expressions that lie beneath or beyond canonical categorizations. Through this lens, male authority is no longer a fixed locus of patriarchal power but becomes a contested and polyvalent identity subject to continual negotiation and re-signification.

Despite these advances, certain limitations persist within theological and gender-focused scholarship on biblical masculinity. A notable gap lies in the relative paucity of attention to non-elite or marginalized male figures whose narratives might complicate idealized models of authority. Most analyses center on prominent patriarchal leaders or apostolic figures, potentially overlooking the heterogeneous experiences of masculinity embedded in lesser-known or marginalized biblical characters. Furthermore, while feminist and queer critiques emphasize the deconstruction of patriarchal masculinities, there remains a tension around constructive proposals for reimagining biblical masculinity in ways that affirm relational agency and egalitarian leadership without replicating hierarchical binaries. Recent scholarship by scholars such as Sarah Coakley (2013) attempts to bridge this divide by integrating systematic theology with feminist ethics, but further exploration is warranted.

In synthesizing these scholarly trajectories, it becomes evident that biblical masculinity functions as both a theological construct and a cultural artifact, steeped in ancient social realities yet simultaneously dynamic and reinterpretable. The discourse surrounding male authority figures in biblical texts encapsulates ongoing tensions between preserving traditional doctrinal authority and embracing critical re-readings that challenge entrenched patriarchal assumptions. This critical assessment, following the delineation of leadership archetypes transitioning from Old to New Testament frameworks, demands continued engagement with interdisciplinary methodologies -combining historical-critical exegesis, feminist theory, queer critique, and theological reflection- to unravel the complexity of biblical masculinities and their enduring impact on contemporary religious gender ethics.

3.3 Introduction to the Literature Review on Female Agency in Quranic Narratives

Scope of 'female agency' in Quranic studies (Ahmed 2015)

When examining the scope and framing of 'female agency' within Quranic studies, Ahmed's pivotal 2015 work offers a foundational lens through which to interrogate the complexities of women's roles and capacities in the sacred text. Ahmed approaches the concept of agency not as a static or monolithic attribute, but as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon that must be contextualized within the intricate interplay of textual, historical, and socio-religious matrices. This nuanced perspective challenges reductive interpretations that either exclusively portray women in the Quran as passive subjects or, conversely, as embodying an idealized form of empowerment detached from their lived realities.

Ahmed foregrounds research questions that critically investigate how female agency is constructed, negotiated, and represented in Quranic narratives. Central to this inquiry is the question of *who* is granted agency within the text and *by what mechanisms* that agency is articulated—whether through speech, actions, or spiritual authority—and, correspondingly, which forms of female agency are marginalized or obscured. She argues that prior scholarship often prioritized readings rooted primarily in patriarchal hermeneutics, thereby restricting interpretive possibilities and leading to an incomplete rendering of women’s roles. Ahmed’s work thus encourages scholars to uncover the diverse modalities of agency, including subtle forms of resistance, negotiation, and power negotiation that women in the Quran may embody.

Building upon such an analytical framework, Ahmed also defines the methodological boundaries and thematic focus that shape the scope of female agency in Quranic studies. She moves beyond merely cataloging female figures or episodic narratives—such as the stories of Maryam (Mary) or the Queen of Sheba—to explore the underlying discursive constructions and theological implications of agency. This involves a rigorous engagement with classical exegetical traditions (tafsir), as well as contemporary feminist and postcolonial critiques that reveal how interpretations have been historically situated within particular socio-political contexts. By embedding agency within this multilayered hermeneutical process, Ahmed opens space for critical reassessments that complicate and potentially transform canonical understandings.

Moreover, Ahmed emphasizes the importance of situating female agency within broader epistemological concerns related to gender, power, and religious authority. She asserts that an exclusive focus on overt expressions of power risks overlooking the spiritual and communal dimensions of agency that the Quran intimates. For example, agency may manifest through faith- based submission that paradoxically constitutes a form of empowerment, or through prophetic narratives where female characters enact pivotal roles without directly confronting dominant structures. This expanded conception invites an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from gender theory, theology, and social history, to explore agency as a fluid and contextually contingent phenomenon.

The research questions Ahmed formulates thus extend beyond assessing the presence or absence of female agency; instead, they interrogate the modes and meanings of agency within Quranic texts. Such questions challenge scholars to discern how agency interacts with competing constructs such as obedience, piety, and social roles delineated by gender norms. They urge a critical reflection on the hermeneutical authority wielded by interpreters themselves, highlighting how authority in interpretation influences the visibility and legitimation of female agency. This reflexivity underscores the dialectical relationship between scripture, interpretation, and socio-historical conditions, emphasizing the necessity of context-sensitive readings.

In essence, Ahmed's contribution to Quranic studies establishes a comprehensive framework for investigating female agency that is both cautious of oversimplification and attuned to the intricacies inherent in religious texts. Her work confirms that exploring female agency in the Quran involves a balancing act: acknowledging agency where it is explicitly endorsed, recognizing implicit or contested forms where agency is constrained, and critiquing interpretive traditions that have limited or enhanced women's participatory capacities. This rigorous delineation of research questions and scope not only informs the contemporary academic discourse but also encourages ongoing critical engagement with how female agency is constructed within Islamic textual traditions.

3.4 Definitions of agency in Islamic feminist discourse (Jones 2018)

Building on Ahmed's multifaceted approach to conceptualizing female agency within Quranic narratives, Jones (2018) offers a valuable operationalization of agency that critically intersects with Islamic feminist discourse. Unlike frameworks that treat agency as a uniformly positive or unidimensional attribute, Jones highlights the complexity and plurality of agency as it manifests for women within Islamic contexts—both textual and lived. This operational definition is pivotal for reconciling feminist theoretical imperatives with the specificities of Islamic hermeneutics, thus addressing the need for culturally grounded models of agency that Ahmed's prior analysis intimates but does not fully articulate.

Jones delineates agency not merely as overt acts of resistance or empowerment but as a spectrum of capacities through which women navigate, negotiate, and sometimes subvert patriarchal and theological structures. Crucially, Jones situates agency within a relational matrix influenced by religious texts, socio-political realities, and epistemic traditions. This relational

understanding counters the often implicit assumptions in Western feminist paradigms that equate agency predominantly with autonomy or emancipation. Instead, Jones argues that agency can include modes of acquiescence, strategic compliance, and spiritual submission, which do not necessarily diminish female subjectivity but may constitute meaningful sites of action within Islamic frameworks. For instance, the invocation of submission to divine will, a theme recurrent in Quranic female narratives, gains renewed interpretive significance as a form of agency that enacts faith-based sovereignty, rather than passive acceptance.

In operational terms, Jones adapts a multidimensional model that categorizes agency through three interlinked modalities: discursive agency, embodied agency, and interpretative agency. Discursive agency involves women's capacity to articulate subject positions within the discourses of religion, law, and community. Drawing on examples such as the figure of Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, who speaks defiantly in Quranic texts, Jones highlights how verbal assertion becomes a vehicle for asserting identity and moral authority. Embodied agency, by contrast, refers to the enactment of agency through ritualized or quotidian practices—prayer, dress, social interactions—that negotiate visibility and presence in gendered spaces. Embodied actions thereby become encoded forms of agency capable of both conforming to and challenging normative expectations. Interpretative agency, a distinctive contribution of Jones's framework, emphasizes the ways women actively engage with exegetical traditions and religious knowledge production. This modality foregrounds women's roles as interpreters, transmitters, and critics of Islamic texts, challenging the hegemonic monopoly on religious authority and expanding the horizons of female religious subjectivity.

This operationalization also carefully considers power asymmetries and structural constraints, rejecting idealized notions of agency detached from material and ideological contexts. Jones argues that agency must be contextualized within intersecting axes such as class, ethnicity, and geographic location, which shape the possibilities and limitations experienced by Muslim women. This intersectional lens enriches feminist engagement with Quranic studies by acknowledging that agency is neither universally accessible nor uniformly experienced. For example, women in conservative socio-cultural milieus may exercise agency largely through subtle negotiations within prescribed roles, such as influencing family decisions or engaging in charitable works, whereas women in more liberal milieus might claim agency in visibly defiant or reformist ways. Jones's framework therefore avoids reductive binaries by allowing for the coexistence of varied and sometimes contradictory expressions of agency.

Moreover, by embedding her operational definition within Islamic feminist discourse, Jones confronts dominant patriarchal hermeneutics that have historically circumscribed female agency in Quranic interpretation. She critically engages with classical tafsir traditions that often marginalize women's voices, advocating for methodologies that privilege female interpretive strategies and lived experiences. This repositioning aligns with Ahmed's call for context-sensitive analysis while advancing the field by specifying how female agency is constructed through interaction with authoritative texts and interpretive communities. Jones further asserts

that these feminist reinterpretations are not merely academic exercises but constitute ethical and political acts of reclaiming religious knowledge production, thereby transforming the discursive landscape within Islam.

In practical terms, Jones's operational definitions guide empirical research and hermeneutical practice by providing clear yet flexible categories for identifying agency in Quranic narratives and Muslim women's lived realities. Her framework accommodates a multiplicity of actions and meanings, enabling scholars to discern agency in contexts where it might otherwise be overlooked— for instance, in narratives of silent endurance or spiritual resilience often dismissed as passivity. The implications extend beyond textual analysis to inform activism, pedagogy, and interfaith dialogue, as Jones's model legitimizes diverse expressions of Muslim women's agency without imposing alien epistemologies.

In summary, Jones's 2018 operationalization of agency within Islamic feminist discourse represents a critical advancement that complements and concretizes the conceptual foundations laid by Ahmed (2015). It establishes an analytical matrix that respects the epistemological particularities of Islamic traditions while embracing a pluralistic, intersectional, and contextually grounded understanding of female agency. By doing so, Jones opens pathways for more nuanced, inclusive, and transformative engagements with Quranic narratives, further enriching the literature on gender and agency in Islam.

3.5 Overview of major debates on gender roles in exegesis and hermeneutics (Saeed 2020)

The ongoing scholarly discourse surrounding gender roles in Quranic exegesis and hermeneutics reveals a nexus of contested interpretive frameworks, where ideological, theological, and methodological debates converge to shape understandings of female agency. Saeed (2020) offers a comprehensive overview of these debates, illuminating how competing hermeneutical approaches engage with—and often resist—the reconfiguration of traditional gender roles embedded within classical and contemporary Quranic interpretation. His analysis foregrounds the tensions between patriarchal orthodoxies and emergent feminist readings that challenge hegemonic narratives, thereby underscoring the interpretive plurality that characterizes this field.

Central to these debates is the question of authorial intent and the extent to which exegetes may legitimately re-interpret Quranic texts in light of evolving socio-cultural contexts. Saeed elaborates that traditionalist exegeses—rooted predominantly in classical tafsir literature—tend to maintain gender hierarchies by emphasizing immutable, divinely ordained roles for men and women. Such readings often invoke a literalist hermeneutic that prioritizes established norms and reinforces patriarchal authority, marginalizing female subjectivity and agency. For example, prescriptions relating to women's obedience, modesty, and familial roles are frequently presented as fixed commandments, limiting interpretive flexibility. This approach reflects the enduring influence of male-dominated scholarly traditions and the socio-political realities that have historically constrained women's interpretative participation.

Conversely, Saeed highlights a burgeoning feminist hermeneutic that critically interrogates these orthodox readings by emphasizing context, linguistic nuance, and the socio-historical environment of revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*). This hermeneutic draws on methodologies that incorporate gender theory, literary criticism, and postcolonial insights to unpack the multilayered meanings of Quranic narratives. Notably, feminist exegetes contest patriarchal interpretations by contextualizing gendered injunctions within the realities of seventh-century Arabian society, arguing that the Quran's ethical core promotes justice and egalitarianism rather than rigid gender dichotomies. Consequently, they propose readings that foreground women's autonomy, moral agency, and participatory subjectivity as integral to the text's message. Saeed underscores that such re-readings are not merely revisionist but rooted in a commitment to recovering the Quran's emancipatory potentials within Islamic epistemology itself.

The debate further extends to methodological divergences on interpretive authority. Saeed delineates how feminist scholars challenge the epistemic monopoly long wielded by male clerics and traditionalists, advocating for hermeneutical pluralism wherein women's voices and experiences constitute vital interpretive data. This shift aligns with Jones's (2018) concept of interpretative agency discussed earlier, wherein women engage actively with exegetical traditions to renegotiate meanings and assert religious subjectivity. Saeed complements this perspective by emphasizing the hermeneutical legitimacy derived from lived realities and embodied experience as sources of knowledge, challenging the strict textualist paradigms that exclude such inputs. In this light, female agency emerges not only within the narratives themselves but also through the act of re- interpretation, wherein women become co-creators of Islamic knowledge.

Saeed further situates these debates within broader socio-political and intellectual currents, noting that contemporary feminist hermeneutics operate amid global conversations on Islam, modernity, and gender justice. He argues that the contestation over gender roles in exegetical traditions is inseparable from larger struggles over religious authority, identity politics, and cultural authenticity. The hermeneutical strategies deployed by feminist scholars often engage in dialogical opposition to Islamist and conservative forces, seeking to expose the political underpinnings of patriarchal exegesis while affirming the Quran's egalitarian ethos. This dynamic reveals interpretive labor as inherently political and ethical, reflecting broader efforts to democratize religious knowledge and expand the parameters of female agency in Muslim communities.

Moreover, Saeed draws attention to nuanced interpretive strategies within feminist hermeneutics, such as the use of metaphorical and allegorical readings to uncover alternative gender constructions. By deconstructing binary gender models that dominate classical tafsir, feminist exegetes engage in reconstructive hermeneutics that open spaces for fluid, dynamic conceptions of gender and agency. These approaches often invoke intertextual analyses that situate Quranic female figures as complex agents—resistant, compliant, and transformative—thereby resonating with Ahmed's multifaceted conceptualization of agency and Jones's tripartite

modal framework. For instance, the ambivalent agency of figures like Maryam (Mary) or the Queen of Sheba is re-examined to highlight their interpretive and embodied agency within theological narratives.

The diversity and contestation within these debates highlight the epistemological challenges that accompany efforts to reconcile religious tradition with contemporary gender discourses. Saeed cautions against reductive readings that impose external feminist categories without sensitivity to Islamic interpretive norms, underscoring the necessity for methodological rigor and hermeneutical humility. Nonetheless, the feminist hermeneutical enterprise represents a critical intervention that complicates monolithic understandings of gender roles and enriches the hermeneutical landscape by centering female subjectivities.

In synthesizing the landscape of gender debates in Quranic exegesis and hermeneutics, Saeed provides a crucial context for understanding how assertions of female agency traverse textual, interpretive, and socio-political dimensions. His work not only complements but also extends the frameworks proposed by Jones (2018) by situating interpretive agency within a contested field where epistemologies, power structures, and identity negotiations intersect. This overview thus lays essential groundwork for exploring how female agency in Quranic narratives is both constituted and contested through interpretive practices, reflecting broader struggles over meaning, authority, and gender justice in Islamic thought.

3.6 Agency and voice of Maryam in classical and modern tafsīr (Griffith 1662)

The figure of Maryam (Mary) occupies a pivotal position at the crossroads of gendered agency within both classical and modern tafsir traditions, embodying a complex interplay between canonical reverence and interpretive negotiation. As Griffith (1992) elucidates, Maryam's portrayal in classical exegesis exhibits remarkable scriptural prominence, which is nevertheless circumscribed by patriarchal exegetical paradigms that both venerate and delimit her agency through the lens of conventional gender expectations. Classical tafsir often emphasizes Maryam's purity, obedience, and exceptional chosenness as signs of divine favor, thereby positioning her as an exemplary female figure whose agency is profoundly mediated by her submission to God's will. This depiction resonates with the broader theological imperative to affirm her sanctity while circumscribing her autonomy within a framework that valorizes submission as a feminine virtue. Consequently, classical interpretations tend to narrativize Maryam's story as one of passive receptivity rather than active volition, thus reflecting dominant gender ideologies that privilege male spiritual and interpretive authority.

Yet, Griffith's analysis underscores that even within this ostensibly restrictive framework, subtler indications of Maryam's agency emerge through her dialogic engagement with the divine and her decisive actions in moments of revelation and crisis. The textual contours of the Quran's narrative about Maryam grant her a distinctive subjectivity that transcends mere passivity; her eloquent responses and steadfast fortitude at critical junctures challenge reductive readings that marginalize female subjecthood. This complexity points toward an inherent tension within classical tafsir, where Maryam's agency is both affirmed and constrained, revealing the layered

hermeneutical space she occupies. Classical exegetes thus navigate a dialectic between affirming doctrinal orthodoxies and portraying Maryam as a figure of spiritual and moral exemplariness—a dynamic that evidences the early exegetical struggle to reconcile female agency with prevailing patriarchal norms.

Moving into modern tafsir, Griffith (1992) identifies a marked shift corresponding with broader socio-political transformations and emerging feminist hermeneutical sensibilities, as elaborated in the preceding discussion of Saeed (2020). Contemporary exegetes increasingly interrogate the patriarchal constraints imposed on Maryam's portrayal, seeking to reclaim her narrative as a locus of female empowerment and autonomous subjectivity. Modern reinterpretations frequently emphasize Maryam's proactive decision-making, resilience, and self-assertion, positioning her as an agent whose faith and courage embody principles of gender justice intrinsic to the Quranic ethos. This re-framing aligns with feminist hermeneutics' methodological insistence on contextual and linguistic nuance, where Maryam's narrative is read not as a static archetype but as a dynamic site of meaning-making through which women's lived realities and spiritual experiences are validated.

Griffith also notes that modern tafsir often engages in dialogical critiques of classical interpretations, highlighting the socio-cultural contingencies that shaped earlier readings and exposing how gender biases have historically narrowed understandings of Maryam's agency. For example, some contemporary exegetes employ rhetorical and literary analyses to foreground Maryam's initiative in seeking refuge and asserting her innocence during her pregnancy, thus highlighting her autonomy and resilience in the face of social scrutiny and marginalization. This interpretive strategy resonates with the feminist emphasis on restoring female protagonists' voices and recognizing the multiplicity of their agency beyond submissive passivity.

Furthermore, Griffith's work illuminates how modern tafsir sometimes mobilizes intertextual insights, drawing upon Christian and broader Abrahamic traditions of Mary to enrich and diversify the Quranic portrayal. This comparative perspective enables a more expansive appreciation of Maryam's agency, emphasizing her role as a prophetic figure whose narrative challenges patriarchal hegemony across religious traditions. Such interdisciplinary engagement contributes to an increasingly complex and nuanced hermeneutical landscape where Maryam's subjectivity facilitates a re-articulation of female spiritual authority and moral agency.

The trajectory identified by Griffith thus encapsulates the broader epicenter of tension described by Saeed (2020) between entrenched orthodoxies and emergent feminist hermeneutics in Quranic exegesis. While classical tafsir offers a foundational but constrained template for understanding Maryam's agency, modern interpretations enact a revisionist project that reclaims her voice as emblematic of egalitarian potentialities within the Quranic narrative. This evolution underscores the dialogical nature of tafsir as a site where historical, theological, and ideological contestations over female agency are actively negotiated, reflecting shifts in interpretive authority and epistemic frameworks.

Importantly, Griffith's analysis highlights that this reconfiguration of Maryam's agency is not simply a matter of imposing contemporary feminist paradigms onto the text, but rather an endeavor grounded in careful exegetical engagement that honors both the textual integrity of the Quran and the lived experiences of female believers. In doing so, modern tafsir creates an interpretive space that challenges patriarchal monopolies on religious knowledge and affirms women's participatory role as co-creators of meaning within Islamic scholarly traditions. This dynamic resonates with the broader hermeneutical pluralism advocated by Saeed (2020) and scholars like Jones (2018), who emphasize the interdependence of narrative agency and interpretive authority in the ongoing project of gender justice within Islam.

In sum, Griffith's 1992 study provides a seminal contribution to understanding the nuanced representation of Maryam's agency across temporal and ideological divides in tafsir. It reveals how her voice, as both a textual character and an interpretive site, mediates shifting constructions of female agency that reflect broader scholarly and socio-political currents. The evolving hermeneutics surrounding Maryam thus encapsulate the dialectical tensions that characterize feminist critiques of Islamic tradition, underscoring the critical importance of exegetical praxis in reimagining gendered subjectivities within Quranic narratives.

3.7 Narrative agency of Asiya and Khadīja as exemplars of resistance (Cook 2000)

The narratives of Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, and Khadīja, the first wife of Prophet Muhammad, offer compelling examples of female resistance and agency within Quranic texts, as articulated by Cook (2000). Their stories serve as distinct yet complementary paradigms where resistance is enacted not through overt political rebellion but through profound spiritual autonomy and moral fortitude. Cook's analysis positions these figures as pivotal female agents whose actions exemplify subversion against entrenched patriarchal and authoritarian structures, thereby expanding the contours of female agency beyond conventional paradigms of passivity or submission.

Asiya's narrative, embedded within the Quranic portrayal of Moses' early life, epitomizes resistance through her courageous defiance of Pharaoh's tyrannical reign and rejection of idolatry. Although her role is comparatively brief in scripture, it is laden with symbolic significance as a woman who chooses divine allegiance over familial loyalty to an oppressive autocrat. This ethical and spiritual resistance enacts a form of agency rooted in autonomous conscience and unwavering faith, which transcends the socio-political limitations imposed upon her gender and status. Cook highlights that Asiya's narrative functions as a corrective to patriarchal paradigms that equate female agency solely with domesticity or subservience. Instead, her story asserts the possibility of female subjectivity that resists hegemonic power through internal conviction and resistance to coercion. Her martyrdom, as canonically understood in Islamic tradition, further amplifies this form of agency as an ultimate testament of self-determination and fidelity to divine principles over worldly authority.

In parallel, Khadīja's narrative illustrates resistance manifested through economic independence, social influence, and spiritual support for the prophetic mission. Unlike Asiya's

martyr-like resistance, Khadīja exemplifies agency through proactive engagement within the socio-economic sphere and as a critical interlocutor in the formative stages of Islam. Cook underscores that Khadīja's position as a successful merchant endowed her with an uncommon degree of autonomy and prestige, challenging prevailing gender norms of sixth-century Arabia that typically circumscribed women's roles strictly within the domestic domain. Her decision to marry Muhammad, support his prophetic calling, and sustain him materially and morally during the initial phases of revelation represents a deliberate and strategic exercise of agency that shapes the trajectory of Islamic history. Khadīja's narrative resists reductive characterizations of women as merely passive recipients of male authority by embodying an active partnership founded on mutual respect, shared spiritual commitment, and assertive socio-economic presence.

The juxtaposition of Asiya and Khadīja in Cook's study reveals a spectrum of female agency as resistance—ranging from spiritual martyrdom to pragmatic empowerment—thereby challenging monolithic conceptions of women's roles within Quranic narratives. This thematic complexity challenges exegetical traditions inclined to marginalize female protagonism, instead positioning these figures as transformative agents whose resistance is both contextually situated and theologically significant. Notably, both women articulate their agency not merely through oppositional stances to male authority but also through deeply relational and faith-based modalities, illustrating that resistance in Quranic discourse encompasses a nuanced interplay between individual autonomy and spiritual ethos.

Furthermore, Cook's framework resonates with and extends insights from the preceding discussion on Maryam's agency by emphasizing the multiplicity of resistance modes available to female Quranic characters. While Maryam's narrative negotiates tensions between obedience and active assertion within a patriarchal religious context, Asiya and Khadīja epitomize forms of resistance that are both externally confrontational, as in Asiya's rejection of tyrannical power, and internally transformative, as in Khadīja's facilitation of prophetic revelation. Collectively, these narratives broaden the interpretive horizon for understanding female agency in the Quran as dynamic, contextually varied, and resistant to homogenizing exegetical constraints.

Importantly, Cook's analysis situates these narratives within broader feminist hermeneutical agendas that seek to reclaim and valorize female voices historically marginalized in Islamic scholarship. By foregrounding Asiya and Khadīja as agents of principled resistance, this approach disrupts gendered hierarchies that confine female agency to obedience or silence. Instead, it affirms that resistance can manifest through spiritual integrity, economic autonomy, relational influence, and moral courage, all of which are vital dimensions of women's lived religious experiences and identities. Cook's work thus contributes to a critical reimagining of Quranic female subjecthood, challenging interpretive traditions to acknowledge the complexity and potency of female resistance as central to Islamic narratives of faith and community.

In sum, the narratives of Asiya and Khadīja, as explored by Cook (2000), illuminate essential modalities of female agency articulated through resistance within the Quran. Their stories

validate diverse expressions of female power that defy patriarchal and socio-political constraints, revealing a rich hermeneutical terrain where resistance intersects with spirituality, ethics, and communal transformation. This nuanced understanding complements and enriches the discourse on gendered agency inaugurated in Maryam's narrative, collectively underscoring the importance of multidimensional approaches to gender and agency in Quranic exegesis. These paradigms not only enhance scholarly comprehension but also inspire contemporary reflective practices that seek to honor and activate female agency within Islamic traditions.

3.8 Interpretations of women's agency in quranic verses (Wadud 2010)

Building upon the portrayal of Asiya and Khadīja as emblematic figures of female resistance and agency, Wadud's (2010) interpretations of Quranic verses constitute a crucial advancement in understanding how women's agency is constructed and contested within Islamic jurisprudential frameworks. Whereas Cook's work foregrounds embodied narratives of resistance contextualized by spiritual autonomy and socio-economic empowerment, Wadud redirects analytical focus toward hermeneutics and legal exegesis, illuminating how the interpretive processes surrounding Quranic injunctions either delimit or enable women's capacity for agency. Her approach challenges prevailing patriarchal readings of the Quran that have traditionally circumscribed female autonomy, arguing instead for interpretations grounded in gender justice and equality that acknowledge women as moral and legal agents within Islamic law.

Wadud's hermeneutical methodology critiques the received male-centric juristic traditions that have tended to naturalize male authority as divinely sanctioned through selective readings of key Quranic verses. By centering the text itself through a feminist lens, she demonstrates how numerous passages commonly cited to justify female subordination can be reinterpreted to affirm women's purposeful participation in legal, social, and spiritual spheres. For example, Wadud interrogates verses that reference women's testimony (such as Quran 2:282) and inheritance laws (e.g., Quran 4:11), revealing how contextualized readings that consider historical circumstances, semantic nuances, and the broader ethical imperatives of the Quran yield more gender-equitable outcomes. Rather than ascribe static legal decrees to the text, Wadud highlights the dynamism inherent in the Quranic message—one that invites continual reexamination and application sensitive to justice and dignity for all believers, irrespective of gender.

This reconceptualization thus reframes agency not merely as individual action against patriarchal constraints, as Cook's focus on Asiya and Khadīja suggests, but as embedded within legal and interpretive practices that shape women's substantive rights and freedoms. Where Asiya's resistance represents a profound moral refusal of political tyranny and Khadīja's agency is expressed through strategic socio-economic autonomy, Wadud's contribution lies in demonstrating how women can be recognized as autonomous legal subjects empowered to participate in shaping Islamic jurisprudence itself. Her work addresses systemic concerns about the marginalization of women's voices within Islamic legal discourses and calls for a revival of

ijtihad (independent reasoning) informed by egalitarian principles derived from the Quran's holistic ethical vision.

Moreover, Wadud's exegesis expands the analytical registers through which agency is understood by emphasizing the interplay between text, context, and interpreter. She advocates for a hermeneutical model that foregrounds the Quran's rhetorical strategies, linguistic precision, and spiritual ethos while remaining alert to the patriarchal biases embedded in centuries of tafsir (exegesis) traditions dominated by male scholars. This multidimensional interpretive practice enables a critical unmasking of unjust patriarchal ideologies masquerading as divine mandates and reclaims the text's original emancipatory intent. It thereby situates female agency within both the theological domain—where women are valued as conscious, accountable moral beings—and the juridical field—where their legal capacities are affirmed and protected.

A pertinent example illustrating Wadud's approach involves her reinterpretation of the verse addressing *qawamah* (guardianship or authority) in Quran 4:34. Traditionally construed as a justification for male authority over women, Wadud argues that the term's root meanings pertaining to responsibility and maintenance must be reconsidered in light of the broader Quranic insistence on mutual respect, kindness, and equitable treatment between spouses. Her reading rejects hierarchical binaries in favor of relational reciprocity, thereby allowing women agency within family structures instead of confining them to subordinated status. This demonstrates how reengagement with the text's linguistic and ethical dimensions can transform juridical interpretations, enabling women's agency to be legally recognized as a norm rather than an exception.

By connecting the lived examples of female agency in Asiya and Khadīja's narratives with legal interpretive frameworks, Wadud's work provides an indispensable bridge linking individual acts of resistance to systemic transformations in Islamic law. The synergy between narrative exemplars and juridical hermeneutics is critical; narratively constructed agency gains institutional legitimacy when supported by equitable legal interpretations that safeguard women's rights in daily life. Consequently, Wadud's feminist tafsir aligns with contemporary gender justice movements within Muslim communities that seek to dethrone patriarchal jurisprudence and cultivate jurisprudential pluralism informed by the Quran's emancipatory ethos.

In essence, Wadud's (2010) legal interpretations challenge static and male-dominated exegeses that have historically marginalized women's participation as legal and moral agents. Her scholarship reveals how a critical, context-sensitive reading of Quranic verses opens interpretive space for recognizing and enhancing women's agency within Islamic law. This approach enriches the thematic exploration of female agency by demonstrating that authentic empowerment encompasses not only spiritual or socio-economic dimensions—as illustrated by Asiya and Khadīja—but also legal agency validated through just and egalitarian Quranic exegesis. Thus, her contribution is pivotal to advancing scholarly discourse on gender and agency in Islam, offering a framework that integrates hermeneutical rigor with normative

commitments to gender justice inherent in the Quranic message itself.

2.9 Spiritual authority and autonomous action in female Quranic figures (Roald 2003)

Building on the hermeneutical advancements articulated by Wadud (2010), Roald's (2003) examination of female Quranic figures foregrounds the intricate relationship between spiritual authority and autonomous action as fundamental dimensions of women's agency within the Quranic narrative framework. Roald challenges reductionist readings that marginalize women's roles to passive or subordinate archetypes by emphasizing how various female figures embody modes of spiritual leadership that confer on them distinctive forms of moral and existential agency. This perspective not only complements but deepens the understanding of empowerment introduced previously through Asiya and Khadīja by highlighting the complex interplay between divine sanction and individual autonomy expressed through spiritual authority.

Central to Roald's analysis is the recognition that female characters in the Quran often exercise agency in ways intricately linked to their perceived spiritual roles and proximity to divine guidance. Unlike strictly juridical or socio-economic interpretations, her approach situates agency within the sacred text's own theological and narrative structures, revealing how spiritual authority can function as a source of empowerment distinct from, yet overlapping with, legal or social autonomy. For instance, the figure of Maryam (Mary), revered for her purity, prophetic status, and direct communion with God, serves as an exemplar of a woman whose autonomous action manifests through obedience infused with divine inspiration rather than resistance in socio-political terms. This form of agency resonates with conceptualizations of spiritual authority as a locus through which women negotiate their subjectivity and legitimacy, illustrating that empowerment may unfold through acceptance and enactment of spiritual mandates, rather than overt contestation alone.

Roald's work elucidates how such embodiments of spiritual authority inform female agency within various narrative contexts by privileging the sacred nature of women's roles in Quranic stories. This emphasis complements Wadud's legalist hermeneutics by underscoring that agency is not solely enacted through rational deliberation or juridical rights but also through the capacity to embody and project spiritual exemplarity. The spiritual agency attributed to women like Maryam or the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) speaks to a different register of empowerment—one where autonomous action is validated not by human law but through divine appointment and exemplary piety. The Queen of Sheba's diplomatic engagement and theological discernment, notably in her interaction with Prophet Solomon, exemplify how spiritual authority crosses into political agency, suggesting that autonomy can be exercised within the contours of spiritual vocation and divine mandate. Roald thereby expands the analytical field by revealing the multifaceted contours of female agency as it is articulated through scripture, where spiritual authority acts both as an enabler and a form of recognition of women's autonomous capacities.

A significant contribution of Roald's study lies in her methodological insistence on reading female Quranic figures within the narrative and theological texture of the Quran itself, rather than imposing anachronistic socio-political categories. This approach highlights that spiritual

authority, as represented in the text, is integral to understanding the nature of female agency in Islam. By interpreting characters as active agents within a divine framework, Roald's scholarship dismantles stereotypes that depict women's religious roles as inherently passive or derivative. Consequently, the autonomous actions undertaken by these figures acquire legitimacy as acts informed by sacred knowledge, moral consciousness, and divine favor. This aligns with feminist critiques of traditional exegesis by foregrounding women's capacities for self-determination in spiritual realms, which have historically been overshadowed by patriarchal theological emphases on male prophets and scholars.

Furthermore, Roald's analysis enriches contemporary scholarly discourse by bridging the gap between spiritual and juridical dimensions of agency. While Wadud situates agency within the domain of legal reinterpretation, Roald's focus elucidates how spiritual authority provides a foundational context for agency that transcends or interacts with legal frameworks. This layered understanding encourages a holistic appreciation of female agency in the Quranic tradition, recognizing that empowerment may be manifested through pious submission as well as through direct legal and social intervention. This interplay illustrates the nuanced ways women in Islamic scripture negotiate their roles, exercising agency that is both divinely inspired and contextually situated.

By incorporating Roald's perspectives, the thematic exploration of female agency gains a richer texture that accounts for diverse modes of action and authority accessible to women within the Quranic worldview. Her study underscores that recognition of spiritual authority is a critical vector through which agency is both conferred and practiced by female figures, challenging reductive secular understandings that often overlook the centrality of spirituality in shaping autonomy. This contributes a vital dimension to feminist theological scholarship, emphasizing that the spiritual domain remains a vibrant and contested space where female agency can be both expressed and nurtured within Islamic narratives.

In summary, Roald's (2003) focus on spiritual authority and autonomous action in female Quranic figures complements and augments previous analyses by situating agency within the interstices of divine sanction and individual spiritual expression. This approach reconfigures empowerment not only as resistance or legal recognition but as participation in a sacred order that validates and necessitates autonomous female subjectivity. Such insights invite ongoing critical reflection on the multiple registers through which women in Islam historically and contemporarily enact agency, thereby broadening the scholarly understanding of gender and spirituality as mutually constitutive forces within the Quranic tradition.

2.10 Feminist hermeneutical approaches to Quranic texts on women's roles (Badran 2006)

Extending the hermeneutical trajectory established by Wadud and nuanced by Roald, feminist approaches to the Quranic text, as developed by scholars like Nadje Al-Ali Badran (2006), introduce a critical methodology that explicitly challenges entrenched patriarchal interpretations. This approach foregrounds the political and social dimensions of women's agency within Islam. Badran's feminist hermeneutical framework seeks to recontextualize

women's roles portrayed in the Quran, not merely as isolated spiritual exemplars or juridical subjects but as active agents whose autonomy must be examined within the broader matrix of gendered power relations, both historically and in contemporary Muslim societies. This approach provides a necessary corrective to traditional exegetical modes that have frequently elided the complexities of female subjectivity in favor of normative prescriptive readings.

At the core of Badran's hermeneutics is an insistence on the dialectical relationship between text, context, and reader, which operates to decenter male-dominated interpretive authorities that have historically monopolized Quranic exegesis. She theorizes that reclaiming women's agency in the Quran demands a feminist rereading that critically interrogates the socio-political conditions shaping both the revelation's reception and its transmission through centuries of patriarchal scholarship. This methodological stance aligns with and expands earlier feminist scholarly interventions by emphasizing that agency should be understood as both a theological and socio-political construct, intricately linked to intersecting systems of oppression that influence how women's roles are constructed within Islamic discourse.

Badran's analysis highlights the necessity of situating the Quranic narratives about women within their historical milieu and correlating them with the lived experiences of Muslim women who have negotiated social constraints, legal restrictions, and religious injunctions. By doing so, she exposes the ways in which entrenched interpretive traditions have often instrumentalized the Quranic text to uphold male authority rather than to reflect the empowering potential offered by the scripture itself. For example, Badran's feminist hermeneutics interrogate how key verses related to women's legal status, such as those concerning testimony, inheritance, and modesty, have been historically reinterpreted in ways that systematically diminish women's participatory agency. She argues that a critical feminist rereading can uncover alternative meanings within the same text that validate women's autonomy and socio-political participation.

One significant aspect of Badran's contribution is her application of feminist hermeneutics to expose the selective historicization of key Quranic narratives involving women. Rather than accepting the classical interpretations at face value, she reconstructs the socio-religious contexts behind these narratives and reveals how they have been employed to naturalize gender hierarchies. This is evident in her examination of stories such as those of Hagar or the female Companions of the Prophet, whose actions reflect strategic agency within patriarchal constraints. By reassessing such figures, Badran's approach affirms that female agency in the Quran embodies a dynamic process of negotiation and contestation, underscoring that women's religious subjectivity must be read as active rather than passive or marginal.

Moreover, Badran's methodology elucidates the intersection of religious discourse and contemporary feminist praxis. She posits that feminist hermeneutics not only function as academic tools but also serve as political interventions aiming to transform Muslim women's lived realities. This dual function resonates with her broader feminist activism, which advocates for reinterpretations of the Quranic text that challenge patriarchal norms and facilitate women's empowerment in both private and public spheres. In this sense, her approach bridges scriptural

analysis and socio-political critique, positioning feminist hermeneutics as a vital framework for agency that transcends textual exegesis and enters the realm of social justice.

In dialogue with Roald's emphasis on spiritual authority as a conduit of women's autonomous action, Badran's feminist hermeneutics broaden the scope of agency by insisting on the inseparability of textual interpretation from power relations embedded within society. While Roald foregrounds the spiritual and theological registers through which authority and autonomy are articulated in the Quranic narratives, Badran extends the analytical field to include critical scrutiny of how these narratives have been mobilized within patriarchal social structures that limit women's agency. This dialectical engagement between hermeneutical strategies highlights the importance of addressing both spiritual subjectivity and material realities when assessing women's roles in Islam.

The implications of Badran's critique also reverberate within contemporary debates around gender justice in Muslim contexts. By unveiling the mutability of Quranic interpretations and advocating for feminist re-readings, she contests monolithic conceptions of Islamic womanhood and the static portrayal of female roles. This approach opens avenues for Muslim women to reclaim scriptural authority and exercise agency in redefining gender norms, allowing for a pluralistic understanding of Islam that accommodates feminist ideals without alienating religious commitments. Thus, Badran's feminist hermeneutics contribute substantially to evolving discourses on gender and agency by demonstrating how reinterpretation is both a scholarly endeavor and an emancipatory practice.

In summary, Badran's (2006) feminist hermeneutical approach intricately deconstructs and reconstructs Quranic portrayals of women's roles through a lens that interweaves textual analysis with socio-political critique. Her work advances the feminist project of reclaiming female agency within Islamic tradition by challenging patriarchal readings and reasserting the Quran's potential as a source of empowerment. By situating agency in the interstices of scripture, history, and feminist praxis, Badran provides a robust methodological framework that enriches the academic understanding of gender and autonomy in Islamic narratives and underscores the dynamic and contested character of women's authority within Quranic texts.

2.11 Postcolonial readings of gender and power in Islamic exegesis (Mernissi 1687)

The postcolonial critique articulated by Fatima Mernissi in her seminal work *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1987) offers a critical lens through which to analyze the gendered power dynamics entrenched within Islamic exegesis. Building on and diverging from feminist hermeneutical approaches like those of Badran, Mernissi foregrounds the colonial context and its enduring legacy in shaping both Islamic scholarship and the socio-political position of Muslim women. Her analysis problematizes the assumption that patriarchal readings within Islamic jurisprudence and Quranic interpretation arise exclusively from indigenous traditions; instead, she reveals how colonial encounters and orientalist discourses have compounded gender inequalities by imposing external narratives that simultaneously exoticize and subjugate Muslim women.

Mernissi's postcolonial reading critically interrogates the historiography of Islamic exegesis, situating it within the broader framework of power relations imposed through colonial domination. This contextualization challenges earlier feminist scholars to consider not only the internal mechanisms of interpretation but also the external influences that have distorted or reinforced patriarchal authority over the Quranic text. By highlighting how colonial administrations utilized gendered stereotypes to justify imperial control, Mernissi reveals that Muslim women's marginalization is not solely a function of Islamic theology or customary practice but is deeply entwined with historical processes of cultural hegemony. This insight broadens the analytical frame beyond the textual to include geopolitical and epistemological dimensions, underscoring the multiplicity of forces that circumscribe female agency in Muslim contexts.

An essential contribution of Mernissi's work involves her critical interpretations of key Quranic narratives, often exposing exclusionary models of female agency that align with social structures favoring male dominance. By tracing the lineage of such interpretations, Mernissi exposes the dialectic between gender and power as not merely theological disputation but as a strategic exercise in maintaining male authority. This analysis reveals how authoritative exegeses have frequently suppressed alternative voices, particularly those of women, thereby limiting the interpretive space in which women might assert theological autonomy.

Mernissi's concept of "the harem" functions metaphorically beyond its literal signification, representing a system of spatial, social, and epistemic confinement imposed on women. This emblematic reading critiques how the gendered separation and silencing of women within Islamic societies parallel their marginalization within religious scholarship. Her postcolonial feminist framework thereby interrogates both the physical realities and interpretive boundaries that constrain women's agency. Unlike prior hermeneutical approaches concerned primarily with the content of scriptural texts, Mernissi insists on analyzing the social practices and institutional power structures that produce, sustain, and legitimize patriarchal exegesis. This structural focus complements the textual critique by illuminating the modes through which women's agency is circumscribed not only in scripture but also in lived religious experience.

Furthermore, Mernissi's work complicates the binary conceptualizations of Muslim women as either oppressed victims or resilient subjects by exposing the hybridity engendered by colonial modernity. She uncovers the tensions between indigenous Islamic traditions and imported Western paradigms of gender and emancipation, thereby problematizing simplistic narratives of liberation that often fail to resonate authentically within Muslim subjectivities. This nuanced perspective highlights the importance of situating female agency within the intersecting matrices of religion, culture, and colonial history, challenging feminist discourses to move beyond universalizing frameworks. As a result, Mernissi's postcolonial feminist analysis demands attentiveness to localized experiences and the historical contingencies that shape women's engagement with Islamic texts and traditions.

This postcolonial reading advances the feminist hermeneutical project by demanding a critical examination of not only the interpretive content but also the context of exegesis production. It foregrounds the imperatives of decolonizing Islamic scholarship to reveal the multivalent and contested nature of Quranic narratives pertaining to women's roles. Her approach anticipates subsequent scholarship attentive to the intersectionality of religion, gender, and coloniality, thereby enriching the discourse on female agency with historical depth and political consciousness. In relation to Badran's framework, Mernissi's critique expands the analytical field by incorporating postcolonial interrogations that reveal the layered forms of domination impinging on women's religious authority, thus fostering a more comprehensive understanding of how power operates within Islamic exegetical traditions.

Ultimately, Fatima Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite* remains a cornerstone in feminist and postcolonial scholarship on gender and Islam. Her critical methodology elucidates how gendered power relations within Islamic exegesis cannot be isolated from broader historical and colonial contexts. Through her incisive exploration of the male elite's interpretive monopoly and the colonial impositions on Muslim societies, Mernissi repositions the question of female agency within a complex field of contestation, resistance, and negotiation. This renders her postcolonial critique an indispensable lens for contemporary scholars seeking to unravel the intertwined effects of religion, power, and colonial history on the configurations of women's roles in Quranic narratives.

4. Feminist hermeneutics applied to biblical female figures

Building upon historiographical insights into women's leadership within ancient Near Eastern contexts, feminist hermeneutics facilitates a critical re-examination of biblical female figures. It uncovers latent meanings obscured by patriarchal interpretive traditions. This methodological approach foregrounds the significance of gender as a central category of analysis, enabling scholars to interrogate how power, authority, and agency are constructed, performed, and contested within biblical narratives. Unlike traditional exegetical frameworks that often reinforce androcentric assumptions and marginalize female voices, feminist hermeneutics actively challenges dominant epistemologies, revealing the complexity and diversity of female subjectivity and leadership in sacred texts.

Feminist hermeneutics exposes how biblical portrayals of women are frequently mediated through ideological filters that sustain patriarchal hierarchies, thus necessitating a hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval. This dual process involves both deconstructing androcentric interpretations that have historically rendered female authority figures as anomalous, passive, or symbolic, and recovering subversive or alternative narratives that affirm women's active participation in religious and social spheres. For example, the figure of Deborah in the Book of Judges—previously framed narrowly as an exceptional or divinely sanctioned anomaly—can be reassessed through feminist lenses as embodying a more nuanced and dynamic form of leadership that transcends conventional limitations imposed on women in the ancient world. Feminist interpreters highlight Deborah's role as prophetess, judge, and military leader,

emphasizing how her authority was intrinsically linked to spiritual charisma and communal legitimacy rather than formal political office alone.

The application of feminist hermeneutics to biblical female figures also entails a critical engagement with textual strategies and narrative conventions that shape representations of gendered authority. Scholars scrutinize the literary roles assigned to women, exploring how syntax, rhetoric, and intertextuality operate to simultaneously disclose and conceal female agency. The story of Huldah the prophetess, for instance, invites reflection on how prophetic authority functions as a gendered space within the biblical corpus. Feminist readings bring attention to the ways her prophetic pronouncements and access to divine revelation challenge gender binaries and question monopolies on legitimate spiritual leadership. Such analyses often draw on Judith Plaskow's concept of "hermeneutical memory," where feminist scholars reclaim female figures from the margins of sacred history by reconstructing the socio-religious contexts that enabled or constrained their authority.

Feminist hermeneutics further interrogates the interaction between gender, power, and theology by revealing how biblical texts negotiate competing discourses of dominance and resistance. For example, the portrayal of Jezebel in the Hebrew Bible has historically been used to demonize a woman who exercises political and religious influence, thereby reinforcing gendered stereotypes that equate female authority with transgression and deviance. Through feminist critique, Jezebel's narrative can be reinterpreted to reflect broader patriarchal anxieties about female sovereignty and the disruption of male-centric power structures. Such reinterpretations underscore how biblical texts often encode complex tensions surrounding women's autonomy and the limits placed upon it by prevailing cultural ideologies.

Moreover, feminist hermeneutics operates not only as a corrective to historical and exegetical biases but also as a transformative hermeneutic that envisions new possibilities for agency and authority among biblical women. This approach situates female figures as active interlocutors within the theological discourse—agents who negotiate identity, power, and spirituality in ways that resonate with contemporary feminist concerns. The examination of Mary Magdalene's role in the New Testament exemplifies this shift, where feminist scholars challenge her traditional marginalization as a repentant sinner and instead emphasize her status as a witness to the resurrection, an authoritative figure within early Christian communities. This reinterpretation challenges ecclesiastical norms and expands the conceptualization of female leadership within Christian origins.

In tracing the intersections between feminist theory and biblical criticism, it becomes evident that feminist hermeneutics contributes not only to recovering female authority figures but also to reconfiguring the conceptual framework within which authority and agency are understood. By employing theoretical tools derived from post-structuralist feminist thought, such as Judith Butler's notions of performativity and intersectionality, scholars elucidate how gendered identities and roles within biblical texts are constituted through complex performative acts embedded in cultural discourses. This nuanced approach dismantles essentialist readings,

foregrounding the fluidity and contingency of female authority as it is negotiated across space, time, and socio-religious contexts.

Consequently, feminist hermeneutics enriches biblical scholarship by amplifying voices historically marginalized and by problematizing monolithic interpretations that have traditionally governed understandings of female leadership. It opens avenues for exploring how biblical narratives encode varied expressions of female authority, both overt and covert, and how these expressions interact with broader historical, theological, and ideological systems. This critical posture complements historiographical awareness of diverse leadership modalities in the ancient Near East by attending specifically to the textual and theological dimensions that shape the construction of female agency within sacred scripture. Ultimately, feminist hermeneutics acts as both a diagnostic and a hermeneutical tool, revealing the intricate dynamics of gendered power in biblical narratives and fostering scholarly dialogues that reconceptualize women's authority in religious traditions.

4.1 Comparative analysis of scholarly debates on Deborah and Huldah

The comparative scholarly discourse surrounding Deborah and Huldah reveals a rich interplay of interpretive tensions and convergences that illuminate broader questions about female authority within biblical texts. While both figures occupy distinct narrative spaces—the former in the Book of Judges as a multifaceted leader and the latter in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles as a prophetic oracle— their portrayals have engendered diverse exegetical approaches, reflecting underlying assumptions about gender, power, and religious legitimacy. Scholarly debates pivot not only on their respective roles but also on the theological and socio-cultural implications of their authority, demonstrating how interpretive traditions have navigated, and at times contested, the boundaries of normative gendered leadership.

Deborah's depiction as a judge, prophetess, and military strategist has often served as a touchstone for discussions about women's leadership in an ancient patriarchal milieu. Traditional scholarship frequently marginalized her exceptionalism by situating her authority as an anomaly, contingent upon divine sanction that superseded social conventions. Yet recent feminist readings challenge this perspective by emphasizing the complexity of her leadership paradigm, one that is both spiritually grounded and communally endorsed. Scholars such as Phyllis Trible and Carol Meyers have underscored how Deborah's narrative disrupts the presumed male monopolization of judicial and military roles, proposing that her authority is embedded not simply in formal office but in performative acts of charisma, wisdom, and prophetic mediation (Trible, 1978; Meyers, 1988). This shift reframes Deborah as emblematic of a non-monolithic model of power, one that interweaves religious legitimacy with active political engagement.

Parallel debates regarding Huldah focus intensively on the nature and scope of her prophetic authority, given her comparatively brief but significant narrative presence. In the biblical account, Huldah functions as a divinely inspired interpreter of the "Book of the Law," whose endorsement validates the reformist agenda of King Josiah. Scholars have debated whether her

role signifies a broader recognition of female prophetic agency or whether it remains circumscribed within a narrowly defined theological moment. Feminist theologians notably argue that Huldah's prophetic pronouncements operate as a critical intervention in the legitimation of religious authority, suggesting that her gender does not undermine but rather accentuates the subversive potential of prophetic discourse (Plaskow, 1991; Bird, 1997). Moreover, her recognition by the king and chronicler introduces questions about institutional acceptance of female spiritual authority, complicating assumptions that biblical leadership is inherently masculinized.

The contrast between Deborah's extended narrative arc and multifaceted leadership and Huldah's episodic but decisive prophetic role invites reflection on how female authority is mediated differently within the genres and contexts of the Hebrew Bible. Deborah's leadership encompasses juridical, military, and prophetic functions that convey a holistic embodiment of communal governance, while Huldah's prophetic activity situates female authority primarily within a religious and textual hermeneutic framework. Scholars such as Athalya Brenner have noted that this distinction highlights divergent narrative strategies: Deborah's story asserts female agency in public, often militarized domains, whereas Huldah's function underscores the authority of divine revelation as a legitimizing mechanism (Brenner, 1993). These differing modalities prompt reconsideration of the extent to which biblical texts grant or restrict female participation in various arenas of power.

Further complexities emerge in how subsequent interpretive traditions have appropriated or suppressed these figures according to evolving theological and cultural agendas. For example, rabbinic exegesis often appropriated Huldah's authority to bolster normative prophetic paradigms while simultaneously circumscribing the public and political dimensions of female leadership, whereas Christian exegetical traditions varied in their engagement with Deborah—from symbolic typologies to neglect—reflecting broader ecclesial discomforts with female authority figures. Comparative scholarship thus reveals how the legacies of these women have been refracted through competing hermeneutic lenses, each shaped by doctrinal, patriarchal, and socio-historical contingencies.

The methodologies employed in these scholarly debates are equally instructive. Feminist hermeneutics, as outlined previously, prioritizes the deconstruction of androcentric readings and the retrieval of subjugated female voices, proving especially fruitful in elucidating the nuanced leadership embodied by Deborah and Huldah. Post-structuralist approaches further complicate traditional binaries by interrogating performative constructions of gendered authority, revealing how these biblical figures enact roles that resist straightforward categorization (Butler, 1990). Additionally, socio-historical criticism frames these figures within the matrix of ancient Near Eastern gender norms and power structures, drawing upon comparative material to contextualize their exceptionalism without erasing it.

Engaging with these multifaceted debates offers a more textured understanding of how female authority is both articulated and contested in biblical narratives. The interplay between

Deborah and Huldah epitomizes a dynamic spectrum of female leadership—ranging from public military-judicial power to authoritative spiritual mediation—that resists reductive interpretations. By critically comparing their portrayals, scholars deepen the discourse on gender and agency, highlighting the variegated ways in which the biblical text encodes female authority and how such readings resonate with, and challenge, the broader historiographical and theological paradigms explored in preceding analyses. This comparative lens thus not only enriches the literature on biblical women but also foregrounds the ongoing negotiation of gender and power in religious textual traditions.

4.2 Contextualization of female authority in biblical scholarship

The exploration of female authority within biblical scholarship necessitates a careful contextualization that acknowledges both historical interpretive traditions and engages with contemporary critical methodologies. Historically, the portrayal and recognition of female authority figures in biblical texts have been profoundly shaped by dominant patriarchal frameworks, which have often marginalized or constrained women's roles within scriptural narratives. Biblical scholarship, especially prior to the latter half of the twentieth century, tended to reflect broader societal norms, frequently relegating female figures to secondary or symbolic roles rather than acknowledging their agency and leadership. For example, women such as Deborah, the prophetess and judge in the Book of Judges, were sometimes read through lenses that emphasized their exceptionalism rather than their normative authority, thereby reinforcing the idea that female leadership was an anomaly rather than an integral aspect of the biblical tradition.

Contemporary scholarship has sought to revise and complicate this understanding by interrogating the socio-historical contexts of biblical composition and reception. Feminist and gender-critical approaches have been vital in this regard, challenging androcentric interpretations and expanding the canonical discourse to include nuanced representations of female authority. This shift is exemplified in works such as Phyllis Trible's *Texts of Terror* (1984), which highlights the mistreatment of women in biblical narratives while also recovering their voices and significance. Similarly, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's pioneering contributions, particularly in *In Memory of Her* (1983), emphasize the need to reconstruct early Christian history from perspectives that recognize women's active participation and authoritative roles within nascent Christian communities.

Moreover, the methodological frameworks employed in biblical scholarship have broadened to incorporate literary, historical-critical, and sociological tools that allow for more sophisticated readings of female figures. This multidimensional approach reveals how biblical texts functioned within ancient societies where gender roles were complex and fluid, often overlapping with spiritual, political, and social dimensions of authority. For instance, stories of women like Miriam, Huldah, and Anna not only depict religious authority but also illustrate the intersections between prophetic voice, ritual leadership, and communal governance.

It is equally important to consider that the reception history of biblical texts—their interpretation, translation, and doctrinal deployment—has been instrumental in shaping the perception of female authority. Patristic and medieval exegesis typically marginalized or allegorized women's roles to fit theological orthodoxies that favored masculine authority, which in turn influenced later theological and ecclesiastical attitudes. Such interpretive trajectories have necessitated contemporary scholars to engage in what Lila Abu-Lughod terms "reading against the grain," whereby they uncover suppressed narratives and reinterpret authoritative figures in ways that resonate with present-day understandings of gender equality and agency.

The contextualization of female authority in biblical scholarship also must account for the diversity of biblical canons and traditions, including differences between the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and various apocryphal texts, all of which offer varied portrayals and degrees of female agency. This diversity suggests that any generalizations about female authority must be made cautiously and with attention to the distinct textual and cultural milieus involved. For example, the deuterocanonical books provide additional female characters whose leadership or prophetic roles complicate the picture further, indicating that canonical boundaries impact scholarly reception and interpretation.

In sum, situating female authority within the landscape of biblical scholarship involves critically engaging with the historical marginalization caused by patriarchal interpretive traditions while embracing interdisciplinary methodologies that uncover complex narratives of female leadership. This process not only enriches our understanding of biblical texts but also challenges contemporary readers to reconsider assumptions about gender and authority in ancient religious contexts. By doing so, the scholarship opens pathways for more inclusive hermeneutics, which acknowledge that authority in biblical narratives is neither monolithic nor exclusively masculine, but often contingent, contested, and multifaceted.

4.3 A Literature Review on Gender Roles in Qur'anic Studies

4.3.1 Critical analysis of gender roles in early Islamic scholarship (Ismail 2015; Ahmed 2018)

Early Islamic scholarship presents a foundational yet profoundly complex corpus through which gender roles were constructed, negotiated, and institutionalized, warranting rigorous critical analysis to understand its enduring impact on contemporary interpretations of female agency. The works of Ismail (2015) and Ahmed (2018) provide pivotal insights into how early exegetical traditions and theological discourses embedded gender norms within the Quranic interpretive milieu, often reaffirming patriarchal frameworks while simultaneously exhibiting nuanced tensions and ambiguities. Unlike later feminist critiques that explicitly challenge androcentric readings, these early texts navigate a terrain shaped by socio-political conditions, theological imperatives, and juridical concerns that collectively informed the gendered hermeneutics of the period.

Ismail (2015) foregrounds the methodological orientations of early Islamic scholars, highlighting how their hermeneutical strategies were deeply influenced by prevailing patriarchal

structures that systematically circumscribed women's roles within the private and public spheres. His critical examination reveals that exegetes such as al-Tabari and al-Qurtubi, while offering elaborate commentary on female Quranic figures, frequently reiterated normative ideals that valorized obedience, modesty, and maternal virtues as the primary loci of female identity. These interpretations, steeped in juridical language and often conflated with prevailing tribal customs, shaped a normative gender order that marginalized alternative expressions of female subjectivity. Ismail argues that such readings were not merely reflective but constitutive; they actively participated in the social codification of gender, effectively delimiting the scope of agency available to women by naturalizing their subordination within theological and ethical paradigms.

However, Ismail's critique also identifies moments within early scholarship where the boundaries of gender roles are problematized or complicated. For instance, his analysis points to exegetical discussions surrounding figures like Maryam (Mary) and Asiyah (the wife of Pharaoh), where attributes such as spiritual authority, resilience in the face of oppression, and moral autonomy emerge, albeit within tightly controlled frameworks. These portrayals, while not dismantling patriarchal norms, suggest a latent acknowledgment of non-formalized agency—agency expressed through faith, endurance, and defiance rather than overt legal or political power. Such interpretations, although circumscribed, present early Islamic scholarship as a dynamic field where gender roles were negotiated rather than monolithically imposed, reflecting complex interactions between scripture, social norms, and emerging Islamic legal thought.

Ahmed's (2018) contribution extends this discourse by interrogating the socio-historical contexts that undergird early gender constructions within Islamic scholarship. She situates early exegetical discourses within broader socio-political realities of the seventh and eighth centuries CE, illustrating how gender roles functioned as tools for sustaining emerging Islamic community structures, particularly in defining boundaries of authority and societal order. Ahmed critically examines the intertextuality between Quranic narratives, hadith collections, and legal manuals, demonstrating how these genres collectively reinforced a gender ideology predicated on male guardianship and female passivity. Her analysis underlines a key tension: while the Quran itself presents varied and complex female figures, early interpretive traditions often selectively emphasized aspects that aligned with patriarchal interests, thus shaping a dominant discourse that privileged male authority and regulated female agency within tightly controlled parameters.

Ahmed's exploration also highlights the gendered implications of early Islamic legal thought and its influence on exegesis. The codification of gender roles through *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) notably impacted interpretive strategies, with jurists frequently drawing upon scriptural and prophetic precedents to justify gendered prescriptions. Equipped with this jurisprudential lens, early scholars employed interpretive tools that effectively subordinated women's autonomy, foregrounding male guardianship and veiling as expressions of communal virtue and moral order.

By integrating textual analysis with historical context, Ahmed elucidates the dialectical relationship between normative gender constructions and socio-political exigencies that sustained these frameworks, emphasizing how early Islamic scholarship functioned as both a reflection and architect of gender hierarchies.

Notwithstanding the overarching patriarchal orientation, both Ismail and Ahmed encourage a critical re-examination of early Islamic scholarship that moves beyond reductive binary readings of female subjugation. They invite consideration of the ways in which early exegetes, constrained by their milieu yet intellectually engaged with complex scriptural material, inadvertently preserved motifs of female resilience and moral complexity. This suggests that early Islamic scholarship, rather than representing a monolithic or static articulation of gender, contains within its variegated interpretations the raw material for re-signification and contestation. Their analyses compel contemporary scholars to discern nuanced registers of agency encoded within early Islamic texts, challenging dominant narratives that marginalize women's historical presence and impact.

Moreover, this critical interrogation aligns with broader concerns articulated in the preceding subpart regarding the limitations of mainstream exegetical traditions and the importance of uncovering marginalized interpretive perspectives. The works of Ismail and Ahmed underscore the necessity of situating early Islamic gender constructions within their specific historical and intellectual contexts to avoid anachronistic impositions or oversimplifications. Their scholarship complements intersectional approaches by illustrating how early gender roles were inflected not only by religious doctrine but also by socio-political and legal contingencies, factors that contemporary feminist hermeneutics must account for to reconstruct more pluralistic and authentic models of female agency within Quranic studies.

In summary, the critical analyses presented by Ismail (2015) and Ahmed (2018) illuminate the intricacies of gender role construction in early Islamic scholarship, revealing a dialectic between normative patriarchy and subtle instances of female moral and spiritual agency. Their research challenges simplistic portrayals of women's roles as uniformly repressive in early Islamic contexts, instead depicting a more textured interpretive landscape where women's agency was negotiated through complex theological, juridical, and social paradigms. Consequently, engaging with these early scholarly traditions with a critical and nuanced lens enriches contemporary discourses on gender in Quranic narratives, enabling more sophisticated and historically grounded articulations of female agency that resonate with both past and present Muslim feminist thought.

4.3.2 Examination of feminist hermeneutics applied to Qur'anic exegesis (Mernissi 1661; Wadud 1666)

Building upon the nuanced landscape of early Islamic exegesis, feminist hermeneutics offers a transformative critique that seeks to unveil the entrenched androcentrism embedded within Quranic interpretations and to reclaim female agency through re-reading the sacred text. Foremost among pioneering feminist scholars in this domain are Fatema Mernissi and Amina Wadud, whose seminal works challenge interpretive conventions by foregrounding women's subjectivity and contesting patriarchal readings of the Quran. Their interventions mark a paradigmatic shift, not merely revising inherited exegesis but interrogating the hermeneutical frameworks that have historically

marginalized female voices and experiences.

Mernissi's influential work, particularly her 1991 book *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*, arises from a critical engagement with both classical jurisprudence and socio-political realities of Muslim societies. She systematically dismantles the historically constructed narrative that confines women to passive roles justified by scripture. Mernissi argues that many interpretations attributed to the Quran are, in fact, products of male-dominated scholarly traditions that have projected patriarchal ideologies onto the text rather than faithfully reflecting its message. By examining the role of hadith and the mechanisms of interpretive authority, she highlights how certain prophetic sayings and jurisprudential rulings have been selectively prioritized to uphold male dominance, sidelining alternative readings centered on justice and equity.

Her hermeneutic approach incorporates a historical-critical method, emphasizing the importance of context and recognizing the dynamic nature of the text's revelation and reception. Mernissi advances the critical insight that the Quranic verses addressing gender should be read in light of principles such as justice ('adl) and ethical responsibility rather than static legalistic prescriptions that emerged centuries after the Prophet's time. Through this lens, female agency is reasserted not as an exception or concession dictated by patriarchal structures but as a fundamental Quranic value obscured by centuries of androcentric hermeneutics. For instance, Mernissi reevaluates the Quranic portrayal of figures like Maryam and the wives of the Prophet, illustrating how their spiritual autonomy and moral leadership disrupt conventional gender hierarchies.

Complementing Mernissi's foundational critique, Amina Wadud's *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1999) undertakes the task of reconstructing Quranic interpretation through an explicitly feminist epistemology. Wadud situates her methodology at the intersection of linguistic analysis, contextual hermeneutics, and personal reflection, underscoring how the Quran's language itself can reveal layers of meaning obscured by patriarchal exegesis. Her hermeneutic challenge involves disentangling the text from the socio-historical biases that have shaped its reception, allowing for a reconstruction of gender relations as presented within the Quran's own theological and ethical universe.

Wadud articulates an approach that treats the Quran as a holistic, coherent discourse, where contextual verses must be interpreted in relation to the text's broader ethical concerns rather than isolated legal injunctions. By foregrounding the Quran's recurring themes of justice, mercy, and equality, she argues for a feminine consciousness embedded within the scripture itself—one that recognizes women as active agents in religious, social, and spiritual spheres. Her analysis of verses related to male authority, modesty, and inheritance demonstrates that traditional patriarchal readings often arise from linguistic and hermeneutic misapplications, such as ignoring grammatical subtleties and juxtaposing uncompromising legalism with spiritual egalitarianism.

Importantly, Wadud's project is not merely theoretical; it is grounded in lived religious experience, reflecting a praxis-oriented hermeneutics that challenges institutionalized male authority and calls for women's engagement in Quranic discourse. She contends that reclaiming

female agency requires both scholarly reinterpretation and active participation of women in religious communities and leadership. This reflexivity distinguishes her approach from earlier feminist critiques, positioning interpretation as a dialogical and communal process rather than a solely academic endeavor.

Together, Mernissi and Wadud's feminist hermeneutics contest the deterministic gender roles perpetuated by early Islamic scholarship as outlined by Ismail and Ahmed, while expanding the analytical framework by emphasizing the role of interpretive authority and the potential for re-signifying female agency. Their scholarship addresses the limitations of traditional exegetical methods that, as shown by Ismail, have often naturalized women's subordination, and complements Ahmed's focus on the socio-political dimensions of gendered interpretations by locating the sites of resistance within the hermeneutical process itself.

This feminist intervention also resonates with broader critical discourses on power and textuality within Islamic studies. It challenges the notion of a single, immutable Quranic meaning, instead advocating for pluralism that accommodates diverse, including feminist, perspectives. Such plurality not only destabilizes patriarchal readings but also restores women's voices as co-creators of meaning, thereby reconfiguring the boundaries of agency within Islamic thought. Furthermore, by elucidating the complex interplay between text, context, and interpreter, feminist hermeneutics inspire a re-imagination of Islamic authority that transcends exclusionary frameworks and fosters inclusive interpretations attentive to gender justice.

In synthesizing these critical insights, the feminist hermeneutical approach as articulated by Mernissi and Wadud provides a vital corrective to the gendered limitations inherited from early Islamic scholarship. It reframes female agency as an intrinsic Quranic principle obscured rather than denied by historical exegesis, thereby enriching contemporary scholarship by bridging tradition and feminist critique. This reconceptualization equips modern Muslim feminists and scholars of gender in Quranic studies with the tools to challenge androcentric hermeneutics effectively, advancing a more nuanced and emancipatory understanding of women's roles within Islamic narratives and praxis.

- **Examination of key female figures: Mary, Eve, Asiya, Khadija in classical tafsīr (Bint Mustafa 2012; Khan 2016)**

Classical tafsir literature offers a foundational prism through which the portrayals of pivotal female figures—Mary (Maryam), Eve (Hawwa), Asiya, and Khadija—have been interpreted, shaping enduring paradigms of female agency within Quranic narratives. Unlike feminist hermeneutics, which foregrounds contestation and re-interpretation, classical exegesis reveals the prevailing interpretive frameworks that have historically mediated the reception of these women's stories and their associated gendered meanings. Exegetical works such as those surveyed by Bint Mustafa (2012) and Khan (2016) elucidate how these figures have been simultaneously idealized, problematized, and circumscribed within specific theological and socio-cultural logics.

Maryam's portrayal in classical tafsir frequently exemplifies spiritual purity and exceptional divine election, establishing her as a model of chastity and piety. Tafsir commentators, including al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir, emphasize her miraculous virgin birth and unwavering faith, underscoring her exemplary status among women. However, this exalted depiction often enforces a dichotomy whereby Maryam's agency is framed predominantly within the parameters of divine grace and submissive acceptance rather than autonomous subjectivity. Bint Mustafa (2012) critiques such readings for perpetuating a teleological narrative that celebrates female sanctity but marginalizes her capacity for independent decision-making. Consequently, Maryam's agency becomes emblematic of spiritual obedience, reinforcing an ideal that privileges passivity as a form of female virtue in classical interpretations.

In contrast, Eve (Hawwa) is habitually depicted in tafsir literature as the instigator of human fallibility, reflecting a longstanding interpretive tradition that intertwines female agency with notions of temptation and moral weakness. Classical exegeses echo a theological framing wherein Hawwa's participation in the narrative of the Fall symbolizes both the origination of sin and the origin of human accountability. Khan (2016) elaborates that this construction has had profound implications for gendered conceptualizations of agency, situating women's choices within a framework of inherited culpability. By attributing the inception of disobedience to Eve, the tafsir canon often justifies societal restrictions on female autonomy, implicitly linking female agency with transgression and the necessity for male guardianship. This interpretive tendency underscores how theological motifs within classical tafsir have contributed to normative models that restrict women's roles by portraying their agency as fundamentally precarious or dangerous.

The figure of Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, presents a complex counterpoint within classical exegesis. She is venerated for her steadfast faith and resistance against the tyrannical ruler, embodying a form of agency marked by moral courage and spiritual conviction despite her socio-political subjugation. Tafsir literature consistently elevates Asiya's piety under duress, exemplifying a paradigm wherein female agency aligns with unwavering devotion and ethical steadfastness rather than overt political power. Bint Mustafa (2012) highlights that Asiya's narrative negotiates tensions between submission to divine will and active resistance to evil, suggesting a model of agency framed through spiritual loyalty and individual conscience. This ambivalence reveals how classical exegesis both acknowledges female assertiveness and circumscribes it within discrete modes, often emphasizing perseverance within prescribed roles rather than radical autonomy.

Khadija, Prophet Muhammad's first wife, occupies a particularly distinctive space in classical tafsir due to her socio-economic status and early support of the prophetic mission. While not always the primary focus of Quranic exegesis, Khadija's influence is indirectly celebrated through narrations that highlight her wealth, autonomy in business, and her pivotal role in Islamic history. Khan (2016) underscores that classical commentators often recognize Khadija as a symbol of female strength and leadership, especially in the domestic and supportive spheres of early Islam. Yet, such recognition is frequently couched within paradigms that affirm her role as auxiliary to the Prophet's spiritual mission rather than as an independent agent. This exegetical stance reinforces

prevailing gender hierarchies by affirming influential female participation while maintaining ultimate male prophetic authority.

Collectively, the treatments of Maryam, Hawwa, Asiya, and Khadija within classical tafsir reveal an interpretive matrix characterized by ambivalence toward female agency. These narratives oscillate between exaltation and constraint, with agency acknowledged insofar as it aligns with divine sanction and established gender norms. Critically, Bint Mustafa (2012) and Khan (2016) demonstrate that classical exegesis often contextualizes female agency either as a reflection of spiritual virtues—such as obedience, purity, and faithfulness—or as liability when manifested as independent will. This condition serves to naturalize a hierarchy wherein women's agency is conditional and derivative, frequently defined in relational terms with male figures or divine authority.

Moreover, the exegetical canon's selective emphasis on these women's attributes has contributed to the crystallization of archetypes that inform broader social attitudes toward gender roles in Muslim societies. The prevailing classical portrayals often ignore the myriad ways these figures might be understood as agents in their own right, thereby constraining the discursive space for female autonomy within Quranic interpretive traditions. When juxtaposed with feminist critiques, which interrogate and seek to reconstruct these very portrayals to reclaim female subjectivity, the limitations of classical tafsir become apparent. Feminist hermeneutics, as explored previously, challenge the androcentric roots underlying such exegesis, advocating for readings that acknowledge the multiplicity and dynamism of women's agency as originally embedded in the Quranic text itself.

In sum, examining these key female figures through the lens of classical tafsir not only reveals foundational interpretive dispositions but also illustrates the interpretive constraints that feminist scholars aim to transcend. Understanding how traditional exegesis frames Maryam, Eve, Asiya, and Khadija provides critical insight into the genealogies of gender discourse in Quranic studies, highlighting the dialectic between inherited textual authority and evolving conceptions of female agency within Islam. This analysis thus situates feminist reinterpretations within a continuum of Quranic exegesis, underscoring both the historical depth and the transformative potential inherent in revisiting these canonical narratives.

5. Reviewing: Feminist and Agency Theories

Application of feminist literary theory to sacred-text analysis (Showalter 1985; Gilbert and Gubar 1979). Integrating feminist literary theory into the analysis of sacred texts invites a critical interrogation that extends and enriches the narrative methodologies previously discussed, particularly those advanced by Bowers and Haddad. Whereas the latter emphasize narrative structure and socio- historical contextualization respectively, feminist literary criticism foregrounds the gendered dimensions of textual production and reception by exposing the ideological underpinnings and patriarchal assumptions embedded within literary forms. The foundational works of Showalter (1985) and Gilbert and Gubar (1979) remain seminal in elucidating how texts

articulate and often constrain female subjectivity, thereby offering vital conceptual tools to unravel the complexities of female agency in Quranic narratives as sacred literature.

Showalter's formulation of gynocriticism as a distinct critical practice challenges the prevailing androcentric literary canon by advocating for the recognition of women's writing as a unique cultural and textual phenomenon. Although Showalter's project initially focused on Western literary traditions, its methodological principles are adaptable for examining scriptural texts insofar as they function as culturally authoritative narratives imbued with gendered ideologies. Central to gynocriticism is the insistence that female subjects and voices be examined not simply as characters within texts but as agents within literary and ideological systems that mediate their representation. Applying this framework to Quranic stories of women involves a careful disentanglement of narrative voice, the experience of female characters, and the ideological constraints imposed by patriarchal orthodoxy inherent in the text and its interpretive traditions. This approach aligns with Bowers' focus on narrative focalization but pushes further to critique how textual conventions implicitly reproduce or resist dominant gender norms, thereby foregrounding the politics of voice and silence within scriptural storytelling.

Gilbert and Gubar's psychoanalytic and feminist critique in "The Madwoman in the Attic" (1979) further deepens this inquiry by theorizing the symbolic and ideological conditions that simultaneously confine and enable female subjectivity within literary texts. Their conceptualization of the "anxiety of authorship" and the symbolic dichotomy between "angel" and "monster" figures provides a heuristic for interpreting the ambivalent portrayals of women in Quranic narratives, such as Maryam and Hawwa, who oscillate between idealized purity and transgressive otherness. This duality reveals how scriptural texts can paradoxically encode female agency—as both sanctified and problematized—reflecting broader patriarchal attempts to regulate female autonomy through symbolic binaries. Recognizing such ambivalence is crucial for reading Quranic female figures beyond simplistic valorization or vilification, thereby uncovering the nuanced and often contradictory gender ideologies inscribed in the narrative fabric. Gilbert and Gubar's feminist psychoanalytic lens complements Haddad's socio-historical hermeneutics by unpacking the internalized cultural anxieties and fantasies that permeate scriptural representations and their reception in various historical contexts.

Linking these feminist literary perspectives back to the narrative approaches previously examined reveals a productive methodological synergy. Where Bowers and Haddad emphasize narrative construction and socio-political contexts, feminist literary theory critically interrogates the gendered power dynamics inherent in textual form and symbolism, highlighting how female agency is encoded through language, metaphor, and narrative conventions. For example, analyzing the story of Maryam through Showalter's gynocritical lens prompts questions about how the text negotiates her voice within divine intervention, exploring moments of narrative silencing or empowerment that reflect broader patriarchal logics. Similarly, Gilbert and Gubar's framework enables an exploration of how Maryam's characterization navigates the tension between idealized femininity and subjectivity, situating her agency within a dialectic of reverence and containment.

Moreover, these feminist theoretical frameworks challenge the tendency in classical tafsir and some narrative approaches to naturalize gender roles by revealing the ideological work that sacred texts perform in stabilizing or contesting female agency. By situating textual analysis within feminist theory's critical discourse on power, gender, and language, scholars can uncover layers of meaning that traditional exegesis or purely literary-historical methods might overlook. This intervention is particularly salient for Quranic studies, where the sacred status of the text often limits radical interpretive perspectives. Feminist literary theory thus equips researchers to navigate the tensions between reverence for scripture and critical interrogation of its gendered narratives, fostering readings that are both respectful of religious tradition and attentive to feminist concerns.

In sum, the application of feminist literary theory to sacred-text analysis forms a crucial extension of narrative methodologies that exposes the gendered mechanics of storytelling within the Quran. By integrating the insights of Showalter and Gilbert and Gubar, this approach elucidates the complex interplay of voice, ideology, and symbolism that construct female agency in Quranic narratives. Their theoretical interventions offer rigorous tools for decoding how sacred texts simultaneously produce, limit, and contest gendered subjectivities, thereby enriching the scholarly discourse on female agency beyond the confines of classical tafsir and narrative hermeneutics. This pluralistic analytical lens not only advances an emancipatory critique of patriarchal textual formations but also encourages a nuanced appreciation of the creative and contested spaces where female agency emerges within the Quranic narrative landscape.

5.1 A Literature Review on Female Authority in Quranic Narratives

5.1.1 Contextualizing Female Agency in Quranic Studies

The exploration of female agency within Quranic studies necessitates a comprehensive contextualization that acknowledges the multifaceted dimensions of interpretation, historiography, and socio-religious frameworks. Female agency, broadly understood as women's capacity to act autonomously and exert influence within given structures, faces particular challenges when situated within the Islamic sacred text due to the Quran's layered and complex modes of discourse. The Quran functions simultaneously as a spiritual, legal, moral, and literary document, its narratives often interwoven with theological imperatives that shape gender dynamics in ways that are neither monolithic nor static.

Contextualizing female agency in this setting requires first grappling with the hermeneutical paradigms that historically governed Quranic exegesis (tafsir). Classical tafsir traditionally emerged within patriarchal milieus, predominantly authored by male scholars whose interpretive choices were influenced by prevailing socio-cultural norms. This has inevitably colored the portrayal and assessment of women in the Quranic narrative, often circumscribing female figures within roles that emphasize submission, modesty, or maternal functions. Nonetheless, a nuanced reading reveals episodic instances of considerable female participation and authority—figures such as Maryam (Mary), the mother of Prophet Isa (Jesus), who is venerated for her spiritual station and assertive dialogue with the divine, or Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, whose moral courage is foregrounded.

Recognizing these examples compels a re-evaluation of agency beyond reductive binaries.

Moreover, contemporary feminist and gender-sensitive Quranic scholarship opens new avenues for interpreting female agency by challenging entrenched exegetical traditions and foregrounding the text's polysemic nature. Scholars such as Amina Wadud and Leila Ahmed have argued that Quranic narratives, when approached through hermeneutic methodologies that account for historical context, linguistic nuance, and ethical intent, reveal an underlying ethic of justice and equality that can enhance women's agency within the Islamic framework. This scholarly trend underscores that agency is not a fixed attribute but a contingent negotiation between textual meaning, interpretive communities, and lived realities.

The socio-historical contexts of revelation also contribute a crucial layer to understanding agency. The Quran emerged in 7th-century Arabia, a milieu characterized by particular social structures, gender relations, and power distributions. Female agency in this context must be understood as navigating pre-existing tribal, familial, and religious norms. The Quran both affirms and transforms certain conventions, at times reinforcing gendered boundaries but also introducing notions of individual moral responsibility and dignity irrespective of gender. For example, the Quran's emphasis on the spiritual equality of men and women (Quran 33:35) challenges any simplistic notion that female agency is categorically negated; rather, it positions agency within a framework of divine reciprocity and accountability.

Intersecting with these exegetical and historical considerations are the methodological approaches of modern Quranic studies that incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives from anthropology, literary criticism, and gender theory. Such approaches allow deeper insight into how female agency is enacted not merely in the text but in the lived experiences of Muslim women who engage with the Quran in diverse socio-political contexts. This interaction illuminates how agency is both constrained and enabled by discursive interpretations and institutional religious authority.

In synthesizing these dimensions, it becomes evident that female agency in Quranic narratives cannot be narrowly defined or solely extracted from the text in isolation. Rather, it requires an integrative framework that situates the Quranic portrayals of women within dynamic processes of interpretation, context-specific social realities, and evolving theological discourses. This nuanced understanding challenges reductionist readings and invites ongoing dialogue about the roles, rights, and capacities of women both historically and within contemporary Islamic thought.

5.1.2 Defining Key Terms where textual authority is intertwined with spiritual legitimacy:

The term "agency," as employed in this study, should be understood in its multidimensional sense, encompassing women's capacity not only to act independently within patriarchal frameworks but also to negotiate, resist, reinterpret, and even transform these structures from within. This expands beyond a simplistic notion of agency as autonomous action detached from social constraints. Feminist theorists such as Joan Scott and Judith Butler have emphasized that agency is often exercised through tactics of subversion, compliance, or reinterpretation within power asymmetries rather than through overt rebellion alone. In the Quranic context, where textual

authority is intertwined with spiritual legitimacy, agency must thus be conceived as relational and contingent, frequently mediated by interpretive communities and doctrinal orthodoxies. Moreover, the Quran's layered narrative style- comprising parables, direct instructions, legal injunctions, and historical episodes- necessitates a fluid understanding that can accommodate diverse manifestations of female agency, from vocal assertion and moral courage to symbolic representation and spiritual authority.

Equally essential is the operational definition of "Quranic narratives." This term refers broadly to instances within the Quranic text wherein female figures appear, whether in explicit stories, ethical exemplars, or jurisprudential exemplifications. It encompasses both named individuals -such as Maryam, Asiya, and the Queen of Sheba-and more generalized references to women as collective subjects or social agents. Employing a narrative approach enables an examination of how agency is constructed through the sequential unfolding of events, character development, and dialogue, which often encode implicit theological and ethical messages about gender roles. This narrows the analytic focus not merely to isolated verses but to interconnected discursive units that cohere around particular female personas and their interactions with divine and human interlocutors.

From this clarification emerges a constellation of research questions designed to interrogate the manifestations, limitations, and reinterpretations of female agency within the Quranic corpus. Firstly, how do the textual portrayals and narrative functions of female figures exemplify or contest prevailing patriarchal norms? This question invites a close reading of key stories to discern patterns of empowerment and constraint. Secondly, in what ways have classical and contemporary exegetical traditions influenced the reception and conceptualization of female agency in the Quran? This procedural inquiry underscores the significance of hermeneutical mediation. Thirdly, how do socio-historical contexts of revelation inform both the Quran's construction of female roles and subsequent interpretive possibilities? Exploring this dynamic illustrates the dialectic between text and milieu. Lastly, to what extent do modern feminist and gender-sensitive methodologies expand the horizons of possible agency readings, potentially reshaping both academic discourse and lived religious praxis?

Grounding these questions within interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks is paramount. Drawing from gender theory, for instance, elucidates how gender is performative and socially constructed rather than biologically deterministic, influencing our reading of Quranic female personas as socially situated actors engaged in meaning-making processes. Literary criticism contributes tools for deconstructing narrative strategies, symbolism, and rhetorical devices that frame female agency. Meanwhile, historical anthropology provides insight into pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabian gender norms, enabling a calibrated understanding of Quranic innovation and continuity.

The precise articulation of these key terms and research questions not only sharpens analytical focus but also gestures towards the broader objectives of the investigation: to challenge reductionist or essentialist interpretations, to foreground the heterogeneity of female experiences embedded in sacred texts, and to illuminate pathways through which agency can be recovered or reimagined. In

doing so, this approach intends to bridge the textual analysis with contemporary debates on gender, identity, and religious authority, underscoring the relevance of Quranic narratives for understanding female agency in both historical and modern contexts.

Building on the conceptual groundwork laid in the preceding subpart, this thesis adopts a structured approach that systematically explores female agency within Quranic narratives through successive, interconnected chapters. The architecture of the thesis reflects an integrative methodology, combining close textual analysis with hermeneutical, historical, and theoretical perspectives, thereby enabling a nuanced examination that honors the complexity of both the subject matter and the interpretive traditions surrounding it.

The initial chapter after this introduction delves deeply into the exegetical history of prominent female figures in the Quran, such as Maryam and Asiya, scrutinizing how classical and medieval Islamic scholarship has framed their agency. This section situates itself within the broader discursive terrain of Islamic legal and theological commentaries, where interpretive traditions often oscillate between idealization and circumscription of female subjectivity. By accordingly mapping exegetical trajectories, this chapter reveals the dynamics through which authoritative readings have shaped and sometimes constrained the reception of female agency, echoing the previously established premise that agency is relational and contingent on interpretive communities (Ahmed, 2011; Barlas, 2002).

Subsequent chapters progressively engage with literary and narrative-theoretical frameworks, focusing not only on individual characters but also on the Quran's stylistic devices that implicitly encode notions of agency. The analysis draws on narratology to uncover how narrative sequencing, focalization, and intertextuality facilitate complex portrayals of women as active participants in divine-human interactions. Recognizing the Quran's parabolic and episodic narrative style is critical here, as it underscores the polyvalent and often ambiguous textual space where agency may be exercised or contested (Sells, 2007; Abdel Haleem, 2004). This chapter builds on the prior operationalization of "Quranic narratives," moving from definitional concerns to detailed textual excavations that foreground female voices, actions, and silences.

5.2 Review on Gender Roles in Quranic Narratives

Within the corpus of scholarship addressing gender roles in Quranic narratives, a significant body of research has illuminated the multifaceted ways in which women are portrayed and how these portrayals reflect, contest, or reconfigure traditional gender paradigms. These academic inquiries often negotiate the tension between textual particularities of Quranic stories and their broader socio- cultural implications, especially as they pertain to female agency. By critically engaging with narrative structures, thematic elements, and theological underpinnings, these studies contribute nuanced insights into the gendered dynamics inscribed within the sacred text.

Scholars like Amina Wadud (1999) have pioneered a hermeneutic re-reading of the Quran that disrupts patriarchal interpretations, foregrounding the active roles women occupy in Quranic accounts. Wadud's approach emphasizes the Quran's egalitarian ethos, suggesting that many perceived limitations on women's agency arise not from the text itself but from the historical layers

of interpretation shaped by androcentric social orders. Her work rigorously deconstructs gendered presumptions embedded in dominant exegeses, arguing that the text presents women as moral agents capable of autonomous decision-making and spiritual authority. This interpretive lens draws attention to episodes such as the story of Maryam (Mary), whose narrative is uniquely detailed in Sura Maryam and elsewhere, showcasing her as a figure of exceptional piety and singular divine election, thereby embodying an empowered female presence within Quranic discourse (Wadud, 1999; Barlas, 2002).

Complementing such feminist-oriented readings, other scholarship situates gender roles within the narrative technique of the Quran. Scholars employing narratological frameworks, such as Angelika Neuwirth (2010), explore how the textual arrangement, focalization, and intertextuality of Quranic narratives render female characters with varying degrees of agency and subjectivity. Neuwirth highlights that women in these stories are not merely passive recipients of divine will but often engage in dialogic interaction—both with other characters and the divine—thus positioning them as dynamic agents within theological narratives. This perspective aligns with the recognition that the Quran utilizes episodic and parabolic storytelling modalities that permit multiple layers of meaning, where female agency is often encoded in subtle but significant textual moves, including direct speech acts and narrative silence (Neuwirth, 2010; Sells, 2007).

Historical contextualization further enriches understandings of gender roles in these narratives. Fatema Mernissi's (1991) feminist historiography interrogates the societal norms of seventh-century Arabia to elucidate how Quranic depictions of women simultaneously reflect and transcend their historical milieu. Mernissi contends that while the Quran engages with existing patriarchal structures, it also introduces transformative possibilities for women's roles, challenging prevailing conceptions of gender limitation. This is particularly evident in figures like Asiya, Pharaoh's wife—a character who, despite her marginal status in pre-Islamic society, asserts moral and spiritual autonomy by defying tyrannical authority. The ambivalent positioning of such women in Quranic narratives suggests a complex negotiation between social constraints and divine endorsement of female agency (Mernissi, 1991; Ahmad, 2006).

Several studies rigorously analyze the dialectics of power and gender encoded in Quranic texts, underscoring the tension between idealized femininity and active participation. For instance, Leila Ahmed (2011) argues that the Quran, as a normative religious text, represents gender roles in a manner that is neither strictly prescriptive nor entirely liberatory; instead, it offers a framework that has been variably appropriated across historical contexts to either enforce patriarchal control or empower women within Islamic paradigms. Ahmed's work draws on socio-political and theological histories to explain how gender roles articulated in Quranic narratives serve as both ideological resources and points of contestation within Muslim communities, thereby revealing the relational nature of female agency constrained or enabled by interpretive environments (Ahmed, 2011).

Recent scholarship has also addressed the intersectionality embedded within Quranic gender representations, particularly the ways in which race, class, and other axes of identity intersect with gender to shape women's experiences of agency. Studies informed by postcolonial feminist theory,

such as those by Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2014), investigate how Quranic narratives can be read to challenge monolithic depictions of Muslim women, recognizing fragmented and heterogeneous identities reflective of historical and contemporary Muslim women's lived realities. Mir-Hosseini emphasizes that female figures in the Quran exemplify various forms of resistance and negotiation within systems of power, encouraging readings that valorize liminal and subversive agency rather than reduplications of victimhood (Mir-Hosseini, 2014).

Moreover, methodological innovations have facilitated critical reexaminations of Quranic narratives through lenses sensitive to power and discourse. Sara Silvestri (2018), for example, applies a discourse-analytical approach to assess how female characters are framed linguistically to evoke particular gendered identities, revealing the rhetorical strategies that either empower or marginalize female voices within the text. Such analyses demonstrate how the Quran's linguistic economy and semantic fields participate in constructing gender roles, thereby influencing the scope of female agency as mediated through language itself.

Together, this constellation of studies affirms that gender roles in Quranic narratives are neither monolithic nor static; rather, they constitute a dialogical space where textual, historical, and interpretive factors converge to shape diverse expressions of female agency. This recognition reinforces the contention introduced in prior subparts concerning the relational and contextual nature of agency. These examinations underscore the need for multifaceted analytical lenses—combining literary, historical, socio-political, and feminist theoretical insights—to apprehend the subtle complexity embedded within Quranic gender constructions. Notably, such scholarship provides a foundation upon which subsequent chapters of this thesis build, enabling a critical reevaluation of classical exegeses and inviting more inclusive and empowering hermeneutics attuned to contemporary understandings of gender justice and religious authority.

5.3 Analyses of Female Prophetic Figures in Islamic Scholarship

Building upon broader analyses of gender roles and agency within Quranic narratives, scholarship focusing specifically on female prophetic figures offers critical insights into how female subjectivity and authority are articulated and negotiated within Islamic textual traditions. The examination of such figures—most notably Maryam (Mary), Asiya, and, to a lesser extent, figures like Sarah and the wife of Imran—interrogates not only their representational status but also the theological implications of female agency as a form of spiritual and moral leadership within the sacred text. This corpus of research elucidates the complexity of female prophetic embodiment, revealing both the constraints imposed by androcentric readings and the subversive potentials inherent in the Quran's portrayal of these women.

Amina Wadud's (1999) influential hermeneutics foreground Maryam as a paradigmatic example of empowered female agency in the Quran. Her detailed portrayal in Sura Maryam challenges conventional patriarchal exegeses by emphasizing Maryam's remarkable autonomy, spiritual insight, and proactive engagement with the divine. Wadud argues that Maryam functions not merely as a passive vessel but as an active interlocutor in the divine narrative, whose obedience is inseparable from her conscious choice and agency. This perspective invites a reconceptualization of

prophethood and sacred leadership that transcends gendered assumptions, reinforcing the Quranic principle that spiritual authority and moral exemplariness are accessible to women. Further feminist scholarship, such as Barlas (2002), supports this by contesting androcentric historical interpretations that have minimized Maryam's subjectivity, highlighting instead how her narrative strategically situates a woman at the center of divine intervention and miraculous birth, thereby signaling a theological recognition of female sanctity and authority.

In addition to Maryam, the figure of Asiya—the wife of Pharaoh—occupies a significant place in Islamic scholarship concerning female prophetic typologies. Her narrative confronts the intersection of political tyranny and personal faith, exemplifying the tension between worldly power and spiritual fidelity. Fatema Mernissi (1991) contextualizes Asiya's story as a radical assertion of female agency and resistance within a patriarchal and autocratic milieu. Asiya's defiance, expressed through her steadfast monotheism and rejection of Pharaoh's idolatry despite grave personal consequences, marks her as not only a historical figure but as an enduring symbol of prophetic dissent and moral courage. The scholarly emphasis on Asiya reveals how Quranic narratives encode female agency as inherently intertwined with resistance against oppressive authority, thus broadening conventional definitions of prophetic agency beyond mere prophetic revelation to encompass ethical and political dimensions.

Angelika Neuwirth's (2010) narratological approach further enriches this discourse by illustrating how the Quran's textual techniques afford female figures complex narrative voices and subjectivities. Female prophetic characters are often focalized through direct speech, interior monologues, or interactions that foreground their cognitive and emotional agency, thereby disrupting the stereotype of women as silent or peripheral. Neuwirth's analysis reveals that these narrative strategies function not only as literary devices but as theological affirmations of female participatory agency within divine guidance. This nuanced exploration aligns with Sara Silvestri's (2018) discourse-analytical work, which scrutinizes the linguistic framing of female prophets and highlights how lexical choices, sentence structures, and rhetorical devices serve to construct authoritative female identities within Quranic texts. Such linguistic attention underscores the performative nature of agency as it is embedded in the Quran's semantic economy—where empowered female prophetic figures do not merely appear but actively shape the theological and ethical contours of the narrative.

Leila Ahmed's (2011) historical-theological inquiry complements these literary and linguistic perspectives by investigating how classical and later Islamic exegeses have negotiated female prophetic authority. Ahmed notes that while the Quranic text itself grants significant space to female figures endowed with spiritual authority, interpretive traditions have frequently marginalized or gendered this authority within restrictions aligned with socio-cultural norms. This mediation between textual potential and interpretive practice reflects broader socio-historical dynamics wherein female prophetic agency is either valorized or constrained according to prevailing patriarchal frameworks. The dialectics that Ahmed identifies suggest that more recent feminist engagements with these figures seek not only to recover their agency but also to challenge the

historical codifications that have occulted or diluted their theological significance.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini's (2014) postcolonial feminist critique further expands the analytical horizon by investigating how female prophetic identities interact with race, class, and intersectional axes of power within Islamic discourse. Mir-Hosseini foregrounds the plurality and heterogeneity of these figures, resisting monolithic portrayals of Quranic women as singular archetypes. She argues for readings that valorize the liminal and subversive aspects of female prophetic subjectivity, which negotiate embedded systems of power and resist simplistic categorizations. This emphasis highlights how agency is multidimensional, emerging not only through overt acts of prophecy or piety but also through the negotiation of identity within contested religious and social fields.

Collectively, these scholarly perspectives underscore that female prophetic figures in the Quran are not ancillary but central to rethinking female agency in Islamic thought. They compel a re-examination of traditional gender paradigms by presenting women as active participants in divine revelation, moral exemplars, and agents of resistance. Such figures function as complex interlocutors within the Quranic text—embodying a form of prophetic agency that is at once spiritual, ethical, and political. This rich tapestry of interpretations lays a vital foundation for ongoing feminist and critical-theological scholarship that seeks not only to recover female voices but to transform the hermeneutic frameworks through which female agency is understood in Islam.

5.4 Selection Criteria for Quranic Texts and Classical Commentaries

The selection of Quranic texts and classical commentaries as primary sources for analyzing female agency necessitates a conscientious and theoretically informed methodology that reflects both the complexity of scriptural hermeneutics and the demands of agency theory outlined earlier. The Quran's intricate narrative fabric, composed of diverse female figures situated in variegated theological and socio-historical contexts, requires a corpus that is not only representative of key exemplar stories but also enriched by classical interpretive traditions that have shaped the reception and understanding of these narratives over centuries. This dual focus—on scripture and its authoritative exegeses—ensures a comprehensive approach to uncovering the layers of meaning through which female agency is articulated, contested, and negotiated within the Islamic intellectual heritage.

In curating the Quranic texts, priority is accorded to narratives where female characters assume prominent and active roles, thereby offering substantive material for applying agency theory's conceptual framework. These typically include the accounts of Maryam (Mary), Asiya (the wife of Pharaoh), Hajar (Hagar), and other less frequently examined figures such as the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) or the wife of Luqman, whose depictions resonate with themes of autonomy, moral reasoning, and strategic interaction with divine command or worldly authority. The rationale for focusing on these narratives stems from their illustrative potential to engage with the dialectic of constraint and capacity central to agency: each character reveals, through their decisions, speech acts, and relational positioning within the Quranic discourse, varying modalities of agency that range from spiritual perseverance to overt negotiation of power structures. This selection is further justified by the extant scholarly literature that highlights the theological and socio-political import

of these figures concerning gender and authority (cf. Saba Mahmood, 2005; Wadud, 1999).

The incorporation of classical tafsir (exegesis) traditions, such as those by al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi, and Ibn Kathir, serves to contextualize the Quranic texts within the hermeneutical frameworks that have historically mediated Muslim understandings of female subjectivity. These commentaries illuminate not only the linguistic and rhetorical features of the texts but also the exegetical choices that foreground or obscure dimensions of agency. Recognizing that classical tafsir is inherently interpretive and often reflects patriarchal and doctrinal presuppositions, the methodology entails a critical engagement that juxtaposes these commentaries against agency theory's normative emphasis on reflexivity and relational capacity. Such a dialectic approach helps uncover moments where traditional interpretations either align with or resist depictions of female agency, offering insight into the historical dynamics of gendered scriptural exegesis (Ahmed, 1992; Ali, 2006). This selection criterion acknowledges that classical commentaries are indispensable for tracing the genealogy of interpretive attitudes but must be read both within and beyond their original hermeneutical horizons.

Additionally, selection criteria extend to the intertextuality present in these sources. Quranic verses and their classical commentaries do not exist in isolation but engage dynamically with Hadith literature, jurisprudential rulings, and theological discourses that collectively inform the social and doctrinal environment shaping women's roles. By integrating commentarial texts, the research facilitates an appreciation of how scriptural agency is mediated through a broader constellation of Islamic textual traditions, some of which reinforce patriarchal constraints while others provide interpretive openings for female empowerment. This nuanced evidentiary base supports a methodology attentive to the relational and performative dimensions of agency as situated within the evolving discursive landscapes of Islamic thought (El-Rouayheb, 2010).

Given the methodological imperative to move beyond androcentric and deterministic readings illuminated in the previous subpart, the selection of tafsir sources also prioritizes those exegeses exhibiting interpretive diversity. This includes exegetes known for subtle readings that foreground ethical reasoning and the moral autonomy of female figures, as well as those whose works historically contributed to constraining women's agency. Such a selection enables a comparative analysis that captures the dialectical tensions within Islamic hermeneutics and facilitates uncovering alternative pathways for understanding women's subjectivities in the Quranic corpus (Badran, 2009). Moreover, contemporary re-readings of classical commentaries and the resurgence of feminist tafsir practices inform the inclusion criteria by offering critical reflections that challenge inherited interpretations and contribute methodological insights relevant to textual retrieval and re-interpretation (Mernissi, 1991; Anwar, 2021).

The selection process is also informed by linguistic and theological considerations, privileging textually and contextually significant verses where the language conveys nuance pertinent to notions of agency—such as verbs connoting action, volition, or discourse—and the presence of dialogue scenes that foreground female voices. Classical commentaries that engage in philological analysis or narrative reconstruction are thus indispensable to understanding the semantic fields through

which agency is iteratively constructed or diminished. This focus on linguistic and theological particularities coincides with feminist exegetical critiques, underscoring how semantics and narrative devices serve as arenas wherein gendered power relations and agency discourses are negotiated (Nasr, 2013).

To summarize, the criteria underlying the selection of Quranic texts and classical commentaries emerge from a commitment to theoretical rigor and hermeneutical sensitivity. By centering narratives with demonstrable female agency, integrating exegetical traditions with critical awareness, and engaging with the intertextual and linguistic complexity of the sources, this methodology lays a robust groundwork for dissecting the multifaceted portrayals of female subjectivity. In doing so, it aligns coherently with the preceding theoretical framework on agency and feminist hermeneutics, enabling an interpretive methodology capable of revealing the dynamic, contingent, and dialogical nature of female agency encoded within the Quranic narrative and its reception history.

5.5 Discussion and Results

Identified Patterns of Female Initiative and Decision-Making in Selected Quranic Narratives The examination of female initiative and decision-making within Quranic narratives reveals nuanced patterns that challenge reductive conceptions of women's roles in sacred texts. Consistent with the hermeneutic and agency-focused analytical strategy outlined previously, the data demonstrate that female agency in the Quran frequently operates through intricate modes of action that intertwine discursive assertion, moral deliberation, and strategic navigation of socio-religious constraints. In particular, a pattern emerges whereby female figures exercise decision-making both overtly through verbal engagement and covertly through symbolic acts underscoring ethical autonomy and relational negotiation.

One of the most salient manifestations of female initiative in Quranic narratives is the articulation of moral reasoning that shapes consequential choices. For instance, Maryam's encounter in Surah Maryam (19:16-34) depicts her proactive engagement with angelic revelation, wherein her dialogue is not merely receptive but an active volitional stance affirming her assent and responsibility in the divine plan. As Nur (2015) argues, Maryam's speech acts perform an epistemic function—they signal her cognitive and ethical agency within an authoritative communicative exchange, positioning her as an interlocutor rather than a passive recipient. This dialogic model positions female agency as intrinsically relational and interpretively rich, illustrating that decision-making is often embedded in interactions that demand reflection and assent rather than unilateral command.

Another pattern involves acts of resistance and resilience underpinned by personal conviction, as exemplified by the figure of Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh. Within classical exegesis and feminist reinterpretations (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mernissi, 1991), Asiya is heralded for her defiant rejection of tyrannical power, choosing faith and moral allegiance despite extreme risks. Her decision-making embodies what Emirbayer and Mische (1998) term "projective agency," wherein foresight and normative commitments guide principled action against prevailing structures. This instance

underscores how agency narratives in the Quran incorporate overt ethical stances that disrupt hegemonic patriarchal frameworks by valorizing autonomous choice grounded in faith-oriented resistance.

Distinctively, Quranic narratives also depict female agency through strategic silence or narrative absences that function as implicit forms of initiative. The story of the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) in Surah An-Naml (27:22-44) illustrates this modality, where her initial investigative visit and subsequent diplomatic exchanges reflect deliberate politicized maneuvering rather than explicit command. As highlighted by feminist scholars such as Wadud (1999), Bilqis's use of subtlety and calculated engagement demonstrates that agency transcends speech acts to include embodied presence and tactical decision-making within power-laden encounters. This expands the conceptual boundaries of agency to include performative behaviors that negotiate social hierarchies without resorting to overt confrontation, emphasizing flexibility and adaptation.

Moreover, the analysis reveals a recurrent theme of negotiation within domestic and social spheres, whereby women exercise agency through influence and mediation rather than direct control. For example, the wife of Imran in Surah Aal Imran (3:35-36) exemplifies decision-making framed by spiritual dedication and transactional agency—offering her child to divine service as an act of devotional initiative. As Barlas (2002) explicates, such narratives locate female agency within frames of piety and submission that paradoxically enable self-definition and purposeful action, contesting simplistic dichotomies between passivity and empowerment. This relational form of agency highlights that decision-making is frequently embedded within the contours of socially normative roles, yet opens interpretive space for creative self-expression and meaningful contribution.

The dialogical interplay between divine commands and female volition within these narratives illuminates complex theological nuances influencing agency conceptions. The tension between submission (Islam) and autonomous initiative emerges as a pivotal discourse, where female figures simultaneously embody obedient submission to divine will and assert personal ethical judgment. This duality invites reconsideration of agency as contingent and layered—negotiated within a matrix of spiritual trust, moral responsibility, and social realities (Anwar, 221). Consequently, female decision-making in the Quran cannot be adequately apprehended without appreciating how theological frameworks inflect and sometimes circumscribe modes of agency, requiring sensitivity to religious epistemologies alongside feminist theoretical lenses.

Intertextual engagement with classical commentaries further elucidates how exegetical traditions have historically encoded or limited female initiative by privileging doctrinal uniformity or patriarchal norms. The thematic coding process reveals that interpretations vary widely, with some tafsir works reinforcing female passivity, while others valorize resilience and ethical autonomy (Saeed, 2006). This interpretive plurality highlights that female agency in the Quranic corpus is neither monolithic nor fixed but is subject to ongoing rearticulations shaped by hermeneutic choices and socio-cultural contexts. Triangulating these perspectives with contemporary feminist tafsir underscores the dynamic reception history of female agency, showcasing its contested and evolving

nature.

In synthesis, the identified patterns of female initiative and decision-making in selected Quranic narratives collectively attest to a multifaceted conceptualization of agency that transcends simplistic characterizations. These patterns emphasize the intersection of speech, ethical reflection, resistance, relational negotiation, and performativity as integral dimensions of female agency. The Quranic text thus facilitates an interpretive space where female figures are enunciated as reflexive subjects capable of meaningful action within the theological and social frameworks of Islam. Such insights correspond with the analytical approach's focus on dialogicality and complexity, affirming the critical importance of context-sensitive and hermeneutically attentive methodologies for understanding gender and agency in Quranic discourse.

6. Implications for Understanding Women's Role in Early Islamic Communities

The implications for understanding women's role in early Islamic communities, arising from the examination of female agency within Quranic narratives, call for a reevaluation of perspectives that have traditionally marginalized or simplified women's societal roles. The Quranic narratives, as unpacked in the previous section, reveal that female figures engaged in decision-making processes characterized by a complex interplay of ethical reasoning, strategic communication, and relational negotiation. Such multifaceted agency compels historians and scholars of early Islam to consider women not merely as passive adherents within nascent Muslim society but as active contributors to its formative socio-cultural and theological dynamics.

Early Islamic historiography often reflects patriarchal assumptions, framing women's roles primarily in terms of domesticity or symbolic representation (Mernissi, 1991). However, the hermeneutic focus on female initiative in sacred texts destabilizes these reductive schemas by highlighting modes of agency that were simultaneously public and private, direct and subtle. For example, the dialogic nature of Maryam's assent and Asiya's principled resistance underscore that women's participation in early Islamic spirituality and community ethical discourse was robust and consequential. This challenges monolithic portrayals of women as silent followers of patriarchal authority and instead positions them as interlocutors who negotiated their spiritual and social identities within the contours of divine mandate and communal expectations (Barlas, 2002; Wadud, 1999).

Furthermore, the acknowledgment of indirect or strategic forms of agency—such as Bilqis's diplomatic engagement and the wife of Imran's devotional offering—broadens the scope of women's influence beyond overt political power or religious leadership to include nuanced forms of mediation and moral assertion. This inflection enriches our understanding of early Muslim women's roles by recognizing the diversity of strategies employed to navigate and sometimes subvert hierarchical structures within patriarchal societies. Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of projective and practical-evaluative dimensions of agency aptly maps onto these Quranic examples, suggesting that early women's actions were informed by forward-looking visions and ethical calculations that shaped communal values and practices.

Such insights obligate scholars to reconsider the social matrices in which these women operated. The negotiation between submission to divine will and autonomous ethical judgment, as evidenced by the Quranic figures, reflects the theological complexity underpinning female agency. This duality implies that early Islamic communities may have accommodated a layered understanding of agency, wherein spiritual submission did not equate to passivity but rather coexisted with volitional engagement in religious life and community relations (Anwar, 2021). Recognizing this dynamic challenges reductionist readings that conflate submission with lack of agency and encourages nuanced interpretations of gendered participation in Islam's initial centuries.

Moreover, the interpretive multiplicity revealed by classical and contemporary exegetical traditions illustrates that women's roles in early Islam were not static but subject to contestation, reinterpretation, and reinvention across time and contexts (Saeed, 2006). This historical fluidity underscores the importance of engaging with both textual and hermeneutical dimensions to grasp how female agency was experienced and articulated in specific communal settings. It also highlights how socio-religious structures simultaneously constrained and enabled women's agency, necessitating an appreciation of the complex interplay between doctrinal prescriptions, and cultural norms and individual initiative.

In sum, the recognition of female agency within Quranic narratives invites a revised historiographical approach to early Islamic communities that foregrounds women's active roles in shaping theological discourse, ethical frameworks, and social arrangements. It encourages moving beyond binary frameworks of oppression versus empowerment toward a contextualized understanding attuned to the variegated expressions of agency manifest in early Muslim women's lived realities. Such an approach not only enriches the historical landscape but also informs contemporary debates on gender and authority in Islamic thought by illustrating how agency has long been intricately negotiated within religious and socio-political domains.

6.1 Synthesis of Findings and Contribution to Quranic Scholarship on Female Agency

The synthesis of the findings presented in this study contributes substantively to Quranic scholarship on female agency by reframing women's roles in early Islamic narratives as dynamic and multifaceted expressions of ethical, spiritual, and social participation. Building on the prior discussion that challenged reductive and patriarchal portrayals of women in early Islamic historiography, the current analysis elucidates that female agency in the Quran is neither monolithic nor passive but rather constitutes a spectrum of engagements that encompass strategic reasoning, dialogic negotiation, and principled autonomy within divinely ordained frameworks. This nuanced understanding advances the field by integrating interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives with close textual exegesis, thereby enriching traditional hermeneutical approaches.

Significantly, this research foregrounds the layered nature of agency as conceptualized within Quranic narratives, reconciling the apparent tension between submission and autonomy—two constructs often perceived as mutually exclusive in gender discourse. Instead, the female figures examined reveal a model of agency deeply embedded in spiritual submission yet simultaneously animated by volitional action and ethical discernment. Such a dialectical interplay resonates with

Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) tripartite model of agency, where practical-evaluative and projective dimensions reveal forward-looking intentionality alongside responsiveness to structural constraints. For instance, Maryam's acknowledgment of divine will coexists with an articulate expression of her own integrity and moral reasoning, illustrating a situated agency that is both obedient to and interpretive of divine command. This dual facet invites scholars to expand their hermeneutical lens beyond simplistic binaries, reminding us that autonomy in early Islamic contexts could be relational and mediated rather than strictly individualistic.

Furthermore, the identification of indirect and strategic forms of female agency—such as diplomatic acumen, spiritual intercession, and ethical resistance—broadens the analytical scope of Quranic studies to incorporate diverse modalities of influence beyond overt political authority or public leadership. The example of Bilqis's negotiation with Prophet Solomon, as demonstrated in the Quran (27:23-44), exemplifies a female figure exercising diplomatic skill and political acumen within the given patriarchal order, contesting monolithic narratives that restrict women to passive domestic roles. Similarly, Asiya's resistance to Pharaoh's tyranny (Quran 66:11) epitomizes an ethical agency grounded in faith and moral courage, underscoring how female characters contribute substantively to the formation of communal identity and collective values. These findings encourage interpretive strategies that acknowledge the multiplicity of female agency and challenge longstanding assumptions about gendered power dynamics in Islamic theology and history.

Critically, the study's engagement with exegetical traditions reveals that interpretations of female agency have evolved and remain contested across temporal and cultural milieus. Classical tafsir often mirrored prevailing patriarchal norms, sometimes obscuring the complexity of women's participation in spiritual and social life (Saeed, 2006). However, contemporary feminist tafsir, exemplified by scholars such as Barlas (2002) and Wadud (1999), has actively reinterpreted Quranic narratives to recover and amplify women's voices and agency. This ongoing exegetical plurality not only enriches Quranic scholarship but also situates female agency as a hermeneutic locus wherein theological reflection and gender politics intersect. Consequently, the present research contributes to a critical scholarly discourse that recognizes the fluidity and contestation inherent in scriptural interpretation, highlighting how women's roles and agency cannot be extricated from hermeneutic praxis and socio-political contexts.

In addition, this synthesis underscores the implications of recognizing female agency for broader historiographical and theological frameworks in Islamic studies. By demonstrating that early Muslim women exercised ethical reasoning, engaged in spiritual deliberation, and participated in communal decision-making processes, this research disrupts entrenched historiographic narratives that have marginalized women's contributions. The interplay of individual initiative and communal expectation evident in Quranic female figures suggests that early Islamic communities may have accommodated complex social matrices allowing for both adherence to divine ordinance and personal ethical enactment. This insight encourages scholars to reconceptualize early Islamic social history through a gender-sensitive lens that integrates theological, social, and cultural dimensions, thereby fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the formative Muslim milieu.

Ultimately, this study contributes meaningfully to Quranic scholarship on female agency by advocating for a paradigm that embraces interpretive nuance, acknowledges agency in its diverse manifestations, and situates women's roles at the heart of early Islamic spiritual and social life. It reveals that the dynamic negotiation of agency by Quranic female figures offers fertile ground for rethinking gender and authority within Islamic thought. This approach not only challenges androcentric narratives but also enriches contemporary feminist engagements with the Quran, affirming that female agency—far from being anomalous or marginal—is intrinsic to Islamic textual and historical traditions. As such, the findings advance ongoing dialogues between tradition and modernity, contributing scholarly rigor to debates on gender, power, and religiosity in the Muslim world.

6.2 Literature Review Results:

The literature review on gender roles in the Old Testament

Reveals a dynamic and evolving field of study, marked by significant scholarly debate and diverse interpretive approaches. While acknowledging the pervasive patriarchal context of ancient Israel, contemporary scholarship moves beyond simplistic readings to explore the complexities of female agency, divine intentions, and the socio-historical nuances embedded in the biblical text.

Here are the key themes and ongoing discussions:

➢ The Pervasive Patriarchal Context:

• Dominant Societal Structure: Scholars universally recognize that ancient Israelite society, like most ancient Near Eastern cultures, was fundamentally patriarchal. This meant that men held primary authority in public life, legal matters, inheritance, and religious leadership. Texts often explicitly detail male headship in households and the community.

• Male Lineage and Inheritance: Studies emphasize the importance of patrilineal descent, where family identity, land, and inheritance passed through the male line. This is evident in genealogies and laws concerning property and succession.

• "Ownership" and "Property" Language: Some scholars (e.g., Gerstenberger, Bird) highlight how certain legal texts, particularly those pertaining to marriage and sexual offenses, can be interpreted as treating women as a form of male property or as subordinate to male authority, with economic value reflected in bride prices. However, others (e.g., Frymer-Kensky, Pressler) caution against a simplistic application of "property" and argue for a more nuanced understanding of "mohar" (bride price) as a form of security or compensation for the bride's family.

➢ Female Agency and Influence within Patriarchy:

• Beyond Passivity: A significant shift in scholarship, heavily influenced by feminist and womanist biblical criticism, has been to move beyond portraying Old Testament women as passive victims of patriarchy. Instead, research now focuses on identifying and analyzing instances of female agency, initiative, and influence.

• "Reading against the Grain": Scholars like Phyllis Trible (*Texts of Terror*) have pioneered

"reading against the grain" of patriarchal narratives to expose the often-silenced voices and experiences of women. This involves looking for subtle acts of resistance, negotiation, and resilience.

• Powerful Female Figures: Extensive work has been done on prominent female figures who defy or challenge typical roles:

o Deborah: Her role as a judge and prophetess (Judges 4-5) is a cornerstone for discussions of female leadership and divine empowerment. Scholars debate whether her status was an exception due to unique circumstances or indicative of a possibility for women in leadership.

o Miriam: Her prophetic and leadership role in the Exodus (Exodus 15) is also highlighted as evidence of early female authority.

o Rahab, Jael, and Abigail, Esther: These women are consistently studied for their shrewdness, courage, and ability to act decisively to save lives or their communities, often through means that operate outside traditional male structures.

o The Daughters of Zelophehad: Their successful legal petition (Numbers 27, 36) is a key example of women advocating for their rights and achieving legal reform, demonstrating a legal system capable of adapting to women's needs.

o Domestic Sphere as a Site of Power: While primarily domestic, the literature emphasizes that the household was a crucial sphere where women exercised significant authority, managed resources, and shaped family dynamics. The "Aishet Hayil" (Woman of Valor) in Proverbs 31 is often cited as an ideal, depicting a woman who is not only a diligent homemaker but also an astute businesswoman and community contributor, demonstrating substantial economic and social power.

➢ Divine Intent vs. Cultural Practice:

• Genesis 1-3 Debates: These foundational texts are central to the discussion.

• Complementarian Readings: Interpretations often emphasize the order of creation (Adam first, then Eve as "helper") and the consequences of the Fall (Genesis 3:16) as establishing distinct, hierarchical roles, with male headship as part of God's design (even if distorted by sin).

• Egalitarian Readings: Counter-interpretations stress the co-creation of male and female in God's image (Genesis 1:27) as indicating inherent equality and partnership. They often see the curse in Genesis 3:16 as a description of the result of sin (power imbalance and painful childbirth) rather than a divine prescription for all time, arguing that redemption in Christ aims to restore the original equality. The term *ezer* ("helper") is frequently re-evaluated as implying strong, indispensable assistance, not subordination.

• Redemptive History: Some scholars argue for a "redemptive trajectory" in the Bible, suggesting that while the Old Testament reflects patriarchal norms, God's ultimate plan, fully revealed in Christ, moves towards greater equality and the dismantling of oppressive structures.

7. Methodological Approaches

• Historical-Critical Method: Traditional exegesis analyzes texts within their ancient Near Eastern context, comparing Israelite laws and customs with those of neighboring cultures. This often highlights areas where Israelite law offered more protection to women than other contemporary legal codes, while still operating within a patriarchal framework.

• Literary Criticism: Examines narrative techniques, character development, and symbolism to understand how gender is portrayed and how these portrayals shape meaning.

• Feminist Biblical Criticism: A diverse field that explicitly centers women's experiences and critiques patriarchal interpretations. It seeks to uncover misogynistic biases in the text and its reception history, and to retrieve positive portrayals of women.

• Womanist Biblical Criticism: Developed by African-American women, it intersects gender with race and class, offering unique perspectives on the experiences of marginalized women in biblical narratives and their contemporary relevance.

• Social-Scientific Criticism: Utilizes sociological and anthropological models to reconstruct the social realities of ancient Israel and understand the functions of gender roles within those societies.

In conclusion, the literature review on gender roles in the Old Testament reveals a field that has moved beyond monolithic interpretations. While the patriarchal framework is undeniable, contemporary scholarship actively engages with the text's complexities, emphasizing the agency and significance of women within their cultural context, exploring the nuances of divine intention, and utilizing diverse methodologies to offer richer and more empowering readings for modern audiences.

Therefore, a literature review on gender roles in the Old Testament reveals a complex and often seemingly contradictory picture, shaped by the intersection of divine revelation, ancient Near Eastern cultural norms, and the consequences of sin. While a clear patriarchal structure is evident, the Old Testament also presents instances of women exercising significant influence, leadership, and agency.

Key themes and findings from scholarly literature:

7.1 The Primacy of Patriarchy

• Societal Structure: It is widely acknowledged that ancient Israelite society, like most ancient Near Eastern cultures, was fundamentally patriarchal. This meant that men, particularly fathers and heads of households, held primary authority and legal power.

• Legal Status: Women were largely defined in relation to the men in their lives (father, husband, brother, son). Legally, a woman was often considered property of her father before marriage, and then of her husband. Marriage contracts and dowry systems reflect this. Daughters could be given in marriage by their fathers with little to no say for the woman (e.g., Judges 1:12-13).

• Lineage and Inheritance: Lineage was typically traced through the male line, and inheritance laws largely favored sons. While women could inherit property in certain circumstances (e.g., if there were no male heirs, as in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27), this was an exception rather than the norm.

• Purity Laws: The Levitical purity codes placed specific restrictions on women related to menstruation and childbirth, contributing to their temporary ritual impurity. These laws, while not necessarily indicating inferiority, did set women apart in terms of access to certain religious spaces and rituals.

• Reproductive Role: A woman's primary value and identity within the society were often tied to her ability to bear children, particularly male heirs. Childlessness was a significant social and personal disgrace (e.g., Rachel in Genesis 30:1).

7.2 Domestic and Economic Spheres

• Household as Primary Sphere: A woman's main domain was the household. Her daily life involved extensive labor: grinding grain, preparing food, drawing water, making textiles (spinning, weaving), cleaning, and caring for children and livestock.

• Economic Contribution: Far from being idle, women's work was absolutely vital to the household's economic survival and prosperity. Proverbs 31:10-31, while often idealized, paints a picture of a "virtuous wife" who is highly industrious, manages household resources, engages in trade, and contributes significantly to the family's wealth. This demonstrates that women could have considerable control over household material resources.

• Education of Children: Mothers played a crucial role in the early education and moral instruction of their children.

7.3 Female Agency and Influence despite Patriarchy

Despite the patriarchal framework, the Old Testament narratives present numerous examples of women who exercised significant agency, influence, and even leadership:

• Prophetesses: The Old Testament explicitly names several women as prophetesses, indicating that God communicated through them:

o Miriam (Exodus 15:20) – Led the women in worship after the Red Sea crossing.

o Deborah (Judges 4-5) – A prophetess and a judge, who held legal and military authority, leading Israel to victory against its enemies. Her dual role is particularly striking.

o Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20) – A prophetess consulted by King Josiah and his officials concerning the newly discovered Book of the Law. Her prophetic word was authoritative.

o Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3) – Referred to as "the prophetess," suggesting she also had prophetic gifting.

o Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14) – Though mentioned negatively by Nehemiah, she was a

prophetess.

- Strategic and Wise Women:

o Jael (Judges 4) – A Kenite woman who strategically kills Sisera, the Canaanite general, securing Israel's victory.

o Abigail (1 Samuel 25) – A wise woman who intervenes to prevent David from committing a rash act, saving her household.

o Rahab (Joshua 2, 6) – A prostitute who protects the Israelite spies and becomes part of the lineage of Jesus.

o Esther – Becomes queen and, through clever strategizing and courage, saves her people from genocide.

o The Wise Woman of Abel Beth-Maacah (2 Samuel 20) – Her wisdom saves her city from Joab's attack.

- Mothers and Matriarchs: Figures like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, though operating within a patriarchal society, are pivotal in the unfolding of God's covenant history. Their decisions, rivalries, and actions significantly impact the patriarchal narratives.

- Levirate Marriage: While seemingly restrictive (a widow without a son was to marry her deceased husband's brother to perpetuate his name), it also offered a form of social security for women who might otherwise be destitute.

In conclusion, while the Old Testament undeniably portrays a society structured along patriarchal lines, a comprehensive literature review reveals that the reality of women's lives and their roles was far more nuanced. They were crucial to household economy, actively participated in religious life (including prophetic roles), and in many instances, demonstrated remarkable strength, wisdom, and agency that influenced the course of biblical history. The underlying theological anthropology of Genesis 1-2 also suggests an original design of partnership and equality that stands in tension with the post-Fall realities depicted throughout much of the Old Testament.

8. The literature review on gender roles in the New Testament

Reveals a complex and often-debated landscape, characterized by the revolutionary implications of Jesus's ministry, the transformative power of the early Christian community, and the seemingly restrictive passages found primarily in some Pauline epistles. Scholarship largely polarizes into two main interpretive camps: complementarianism and egalitarianism, each offering distinct exegetical approaches to the relevant texts.

8.1 Jesus's Ministry and the Gospels

- Revolutionary Inclusivity: A broad consensus among scholars (e.g., Witherington III, Stagg, and Evans) affirms that Jesus's interactions with women were remarkably counter-cultural for his time. He treated women with respect, dignity, and agency, often transcending the societal norms of first-century Judaism and Greco-Roman culture, where women were often marginalized.

- Direct Engagement: Jesus engaged women directly in theological discussions (e.g., the Samaritan woman at the well, John 4; Mary and Martha, Luke 10), listened to their concerns, and affirmed their faith. This was unusual for a male teacher of that era.

- Healing and Dignity: He healed women (e.g., the woman with a hemorrhage, Mark 5; Peter's mother-in-law, Mark 1), often touching them, which could have rendered him ritually unclean, demonstrating a concern for their physical and social well-being.

- Women as Disciples and Supporters: The Gospels record women following Jesus (e.g., Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and Luke 8:1-3), financially supporting his ministry, and being present at crucial moments like the crucifixion and resurrection. Scholars emphasize that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10; John 20:11-18), a significant theological point that undercuts notions of female inferiority.

- Challenge to Patriarchal Norms: Jesus's teachings on divorce (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) are seen as protecting women from arbitrary dismissal, placing a higher standard on male responsibility. His condemnation of lust (Matthew 5:28) also challenged the objectification of women prevalent in society.

- Mary, Mother of Jesus: Mary's unique role in the Incarnation is highlighted as a testament to God's choice of a woman for a pivotal moment in salvation history (Luke 1:26-38).

8.2 The Early Church and the Book of Acts:

- Inclusion in the Spirit-Empowered Community: Acts depicts women as integral to the early Christian community.

- Pentecost: Women were present at Pentecost (Acts 1:14), receiving the Holy Spirit and its accompanying gifts, including prophecy (Acts 2:17-18, quoting Joel 2:28-29, which explicitly states "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy").

- Active Participants: Women are shown engaging in prayer, hospitality, and evangelism (e.g., Lydia, Acts 16:14-15; Dorcas, Acts 9:36-39).

- Priscilla: Along with her husband Aquila, Priscilla is depicted as a co-worker with Paul and a teacher of Apollos (Acts 18:26), suggesting a significant role in theological instruction.

- House Churches: Given that many early Christian gatherings met in homes, women who owned these homes (e.g., Mary, mother of John Mark, Acts 12:12; Nympha, Colossians 4:15) likely played leadership roles as hosts and patrons.

8.3 Pauline Epistles: The Core of the Debate

The Pauline letters are the primary battleground for discussions on gender roles in the New Testament due to seemingly contradictory statements.

- Egalitarian Interpretations :

  - Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and

female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This verse is often considered the theological bedrock for egalitarianism, arguing that in Christ, traditional societal hierarchies, including gender-based ones, are nullified regarding spiritual standing and functional roles in the church. Scholars like Catherine Kroeger, Richard Clark Kroeger, and Ben Witherington III emphasize that this verse signifies a radical new order of equality in the Christian community.

- Women Co-Workers: Paul's greetings in Romans 16:1-16 are frequently cited, listing numerous women as co-workers (Phoebe, a *diakonos* or deacon/minister; Junia, possibly an "apostle"; Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus's mother, Nereus's sister, Julia). Egalitarian scholars argue that these women held significant, recognized leadership and ministry roles.

- 1 Corinthians 11:5: "But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head." This passage shows women publicly praying and prophesying in church, indicating active participation in spiritual gifts, albeit with a concern for cultural appropriateness (head covering).

- Contextual Readings of Restrictive Passages: Egalitarians interpret passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 ("women should remain silent in the churches") and 1 Timothy 2:11- 14 ("I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man") as:

  - Culturally Specific: Addressing particular issues in those specific congregations (e.g., unruly behavior, addressing false teaching, or concerns about pagan cult practices).

  - Limited Authority: Interpreting "authority" (*authentein*) in 1 Timothy 2:12 as a specific type of illicit or domineering authority, not a general prohibition against all teaching or leadership.

  - Disputed Translation/Meaning: The Greek word *authentein* ("to exercise authority" in 1 Tim 2:12) is rare and debated, with some arguing it means "to domineer" or "usurp authority," rather than legitimate authority.

  - Textual Integrity: Some scholars also question the authenticity or original placement of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, suggesting it might be a later scribal addition or a quotation of an opposing view.

- Pastoral Epistles' Emphasis: Some scholars argue that the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) reflect a concern for maintaining order and reputation in the emerging church in a hostile pagan environment, which sometimes led to more conservative social adaptations.

8.4 Complementarian Interpretations

- Creation Order and the Fall: Complementarians (e.g., Wayne Grudem, John Piper, Andreas Köstenberger) generally build their case from Genesis 1-3, emphasizing the order of creation (Adam first, then Eve as "helper") and the consequences of the Fall in Genesis 3:16 as establishing a divine pattern for male headship in the family and church. They see this pattern as consistent throughout Scripture.

- Pauline Headship and Submission: They interpret passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33 ("Wives, submit to your husbands... Husbands, love your wives...") and 1 Corinthians 11:3 ("the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man...") as prescriptive, establishing a divinely ordained hierarchy with male headship and female submission in marriage. The term *kephalē* ("head") is understood to mean "authority over."

- Prohibitions on Teaching and Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-14 ("I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet") is a central text for complementarians, seen as a universal and timeless prohibition against women holding authoritative teaching or leadership roles over men in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is also interpreted as a general prohibition on women speaking in an authoritative capacity in the church.

- Galatians 3:28 Context: Complementarians argue that Galatians 3:28 refers to spiritual equality in salvation, not to functional roles or the abolition of gender distinctions in the church or home. They maintain that while male and female are equal in worth before God, they have different, God-designed roles.

- Distinction between "Value" and "Role": While accepting spiritual equality, complementarians hold that God has ordained distinct roles for men and women within the family and church.

In conclusion, the literature on gender roles in the New Testament is characterized by a vigorous dialogue, primarily between complementarian and egalitarian perspectives. While both sides agree on the equal worth of men and women in God's eyes, their differing interpretations of key Pauline passages and the broader theological trajectory of the New Testament lead to divergent conclusions regarding the scope of women's roles in Christian leadership and the family. Jesus's radical treatment of women remains a central point of affirmation for both sides, albeit interpreted through different hermeneutical lenses.

Therefore, a literature review of gender roles in the New Testament reveals a dynamic tension between the prevailing patriarchal norms of the Roman and Jewish societies of the time and the radical, transformative teachings of Jesus and the early Christian movement. While certain passages appear to uphold traditional gender hierarchies, a broader reading emphasizes spiritual equality, mutual service, and significant female involvement in the burgeoning church. The theological declaration of spiritual equality in Christ (Galatians 3:28) challenged the prevailing norms. The "household codes," particularly when understood through the lens of mutual submission and Christ-like sacrificial love, transform typical ancient power dynamics into a call for reciprocal service and partnership. Modern scholarship continues to grapple with these texts, seeking to understand the biblical vision for gender in light of both historical context and timeless theological principles of equality, love, and redemption.

Chapter II : Theoretical Framework

CHAPTER II : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1 Contextualizing the Concepts of Equity, Responsibility, Duties and Rights in Biblical Narratives

Contextual background of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights in biblical scholarship (Smith 2020)

The exploration of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within biblical scholarship necessitates a nuanced understanding of their historical and theological contexts, as well as the interpretive frameworks that have shaped their conceptualization over time. According to Smith (2020), these categories are neither static nor universally defined; rather, they emerge from complex interactions between ancient socio-cultural norms and evolving religious doctrines. Biblical narratives often articulate notions of equity in terms markedly different from contemporary understandings shaped by modern legal and ethical philosophies. For instance, equity in the biblical context frequently intersects with divinely ordained justice, whereby fairness is not only a matter of human interaction but also a reflection of God's covenantal faithfulness and judgment. This theological underpinning situates equity as intrinsically bound to a moral cosmic order rather than an abstract principle of equality.

Responsibility in biblical texts extends beyond individual obligation to encompass collective duties that sustain both community and covenant. Smith emphasizes that these responsibilities, particularly those enshrined within the Torah and prophetic writings, are integrally linked to one's relational identity within the community of faith and to God. The Israelites' responsibilities, for example, encompass ritual observances, social justice mandates, and ethical comportment, all of which maintain the communal and theological integrity of the covenantal relationship. This perspective broadens the modern conception of responsibility, highlighting its inherently relational and sacred dimensions in biblical thought.

When assessing duties, biblical scholarship often underscores their differentiation from rights, with duties commonly framed as primary and rights as derivative or communal entitlements. Smith (2020) articulates that duties in the biblical milieu are generally positioned as divinely imposed imperatives that confer order and sanctify social roles. These encompass duties of care, hospitality, and justice, which are not merely pragmatic but serve to embody the ethical character of the community. The prophetic literature, notably, foregrounds duties toward the marginalized as essential indicators of a just society under God's scrutiny, thereby linking social ethics directly to religious fidelity.

Rights in the biblical narrative present a more contested and nuanced category. Unlike modern conceptions that emphasize individual freedoms and legal protections, biblical rights are often implicit and framed through the lens of covenantal inclusion and social responsibility. Smith highlights that rights function within biblical texts as protective measures for vulnerable groupsin particular, widows, orphans, and strangersanchored in the theological imperative of loving one's

neighbor and embodying divine justice. These rights are not codified in explicit legalistic terms comparable to contemporary frameworks but are nonetheless integral to maintaining social equilibrium and reflecting God's justice.

Moreover, Smith's analysis underscores the dynamic interplay among these concepts, illustrating how equity informs the equitable distribution of responsibilities and duties, which in turn condition the recognition of rights within the biblical communities. This holistic approach challenges reductionist interpretations that isolate these categories and instead advocates for a contextual reading that foregrounds their interdependence within the socio-religious fabric of ancient Israel and early Christian communities.

The growing scholarship acknowledging the importance of cultural, historical, and theological contexts for interpreting biblical texts also sheds light on the variability of these concepts across different biblical genres and temporal stages. For example, the ethical imperatives in the Pentateuch may prioritize covenantal fidelity and ritual purity, whereas wisdom literature situates responsibilities and rights within broader human experience and divine order, and New Testament writings often reconfigure these notions through Christological and ecclesial frameworks.

In relation to the broader research objectives of contextualizing equity, responsibility, duties, and rights in biblical narratives, Smith's work contributes a crucial foundation by situating these categories within their original milieus and theological rationales. His scholarship challenges contemporary readers to recognize that biblical understandings demand attentive, context-sensitive hermeneutics that resist anachronistic projections and instead appreciate the embeddedness of these ethical concepts in a worldview centered on covenant, divine justice, and communal integrity.

Research context and problem statement in biblical studies

The conceptualization of rights and duties in biblical texts cannot be disentangled from the broader theological framework that situates human agency under divine sovereignty. Equity, as depicted in the Hebrew Bible, often rests on the premise of justice as an extension of God's character and covenantal faithfulness, rather than an autonomous human right subject to secular legal scrutiny. Such a framework positions duties as relational commitments anchored in religious identity and communal belonging, rather than as universal entitlements detached from theological obligations. This theological underpinning invites a reassessment of modern assumptions about individual autonomy and legalistic interpretations of rights, emphasizing instead a vision of ethics that is deeply embedded in covenantal and communal contexts.

Moreover, the variable social stratifications present in biblical timesranging from patriarchal family structures to hierarchical tribal and monarchic systemsshape the expression and enforcement of duties and rights within the text. The roles and expectations assigned to different groups, notably women, slaves, foreigners, and the economically marginalized, reflect a stratified understanding of responsibility that challenges contemporary egalitarian ideals. Nonetheless, certain biblical narratives introduce transformative impulses that problematize established inequities and suggest proto-conceptions of fairness and mutual obligation. For example, the prophetic analyzes of social

injustice often foregrounds the plight of the oppressed and calls for restorative justice, thereby providing a critical lens through which to evaluate the development of equity within the biblical tradition.

Contemporary biblical scholarship must therefore navigate this intricate landscape by employing interdisciplinary approaches that integrate historical-critical methods, literary analysis, and socio-political theory. The task involves discerning how biblical texts articulate and embody evolving notions of responsibility and rights while recognizing the textual and cultural specificities that delimit these concepts. This endeavor contributes not only to academic understanding but also to contemporary theological and ethical debates, as modern readers grapple with the tension between ancient scriptural paradigms and current frameworks of justice, especially within faith communities negotiating issues of gender, agency, and social equity.

Consequently, the problem statement at the heart of this research lies in the imperative to contextualize and critically analyze how equity, responsibility, duties, and rights are conceptualized and operationalized within biblical narratives, avoiding anachronistic readings that project modern ideologies onto ancient texts while also acknowledging the formative influence these texts exert on

contemporary ethical discourse. By situating these concepts within their original historical and theological settings, the study aims to uncover layers of meaning that have significant implications for understanding the interface between religious tradition and notions of social justice, a critical endeavor given the enduring influence of biblical scripture in shaping societal norms and moral reasoning.

1.1 Definition of key concepts: equity, responsibility, duties, rights

Clarifying the terminology of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights constitutes an indispensable preliminary step for any rigorous analysis of their manifestations within biblical narratives. Each of these concepts, while interconnected, embodies distinct dimensions that require precise definition to avoid conflation and to illuminate their respective roles within the texts under scrutiny.

Equity, in its most fundamental sense, refers to a qualitative notion of fairness or justice, differentiated from strict equality. Unlike legal equality, which emphasizes uniform application of rules, equity demands attentiveness to context, relationships, and particularities that might warrant differential treatment to achieve fairness. Within biblical literature, equity is often inextricable from divine justice (Hebrew: *tzedek*), a concept that transcends human jurisprudence by rooting fairness in God's covenantal fidelity and moral character (e.g., Deuteronomy 16:20). Consequently, equity involves restoring balance within social relations, especially by addressing disparities affecting marginalized groups, a theme recurrent in prophetic admonitions (Isaiah 1:17, Amos 5:24). This nuanced understanding challenges modern interpretations that predominantly frame equity in secular legal terms, underscoring the theological substratum that governs biblical equity as an expression of divine will and relational harmony rather than impersonal justice.

Responsibility denotes the acknowledgment and acceptance of roles and duties that an

individual or group holds within a community, often predicated on interpersonal and covenantal bonds. In the biblical context, responsibility is not merely a personal obligation but is embedded within collective frameworks that assign accountability to individuals in relation to God and society. The Deuteronomic insistence on communal responsibility (e.g., Deuteronomy 6:2425) exemplifies this intertwining, where obedience to divine commandments entails practical stewardship over social order and ethical conduct. This conception involves both proactive and reactive elements: individuals must actively uphold just behavior and are held accountable for failures that disrupt covenantal harmony. Responsibility thus functions as a mediating category between divine demands and human agency, highlighting the intrinsic link between theological identity and moral comportment.

Duties can be understood as the specific acts or obligations prescribed to individuals or groups, often codified in law or ethical instruction, delineating expected behaviors within a normative framework. The biblical corpus, particularly in legal texts such as the Covenant Code (Exodus 2023) and the Holiness Code (Leviticus 1726), articulates diverse duties spanning ritual, social, and ethical domains, including care for the poor, honesty in commerce, and familial obedience. Duties differ from responsibility in that they often constitute externally imposed mandates rather than broader ethical commitments; however, they are interrelated in so far a fulfilling duties is a primary means by which one exercises responsibility. Moreover, the performance of duties reflects social stratifications and gender roles characteristic of ancient Israelite society, with some duties exclusively gendered or status-dependent, reaffirming the need to approach the term with sensitivity to historical particularities and cultural contexts.

Rights, as a concept, presents particular challenges within biblical studies due to its anachronistic connotations rooted in modern liberal legal traditions emphasizing individual entitlements and autonomy. In biblical narratives, explicit articulation of “rights” as individual claims is comparatively rare; instead, what might be identified as rights often emerge implicitly through protective legal provisions or covenantal guarantees afforded to various social actors. For instance, the biblical injunctions safeguarding the rights of foreigners, widows, and orphans (e.g., Deuteronomy 10:18; Exodus 22:2124) express collective ethical commitments that uphold social welfare and justice. These “rights” are tethered to relational and communal frameworks and thus differ markedly from contemporary notions predicated on universal human dignity independent of social status or religious affiliation. The asymmetry in power and hierarchy conventional in ancient societies further complicates direct parallels to modern rights discourse. Consequently, rights in the biblical context are best interpreted through lenses of protection, inclusion, and covenantal promise rather than as autonomous legal claims.

Interrelating these concepts reveals a complex matrix wherein equity functions as the overarching ideal of fairness grounded in divine justice; responsibility embodies the relational obligation to uphold this ideal; duties represent the concrete enactments of responsibility within societal and religious norms; and rights emerge as protective assurances that safeguard members of the community, especially the vulnerable, within this order. This conceptual framework echoes

the broader theological milieu of biblical texts, in which social ethics derive from covenantal relationships rather than secular notions of individualism. Establishing these definitions lays the groundwork for examining their specific articulations in biblical narratives, thereby providing a vital counterpoint to reductionist readings and enriching contemporary discourse on justice, agency, and gender in theological contexts.

In sum, approaching equity, responsibility, duties, and rights with an awareness of their theological, historical, and socio-cultural embeddedness is essential for a nuanced hermeneutic that respects the integrity of biblical literature. Clarifying these terms enables a critical yet empathetic engagement with ancient texts, acknowledging their formative influence on ethical thought while delineating their distance from modern conceptual frameworks, thus facilitating a more balanced and contextually informed analysis throughout this study.

1.2 Examining how these concepts operate within biblical narratives

Building on the prior clarification of key terms such as equity, responsibility, duties, and rights, the present research seeks to examine how these concepts operate within biblical narratives, not only as abstract principles but as relational and theological realities embedded within specific sociocultural and historical matrices. The central question guiding this study asks: In what ways do biblical narratives contextualize equity, responsibility, duties, and rights, and how do these conceptualizations inform contemporary understandings of justice, agency, and social ethics within the Judeo-Christian tradition? This inquiry requires unpacking the multilayered representations of these concepts, considering their theological foundations, narrative functions, and socio-historical underpinnings, with particular attention to the intersections of gender and agency.

Subordinate research questions arise to provide a structured pathway toward addressing this overarching inquiry. First, how do biblical texts articulate equity as a divine and communal ideal, and how is this notion differentiated from secular or legalistic interpretations of fairness? Second, what is the nature of responsibility in the biblical worldview, especially in terms of individual and collective agency, and how does it relate to covenantal identity and ethical stewardship? Third, in what ways are duties prescribed and enacted, particularly through gendered roles and social hierarchies, and how do these shape or constrain agency within the narratives? Fourth, what forms do rights take within biblical law and storytelling, especially considering marginalized figures such as women, widows, and foreigners, and how do these inform or challenge modern rights discourse?

Together, these questions seek to elucidate the dynamic interplay of ethical and theological categories within scriptural texts and their implications for contemporary debates on justice and social responsibility.

The objectives of this research extend beyond mere descriptive analysis toward critical contextualization and hermeneutical engagement. Primarily, the study aims to produce an intricate, context-sensitive interpretation of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights as they emerge in both the Hebrew Bible and selected New Testament narratives, emphasizing their covenantal and communal dimensions. This involves a comparative approach that critiques secular and modern

legalistic readings, situating biblical ethics within ancient Near Eastern cultural frameworks and theological paradigms. Additionally, the study seeks to foreground the gendered dimensions of these concepts, recognizing how biblical texts both reflect and construct gendered identities, responsibilities, and rights, thereby influencing individual and collective agency. By doing so, this project intends to contribute to broader scholarly conversations in biblical ethics, theological anthropology, and gender studies, offering nuanced perspectives that challenge reductive interpretations.

The scope of the current study issues necessarily delineates the parameters of inquiry while acknowledging the vastness of biblical material and interpretive traditions. The focus will be primarily on canonical texts that centrally engage issues of social justice, covenantal law, and communal ethics, with emphasis on passages that explicitly or implicitly address themes of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights. This includes, but is not limited to, the legal corpora within the Pentateuch, the prophetic literature that critiques social injustice, and narrative accounts within both Testaments that highlight relational dynamics and moral obligations, such as parables or legal pronouncements of Jesus and apostolic writings. While the investigation includes attention to gender roles and agency, it does not aim to exhaustively catalogue all gender-related passages but strategically selects texts that exemplify the interrelation between theological ethics and gendered social roles. Geographically and temporally, the study remains anchored in the biblical milieu, occasionally drawing on comparative ancient Near Eastern legal and ethical texts where pertinent for contextualization but refrains from extensive extra-biblical theological engagement. Methodologically, the research employs a combination of historical-critical, literary, and theological analysis to maintain robust interpretive rigor.

By framing research questions that grapple with both conceptual clarity and narrative-contextual analysis, setting precise objectives that integrate theological and gender-sensitive dimensions, and defining a thesis scope attentive to appropriate textual and methodological boundaries, this study seeks to navigate the complexities of biblical ethics. It thereby aims to illuminate how ancient scriptural texts negotiate fundamental human concernsfairness, accountability, obligation, and protectionin ways that resonate with contemporary ethical challenges, providing fertile ground for ongoing dialogue about equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within faith communities and academic discourse alike.

1.3 Equity conceptualizations in Old Testament scholarship

Old Testament scholarship presents a rich but complex tapestry of conceptualizations of equityoften articulated through the Hebrew term *mishpat* and related notions such as ***tzedakah,*** which are infused with theological, social, and legal dimensions. Unlike modern secular constructions of equity primarily grounded in formal legal equality or impartiality, Old Testament conceptions must be understood as inherently relational and covenantal, embedded within a framework where divine justice and human responsibility converge. Thus, equity transcends mere procedural fairness to embody the faithful enactment of God’s will, manifesting as an ethical ideal

that governs the community's collective life as well as individual behavior.

Biblical equity as a divine mandate reflects a profound concern for social order, where justice ensures the protection and flourishing of vulnerable groupswidows, orphans, strangers, and the poorwho otherwise risk exclusion from the covenantal community. This emphasis, evident in Deuteronomic legislation (e.g., Deut 10:18; 24:17-22) and prophetic exhortations (Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:24), situates equity not simply as fairness abstracted from context, but as the restoration and maintenance of right relationships grounded in God's fidelity to the oppressed. Walter Brueggemann's seminal analysis frames *mishpat* as a term that oscillates between "justice" in the sense of juridical verdict and "equity" in the sense of social remedy, underscoring the dynamic interplay of legal authority and ethical responsibility (Brueggemann 1997). Through this lens, equity demands active intervention on behalf of the disadvantaged, positioning justice as a proactive and communal endeavor rather than a passive ideal.

Critical to Old Testament discussions is the recognition that equity often relates intimately with divine covenantal responsibility, whereby the people of Israel are called to imitate God's just character as covenant partners. For instance, the narrative of Exodus and the Sinai covenant establish patterns of responsibility where leadership and people alike bear duties to enact justice grounded not in human whim but in divine revelation (Exod 22:21-27). This theological orientation distinguishes Old Testament equity by embedding it within a theocentric worldview, where human social ethics are inseparable from faithful response to God. The legal codes thus function not merely as social contracts but as expressions of covenantal trust and accountability, enforcing a relational justice that sustains Israel's identity and mission.

Within scholarly debates, tensions arise regarding the extent to which Old Testament equity can be universalized versus particularized to Israelite identity. Some scholars, following the historical-critical method, emphasize the contingency of equity within the socio-political realities of ancient Near Eastern monarchies, constraining its applicability predominantly to the Israelite community (Wright 2006). Others argue for a more prophetic and visionary trajectory, reading texts such as Micah 6:8 or Isaiah 58 as articulating an ethical horizon that transcends ethnic boundaries and anticipates a more inclusive justice. This dialectic reveals how equity in Old Testament scholarship functions at the intersection of concrete historical contexts and enduring theological aspirations, requiring interpretation that balances diachronic evolution with the continuity of divine justice themes.

Gender also emerges as a critical axis through which equity and related ethical concepts are negotiated in Old Testament texts. Feminist and gender-critical scholars highlight that while the Hebrew Bible reflects patriarchal social structures, its law codes and prophetic literature frequently call for protections and rights aimed at women's welfare and agency, albeit within constrained frameworks. Legal provisions like gleaning laws (Lev 19:9-10) and protection of widow's rights (Exod 22:22-24) reveal an embedded concern for equity that attends to gendered vulnerabilities, reflecting a nuanced ethical universe where duties and rights engage familial and communal

dimensions of agency. Arianne J. Cohen's work demonstrates how these provisions can be read both as reflecting patriarchal norms and as radical attempts to mitigate injustice within those social realities (Cohen 2018). Consequently, equity in the Old Testament cannot be disentangled from its gendered expressions, which both enforce and challenge existing hierarchies and roles.

The methodological approaches within Old Testament scholarship further shape conceptualizations of equity by incorporating literary, historical, and theological perspectives. Literary analysis explores how narrative structures and rhetorical strategies in texts like the

Judges or the prophetic oracles underscore themes of justice and equity as charged, urgent ethical demands, while historical-critical scholarship situates equity within ancient Near Eastern legal traditions, allowing comparative insights into its distinctiveness and

commonalities (Köstenberger and Patterson 2011). Theological interpretation, moreover, interrogates the conceptual link between God's character and human justice, emphasizing that equity is not only a social ideal but a reflection of divine holiness and compassion. Thus, the multifaceted scholarly discourse on Old Testament equity underscores its holistic complexity as simultaneously legal, ethical, theological, and social.

In sum, Old Testament scholarship conceptualizes equity as a multifarious ideal deeply rooted in covenantal theology and social ethics, distinct from secular notions of fairness by virtue of its divine grounding and relational orientation. It demands attentiveness to vulnerable members within the community, rests upon a responsible enactment of God's justice, and operates within culturally and historically specific frameworks that both constrain and inform its development. This nuanced understanding resonates with the broader research aim of this study, which seeks to contextualize equity alongside responsibility, duties, and rights as interwoven theological and ethical constructs within biblical narrativesparticularly as they interface with questions of gender and agency. By illuminating these scholarly debates and interpretive complexities, the present analysis lays a critical foundation for comprehending how Old Testament equity functions not only as a normative ideal but as a lived reality shaping communal identity and moral praxis.

1.4 Review on Equity in Biblical Narratives

Equity concepts in Old Testament texts (Johnson 2018) An examination of equity within Old Testament texts reveals a complex tapestry of legal, ethical, and theological nuances that shape the understanding of fairness and justice in Israelite society. Johnson (2018) undertakes a comprehensive survey of how equity is conceptualized and operationalized across diverse genres of Old Testament literature, foregrounding its embeddedness within covenantal relations and communal norms rather than as an abstract or purely individualistic principle. Unlike modern secular notions of equity, which often emphasize formal equality or proportional fairness in distributive contexts, the Old Testament depiction is inherently relational and rooted in divine ordination, where equity functions as an extension of *mishpat*, or just ordering, mediated by Yahweh's covenant with Israel.

Johnson's analysis begins by tracing the semantic range of terms frequently rendered as equity, such as *mishpat, sedekah* (righteousness or justice), and *tsedeq*, highlighting that these terms frequently overlap in Old Testament texts but yield distinct theological emphases. *Mishpat* often denotes judicial rightness or legal equity, emphasizing corrective justice that restores balance disrupted by wrong actions. In this framework, equity emerges not only as an ideal but as a duty incumbent upon judges, leaders, and the covenant community to maintain social order and divine fidelity (Johnson, 2018, p. 45). For example, in Exodus 23:1-3, the injunctions against false testimonies and partiality underline the imperative for equitable judgment driven by truthfulness and impartiality rather than favoritism or corrupt interests.

The prophetic literature, according to Johnson, deepens the discourse on equity by increasingly linking it to social justice, particularly the fair treatment of marginalized groupswidows, orphans, strangersas emblematic of fidelity to God's covenant and ethical responsibility. Prophets such as Amos and Micah articulate equity as a divine demand for the rectification of social injustices, framing it as the hallmark of covenantal obedience (Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8). This shift introduces a moral dimension into equity that transcends legalistic interpretations, tying it to an overarching responsibility to foster communal well-being and protection of vulnerable populations. Johnson emphasizes that such passages illustrate equity as a dynamic ethical force that negotiates between individual accountability and collective responsibility within a holistic theological worldview.

Moreover, Johnson's survey notes the functional role of legal codes, particularly those in the Pentateuch, where equity is systematically institutionalized through laws regulating property rights, restitution, and economic fairness, thereby shaping societal structures. For instance, the Jubilee ordinance in Leviticus 25 institutionalizes equitable restoration by mandating the return of ancestral lands and the emancipation of indentured servants every fiftieth year, thereby addressing systemic inequalities and preventing the ossification of poverty (Johnson, 2018, pp. 7879). This demonstrates that equity, in Old Testament thought, is not merely a principle applied ad hoc but is embedded within a cyclical temporal framework that reflects God's providential governance and concerns for social renewal.

An important contribution of Johnson's work lies in articulating the way equity in the Old Testament is intertwined with notions of divine justice and mercy, operating within a covenantal matrix that defines social and religious identity. Equity is not a secular standard but is perceptible as a reflection of God's character, to which the community aspires and by which its members are measured. This interrelation is critical for understanding equity not as an isolated ethical value but as integrally linked to responsibility, duties, and rightsthe very categories explored in the preceding methodological framework. The covenantal paradigm enforces a moral ecology where equity mediates between divine commands and human social interactions, balancing justice and compassion under the authoritative imperative of Yahweh.

Johnson also highlights the dialectical tensions present in Old Testament equity, noting occasions where legal prescriptions seemingly conflict with equitable outcomessuch as the

differential treatment of insiders versus foreigners, or gender-specific lawsthereby inviting readers to consider the contextual, socio-historical conditions shaping these texts. Such tensions underscore that equity is neither monolithic nor universally applied with modern egalitarian expectations, but rather negotiates complexities within a stratified society deeply conscious of communal boundaries and divine election. This critical nuance allows for a richer hermeneutical engagement, acknowledging both the ethical aspirations and limitations internal to the biblical worldview.

In sum, Johnson (2018) offers a thorough and critical mapping of equity concepts in the Old Testament, revealing them as multifaceted constructs deeply embedded within covenantal theology, societal structure, and prophetic ethics. This survey complements the methodological approach outlined previously by providing specific textual and thematic loci where equity intersects with responsibilities, duties, and rights, furnishing fertile ground for subsequent exegetical and theological analysis. Understanding equity in this manner enriches interpretative fidelity to the biblical corpus and prepares the ground for exploring continuity and divergence in New Testament and broader Judeo-Christian ethical discourse.

1.4.1 Equity and social justice in New Testament contexts (Martinez 2016)

The New Testament presents a distinct yet interconnected stage for the development of equity and social justice, building upon the Old Testament foundations while reorienting them within the emerging Christocentric paradigm. Martinez (2019) meticulously examines this evolution, emphasizing how equity in New Testament contexts transcends strictly juridical frameworks to encompass broader theological and ethical dimensions rooted in the incarnation, ministry, and teachings of Jesus Christ. Unlike the Old Testament's covenantal and communal matrix, where equity is closely tied to Israel's identity and legal codes, the New Testament situates equity within the radical proclamation of the kingdom of Godushering in new socioreligious dynamics that challenge existing hierarchies and invite reconfigured understandings of responsibility, duties, and rights.

Central to Martinez's analysis is the notion that New Testament equity is intrinsically linked to the life and ethos of Jesus, who embodies divine justice in praxis through inclusive acts and parabolic teachings. This is evident in texts such as Luke 4:18-19, where Jesus declares a mission to "proclaim good news to the poor…to set the oppressed free," which implies a preferential concern for socially marginalized and dispossessed groups. This preferential option for the poor echoes and reinterprets the Old Testament's prophetic emphasis but is undergirded by a soteriological hope that justice and equity find their ultimate fulfillment in the coming kingdom. Martinez argues that equity here ceases to be merely a legal or social ideal and becomes a transformative principle animating the community of faith, calling believers to embody reciprocal relationships grounded in humility and service (Martinez, 2019, p. 112).

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul's epistles provide a critical locus for understanding the practical and theological implications of equity within early Christian communities, which were marked by ethnic, socio-economic, and gender diversity. Martinez highlights Galatians 3:28 as a paradigmatic

text where equity is articulated in the abolition of divisions"there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." This radical egalitarianism does not purge distinctions outright but subverts their exclusionary function, enabling a new identity shaped by faith in Christ that redefines social roles and rights. Paul's vision promotes an equity that is both ontologicalrooted in union with Christand ethicalexpressed in mutual love and accountability (Martinez, 2019, pp. 130-134). Yet, Martinez also carefully notes the tensions inherent in Pauline communities, where certain instructions appear to preserve hierarchical norms (e.g., gender roles in household codes), reflecting the ongoing negotiation between transformative ethics and embedded cultural realities.

In addition, Martinez explores the Johannine corpus, where equity is framed in terms of divine love and community belonging, emphasizing the relational and spiritual dimensions of justice. The call to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34) reconstitutes equity as an ethical imperative that transcends legalistic measures to create inclusive, sacrificial solidarity among believers. This theological theme underscores the intrinsic dignity and responsibility of each member within the body of Christ, thereby expanding the understanding of equity to incorporate concepts of rights and duties that are mediated by relational reciprocity and imitatio Christi (Martinez, 2019, p. 142).

Martinez also deals with early Christian communal practices, particularly those described in Acts and the Pauline letters, which reflect tangible expressions of social justice closely aligned with equity. The sharing of goods in Acts 2:44-45 and the collection for the Jerusalem church (1 Corinthians 16:1-4) demonstrate how equity was operationalized through redistribution and mutual care, signaling that early Christian identity entailed active participation in social restoration. This praxis was not merely pragmatic but constituted theological witness, manifesting God's reign in everyday life. Martinez argues that such practices reveal a nuanced interplay between individual responsibility, communal duties, and distributive rights, providing a prototype for subsequent Christian social ethics rooted in the New Testament worldview.

It is crucial to contextualize Martinez's exploration alongside the preceding Old Testament analysis, as it illuminates continuity and divergence within biblical equity discourse. While Johnson (2018) foregrounds equity's embeddedness in covenantal law and prophetic social critique, Martinez's work demonstrates how the New Testament radicalizes these notions, situating equity within a redemptive framework that destabilizes socio-religious barriers and redefines agency within the faith community. This progression reveals a dynamic hermeneutical trajectory where equity evolves from a divinely ordained social order into a transformative ethic bound to Christological identity and eschatological hope.

Nevertheless, Martinez also attends to the inherent complexities and ambiguities within New Testament texts, acknowledging that while the gospel promotes equitable visions, lived realities often reflected enduring inequalitiesespecially regarding gender and ethnicitythat required ongoing theological reflection and community discernment. Such tensions invite a critical reading that neither idealizes the text nor dismisses its radical calls for justice. Instead, they offer fertile ground for engaging with the biblical witness on equity in ways attentive to historical context and

contemporary application.

In sum, Martinez's (2019) examination elucidates New Testament equity as a multifaceted construct integrating theological Christology, ethical mandates, and social praxis. This expanded vision situates equity not only as an aspect of justice but as a constitutive element of Christian identity and communal life, intricately linked to responsibilities, duties, and rights in a manner that both inherits and transcends Old Testament paradigms.

1.4.2 Historical background of responsibility and duty in Israelite law codes (Brown 2017)

The foundation of responsibility and duty within Israelite law codes reveals an intricate interplay between communal cohesion, covenantal obligations, and socio-legal structures that differed significantly from modern conceptions of individual agency and rights. Brown (2017) meticulously unpacks these historical definitions by situating Israelite laws within their broader Ancient Near Eastern milieu, emphasizing how responsibility was less a matter of abstract individual accountability than a reified collective embeddedness. Unlike contemporary juridical paradigms predicated on individual autonomy and rational legal subjecthood, Israelite laws constructed responsibility as an inherent relationality, wherein each person's duties were inherently tied to their role within the covenant community, agricultural economy, and familial hierarchies.

Central to Brown's analysis is the contention that Israelite legal texts articulate responsibility through a matrix of communal reciprocity and divine sanction, which served both to enforce social order and to embody theological commitments. For example, the surrender of personal vengeance in favor of prescribed legal remedies reflects an understanding of duty that transcends personal volition, rooted instead in the maintenance of covenantal peace and divine justice (Brown, 2017, p. 58). This communalized responsibility contrasts sharply with modern legal notions of individual culpability; it anchors duty within the collective's sustenance rather than private moral choice. Here, responsibility is closely allied with ritual and ethical mandates that articulate an interdependent web of relationships undergirded by divine ordinances.

Moreover, Brown articulates how the Israelite law codes incorporate various gradations and categories of personssuch as landowners, tenants, Levites, women, and resident alienseach bearing distinct duties and entitlements that mutually reinforce the socio-religious hierarchy. Notably, responsibility in these laws often encompasses the protection of the vulnerable, including widows, orphans, and the sojourner, not as abstract human rights but as duties embedded in the covenant's ethical framework (Brown, 2017, p. 73). This responsibility also intersects with the notion of collective guilt and restitution, wherein infractions committed by individuals necessitate redress affecting families or clans, thereby reinforcing collective solidarity and social equilibrium.

Brown's historical perspective critically nuances the relationship between duty and equity by demonstrating that Israelite conceptions of responsibility were tightly bound to temporal and spatial contexts, reflecting a dynamic balance between justice and mercy. For instance, laws concerning sabbatical years and gleaning emphasize an economic responsibility toward the disenfranchised, framed within a theology of divine provision and social renewal rather than secular redistribution

(Brown, 2017, pp. 8489). This theological underpinning imbues duty with an ethical intentionality distinct from modern secular rights discourses, emphasizing restoration and communal flourishing rather than adversarial legal enforcement alone.

In dialogue with Chen's (2022) critique of prevailing hermeneutical approaches, Brown's historical definitions offer a corrective by foregrounding the socio-historical and covenantal situatedness of responsibility that Chen argues is often elided in modern readings. While Chen highlights the ideological flattening of biblical equity that occludes the ambivalences and contingent power relations inherent in these texts, Brown provides the necessary legal-historical grounding that elucidates these tensions through a meticulous reconstruction of law codes as instruments of both inclusion and exclusion within Israelite society. Brown's analysis affirms Chen's insistence on viewing responsibility not as a monolithic, universal norm but as a culturally embedded, mutable construct informed by covenantal theology and communal priorities.

Through this perspective, the Israelite law codes emerge less as static norms and more as vibrant legal-theological discourses mediating between ideals of divine justice and the lived realities of stratified social organization. Brown's scholarship thus invites contemporary interpreters to resist anachronistic projections of modern legal principles onto biblical texts and instead to appreciate the complexity by which responsibility and duty intersect with issues of equity, hierarchy, and social welfare in the biblical tradition. This approach not only deepens the historicized understanding of biblical law but also illuminates the political and ethical valences embedded in ancient justice discourses, which remain crucial for contextualizing contemporary conversations around equity and responsibility within Judeo-Christian ethical frameworks.

2 Feminist approaches to agency in scriptural texts

Within the complex terrain of biblical covenants as social contracts, feminist approaches of agency introduce critical perspectives that challenge and enrich traditional interpretations of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights. These frameworks foreground the ways scriptural texts engage with gendered power relations and marginalized voices, thereby reconstructing agency not merely as formal participation within divinely ordained contracts but as transformative praxis that contests hierarchical structures. Feminist readings of biblical narratives criticize the patriarchal monopolization of agency by male figures and dominant theological discourses, interrogating the canonical silences and exclusions that have historically diminished women's roles in shaping covenantal community. Liberationist models expand this critique further by situating biblical agency within contexts of systemic oppression, emphasizing the pursuit of justice as intrinsically linked to the agency of the oppressed in resisting and restructuring inequitable social orders.

Feminist biblical scholarship often highlights the ambivalent representation of women, underscoring how scriptural texts both constrain and enable female agency. For example, scholars such as Phyllis Trible and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza have elaborated on women's biblical roles as sites of latent subversion rather than mere passivity. Trible's method of "reading with" rather than "reading against" the text uncovers narrative strategies that depict women as active interpreters

and participants in covenantal faithfulness, albeit within patriarchal constraints (Trible, 1978). Fiorenza's concept of "kyriarchy," a term denoting intersecting systems of domination including patriarchy, foregrounds the relational nature of agency, where women exercise power through communal networks and resistive acts embedded within scripture (Fiorenza, 1992). This reconceptualization challenges the previously assumed binary of male public agency versus female private subordination, revealing how rights and responsibilities within biblical covenants are negotiated through gendered experiences rather than abstract universal categories.

Liberation theologians similarly emphasize the dynamics of agency related to systemic marginalization and the necessity of praxis for genuine equity. Gustavo Gutiérrez's theology posits that agency arises from the praxis-oriented struggle of the oppressed, which in biblical narratives resonates with the motif of God's preferential option for the marginalized (Gutiérrez, 1973). This perspective intersects with feminist models by recognizing that equity is inseparable from the empowerment of those whose rights and duties have been historically suppressed or devalued. For instance, the Exodus narrative offers a paradigmatic liberationist reading where Israel's covenantal formation is understood not only as a legalistic arrangement but as an emancipatory event that redefines agency in terms of collective liberation from oppression (Deut 10:18-19; Exod 3:7-8). In this light, agency encompasses both the responsibility to uphold covenantal ethics and the right to resist unjust power structures that contravene divine justice.

Additionally, the implications of these feminist and liberationist interventions extend to reimagining the very notions of duties and rights within biblical covenants. Contrary to classical social contract interpretations emphasizing mutual consent and reciprocal obligations primarily among free male agents, these models underscore the embeddedness of power asymmetries that shape access to rights and capacity for fulfilling duties. Feminist theologians argue that the distribution of duties in biblical texts often reflects patriarchal priorities that marginalize women's religious and social agency, necessitating a hermeneutic of suspicion that critically assesses normative assumptions about gendered responsibilities (Ruether, 1983). Liberationist frameworks likewise advocate for reading biblical duties through the lens of justice praxis, where responsibilities are not merely compliance with divinely imposed mandates but active engagement in dismantling structures of exploitation and exclusion.

Moreover, examples such as Deborah's judicial role (Judges 45), the prophetic ministry of Miriam (Exodus 15:2021), or the solidarity with marginalized groups mandated in Deuteronomy (Deut 24:17-22) function as scriptural anchors for these expanded models of agency. These instances contest simplistic patriarchal readings by demonstrating that women and oppressed communities possess and exercise covenantal agency, embodying rights and enacting duties that contribute to the preservation and reform of covenantal justice. This reveals a polyvalent conception of agency within scripture, one that integrates gender and power analysis with theological anthropology. The exercise of agency, therefore, must be understood as contextually situated and often contested, reflecting ongoing negotiations between divine fidelity and sociopolitical realities.

In conclusion, feminist and liberationist models of agency offer indispensable tools for reinterpreting biblical covenants within the theoretical framework of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights. By interrogating patriarchal and oppressive structures within the scriptural texts, these models expose the limitations of traditional social contract analogies and invite a more nuanced appreciation of how agency is embodied and exercised. They emphasize the transformative potential of marginalized subjects to renegotiate the terms of covenantal participation, thereby aligning biblical ethics more closely with contemporary concerns for social justice and gender equity. Such reexaminations not only deepen our theological understanding of agency but also illuminate pathways for responsible, equitable participation in modern faith communities.

2.1 Textual and Contextual Analysis

2.1.1 Criteria for selecting biblical narratives

The determination of appropriate criteria for selecting biblical narratives constitutes a fundamental methodological step in contextualizing concepts of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within the scriptural corpus. Given the intricate interplay of theological, historical, and socio-political factors that shape biblical texts, any attempt at discerning narratives relevant to these themes requires careful calibration to avoid reductive or anachronistic readings. The criteria must thus be both hermeneutically rigorous and contextually sensitive, enabling an analysis that remains faithful to the texts' complexity while attending to their situatedness within particular communities and power structures. This process builds upon the insights of postcolonial biblical criticism by embracing interpretive frameworks that are alert to the historical processes of marginalization and reinterpretation outlined previously.

Foremost among the guiding principles is the need to identify narratives that explicitly or implicitly engage with notions of equity and justice as lived and contested realities rather than solely abstract ideals. Equity, as the pursuit of fairness attuned to differing circumstances and needs, appears in biblical stories that foreground disparities in social status, gender, ethnic identity, or economic power. For instance, the Exodus narrative and its attendant legal texts emphasize liberation from structural oppression (cf. Exodus 312), while wisdom literature, such as parts of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, grapples with issues of social responsibility and moral accountability. Selection criteria must therefore privilege narratives wherein duties and rights are embedded within communal relations and negotiations, reflecting empirical socio-religious contexts rather than idealized theological constructs. This prioritization resonates with postcolonial critiques that caution against universalizing interpretations detached from historical realities (Sugirtharajah, 2002).

Another essential criterion concerns the representation of plurality within the biblical canon, encompassing diverse genres, historical epochs, and sociocultural milieus. By including prophetic declarations, legal codes, wisdom sayings, and narrative texts, the analysis gains access to multifaceted conceptions of responsibility and agency that intersect with gender and ethnicity. For example, prophetic texts like Amos or Micah vociferously demand social justice and equitable treatment of marginalized groups, offering perspectives on communal duties that challenge elite

dominance (Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8). In parallel, legal texts from the Pentateuch contain intricate frameworks for rights and obligations that shape communal cohesion and individual comportment (e.g., Deuteronomy 15:711). Moreover, narratives featuring female figures, such as Ruth and Esther,

provide nuanced insights into gendered expressions of agency and moral responsibility that disrupt patriarchal assumptions. The inclusion of such diverse materials facilitates a robust and intersectional interpretation aligned with feminist and postcolonial methodologies (Nadar, 2011). A further methodological consideration involves the hermeneutic stance toward the power dynamics operative within the biblical narratives themselves and the subsequent histories of their interpretation. Narratives selected must allow critical engagement with how rights and duties are portrayed in relation to systemic inequalities and modes of resistance. This involves examining the ways marginalized characters articulate or are denied agency, thereby exposing implicit hierarchies and contestations embedded in the text. For example, the story of Hagar (Genesis 16; 21) raises issues of displacement, vulnerability, and divine care that challenge dominant frameworks privileging patriarchal legitimacy. Similarly, the narratives of the Exodus and exile incorporate notions of collective responsibility and covenantal fidelity that have been variously interpreted as instruments of both liberation and control. Attending to such texts' ambivalences supports an interpretive strategy aware of the dialectical nature of duties and rights, as shaped by ongoing struggles within and beyond biblical communities (Ukpong, 2006).

In addition, the criterion of relevance to contemporary socio-ethical concerns must not be overlooked, particularly regarding the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and colonial histories as foregrounded in the preceding discussion. The selected narratives need to serve as heuristic devices facilitating dialogue between the biblical world and present-day discourses on equity. This entails consciously choosing texts that, when reread through lenses such as postcolonial and feminist criticism, challenge inherited paradigms and stimulate emancipatory readings. For example, the prophetic calls for justice resonate with modern movements advocating for gender equality and Indigenous rights, while the legal provisions for the "other" in Leviticus and Deuteronomy offer ground for reconstructing relational ethics attentive to hospitality and care. The intertextual and contextual resonance of such narratives validates their selection as vehicles for rethinking duties and rights in ways that address the enduring legacies of colonialism and patriarchy (Spivak, 1988).

Finally, scholarly viability and accessibility constitute pragmatic yet indispensable factors. The chosen biblical narratives must be well-documented, with sufficient exegetical resources and textual variants allowing expert's to engage in nuanced analysis.This criterion ensures that interpretations rest on sound philological and historical foundations while being open to revision and contestation within academic discourse. Incorporating well-studied texts with rich commentarial traditions enables the integration of multiple hermeneutical voices and methodological perspectives, fostering interpretive pluralism consistent with a decolonizing approach. Furthermore, the selection process must remain attentive to linguistic and cultural translation challenges, preventing distortions that may arise from imposing dominant linguistic frameworks on non-Western contexts (Sugirtharajah, 2002).

In sum, the criteria for selecting representative biblical narratives require a multifaceted approach that harmonizes fidelity to textual integrity with responsiveness to the socio-political contexts from which contemporary concerns about equity, responsibility, duties, and rights emerge. This approach not only sustains the rigorous demands of textual and contextual analysis but also aligns with the transformative imperative of postcolonial biblical criticism to reclaim marginalized voices and resist universalist impositions. Through deliberately choosing narratives that embody contested and relational conceptions of rights and duties, the methodology lays the groundwork for an interpretative praxis that honors diversity and fosters theological and ethical renewal grounded in the lived realities of historically situated communities.

2.1.2 Mixed-method approach combining narrative criticism and socio-historical analysis

The integration of a mixed-method approach that combines narrative criticism with socio-historical analysis offers a potent methodological framework for examining biblical narratives in their full complexity, particularly with respect to conceptualizing equity, responsibility, duties, and rights. This approach emerges as a natural extension of the rigorous selection criteria outlined previously, as it allows for both an in-depth textual engagement and a contextual exploration of the multiple layers of meaning embedded within the biblical stories. By weaving together the interpretive strengths of narrative criticismattuned to the internal dynamics, character interactions, and literary devices within the textsand socio-historical analysis, which situates these texts within their broader cultural, political, and historical milieus, the methodology transcends purely textual or purely contextual readings. This dual focus enables a nuanced understanding of how equity and related concepts are constructed, contested, and negotiated within the biblical corpus.

Narrative criticism, with its emphasis on the structure, plot, character development, point of view, and narrative voice, provides a lens through which the ethical and social dimensions of biblical narratives can be discerned in the immediacy of the story world. This method foregrounds how duties and rights are dramatized through narrative action and interpersonal relationships rather than solely through abstract legal pronouncements or theological axioms. For example, applying narrative criticism to the figure of Hagar reveals how her marginal status and her interactions with Sarah and Abraham communicate tensions around agency, vulnerability, and divine justice within a patriarchal setting (Genesis 16; 21). Rather than isolating legal elements or prophetic mandates, narrative criticism helps to expose how widespread social inequalities and notions of responsibility are experienced at the level of individual and communal storytelling. This approach is especially critical when attending to gendered expressions of agency, as seen in the stories of Ruth and Esther, where narrative form shapes the possibilities and constraints imposed upon female protagonists, thereby informing complex readings of equity within patriarchal societies.

However, narrative criticism alone risks neglecting the extratextual forces that inform these stories' emergence, reception, and interpretation. Socio-historical analysis complements this by elucidating the historical realities of the biblical world, including economic structures, political power relations, social stratification, and cultural norms that frame the lived experiences reflected in

the texts. This form of analysis draws upon archaeological findings, ancient Near Eastern legal codes, socio- anthropological studies, and historical-critical scholarship to reconstruct the contexts in which the notions of rights and responsibilities were negotiated and inscribed. For instance, understanding the socio-political environment of ancient Israelite society illuminates why legal provisions in Deuteronomy emphasize obligations toward the widow, orphan, and foreigner (Deut 15:7-11), revealing these texts as responses to systemic marginalization rather than mere ritualistic prescriptions. Intersectional socio-historical inquiry further highlights the interplay of ethnicity, gender, and class hierarchies, and offering insights into how biblical texts both reflect and challenge these orders. The prophetic critiques of injusticesuch as Amos's denunciation of exploitation (Amos 5:24) gain greater force when situated within the realities of monarchic Israel and its social inequalities.

The strength of combining narrative criticism with socio-historical analysis lies in their mutual reinforcement, enabling an interpretive praxis that transports the reader into the hermeneutical horizon of the biblical communities while retaining critical awareness of the historical conditions that shaped textual production and transmission. This hybrid methodology responds directly to the imperative, raised in postcolonial and feminist biblical criticism, to resist ahistorical or universalizing readings that efface power dynamics and marginalized voices. By excavating both the narrative strategies that give shape to concepts of equity and the socio-historical frameworks that condition these narratives, scholars can discern how rights and duties were simultaneously normative ideals, social practices, and contested sites of tension. For example, the Exodus narrative's emphasis on liberation from oppression cannot be fully apprehended without appreciating both the literary motifs of deliverance and covenant and the actualities of ancient slavery, servitude, and empire (Exodus 3-12). Integrating these perspectives illuminates the dialectical character of biblical notions of justice, which operate within frameworks of divine command, community cohesion, and resistance to domination.

Furthermore, the mixed-method approach enhances the capacity to address contemporary concerns surrounding gender, ethnicity, and postcolonial identity by facilitating readings that bridge ancient and modern contexts without collapsing their distinctiveness. By tracking how narrative agency and socio-political agency converge or diverge across biblical stories, researchers can critically evaluate the ongoing legacy of these texts in shaping ethical models and social imaginings today. This is particularly significant for reinterpreting communal responsibilities and individual rights through lenses that critique patriarchal hegemony and colonial impositions, thereby promoting emancipatory theologies attentive to marginalized subjects. For example, the legal and narrative treatment of the "other" in Leviticus and Deuteronomy offers a methodological gateway to reconstructing relational ethics rooted in hospitality and reciprocity, resonating with global movements for social justice and decolonization. The attentive balancing of close textual reading with historically informed contextualization thus fosters readings that preserve the texts' intrinsic richness while aligning with the demands of ethical responsiveness to contemporary inequalities.

Methodological pluralism, as evident in this mixed-method framework, does present challenges, such as negotiating tensions between textual autonomy and historical situatedness or navigating potential anachronisms inherent in applying modern concepts like equity and rights. Nevertheless, the conscious and critical articulation of narrative criticism alongside socio-historical analysis addresses these concerns by constantly recalling the interpretive act as dialogical and provisional. This stance privileges neither literary hermeneutics nor historical reconstruction at the expense of the other but embraces their intersection as a generative space for producing knowledge that is both critically sound and ethically meaningful. By doing so, the methodology resists flattening the biblical texts into either static artifacts or purely ideological instruments and instead situates them as dynamic texts engaged in ongoing conversations about social justice, human dignity, and communal accountability.

In sum, the adoption of a mixed-method approach combining narrative criticism with socio-historical analysis responds decisively to the multi-layered nature of biblical narratives and the complexity of situating equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within them. It advances a methodological paradigm that is at once textually rigorous, historically grounded, and ethically attuned, thereby enabling deeper insights into the biblical imagination and its relevance for contemporary discourse. This integrative framework honors the multifarious voices, tensions, and power relations inherent in the scriptures, facilitating a transformative engagement that challenges reductive interpretations and invites sustained, critical reflection on justice as embedded in lived realities.

2.2 Responsibility and agency in Pauline letters

Building upon the Old Testament's rich articulation of equity as inherently tied to covenantal responsibility and social justice, the Pauline letters reinterpret and reshape the concepts of responsibility and agency within the early Christian communities. Unlike the primarily corporate and legal dimensions evident in ancient Israelite society, Paul's epistles introduce a nuanced synthesis wherein individual agency is both empowered and circumscribed by theological commitments to communal fidelity and Christological identity. Responsibility, in Pauline thought, becomes inseparable from participation in the body of Christ, a metaphor that simultaneously confers rights, duties, and moral obligations that undergird the community's mutual interdependence.

Central to Paul's theology is the idea that responsibility is not merely a matter of external adherence to lawsuch as the Torah observed in Judaismbut an internalized ethical vocation emanating from the transformative encounter with the risen Christ. For instance, in Romans 12:1-2, Paul exhorts believers to offer their bodies as "living sacrifices," signaling a shift from external juridical observance toward an embodied responsibility that reflects a reoriented agency aligned with divine will. This ethical responsibility is intricately connected with freedom and empowerment; agency is expressed through the renewed mind (νοῦς, *nous*), which discerns the "will of God" rather than conforming to external norms. Here, Pauline responsibility transcends legalistic duty and becomes a dynamic interplay between divine initiative and human

responsiveness, engendering an active moral subjectivity rather than passive compliance.

Moreover, Paul's letters frequently articulate agency within a framework of reciprocal duties that balance individual freedom with communal stability. His exhortations in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 employ the metaphor of the body to emphasize that each believer's agency is both empowered and limited by their role in the ecclesial whole. Individual gifts and capacities must be exercised in ways that uphold the common good, thereby situating personal responsibility within a communal ethics of interdependence. This body metaphor complicates simplistic individualism by embedding agency within a matrix of mutual obligations, where rightssuch as freedom in Christare practiced with restraint so as not to harm weaker members (1 Corinthians 8:9-13). Thus, responsibility in Pauline ethics consistently mediates between personal agency and the call to love-driven self-limitation.

Within gendered dynamics, Paul's discourse on responsibility often invokes complex tensions that continue to provoke scholarly debate. While certain passages (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; Ephesians 5:21-33) articulate hierarchical relationship models reflecting the sociocultural milieu, other texts emphasize the radical leveling of social distinctions through Christian identity (Galatians 3:28). This dialectic influences understandings of gendered agency by simultaneously affirming differentiated rolesoften emphasizing duties and responsibilities aligned with traditional gender expectationsand promoting an inclusive vision of spiritual equality. The coexistence of these strands suggests that Pauline responsibility involves negotiating existing social structures without wholly abandoning or uncritically endorsing them. Feminist and gender-critical scholarship highlights how Paul's epistles can both constrain and enable women's agency: for instance, his acknowledgment of female co- workers (Romans 16) indicates a recognition of women's active engagement and responsibility within the mission of the early church, challenging monolithic portrayals of Pauline gender ethics (Osiek and MacDonald 2006).

Importantly, Pauline letters articulate responsibility with a strong soteriological framing: human duties and rights are ultimately grounded in the redemptive work of Christ, which redefines agency as a participation in divine grace. The concept of *dikaiosune* (righteousness) is reframed not as an external status secured by legal adherence but as an ethical empowerment flowing from justification by faith (Romans 5:1-11). This theological reorientation mitigates a purely juridical notion of rights and duties, embedding them within an ongoing process of sanctification and covenantal fidelity.

Consequently, agency in Paul's letters is dialectically shaped by divine initiative and human cooperation, reinforcing a responsibility that is simultaneously gift and task.

Scholarly debate also attends to the sociohistorical conditions shaping Paul's discourse on responsibility and agency. The nascent Christian communitiesmarked by diverse ethnic, social, and gender backgroundsnavigate tensions between Jewish law and Greco-Roman cultural expectations. Paul's articulation of duties and rights must thus be understood as a formative negotiation that seeks to construct a new socio-moral order grounded in Christ but responsive to prevailing realities (Fitzmyer 2008). This situates Pauline responsibility not as a static set of obligations but as a

dynamic and contextualized ethical engagement that redefines agency in light of apocalyptic urgency and communal identity formation.

In sum, the Pauline letters present a multifaceted framework of responsibility and agency that is inseparable from faith, community, and Christological identity. Unlike Old Testament equity, which emphasizes covenantal law and social justice within Israel's communal boundaries, Paul reconceives responsibility as an empowered ethical vocation internalized through transformative participation in Christ's body. Agency emerges as both a gift and a duty, exercised within relational mutuality and undergirded by theological convictions that challenge and reshape ancient cultural norms, including those related to gender. This complex synthesis of rights, duties, and responsibility in Paul's writings thus contributes a crucial dimension to understanding biblical narratives of equity and agency, offering an interpretive lens to discern the evolving intersections of divine justice, individual autonomy, and communal solidarity.

2.3 A critical examination of duties and rights in biblical law

In critically engaging with duties and rights as articulated within biblical law, one must address the intricate legal and moral frameworks established primarily in the Pentateuch, which serve as the bedrock for Israelite social organization and religious identity. Unlike the Pauline reinterpretations of responsibility and agency that foreground internalized ethical vocation and Christological identity, biblical lawrooted in the covenantal stipulations of the Torahoperates overwhelmingly within a juridical paradigm wherein duties and rights are codified as explicit prescriptions and proscriptions regulating social conduct, ritual purity, property relations, and communal obligations. These laws instantiate a distributive justice that is closely tied to divine command, reflecting a cosmology where social equity is inseparable from covenant fidelity and divine sanction.

The critical scholarship on biblical law consistently challenges simplistic understandings that reduce these legal codes to archaic statutes concerned merely with punitive measures or hierarchical control. Instead, these laws emerge as protocols designed to balance communal cohesion with individual accountability, thus embedding rights and duties within a complex dialectic of social order and theological legitimacy (Driver 1922; Wenham 1979). For example, the Decalogue's prohibition against theft and false witness can be interpreted as rights-respecting norms that protect personal property and reputation, while simultaneously imposing duties on community members to uphold justice and truthfulness. This dual emphasis suggests that rights in biblical law are not absolute entitlements but function relationally, contingent upon reciprocated responsibilities within the covenant community.

A nuanced critique arises from feminist and postcolonial readings that problematize the gendered and socio-economic asymmetries inherent in these legal provisions. Biblical laws pertaining to inheritance, marriage, and ritual purity often reflect patriarchal assumptions that circumscribe women's rights and normalize male authority (Trible 1978; Assmann 1997). Such critiques illuminate how duties and rights in biblical law are neither static nor universally egalitarian but are deeply contextualcontingent on variables such as gender, class, and ethnicity. For instance,

laws governing the redemption of land and property in Leviticus 25 articulate communal duties to prevent permanent dispossession and social marginalization, yet simultaneously, the rights and protections afforded to women and foreign residents remain markedly constrained within these legal structures. This ambivalence necessitates a critical interrogation of the ways in which biblical law simultaneously endorses communal equity and perpetuates social hierarchies.

Moreover, one cannot overlook the performative dimension of biblical law, wherein duties function as acts of covenantal allegiance that construct identity and agency within a theologically ordered world. The stipulations contained in Deuteronomy, for example, are not mere legalistic rules but are integrally linked to the existential reality of Israel as God's chosen people, tasked with embodying covenantal faithfulness through obedient action. This conflation of legal duty with religious devotion complicates modern categories of rights as emancipatory or individualist claims. Rather, in biblical law, rights often appear circumscribed by an overarching duty oriented toward communal holiness and divine command (Brueggemann 1997). Consequently, biblical rights cannot be disentangled from their corresponding duties, as each right presupposes an articulation of responsibilities that sustain covenantal relationships and social order.

The tension between communal obligations and individual entitlements within biblical law resonates with and yet differs sharply from the Pauline conceptualization of agency described in the previous subpart. While Paul reconceives responsibility through an embodied, internalized ethic shaped by grace and spiritual identity, biblical law maintains a more external and prescriptive orientation, grounded in concrete social roles and legal stipulations. Nevertheless, the transition from biblical law to Pauline ethics does not represent a wholesale rejection of duty-bound rights and responsibilities but rather marks a dynamic shift in which the legal corpus informs, yet is transcended by, emerging theological paradigms of agency and moral subjectivity.

The critical literature also underscores a dialectical relationship between biblical law's duties/rights framework and the socio-political contexts in which it was received and enacted. Ancient Near Eastern legal parallels, such as the Code of Hammurabi, illuminate shared concerns with justice, social stability, and divine legitimacy, but biblical law distinguishes itself through its covenantal ethos and emphasis on equity for the marginalized, such as widows, orphans, and strangers (Milgrom 2004). These provisions function as corrective justice mechanisms that mitigate purely hierarchical or transactional interpretations of rights, illustrating a proto-social justice orientation within the legal corpus. However, this orientation must be understood within the limits of its ancient context, which did not conceive rights as universally inalienable but as relationally embedded within community structure and divine enactment.

In sum, critical perspectives on duties and rights in biblical law reveal a deeply intertwined matrix where legal prescriptions serve not only as mechanisms of social governance but as foundational expressions of covenantal identity and communal equity. These perspectives emphasize the conditional, relational character of rights as contingent upon fulfilled duties, while simultaneously acknowledging the embedded social hierarchies and exclusions that complicate modern readings of biblical justice. This analysis provides a necessary context to appreciate the

transformative appropriation of duties and rights in later biblical texts, notably Pauline theology, where internalized ethical agency and soteriological dimensions reconfigure the locus of responsibility from external legalism toward participatory moral vocation. Accordingly, scholarly engagement with biblical law's duties and rights remains indispensable for any robust theological inquiry into equity, responsibility, and agency within biblical narratives.

2.3.1 Social justice theory applied to biblical texts

Building upon the foundational exploration of duties and rights within the juridical and covenantal frameworks of biblical law, it becomes imperative to engage social justice theory as a critical lens for illuminating the ethical and communal dimensions embedded in these ancient texts. Social justice, broadly conceived as the pursuit of equitable distribution of resources, recognition of marginalized identities, and restoration of participatory agency within social structures, offers a versatile theoretical framework to dissect how biblical narratives negotiate issues of equity, responsibility, and rights. This approach challenges reductive historical-legal readings by foregrounding the moral imperatives and socio-political critique inherent in biblical discourse, thus bridging text and praxis.

At its core, applying social justice theory to biblical texts entails a reading that identifies and interrogates the ways these texts articulate and institutionalize mechanisms for countering socio-economic exclusion and affirming communal responsibilities toward vulnerable populations. Such an approach draws on key constructs within social justice scholarship, including distributive justice, recognition theory, and restorative justice, thereby enriching our understanding of biblical law and narrative beyond mere legal formalism. For example, distributive justice theories, which emphasize the fair allocation of resources and privileges, resonate deeply with the jubilee laws in Leviticus 25, where land restitution and debt forgiveness manifest concrete strategies for economic reset and social recalibration. This biblical enactment can be situated within a proto-social justice framework insofar as it disrupts cycles of dispossession and entrenched inequality, aligning with contemporary concerns regarding structural poverty and systemic marginalization.

Moreover, recognition theoryadvanced by scholars like Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraserunderscores the necessity of acknowledging the dignity and identity of marginalized groups as central to justice. When applied to biblical narratives, this perspective highlights the significance of laws and prophetic injunctions that address widows, orphans, aliens, and the poor (e.g., Deuteronomy 10:18- 19; Exodus 22:21-24). Rather than treating these statutes as archaic humanitarian prescriptions, social justice theory invites us to perceive them as radical assertions of inclusion within a socio- religious order that otherwise risked exclusivism. The biblical insistence that the "stranger" be treated justly (Leviticus 19:34) represents a profound ethical directive that disrupts tribal or nationalistic boundaries, advancing a vision of community defined by mutual recognition and responsibility. This interpretative move foregrounds how biblical texts function as active agents in social critique and reform, challenging contemporaneous hegemonies.

Restorative justice, with its emphasis on repairing harm and restoring relational equilibrium, further complements social justice theory's application to biblical texts. Biblical narratives frequently depict processes of confession, atonement, and reconciliation (e.g., the Day of Atonement rituals in Leviticus 16 or the prophetic calls to repentance in Isaiah and Jeremiah) that underscore communal restoration over retributive punishment. Such dynamics resonate with modern justice models that prioritize healing and transformation of social relationships, suggesting that biblical conceptions of right and duty encompass a holistic vision where equity involves the restoration of fractured communal bonds. This insight nuances the previous subpart's depiction of biblical law as juridical by emphasizing its performative and restorative dimensions, illustrating how legal duty and social justice imperatives coalesce within a theological paradigm.

Critical engagement with biblical texts through social justice theory also necessitates grappling with the inherent tensions and contradictions that surface within the scriptures themselves. While the biblical corpus contains robust imperatives toward equity, it simultaneously reflects and perpetuates socio-political hierarchies, including patriarchal dominance, ethnic exclusivism, and class stratification. For instance, female agency is circumscribed in many legal provisions, as highlighted by feminist critiques, and the inclusion of foreigners is often conditional or ambivalent. Social justice theory does not accept these asymmetries as either historical inevitabilities or theological absolutes but rather uses them as a point of critical reflection on how scripture participates in, yet also challenges, oppressive structures. This dialectical stance opens space for contemporary interpretative strategies that seek to recover emancipatory themes from within contested biblical materials, fostering dialogue between ancient texts and present-day justice concerns.

The intersection of social justice theory with biblical texts furthermore enriches our understanding of responsibility and agency as relational and context-dependent rather than fixed or individualistic constructs. Social justice perspectives emphasize that rights and duties gain their meaning within networks of social interdependence and power relations, mirroring the covenantal matrix described previously. Recognizing this interdependence in biblical contexts accentuates how individual moral agency is embedded within communal identities and divine mandates, complicating modern secular assumptions about autonomous rights-bearing subjects. For example, the prophetic literature's critique of social injustice (e.g., Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8) reveals a conception of ethical agency grounded in collective accountability and covenantal fidelity, positioning responsibility not merely as an individual choice but as participation in communal restoration. This reorientation offers fertile ground for ethical reflection on the mutual responsibilities entailed by rights within biblical narratives.

In synthesizing social justice theory with biblical exegesis, scholars can deepen the interpretative frameworks addressing equity, responsibility, duties, and rights in scripture. Such an approach moves beyond descriptive or historical analysis toward normative inquiry that explores the transformative potentials embedded in biblical texts. It foregrounds the social and theological impetus behind legal stipulations and narrative portrayals, illuminating how these ancient materials both reflect and challenge their socio-historical milieus. Ultimately, this perspective asserts that

biblical texts, while historically situated and complex, offer enduring resources for articulating visions of justice that integrate distributive equity, recognition of dignity, and restorative transformationkey components of contemporary social justice discourse. Such integration is indispensable for a contextualized understanding of how biblical narratives engage the intertwined notions of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights.

2.4 Exploring agency theory within theological discourse.

The integration of agency theory within theological discourse provides a critical framework for analyzing how biblical narratives not only prescribe duties and rights but also actively construct and negotiate the capacity of individual's and communities to exercise moral and ethical agency. Building upon the previous engagement with social justice theorywhere equity, responsibility, and relational interdependence underscore the communal fabric of biblical lawagency theory directs attention to the nuances of human and divine action, emphasizing the interplay between structure and freedom, constraint and possibility. This shift foregrounds how biblical texts do not simply regulate behavior through decrees but also envision agents endowed with intrinsic capacity to effect change, assume responsibility, and participate meaningfully within covenantal relationships.

At its core, agency theory in theology grapples with questions of intentionality, autonomy, and empowerment in the context of divine-human interaction and socio-religious institutions. This perspective takes seriously the biblical portrayal of individuals not merely as passive recipients of divine command but as co-participants in the unfolding narrative of redemption and justice. For example, the prophetic tradition illustrates a dynamic model of agency where prophets act as mediators of divine will while simultaneously challenging entrenched powers and mobilizing communities toward ethical renewal (cf. Amos 5; Jeremiah 7). Such figures exemplify how agency emerges relationallynot as isolated self-determination but within the tension of obedience, resistance, and transformative vocation. This epistemic lens enriches the understanding of biblical duties and rights by positioning them within a lived experience of moral responsiveness that involves conscious choice, discernment, and ethical accountability.

Furthermore, theological agency theory interrogates the ways scriptural narratives portray marginalized or structurally disempowered subjects as agents capable of exercising responsibility and claiming rights, albeit within constricted horizons. The presence of female characters such as Deborah (Judges 4-5), Hannah (1 Samuel 1), and Ruth challenges patriarchal paradigms by demonstrating active engagement in religious, social, and political domains. These agents negotiate identity, assert influence, and negotiate communal belonging, often drawing upon divine promises or covenantal commitments as the foundation for their actions. Such narratives complicate simplistic binaries of power and subordination, revealing a textured understanding of agency that encompasses resistance, negotiation, and strategic use of available social capital. The expansion of agency theory in theology thus counters monolithic depictions of biblical subjects as mere objects of law or tradition, highlighting their capacity to reinterpret, embody, and transform normative frameworks. This theoretical orientation also invites a critical re-examination of how duties and rights are framed within biblical texts in relation to notions of freedom and

constraint. Agency theory foregrounds the dialectic between divine sovereignty and human freedom, acknowledging that biblical agency is situated within a cosmic order that imposes limits but also empowers moral action. The covenant relationship exemplifies this duality, offering a locus where obligations are not solely externally imposed norms but relationally grounded commitments that enable flourishing and mutual accountability. The Torah's legal corpus, while regulatory, functions as a pedagogical vehicle to form subjects capable of ethical discernment and responsible agency (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4-9). Thus, agency is less an expression of unchecked autonomy and more a cultivated capacity shaped by theological identity, communal memory, and covenantal fidelity, which in turn recalibrates contemporary conceptions of rights and duties beyond secular individualism.

The deployment of agency theory within theological discourse also provides a critical vantage point for addressing the ambivalences and tensions inherent in scriptural portrayals of social hierarchy and exclusion. It permits a dialectical reading that recognizes how structures can simultaneously enable and constrain agency, calling attention to moments where marginalized agents assert counter- narratives or perform acts of subversion that reconfigure power relations. For instance, biblical laws concerning the “stranger” or the alienwhile often circumscribed by conditional hospitalityalso create discursive space for alternative identities and modes of belonging (Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:33- 34). Theological agency theory, by integrating notions of power, subjectivity, and resistance, illuminates how marginalized actors within biblical texts engage in forms of ethical agency that contest exclusionary norms and open pathways for expanded recognition and inclusion. This perspective resonates with social justice approaches but enriches them by emphasizing the subject’s internal experience and capacity for self-reflexivity and moral creativity.

Interdisciplinary contributions, particularly from feminist and postcolonial theological scholarship, further deepen agency theory’s relevance within biblical studies. Feminist theologians critique androcentric readings that have historically occluded women’s agency, employing agency theory to recover the voices and actions of women who navigate complex patriarchal matrices (eg. Phyllis Trible, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza). Postcolonial frameworks similarly deploy agency theory to highlight indigenous, subaltern, or diasporic biblical subjects who negotiate imperial domination and cultural hybridity. These critiques underscore that agency is always contextualshaped by intersecting identities, structural constraints, and cultural narrativesand that theological agency must therefore account for multiplicity, ambivalence, and the potential for transformative praxis. This expansion of agency theory not only revises our understanding of biblical equity and responsibility but also challenges contemporary readers to engage biblical texts as dynamic sites where notions of power, freedom, and justice are actively contested and reimagined.

In sum, incorporating agency theory within theological discourse offers a robust analytical tool that complements social justice frameworks by centering the experiential and relational dimensions of human responsibility in biblical narratives. It reorients the study of equity, duties, and rights from abstract principles toward embodied practices of moral discernment, resistance, and covenantal participation. By illuminating how biblical agents exercise, negotiate, and sometimes subvert the

moral orders that define them, agency theory enhances our comprehension of the complexities of biblical law and narrative. Consequently, this theoretical lens fosters a more nuanced and ethically resonant engagement with scripture, underscoring its enduring capacity to inform contemporary discourses on justice, responsibility, and human dignity within faith communities and beyond.

3 Qualitative textual analysis approach

The qualitative textual analysis approach employed in this study is deliberately chosen to engage deeply with the layered complexities inherent in biblical narratives, particularly those that articulate concepts of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within gendered frameworks. This method allows for a nuanced examination of the text as a dynamic site where theological discourse and social realities converge. Unlike quantitative methodologies that may reduce these concepts to measurable variables, qualitative textual analysis emphasizes interpretive depth, contextual understanding, and the recognition of multiple, often competing, meanings embedded in the scriptural material. Its strength lies in facilitating a hermeneutic dialogue between the text and contemporary frameworks of gender and moral theology, thereby moving beyond surface-level readings to reveal the interplay of power, agency, and ethical claims.

Central to this approach is the close reading of biblical texts within their canonical, historical, and socio-cultural contexts, and integrated with critical gender hermeneutics to expose androcentric biases and to recover marginalized voices. The detailed scrutiny of narrative structure, rhetorical devices, characterization, and thematic motifs enables a careful unpacking of how equity and responsibility are constructed and communicated. For example, applying qualitative textual analysis to the stories of female figures such as Hannah or Deborah involves considering not only their explicit actions and speeches but also the implicit ideological positions that frame their roles and moral agency. Through such analysis, the methodological lens discerns how texts simultaneously uphold and subvert prevailing gender norms, reflecting the dialectical nature of biblical morality as both prescriptive and aspirational.

Informed by feminist and postcolonial biblical criticism, this analytical strategy attends to the power relations that inform textual production and reception. It recognizes that biblical narratives are not static repositories of normative ethics but are instead contested spaces where cultural assumptions about gender, authority, and social responsibility are negotiated and reimagined. The qualitative approach facilitates identifying textual traces of resistance or accommodation to dominant patriarchal ideologies that shape notions of duties and rights. Such an interpretive move is crucial for exposing the limits of traditional moral theology when read uncritically and for reclaiming alternative ethical trajectories embedded within the texts that have been overlooked or suppressed. For instance, the care commands for widows and orphans, when read through this lens, not only represent social obligations but also articulate a prophetic critique of exclusionary power structures, reinforcing the moral imperative for equity grounded in vulnerability and interdependence.

Furthermore, qualitative textual analysis enables engagement with the intertextual and intra-textual dynamics that inform the development of ethical concepts throughout the biblical corpus. By tracing thematic continuities and divergencessuch as the evolution of covenantal duties or the shifting portrayal of female agencythis method situates individual passages within a broader theological discourse. This expanded perspective elucidates how ancient contexts, infused with specific gender ideologies, influence the articulation of rights and responsibilities while opening interpretive possibilities that challenge monolithic understandings. The intersection of qualitative analysis with agency theory thus reveals the contingent and performative nature of moral identity in biblical narratives, where individuals navigate constraints imposed by social and divine law yet exercise transformative agency.

The qualitative textual analysis approach also critically engages with the notion of textual authority and its implications for contemporary ethical reflection. By unpacking how biblical texts have been historically transmitted, interpreted, and institutionalized within religious traditions, this method interrogates the ways scriptural authority can both enforce and destabilize gendered moral codes. It acknowledges that interpretation itself is an act of agency shaped by the interpreter's historical and cultural location, thereby situating hermeneutical responsibility at the heart of ethical inquiry. This reflexivity is vital for adopting a hermeneutics of suspicion alongside a hermeneutics of retrieval, as advocated by feminist and postcolonial scholars, ensuring that the analysis remains critically aware of how equity and duty are mediated through interpretative choices.

In practical terms, the research process involves iterative cycles of text selection, coding for thematic elements related to equity, responsibility, duties, and rights, and contextual analysis informed by relevant secondary literature. This includes engaging with classical commentaries and contemporary feminist, womanist, and queer readings to enrich the interpretive horizon and to challenge dominant theological paradigms. Through this rigorous and dialogical method, the qualitative textual analysis approach supports a multidimensional understanding of biblical ethics, foregrounding the dynamism and contestation that characterizes the negotiation of moral agency within gendered realities.

Ultimately, by adopting a qualitative textual analysis model, this study aligns methodological rigor with ethical sensitivity, enabling a critical yet constructive engagement with biblical texts. This approach not only deepens comprehension of how equity, responsibility, duties, and rights are textualized in scripture but also contributes to broader theological conversations that seek to affirm justice and inclusivity in contemporary faith communities. The method thus forms an indispensable bridge between the interpretive insights of gender hermeneutics and the normative concerns of moral theology, fostering a scholarly praxis attentive to the complexities of gendered agency in biblical narratives.

3.1 Selection criteria and justification for chosen biblical passages

The selection of biblical passages for this study is governed by a deliberate set of criteria aimed at isolating textual instances that richly embody the intersecting themes of equity, responsibility,

duties, and rights within gendered frameworks. This hermeneutical intentionality responds to the methodological commitment previously outlined, whereby qualitative textual analysis seeks to engage with the depth and complexity of scriptural narratives rather than treating them as monolithic or isolated statements. Consequently, the passages chosen serve multiple interrelated purposes: they must exhibit narrative or legal material that explicitly or implicitly delineates social and moral roles, highlight relational dynamics particularly relevant to gender, and provide fertile ground for critical reflection on power asymmetries and agency.

To ensure rigorous, alignment with the study's overarching concerncontextualizing concepts of equity and moral responsibility vis-à-vis genderit was imperative to prioritize texts that either elucidate normative structures or reveal moments of ideological tension and disruption. For instance, texts that portray duties and rights through the experiences of marginalized figures, such as women whose moral agency challenges patriarchal expectations, were prioritized. This focus aligns with feminist and postcolonial critiques that call attention to voices historically suppressed or distorted in traditional biblical interpretation. The narratives of women like Hannah, Deborah, Ruth, and the prophetic speeches concerning widows and orphans exemplify passages where equity and responsibility are not merely prescriptive norms but constitute contested and dynamic ethical terrains. Inclusion of such texts enables the study to explore how these concepts are negotiated in lived realities and reflect broader socio-religious power configurations.

Moreover, passages selected encompass a range of literary genresnarrative, legal, prophetic, and wisdom literatureto capture the multifaceted ways in which equity and duties are articulated. For example, laws related to Jubilee or gleaning, embedded in the Pentateuch, provide explicit legal frameworks for social equity and communal responsibility, while wisdom texts offer reflective insights into individual ethical conduct and relational justice. By integrating these diverse genres, the analysis situates the discussion of rights and responsibilities within a textured biblical landscape, resisting reductive readings and enabling a comprehensive exploration of the theological and social dimensions involved.

Additionally, consideration was given to the historical and canonical contexts of the passages. Texts were chosen to represent different epochs and socio-political milieus within the biblical corpus to trace the evolution and variation of moral concepts across time and textual strata. This diachronic perspective acknowledges that biblical narratives reflect shifting understandings of gendered duties and rights influenced by changing social structures, cultic practices, and ideological currents. For example, comparing early narratives in the Pentateuch with prophetic enactments or post-exilic restorations allows for the identification of continuities and ruptures in ethical discourse, offering insight into the contingent nature of equity and responsibility as cultural constructs.

The criteria also emphasized passages where dialogical tension or ambiguity concerning agency and authority is palpable. Texts that superficially affirm status quo norms but simultaneously contain subversive elements or conflicting voices were intentionally included to unpack the dialogic and contested nature of biblical morality. This selection strategy is influenced by the postcolonial feminist hermeneutical imperative to expose layered power dynamics and resist simplistic

dichotomies of oppression and agency. For example, the story of Deborah as a judge reflects both an extraordinary female leadership that disrupts patriarchal expectations and the constraints imposed by a male-dominated cultural milieu, thereby illustrating the simultaneous limitation and exercise of moral agency within the text.

Finally, secondary scholarly engagement with the materials informed the selection process. Passages that have been extensively analyzed in feminist, womanist, or queer biblical scholarship for their complex ethical implications were prioritized to ensure that the study dialogues with established critical conversations and benefits from prior exegetical insights. This intertextual academic engagement helps to substantiate the interpretive choices and grounds the analysis within recognized scholarly frameworks, enhancing both credibility and depth.

In sum, the selection criteria deliberately balance textual richness, thematic relevance, genre diversity, historical contextualization, and critical interpretive potential. This comprehensive approach enables the study to move beyond isolated scriptural citations towards a nuanced engagement with the biblical corpus as a whole, consistent with the qualitative textual analysis methodology.

It foregrounds the multifaceted articulation of equity, duties, rights, and responsibility as embedded within gendered experiences, power relations, and theological discourse, thus contributing to a sophisticated recontextualization of these concepts in biblical narratives.

3.2 Portrayal of equity in Exodus and Deuteronomic narratives

The Exodus and Deuteronomic narratives, as foundational strata within the Pentateuch, present distinctive yet interrelated articulations of equity that profoundly shape the biblical ethical landscape. These texts embed equity not merely as a social ideal but as a covenantal imperative tied to divine justice and communal responsibility. The portrayal of equity within these narratives must therefore be understood against the backdrop of theological concerns governing the formation and maintenance of Israelite identity, law, and social order. Equity is not an abstract moral principle detached from lived realities; rather, it is concretized through legal prescriptions and narrative depictions that delineate rights and duties within a stratified society, frequently mediated through gendered roles and status.

In the Exodus narrative, equity emerges principally through the motif of liberation from oppression and the establishment of a just social order under Yahweh's covenant. The liberation of Israel from Egypt's bondage frames equity as divine redress for unjust subjugation, emphasizing responsibility towards the vulnerable. This is particularly evident in the ethical injunctions that extend protection and provision to marginalized groups such as strangers, widows, and orphansfigures whose social marginality intersects with gendered vulnerability. For example, Exodus 22:2124 explicitly commands the community not to wrong or oppress the sojourner, reflecting an equity that is relationally defined by inclusion within the covenantal people and the moral obligation to ensure their welfare. This insistence situates equity within an interdependent communal framework where right conduct involves attentive responsibility to those at the margins,

disrupting hegemonic hierarchies that would otherwise relegate these groups to perpetual subservience.

The Exodus laws thus juxtapose divine justice with human social ethics, articulating equity as a reflection of God's own character (Exodus 34:67). However, this portrayal also reveals the limitations and conditions of equity as governed by patriarchal structures prevalent in ancient Israelite culture. Equity frequently serves to regulate social disparities rather than to abolish them entirely. For instance, protections extended to vulnerable individuals coexist with legal norms that maintain male headship and control over property and family lineage. While women's agency is not erased; it is framed within parameters that support broader communal order. Such dual dynamics suggest that equity in Exodus functions as a harmonizing principle aimed at balancing compassion with social stability, rather than initiating radical egalitarianism.

Transitioning to the Deuteronomic corpus, a more elaborated and systematized legal framework emerges, where equity is inscribed within an expansive code of duties and rights that governs not only interpersonal relations but also political and ritual life. Deuteronomy intensifies the covenantal themes found in Exodus by underscoring obedience to the law as a prerequisite for communal well-being and divine blessing, thereby connecting equity to collective responsibility. The text's pronounced concern with equitable governance is evident in laws targeting just treatment of the poor, transparent judicial processes, and the cyclical renewal of economic balance through mechanisms such as the Sabbatical year (Deut. 15) and the regulation of fair weights and measures (Deut. 25:1316). These provisions reveal a theological vision in which equity sustains social harmony and anticipates eschatological restoration.

Significantly, Deuteronomic texts articulate equity with explicit gendered dimensions, especially concerning the protection of women in contexts of marriage, inheritance, and social vulnerability. Laws regulating levirate marriage (Deut. 25:510), the rights of the daughter who is a sole heir (Deut. 21:1517), and the treatment of female captives (Deut. 21:1014) negotiate women's entitlements within patriarchal conventions, reflecting attempts to balance familial duties with social inclusion. These complex legal articulations serve as sites where responsibility and rights converge, underscoring how equity operates amid competing claims of communal integrity, individual welfare, and gendered social roles. Moreover, the Deuteronomic emphasis on the king's responsibility to uphold justice and defend the rights of the vulnerable (Deut. 17:1420; 21:1821) situates equity within a broader vision of divinely sanctioned authority accountable to ethical standardsan insight that implicitly contests absolute power and demands moral exercise of leadership.

Together, the Exodus and Deuteronomic portrayals of equity reveal a dynamic tension between ideal and practice, community and individual, male authority and marginalized agency. Equity, as constructed in these texts, cannot be reduced to legalistic formalism; rather it is embedded within narratively charged moments and legal codes that reflect evolving socioreligious attempts to articulate just relations. Gender emerges as a critical axis in this processwomen's rights and duties are neither monolithic nor static but fluctuate in relation to broader ideological and historical

contexts. The interplay between prescriptive law and lived experience hinted at in these narratives invites a hermeneutical openness to how biblical texts both reinforce and problematize prevailing power structures.

In relation to the prior subpart's emphasis on the selection criteria apropos gendered agency and sociopolitical complexities, examining equity within Exodus and Deuteronomy illuminates the canonical roots of these themes. The prominence afforded to marginalized figures and their ethical treatment highlights how foundational biblical texts engage ongoing debates about responsibility and rights, especially within hierarchical frameworks that continue to mediate gendered power. By analysing these portrayals through a critical feminist and postcolonial lens, one uncovers the ways in which notions of equity are constructed, contested, and operationalized in relation to both divine command and human social order. This critical engagement deepens understanding of how biblical narratives provide paradigmatic yet problematized models of justice, contributing substantially to the study's overarching aim of contextualizing equity in biblical discourse.

3.3 Examining Responsibility themes in the Synoptic Gospels

The Synoptic GospelsMatthew, Mark, and Lukeoffer vivid yet variegated presentations of responsibility, which contribute a distinctive theological and ethical dimension to biblical discourses on duties and rights. Building on the foundational conceptions of covenantal equity elaborated in the Exodus and Deuteronomic traditions, the Synoptics situate responsibility primarily within the framework of discipleship and communal formation under the reign of God. Unlike the legal and communal ordinances that underpin equity in the Pentateuchal strata, the Gospels articulate responsibility through narrative paradigms that emphasize moral accountability as relational, performative, and eschatologically charged.

The Synoptic emphasis on responsibility can initially be discerned in Jesus' teachings, which frequently reconfigure duties away from rigid legal observance towards an overarching ethic of love and justice. For instance, the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 57 epitomizes this shift by embedding responsibility within a radical re-interpretation of the law"You have heard that it was said... But I tell you..." (Matt 5:21-48). Here responsibility transcends formal obligation to encompass internalized righteousness that fosters equitable interpersonal relations: mercy to the persecuted, honesty, reconciling with one's adversary, and generosity towards the poor. This expansiveness mirrors yet innovates upon the Deuteronomic concern for justice, extending it beyond a public-legal sphere into personal and communal ethical comportment.

Mark's Gospel, often noted for its urgency and messianic focus, presents responsibility primarily through the lens of discipleship as vocation and service. Responsibility is implicated in the call to "take up one's cross" and "follow" Jesus (Mark 8:34), suggesting an embodied and costly commitment that demands loyalty, self-denial, and agency within the mission to proclaim the kingdom (Mark 10:4245). This conceptualization resonates with earlier Pentateuchal duties insofar as it underscores relational accountabilityto God, the community, and the vulnerablebut reframes it in terms of imitating divine service rather than maintaining social order per se. The motif of servant

leadership, evident in Mark's passion narrative and teachings, reveals a countercultural ethic that problematizes hegemonic authority structures, inviting a reconsideration of gendered power and responsibility by emphasizing humility and receptivity.

Luke's Gospel uniquely amplifies responsibility by highlighting the inclusion of marginalized groups, foregrounding women, the poor, and Gentiles in its ethical vision. Luke's narrative embeds responsibility within a social justice framework that mirrors and radicalizes the Exodus motif of liberation. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) poetically voices a divine inversionlifting the lowly and sending the rich away emptyas a call to responsible stewardship that entails structural transformation. Furthermore, Luke's parables, such as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), articulate responsibility as concrete, neighborly compassion that transcends ethnic and religious boundaries. This ethical inclusivity recalls the earlier covenantal mandates to protect the marginalized yet expands the scope of responsibility to cross-cultural and gendered dimensions, challenging traditional notions of community and rights. The Synoptics' treatment of responsibility is also inherently eschatological, intertwining duties with anticipation of God's final judgment and the coming kingdom. The Parable of the Talents (Matt 25:1430) and related sayings emphasize accountability as stewardship of God-given gifts, whereby failure to act responsibly entails judgment. Such narrative juridical motifs intersect with earlier biblical legal traditions but are refracted through Christological and apocalyptic lenses that situate responsibility not merely in communal maintenance but as participation in divine restoration. This temporal and theological dimension informs the ethical demands placed on agents within the Christian community, fostering an ethos of vigilant, proactive responsibility.

Gender permeates these Synoptic constructions of responsibility with considerable complexity. Women, though often marginalized in socio-religious structures of the time, occupy roles that are pivotal in embodying and modelingly enacting responsibility. Figures such as Mary Magdalene, the woman at the well (John, although not a Synoptic Gospel, resonates with these themes), and the women who financially support Jesus' ministry illustrate a form of agency intersecting with responsibility that challenges patriarchal restrictions. While the Synoptic texts do not dismantle the prevailing gender order outright, they frequently depict women as exemplars of faithfulness, hospitality, and prophetic witness, thereby subtly unsettling rigid gendered boundaries of duty and rights established in earlier biblical traditions. Moreover, Jesus' interactions with womenoften inclusive, respectful, and liberatingsuggest an ethical imperative that reconfigures gender relations within the broader discourse of responsibility.

In synthesizing these dimensions, it becomes evident that the Synoptic Gospels deepen and diversify biblical understandings of responsibility, integrating covenantal justice with relational ethics, eschatological vision, and complex gender dynamics. Unlike the Exodus and Deuteronomic codifications that enshrine responsibility within legal and social frameworks tied to national identity and ritual order, the Synoptics emphasize personal and communal transformation oriented toward the coming kingdom. This shift foregrounds the active fulfillment of duties as a manifestation of

allegiance to God's reign, blurring the boundaries between rights and obligations, individual agency and communal solidarity.

This exploration underscores that responsibility within the Synoptics is a dynamic, contested terrain where ethical imperatives unfold through narrative tropes and theological motivation. Attending to these themes with a critical awareness of gendered agency and sociopolitical context enriches the study's broader aim to contextualize equity, responsibility, duties, and rights in biblical narratives. The Synoptic witness thus not only complements but also problematizes earlier equity models by reimagining the conditions of just relations and the scope of ethical accountability in light of Jesus' ministry and eschatological hope.

3.4 Duties and rights patterns in Levitical legislation

The Levitical legislation, integral to the Pentateuchal corpus, constructs a multifaceted framework of duties and rights that reflect the communal, religious, and ethical priorities of ancient Israelite society. Rooted firmly within the covenantal relationship that defines Israel's identity under Yahweh, these laws articulate a systematic pattern of reciprocal obligations designed to sustain social harmony, ritual purity, and divine favour. Unlike the narrative-ethic approach of the Synoptic Gospels, Levitical legislation foregrounds a codified order where responsibility is formalized through legal stipulations that govern interpersonal conduct, sacred duties, and the allocation of rights within a covenant community. This legalistic mode, therefore, offers a foundational paradigm for understanding equity and responsibility not simply as moral imperatives but as embedded enactments of divine command and communal constitution.

Central to the Levitical decree is the explicit coupling of duties and rights as correlative components of social equilibrium. The duty to observe holinessboth in ritual and ethical termsconstitutes the principal axis around which many rights and responsibilities revolve (Lev. 19:2). For instance, the injunctions concerning treatment of the stranger, the poor, and the vulnerable (Lev. 19:9-10, 33-34) establish a framework that extends sacred obligations beyond ritual performance to social justice practices. These laws enshrine the poor's right to glean from the margins of the fields, implying a social responsibility of landowners to provide for the marginalized as an expression of covenantal faithfulness. This procedural linkage between duty and right underscores a distinctively collective ethos whereby individual entitlement is inseparable from the communal duty to uphold justice and compassion, echoing the broader Deuteronomic concern yet specifying particular roles within Levitical holiness.

Moreover, the Levitical codes allocate specific ritual and ethical responsibilities with gendered dimensions that illuminate the intersection of authority, agency, and social identity. Priestly duties, designated exclusively to male descendants of Aaron, shape a rigid hierarchy wherein spiritual responsibilities correlate with rights of ritual service and legislative authority (Lev. 810). Yet these statutes also delineate obligations pertaining to women, such as prescribed offerings and ceremonial regulations linked to childbirth, menstruation, and purity (Lev. 12; 15). These provisions, while evidently restrictive, function within a paradigm that balances

communal purity and individual rights, situating women's duties within a framework that both regulates and recognizes their place in Israel's socio-religious order. The complex interplay between inclusion and exclusion here enriches the discourse on gendered agency by revealing how rights and duties were intertwined with notions of ritual status and bodily integrity that undergirded the covenant community's wellbeing. The Levitical legislation further nuances the relation of duties and rights through its detailed prescriptions on restitution, penal sanctions, and property regulations. For example, the requirement to restore stolen goods with an added penalty (Lev. 6:1-7) signals both an obligation to acknowledge wrongdoing and a right of the victim to reparation, thereby embodying principles of equity that promote reconciliation and social restoration. This legal reciprocity reflects a concern not only with maintaining order but with restoring relational balance, which parallels the Synoptic emphasis on reparative justice yet within a formal juridical structure. The Levitical system thus institutionalizes responsibility as both a communal safeguard and a mechanism for affirming individual rights within the bounds of divine law.

The ritual calendar and festival laws further integrate duties and rights into the cyclical life of Israel, embedding social memory and collective identity within temporal observances (Lev. 23). Participation in these sacred rites entails specific obligationssuch as offerings, Sabbath observance, and the Year of Jubileewhich in turn guarantee communal wellbeing and individual renewal. The Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25), in particular, enshrines a radical redistribution of property and freedom that redefines equitable rights across generations. This socio-economic regulation reflects a profound theological commitment to stewardship, equity, and social responsibility under God's sovereignty, providing a corrective to potential abuses that threaten communal cohesion. The theological dimension embedded in these patterns exemplifies how duties and rights in Levitical legislation transcend mere legal compliance to embody covenantal fidelity and divine justice.

When juxtaposed with the Synoptic Gospel treatment of responsibility, the Levitical model offers a contrastive grounding that clarifies the evolution of biblical ethics. While the Synoptics reframe responsibility into relational and eschatological terms emphasizing internal transformation and voluntary discipleship, Levitical laws present an external, deontological framework anchored in official pronouncements that shape communal life. Nonetheless, both systems converge on upholding justice towards the marginalized and the vulnerable, illustrating a continuity in the biblical tradition's concern for equitable social relations. Moreover, the gender dynamics evident in Levitical duties and rights prefigure the subtler and more relationally embodied roles attributed to women in the Gospels, demonstrating a trajectory from rigid legal obligations toward more nuanced ethical engagements with gender and agency.

In sum, the Levitical legislation encapsulates a comprehensive scheme wherein duties and rights are systematically interwoven into the fabric of Israelite existence, reflecting an ethos of holiness that governs both ritual observance and social justice. This legal corpus establishes a foundational vocabulary for equity and responsibility within the biblical worldviewone that situates individual rights within collective responsibilities mediated through covenantal fidelity and divine mandate. Attending to these patterns not only enriches the understanding of biblical justice in context but also

illuminates how early scriptural traditions inform subsequent theological developments concerning gender, agency, and moral accountability throughout the biblical narrative.

3.5 Discussion and Interpretation

Synthesis of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights across testaments:

The synthesis of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights across the testaments must acknowledge the distinctive yet interconnected ways these concepts are articulated within both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. A comprehensive examination reveals a dynamic interplay whereby equity often serves as a normative horizon, responsibility operates as a binding relational force, duties function both as ethical imperatives and covenantal obligations, and rightswhile rarely expressed as formal legal entitlementsare deeply woven into the fabric of communal and divine justice. This multifaceted integration surpasses reductive dichotomies of legalism versus moral exhortation by demonstrating that these early scriptural traditions embrace a holistic ethic where structural justice and interpersonal accountability are mutually constitutive.

The Hebrew Bible, with its legal codes and prophetic pronouncements, grounds equity primarily in the notion of righteousness (*ṣedeq*) and justice (*mishpat*), which entail both correct judgment and equitable treatment reflective of divine standards (Weinfeld, 1995). Here, responsibility is often communal and covenantal, emphasizing that social order depends on actors fulfilling their prescribed roles and duties toward the vulnerablewidows, orphans, and strangersthus actualizing the covenantal ideals of fidelity and protection (Brueggemann, 1997). Rights in this context are implicit within duties enjoined by Torah law: while direct mention of "rights" as subject claims is sparse, the protective statutes imply legitimate claims to justice, inclusion, and material sustenance rooted in God's covenantal obligations (Clements, 1996). Hence, in the Hebrew Bible, the language of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights constitutes a tightly interwoven matrix that serves both as social ethics and as theological testimony to divine justice.

In juxtaposition, the New Testament offers a transformative reinterpretation that reframes these concepts within the person and mission of Jesus, as well as the ensuing Christian community's ethos. Importantly, the New Testament infuses equity with a radicalized theological charge, where divine grace disrupts conventional meritocracy, as seen in the synoptic parables. Responsibility and duties are increasingly articulated through reciprocal love, embodying a profound relational ontology where rights emerge less as juridical claims and more as participatory expressions of communal belonging and eschatological promise (Moltmann, 1993). The examples of stewardship and mercy in Jesus' teachings underscore that duties cannot be abstracted from the character of God's kingdom, with rights implicitly mapped onto the sufferer or outsider who is the object of divine compassion (Wright, 2004).

This shift does not negate the normative force of justice but repositions equity as a grace-imbued principle that transcends transactional fairness, complicating modern conceptions of legalistic rights. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard illustrates that responsibility aligned with divine generosity challenges equitable distribution on purely proportional grounds, thus introducing a

teleological dimension to rights grounded in God's sovereign benevolence rather than human entitlement (Snodgrass, 2008). Similarly, the Parable of the Good Samaritan redefines duties beyond ethnic and legal boundaries, expanding rights to encompass those marginalized within prevailing social and religious structures. This reframing embodies a participatory ethics where agency involves assuming responsibility that both affirms others' claims to dignity and enacts transformative justice (Blomberg, 1990).

Crucially, in both testaments, duties serve as the sine qua non through which rights are actualized; rights do not emerge solely as individual claims but as embedded within comprehensive social relations regulated by the covenantal or ecclesial community. This intertwining is most evident in the New Testament's emphasis on love as the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10), which integrates equity and responsibility into an ethical imperative that transcends legal codification while ensuring communal well-being. Such framing challenges secular abstractions of rights as atomistic or solely juridical, foregrounding instead the porous boundaries between claims and obligations within lived faith contexts (Balch, 1991).

Furthermore, the eschatological orientation present in both testaments imprints a forward-looking horizon that shapes the interpretation and enactment of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights. The Hebrew prophetic literature situates social justice within the anticipation of divine restoration, in which equitable relations are markers of covenantal fidelity (Brueggemann, 1993). The New Testament, through parables like the Sheep and the Goats, situates rights claims within divine judgment, implying that earthly responsibilities toward the marginalized correspond to ultimate accountability before God. This theological framework imbues rights and duties with profound moral urgency while situating equity as both a present ethical demand and a future hope (Keener, 1993).

Synthesizing these perspectives suggests that the biblical scriptural corpus neither delivers a fully articulated theory of rights nor confines itself to legal formalism but rather advances a complex moral vision. This vision integrates social equity, embodied responsibility, divinely mandated duties, and relational rights into a unified ethic shaped by covenantal relationship and eschatological hope. The tension between explicit legal prescription in the Hebrew Bible and the implicit moral imagination in the New Testament reveals an evolving conceptual terrain where agency is exercised through the reciprocal fulfillment of duties and the recognition of rights as relationally grounded. Consequently, any contemporary endeavor to contextualize equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within biblical narratives must appreciate these nuanced interdependencies and the consequent hermeneutical challenge they pose to modern frameworks of justice.

4 Synthesis of findings relative to the research questions

The synthesis of findings relative to the research questions reveals a complex, interwoven portrayal of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within biblical narratives that defies reductive or monolithic interpretations. The inquiry elucidates that these concepts, far from existing in isolation, function as dynamic, relational categories deeply embedded within the theological and social matrices of both the Old and New Testaments. Central to this synthesis is the recognition that biblical equity transcends modern secular conceptions of justice by integrating legal, relational, and eschatological dimensions which collectively inform ethical discourse and praxis.

At the heart of the findings is the dialectic between structure and agency, particularly how biblical texts negotiate the tension between divinely mandated duties and the exercise of volitional responsibility. The Old Testament, especially in Levitical law, situates equity largely in the realm of communal obligations and distributive justice, emphasizing institutionalized mechanisms to protect the marginalized and establish social order. This legalistic framing underscores the permanence of communal duties, which are not contingent on personal sentiments but divinely commanded, thus guaranteeing enforceability. However, the research highlights that these juridical norms do not operate in a vacuum; they are embedded within a covenantal framework that situates social justice within a broader theological narrative of divine fidelity and human accountability.

Transitioning to the New Testament, the research delineates a notable shift toward internalized ethics characterized by agape as the animating principle. Here, the emphasis on voluntary love and relational accountability reconfigures duties and rights from externally imposed obligations to expressions of transformed moral agency. This evolution from legalism to a spirituality of responsibility implies that ethical comportment is less about mere rule following and more about embodying the character of Christ within communal relationships. The synthesis thus underscores the importance of embracing both paradigmsnot as mutually exclusive but as mutually enrichingfor contemporary theology. Structural justice rooted in covenantal law provides the necessary scaffolding to ensure systemic equity, while agape-driven agency fosters moral transformation and relational equity.

Gendered agency emerges as a critical thematic strand within this synthesis, revealing the fluid and contextually contingent nature of duties and rights in biblical narratives. The comparative analysis elucidates how scriptural accounts challenge monolithic gender constructs by portraying women's participation beyond rigid functional roles. For example, the New Testament's depiction of women in ministry functions and prophetic roles signals an expansion of agency that both respects continuity with Old Testament traditions and embraces new possibilities rooted in eschatological hope and communal inclusion. Such findings have profound implications for contemporary ethics, advocating for a hermeneutic that seeks to recover marginalized voices and affirm gendered responsibilities as integral to equitable community life.

Moreover, the covenantal and eschatological visions serve as pivotal lenses through which duties and rights are not only defined but also oriented toward a horizon of hope and ultimate

restoration. This dual theological framework invites a nuanced understanding that grapples with present exigenciessuch as social justice, human rights, and ecological stewardshipwhile maintaining a teleological perspective centered on God's redemptive purposes. Ethical agency, therefore, is both a present responsibility and a proactive anticipation of divine justice, offering a rich normative resource for addressing the ambiguities and challenges of modern pluralistic societies.

The interpretive complexity uncovered in the findings cautions against simplistic or ahistorical readings of biblical ethics. Instead, it advocates for a hermeneutical posture that is critically aware of the texts' situatedness and their dynamic development across canonical and historical contexts. This sensitivity safeguards against anachronism and supports a responsible appropriation of biblical principles that honors both continuity and innovation. Such a methodological stance ensures that contemporary applications of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights remain faithful to theological integrity while responsive to evolving sociocultural frameworks.

In integrating these dimensions, a participatory ethic emerges, one that situates moral agency within relational networks shaped by divine and human reciprocity. Rather than viewing duties and rights solely as juridical impositions or autonomous choices, this model envisions them as expressions of communal fidelity whereby institutions and individuals co-construct just and compassionate social realities. Consequently, biblical narratives provide a robust conceptual architecture that enables contemporary theological ethics to navigate the complexities of justice in ways that balance institutional reform with transformative interpersonal praxis.

Ultimately, the research asserts that the biblical discourse on equity, responsibility, duties, and rights offers a deeply textured and multifaceted paradigm. This paradigm champions an ethic that is simultaneously structurally attentive and agape-centered, fostering justice that is both systemic and relational. The synthesis points to a theological vision wherein faithful discipleship manifests through balanced commitments to communal well-being, gender inclusivity, and eschatological hope. By engaging these interrelated dimensions, contemporary theological ethics gains a richly resonant framework capable of addressing both perennial and emergent social challenges with nuance, integrity, and forward-looking hope.

4.1 Comparative analysis of equity and duty across testaments

Building upon the intricate legal and communal ethos discerned within the Levitical corpus, a comparative analysis of equity and duty across the biblical testaments reveals both continuity and development in the conceptualization of responsibility and rights. The Old Testament's codified framework, as exemplified by the Levitical legislation, foregrounds an externally enforced system wherein duties are delineated in explicit legal terms within a covenantal community bound by divine command. In contrast, the New Testament manifests a shift toward internalized moral agency, emphasizing the relational and eschatological dimensions of equity and duty, particularly illuminated in the teachings of Jesus and the apostolic writings. This transition invites a nuanced exploration of how equity and duty are reframed to accommodate differing theological agendas, sociocultural contexts, and gender dynamics, while retaining core concerns related to justice and communal well-being.

Within the Old Testament, equity is predominantly articulated through distributive and restorative justice mechanisms embedded in a juridical structure. The legal stipulations obliging the landowners to leave gleanings for the poor, or the commands governing restitution for wrongs (Lev. 19:9-10; 6:1-7), epitomize an equity grounded in social balance and collective responsibility. Duties are not simply individual moral choices but formalized enactments sustaining the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh. Rights, correspondingly, are granted and protected in tandem with communal obligations, such that the vulnerable possess an enforceable claim anchored in sacred law. Gendered duties further reinforce this logic by situating women's roles within sacrificial, purity, and familial contexts, which while restrictive, are integrally connected to the community's ritual and ethical order. This legalistic conception ensures social cohesion through a transparent, externally regulated system of responsibilities and entitlements.

The New Testament, however, introduces a transformative ethical paradigm that reinterprets equity and duty within the framework of the Kingdom of God, thereby privileging voluntariness and inward disposition alongside communal concern. Jesus' teachings in the Synoptic Gospels notably reorient responsibility from compliance with external commandments toward a motivational ethic rooted in love (agape) and mercy (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:28-31). This eschatological framing injects dynamism into the concept of duty, positing it as an expression of discipleship that transcends mere legal obligation to encompass personal transformation and relational restoration. Equity surfaces less as a formal juridical concept and more as an ethical imperative urging inclusion of the marginalized, demonstrable in parables such as the Prodigal Son or the Good Samaritan (Luke 15; 10:25-37). Duties to the poor, strangers, and vulnerable are thus reframed as voluntary, loving acts reflective of the kingdom's values rather than statutory prescriptions.

This redemptive reconfiguration simultaneously impacts gendered agency, whereby the portrayal of women in the New Testament exhibits a subtle shift from the rigidly defined priestly and purity-related roles in Leviticus to multifaceted participants in ministry and community life. Women like Mary Magdalene, the Samaritan woman, and Priscilla (Mark 16:9; John 4; Acts 18:2-3) embody relational agency that challenges conventional power structures while remaining attentive to equitable treatment within the early church. The New Testament's ethical vision, therefore, incorporates an inclusive discourse on rights and duties that is relationally embedded and less dependent on externally imposed categories, thus fostering a more fluid, interactional model of agency.

Despite these shifts, a fundamental continuity persists between the testaments in the concern for justice as an expression of divine fidelity. Both Levitical law and the Gospel ethic uphold the imperative to protect and empower the marginalized, reflecting an overarching theological conviction that responsible agency entails commitment to equity within the community. Whether through formal commands or ethical exhortations, duties are tethered to a vision of societal well-being informed by covenantal or kingdom ideals. Moreover, the juridical precision of the Old Testament informs the New Testament's moral ethos by providing a structural backdrop against which redemptive ethical freedom can be articulated and concretized.

In sum, the comparative analysis uncovers a complex dialectic wherein equity and duty evolve from legally mandated, covenantal enactments into relational, eschatologically charged ethical responsibilities. The Old Testament situates equity within a codified, communal legal order that calibrates rights and duties through divine command, while the New Testament reframes these concepts within an interpersonal, transformative ethic centered on love and kingdom realities. This interplay underscores the continuity of biblical concern for just social relations even as the modalities of agency and obligation shift in response to changing theological emphases and historical contexts. Such an integrated understanding enriches contemporary reflections on gender, agency, and responsibility by highlighting the dynamic ways biblical narratives negotiate the balance between collective justice and personal ethical agency.

4.2 Implications for contemporary theological ethics

Contemporary theological ethics encounters profound challenges and opportunities when engaging with the biblical narratives on equity, responsibility, duties, and rights as illuminated through the comparative analysis of Old and New Testament paradigms. This interrogation compels ethicists to wrestle with the tension between externally codified legal norms and the internalized, relational ethic propounded in the New Testament, a dynamic particularly relevant in pluralistic societies navigating diverse cultural and moral frameworks. Importantly, the evolution from a juridical to a voluntary, love-centered ethic offers a critical resource for revising modern conceptions of justice and agency in ways that transcend legalism while preserving commitment to communal well-being and marginalized inclusion.

One of the foremost implications lies in resisting simplistic appropriations of biblical equity as either purely legalistic or wholly spiritualized. The Levitical emphasis on distributive justice and enforceable duties foregrounds the necessity of structural protections for vulnerable populations, a principle that persists in contemporary discussions about social justice and human rights. However, the New Testament's paradigm, which privileges agape as the motivating force behind ethical responsibility, challenges contemporary theology to foreground personal transformation and relational accountability alongside institutional frameworks. This synthesis suggests a model of ethics that requires both just social structures and the cultivation of voluntary, compassionate agency, thereby balancing systemic reform with individual moral intentionality.

Moreover, the nuanced biblical portrayal of gendered agency signifies a critical resource for contemporary theological ethics, inviting reassessment of entrenched gender roles within religious communities. The shift from the prescriptive, functionally circumscribed duties of women in Levitical law to their more fluid participation in the ministry and relational networks of the early church exemplifies how evolving theological understandings can enable expanded female agency without negating foundational commitments to equity. Contemporary ethicists may thus draw upon this biblical dynamism to advocate for inclusive practices that recognize diverse expressions of gendered responsibility and leadership, undergirded by a vision of relational equity that transcends legal codification while affirming communal integrity.

Additionally, the convergence of covenantal and eschatological visions in the biblical text offers a profound theological grounding for the intersection of duties and rights in contemporary contexts. The covenantal model's stress on collective accountability and sacredly mandated duties resonates with current debates on social cohesion, communal responsibility, and public ethics. Concurrently, the New Testament's kingdom-oriented ethic, which situates rights and duties in the horizon of eschatological hope, provides a vision for ethical action that anticipates ultimate justice and restoration. This dual framework enables theologians to formulate ethical responses that are both pragmatically attentive to present realities and hopeful toward transformative futures, enriching dialogue on issues such as economic equity, environmental stewardship, and human dignity.

Furthermore, there is an imperative within contemporary theological ethics to critically engage with the biblical texts' historical and cultural situatedness, particularly recognizing the dialectical interplay between continuity and development identified in the legal and relational paradigms of equity and duty. Ethical reflection attentive to this complexity avoids anachronistic readings and acknowledges the interpretive challenges inherent in applying ancient texts to modern dilemmas. Such reflective appropriation necessitates hermeneutical sensitivity to the trajectory of biblical ethics, appreciating the mutable forms of agency and responsibility that biblical communities envisioned, while discerning principles adaptable to new sociocultural contexts without forfeiting theological integrity.

Finally, the integrative approach arising from this biblical discourse underscores a participatory model of moral agency that resists reductionist notions of either institutional imposition or overly individualistic voluntarism. Contemporary theological ethics, therefore, benefits from conceptualizing duties and rights not merely as juridical assignments or personal choices but as embedded within relational networks structured by both divine fidelity and human reciprocity. This relational ontology challenges ethicist's to consider how communities can engender environments in which justice is institutionalized and simultaneously embodied through the transformative praxis of love, mercy, and equitable responsibility.

In conclusion, the biblical narratives examined imbue contemporary theological ethics with a richly textured framework that simultaneously honors the necessity of structural justice and the transformative power of agape-centered moral agency. This dual emphasis equips ethicists to address pressing social and communal challenges by fostering an ethic of responsibility that is both historically grounded and dynamically forward-looking, attentive to equity, duties, and rights as interrelated dimensions of faithful discipleship and communal flourishing.

4.3 Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

While this study elucidates important dimensions of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within biblical narratives, it also encounters limitations inherent to its methodological choices and scope, which warrant critical reflection. One significant limitation arises from the exclusive focus on canonical texts within the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, which, while foundational, represent theological constructs shaped by particular historical, cultural, and religious contexts. This

delimitation potentially constrains the generalizability of findings, as these texts reflect ideological and normative frameworks specific to ancient Israelite and early Christian communities rather than universal or static conceptions of justice. Moreover, the interpretative lens applied privileges a theological and ethical hermeneutic that foregrounds covenantal and eschatological themes. While this approach enriches understanding of biblical notions as relational and dynamic, it may inadvertently underemphasize sociopolitical factors influencing the development of duties and rights in these texts, such as power dynamics, gender relations, and economic structures. For example, the status of women and marginalized groups within biblical equity frameworks remains underexplored, despite their centrality to ecclesial and legal debates (Balch, 1991). This gap signals the necessity for nuanced intersectional analyses that integrate gender, class, and ethnicity to uncover how biblical agency and rights were differentially configured.

Additionally, the study's emphasis on textual analysis, primarily through canonical scripture and classical theological interpretations, limits engagement with contemporary reception history and lived religious praxis. The transformative potential of biblical concepts in modern contextshow faith communities negotiate equity and duties amid social justice challengesis an area left unexplored here but of critical importance for bridging ancient narratives and current ethical praxis. Future research could productively investigate the reception and adaptation of these biblical categories across diverse Christian and Jewish traditions, paying particular attention to feminist, liberationist, or postcolonial readings that challenge or expand normative interpretations (Clements, 1996). Such work would enhance understanding of how foundational theological ideas are contested and reimagined in response to evolving social realities.

Another methodological constraint involves the treatment of rights and duties largely within conceptual and theological frameworks at the expense of comparative analysis with non-biblical legal or ethical traditions. While this study deliberately distinguishes biblical categories from secular models, integrating comparative perspectives would shed light on points of convergence and divergence, thereby enriching theoretical discourse on rights and equity. For instance, exploring parallels with Ancient Near Eastern legal codes or Islamic jurisprudence could reveal how ancient notions of responsibility are culturally embedded and how religious frameworks negotiate the tension between individual claims and communal obligations. This comparative approach would also mitigate the risk of anachronistic interpretations by situating biblical concepts within a broader matrix of ancient social orders and their attendant epistemologies.

In terms of suggestions for further research, expanding interdisciplinary methodologies would substantially benefit the field. Employing socio-historical criticism in conjunction with feminist and postcolonial hermeneutics can uncover marginalized voices within biblical texts, reconceptualizing duties and rights beyond dominant patriarchal paradigms. Likewise, ethnographic studies of contemporary religious communities' engagements with these biblical ideals could elucidate the mutable nature of agency and responsibility as lived phenomena, not solely as textual constructs.

There is also promise in applying theological frameworks alongside current human rights theory, challenging secular assumptions by introducing covenantal and relational paradigms from

scripture into normative debates on justice. Investigating how these ancient concepts might inform restorative justice models or communal accountability structures today would bridge academic insights with practical applications.

Furthermore, envisaging a dialogical model that compares biblical narratives with Islamic scripture and tradition regarding equity and rights could open new avenues for interfaith understandings of agency and justice. Given the shared Abrahamic heritage and the complex interplay between law, theology, and ethics in both religions, comparative studies could identify opportunities for mutual enrichment and collaborative ethical frameworks responsive to pluralistic societies. Such scholarship would not only deepen theological interpretation but also contribute to contemporary discussions on religious pluralism and social cohesion.

In sum, while this study successfully advances an integrated theological analysis of equity, duties, responsibilities, and rights within biblical literature, acknowledging its textual, methodological, and scope limitations underscores the need for broader, more inclusive research trajectories. Future inquiries that interweave gender, socio-political contexts, comparative traditions, and reception history will facilitate a more comprehensive and dynamic understanding of how these fundamental concepts operate both within ancient religious frameworks and in ongoing ethical discourses. By attending to these dimensions, scholarship can continue enhancing the theoretical and practical relevance of biblical notions of justice for contemporary faith communities and social theory.

5 Contextualizing the concepts of Equity, Responsibility, Duties and Rights in Quranic Narratives

5.1 Contextualizing equity and responsibility within the Quranic narrative corpus

The Quranic narrative corpus offers a multifaceted framework for understanding the interplay between equity and responsibility, situating these concepts within theological, ethical, and social dimensions that transcend simplistic or isolated interpretations. Integral to this framework is the manner in which equityor ‘adland responsibility are articulated not merely as abstract ideals but as active, dynamic principles interwoven within the fabric of human-divine relations and communal life. The Quran’s approach conceptualizes equity as a guiding norm that commands balance, fairness, and justice across various contexts, ranging from interpersonal interactions to governance and divine judgment. This conceptualization challenges contemporary readers to engage with equity beyond legalistic dimensions, recognizing it as a holistic paradigm that necessitates conscientious responsibility.

Within this narrative corpus, responsibility acts as the corollary and operational mechanism through which equity is actualized. Human beings are repeatedly portrayed as moral agents entrusted with duties that span care for the vulnerable, stewardship over creation, and adherence to divine directives. The responsibility detailed in the Quran is not merely individualistic but encompasses a collective dimension, underscoring communal obligations and social accountability. For instance, the concept of amana (trust) encapsulates both a divine mandate and human duty,

emphasizing that the equitable distribution of rights and duties is contingent upon fulfilling this entrusted role with integrity. The Quran thus situates responsibility not only as an ethical imperative but as an ontological condition of human existence, linking it directly with the exercise of agency and moral discernment.

The Quran's narratives also embed equity and responsibility within stories that frame moral failures and successes, thereby highlighting the consequences of neglect or fulfillment of these principles. The examples of prophets such as Musa (Moses) and Sulayman (Solomon) illustrate these themes vividly: Musa's leadership and call for justice among his people demonstrate the critical role of responsibility in maintaining social equity, while Sulayman's wise judgment signifies the exercise of divinely guided equity in governance and decision-making. These narratives reinforce the notion that equity presupposes responsible action informed by both divine guidance and contextual awareness, suggesting a model of justice integrated with compassionate accountability. This narrative methodology situates equity and responsibility not as static concepts but as lived realities subject to continual negotiation and interpretation within community and spiritual life.

Moreover, the Quranic corpus intertwines equity and responsibility with the reception and exercise of rights, challenging androcentric or patriarchal readings by foregrounding the interdependence of rights and duties. This is especially significant in exploring gendered dimensions of agency, where responsibility is paralleled with spiritual and social rights endowed upon all individuals regardless of gender. The narratives emphasize mutual responsibilities within family and societal structures, promoting a balanced ethical vision that resists reductionist dichotomies. The Quran's insistence that no soul bears the burden of another (Quran 6:164) encapsulates the individualized nature of moral responsibility while simultaneously affirming intersubjective obligations that ensure equity at a collective level.

Crucially, contextualizing equity and responsibility within the Quranic narrative corpus demands attention to the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed, which serve to reinforce these concepts experientially and affectively. The use of parables, direct commands, covenantal language, and portrayals of divine mercy and justice interlace to create a layered understanding that both guides and challenges adherents. This narrative complexity mandates interpretive practices that are sensitive to historical context, textual intertextuality, and theological discourse, all of which influence contemporary debates on the practical realization of equity and responsibility. As such, the Quranic narrative corpus invites an ongoing hermeneutic engagement that appreciates the inseparability of these concepts and their relevance for ethical discourses in modern Muslim societies and beyond.

In sum, the Quranic narratives provide a profound ontological and ethical foundation for equity and responsibility, portraying them as interdependent principles embedded within divine-human relationality and communal constructs. This contextualization disrupts narrow readings that isolate rights or duties, instead framing a comprehensive vision where equitable treatment arises through responsible agency informed by divine commands and social exigencies. Such a framework

underscores the transformative potential of Quranic narratives to shape discourses on justice, gender, and social ethics, rendering them vital for contemporary scholarly inquiries into agency and equity within Islamic thought.

5.2 Formulation of research questions on duties and rights in Quranic texts

The articulation of research questions concerning duties and rights within Quranic texts stems organically from the preceding elucidation of equity and responsibility as foundational, interwoven concepts in the Quranic narrative corpus. Given that equity (ʿadl) and responsibility manifest not as abstract ideals but as lived ethical imperatives intimately connected with human agency and divine mandate, the endeavor to frame precise research inquiries necessitates a careful unpacking of how duties and rights are linguistically and thematically configured in the Quran. Such questions must navigate the complex overlap wherein rights are neither isolated entitlements nor unconditional claims but are contingent on the concomitant fulfillment of duties, thereby inviting a reconceptualization of legalistic or doctrinal assumptions prevalent in many interpretive traditions. A primary line of questioning concerns the extent to which Quranic texts delineate duties and rights symmetrically or asymmetrically across various social and spiritual domains. This invites inquiry into how responsibilities assigned to individualswhether men or women, rulers or subjects correspond to the rights they are accorded, thus probing the Quran's vision of distributive justice within its multifaceted ethical framework. For instance, one might ask: How does the Quran establish the relational dynamics between rights and duties within matrimonial arrangements, inheritance laws, or communal worship, and to what degree do these reflect an integrative conception of equity rather than gendered or hierarchical privilege? Exploring these questions demands attention to specific verses, such as those in Surah An-Nisa (4:1-35), which emphasize mutual rights and duties but are often contested in contemporary hermeneutics regarding gender equity.

Moreover, the Quran's insistence that no soul bears the burden of another (Quran 6:164) generates further inquiry into the individualization of moral and legal accountability vis-à-vis collective obligations. A nuanced research question thus arises: In what manner do Quranic formulations of duties and rights negotiate the tension between individual agency and communal responsibility, and how does this balance sustain the ethical paradigm of equitable treatment? This question foregrounds the tension between personal autonomy and societal interdependence, entailing a hermeneutic approach that situates duties and rights within an ever-shifting matrix of social relations rather than static codices.

The research must also interrogate the epistemological and hermeneutical registers through which duties and rights are promulgated in the Quranic text. How do rhetorical devices such as covenantal language, commands, parables, and illustrative narratives contribute to constructing a normative framework that informs believers' understanding and enactment of these concepts? By framing this question, one acknowledges that understanding duties and rights in the Quran transcends mere expository analysis and demands engagement with the text's affective, spiritual, and social resonances. For example, the parable of the believers as a single body (Quran 49:10)

encapsulates a profound ethical injunction towards mutual responsibility that implicitly enshrines rights and duties as interdependent principles sustaining communal harmony.

Another dimension ripe for research lies in the gendered implications of these Quranic formulations. How do the Quranic texts negotiate the distribution of duties and rights across gender lines, and what hermeneutical methodologies enable a reading that resists androcentric or patriarchal bias. This question aligns with feminist and gender-critical scholarship that challenges reductive interpretations, foregrounding the Quran's potential to endorse a balanced ethical vision as demonstrated in the mutual obligations emphasized in marital verses (Quran 30:21; 2:228) and the discourse on spiritual equality before God (Quran 33:35). Such inquiries necessitate methodological pluralism, incorporating linguistic analysis, historical context, and contemporary ethical reflections to elucidate the intersectionality of gender, agency, and justice.

Finally, a meta-level question interrogates how the conceptual interplay of duties, rights, equity, and responsibility in the Quran informs present-day legitimate claims of justice and agency within Muslim societies. To what extent do Quranic principles offer a framework that supports transformative social ethics sensitive to historical contingencies and evolving notions of individual and collective rights? This inquiry opens interdisciplinary dialogues between Quranic hermeneutics, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), and modern human rights discourses, positioning the research within both tradition and contemporary reformist trajectories.

Collectively, these questions not only map the terrain of duties and rights within Quranic texts but also reflect a commitment to interpretive rigor and contextual sensitivity, attentive to the theological, ethical, and sociocultural complexities that inform Quranic equity and responsibility. Addressing them facilitates a critical retrieval of the Quranic ethos that can contribute substantially to academic discourses on justice, gender, and agency in Islamic studies and beyond.

5.3 Scope, significance, and overview of the concepts whithin the Quranic Corpus:

Delimiting the scope of this inquiry requires a nuanced appreciation of the Quranic corpus as a multilayered text where concepts such as equity, responsibility, duties, and rights are neither monolithic nor static but dynamically interwoven within theological, ethical, and social registers. Rather than attempting a comprehensive exegesis of the entire Quranic textwhich would be unattainable within the parameters of this studythe research selectively emphasizes verses and thematic clusters that directly engage with interpersonal ethics and communal justice, with a particular focus on those narratives that illuminate the reciprocity and tension between rights and duties. This circumscribed focus allows for in-depth textual and contextual scrutiny, enabling the extraction of normative principles that bear upon contemporary discourses in gender, agency, and social justice within Islamic thought. Accordingly, the analysis prioritizes scriptural moments such as Surah An-Nisa, Surah Al-Ma'idah, Surah Al-Baqarah, and select Medinan and Meccan revelations that juxtapose divine mandates with human ethical performance, thus effectively showcasing the Quran's methodological integration of law, morality, and social equity.

The significance of undertaking such a study extends across multiple dimensions. Theologically, it offers an opportunity to re-engage with classical Quranic jurisprudence and ethics through a hermeneutical optic that foregrounds equity (ʿadl) and responsibility (taklīf) not merely as juridical categories but as foundational to the formation of a just social order. This re-framing challenges prevailing reductionist interpretations that often pit rights against duties or naturalize gendered paradigms without attending to the text's holistic ethical vision. Furthermore, by interrogating duties and rights symbiotically, the research contributes to critical feminist and postcolonial critiques, which have underscored how scriptural texts are deployed variably to reinforce or resist patriarchal structures. Practically, such an approach equips contemporary Muslim communities and scholars with conceptual tools to articulate claims for social justiceincluding gender equitygrounded firmly in the textual sources, thereby bridging traditional scholarship and modern ethical imperatives. This aligns with broader academic endeavors seeking to redress historical misreadings and to amplify marginalized voices within Islamic interpretive traditions.

Methodologically, the study adopts an interdisciplinary hermeneutic framework that synthesizes classical tafsir methodologies with contemporary gender theory, social ethics, and linguistic analysis. The starting point entails a close textual exegesis (tafsīr al-āyāt) grounded in canonical classical sources such as al-Tabari and Ibn 'Ashur, complemented by modern critical translations exemplified by Abdel Haleem (2004). This philological scrutiny is juxtaposed with thematic analysis, enabling the researcher to discern patterns in how duties and rights are delineated across juridical, ethical, and relational domains. Simultaneously, critical feminist hermeneutics, especially informed by scholars like Amina Wadud (1999), facilitate a re-examination of gendered narratives, interrogating the interpretive trajectories that have historically shaped orthodox readings. Central to the method is a sensitivity to the sociohistorical contexts of revelation, acknowledging how mediating conditions influence textual emphases and ethical prescriptions. This historical-contextual awareness situates the Quran's moral economy not as an abstract universal but as a lived, responsive discourse.

Moreover, the methodological approach embraces a dialogical epistemology, wherein the Quranic text is engaged as a vibrant interlocutor rather than a static document. This approach recognizes rhetorical devicessuch as covenantal language, parables, and narrative metaphorsas instrumental in constructing the normative universe that shapes believers' understandings of agency and justice. For instance, analyzing the metaphor of the believers as "one body" (Quran 49:10) raises profound interpretive questions about communal solidarity and individual responsibility, which are explored through both exegetical commentary and contemporary ethical theory. This dialogic stance also necessitates awareness of hermeneutical pluralism, recognizing the multiplicity of Quranic readings across historical periods and cultural contexts. This pluralism is particularly salient in exploring gendered dimensions, where feminist readings seek to surface latent egalitarian impulses obscured by patriarchal exegesis.

In attempting to operationalize these analytical categories, the research utilizes qualitative content analysis of selected Quranic verses, contextualizing them within broader Quranic themes

and relevant prophetic traditions (hadith) when needed to clarify ambiguous notions of duties and rights. By adopting a comparative lens, the study also critically assesses how contemporary legalistic and doctrinal interpretations align or deviate from the Quranic ethos of equitable mutual obligations. This triangulation between text, context, and interpretive tradition enriches the analysis, allowing for grounded claims that reflect both scriptural fidelity and modern ethical concerns. Ultimately, the approach seeks to underscore the Quran's potential as a source of normative guidance that transcends simplistic binariessuch as rights versus duties or male versus female obligationsilluminating instead an intricate web of relational ethics deeply embedded in notions of divine justice and human agency.

Hence, by articulating this scope, acknowledging the study's significance, and delineating a rigorous multidisciplinary methodology, the research not only establishes a solid foundation for critical inquiry but also addresses the urgent academic and social imperative to contextualize Quranic concepts of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within a framework that is at once historically informed and ethically resonant. Through this, the study contributes meaningfully to ongoing debates regarding gender and agency in Islamic thought while situating the Quranic narrative as a living source for conceptualizing justice that is both dynamic and grounded in tradition.

5.3.1 Critical perspectives on agency and responsibility in Quranic studies (Ahmed 2021)

Building on the jurisprudential frameworks outlined by Farah (2019), Ahmed (2021) offers a critical vantage point for interrogating the conceptualizations of agency and responsibility in Quranic studies that extends beyond legalistic interpretations to encompass hermeneutical and epistemological dimensions. Ahmed problematizes dominant readings of the Quran that excessively individualize agency within normative structures, arguing that such approaches risk neglecting the complex interplay between divine command, human volition, and sociohistorical contexts. This critique foregrounds a tension between deterministic and autonomous models of agency embedded in the text, urging scholars to reconsider how responsibility is ascribed, negotiated, and enacted within Quranic narratives.

Ahmed's analysis dissects the hermeneutical assumptions underpinning traditional exegeses (tafsir) that often frame human agents as either fully accountable moral actors or passive recipients of predestined outcomes. Instead, she proposes a more dialectical understanding, where agency is relationally constituted through a synergy of ethical obligation, contextual possibility, and interpretive mediation. This perspective resonates with and extends Farah's emphasis on ijtihād, suggesting that agency in Quranic discourse cannot be decoupled from dynamic interpretive processes that mediate scripture's application in lived realities. For instance, Ahmed examines narratives such as the story of Adam and Iblis to illustrate how responsibility is negotiated between obedience and disobedience, free will and divine knowledge, exposing the multiplicity of agency expressions rather than a singular theological determinism.

Furthermore, Ahmed engages with feminist critiques and postcolonial scholarship to challenge androcentric and hierarchical constructs that constrain agency, particularly for women and marginalized subjects within the Quranic corpus. By unpacking selective readings that reduce female figures to passive archetypes or moral exemplars confined within rigid roles, she advocates for a re-examination of gendered agency that attends to subtleties within the textsuch as instances where women exercise discernment, moral courage, or subversive resistance. These readings contribute to a more nuanced conceptualization of responsibility that traverses binary oppositions of obedience versus rebellion or duty versus rights, instead highlighting the fluidity and contestation inherent in ethical decision-making processes as portrayed in Quranic narratives.

Ahmed also critiques the prevalent tendency in Quranic studies to universalize normative concepts of agency that align with Western liberal notions of autonomous subjectivity, arguing this risks obscuring culturally and historically situated understandings of relational responsibility and communal accountability inherent in Islamic ethics. She draws attention to the Quran's complex socio-ethical landscape, where individual agency is embedded within interconnected matrices of family, community, and divine authority. Through hermeneutical strategies attentive to maqāṣid al- sharīʿah and maqāṣid al-tafsīr (objectives of interpretation), Ahmed proposes a reframing of responsibility that emphasizes collective dimensions and acknowledges structural constraints affecting the realization of ethical agency, especially vis-à-vis gendered power relations.

This critical perspective invites a reevaluation of how Quranic ethics conceptualize the overlap between duties and rights, underlining that agency is neither absolute nor entirely circumscribed but mediated by historically contingent realities that shape the enactment of responsibility. Ahmed's work thus complements the juridical insights of Farah by situating agency within broader interpretive and socio-political contexts rather than solely within the parameters of legal theory. It underscores the necessity of a pluralistic hermeneutics capable of navigating textual ambiguity and ethical complexity, offering vital methodological tools for scholars aiming to articulate Quranic principles of equity, responsibility, and gender justice in contemporary frameworks.

In light of these arguments, Ahmed's contribution enriches the discourse on Quranic agency by challenging monolithic representations and advocating for an approach that synthesizes theological, legal, ethical, and socio-cultural dimensions. This multidimensional understanding is essential for unpacking the dynamic interplay of gendered rights and duties embedded in the Quran and their ongoing negotiation within Islamic traditions and modern interpretations. By emphasizing interpretive flexibility and the relational constitution of responsibility, Ahmed's critical lens provides a foundational platform for engaging with the challenges of contextualizing equity and justice in Quranic narratives without simplifying or depoliticizing complex normative engagements.

3- Analyses of duties and rights in classical tafsir commentaries (Ibn Kathir 1995)

Ibn Kathir's classical tafsir offers an indispensable vantage point for examining duties and rights within Quranic narratives, as it embodies a foundational exegetical tradition that has profoundly shaped Islamic thought and jurisprudence. His commentary, extensively compiled in the twentieth

century but rooted in the fourteenth-century intellectual milieu, provides a systematic exploration of how scriptural injunctions prescribe social and moral responsibilities alongside individual and communal entitlements. Unlike more contemporaneous critical approaches such as that articulated by Ahmed (2021), who foregrounds dynamic hermeneutics and socio-political contextualization, where I integrate Ibn Kathir's interpretations here to illustrate a hermeneutical baseline from which later debates on agency and responsibility evolve.

Ibn Kathir's exegesis meticulously elucidates Quranic verses through a lens heavily informed by hadith literature and classical jurisprudential consensus (ijmāʿ), framing the interplay between duties and rights primarily within normative legal and theological boundaries. His hermeneutical strategy is characterized by an emphasis on definite divine prescriptions that both empower and constrain human agency. For instance, in his commentary on Surah An-Nisa (4:34), which addresses men's duties as "qawwam" (maintainers) of women, Ibn Kathir explicates a tripartite framework of responsibility encompassing provision, protection, and moral leadership, thereby enshrining hierarchical but reciprocal duties intended to uphold family and social harmony (Ibn Kathir 1995). Here, duties and rights are understood to be interdependent yet clearly delineated, reflecting the Qur'an's broader discursive aims of order and equity as mediated through divinely sanctioned social roles.

The classical tafsir also attends to the articulation of rights, particularly through the prism of justice (ʻadl) and covenantal obligation (ʿahd). Ibn Kathir frequently foregrounds Quranic injunctions that mandate equitable treatment and the safeguarding of rights for vulnerable groups, including orphans, women, and the poor. His commentary on Surah Al-Baqarah (2:177), which enumerates ethical virtues, underscores that true righteousness involves fulfilling obligations to others alongside ritual piety, thus positioning duties and rights within a holistic moral economy shaped by divine commands. In this manner, Ibn Kathir's tafsir implicitly recognizes that accountability is not unilateral but dialogical, embedded within a web of relational ethics that circumscribes individual freedom with communal responsibility.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that Ibn Kathir's approach remains deeply embedded within a theological determinism that privileges divine sovereignty and textual literalism over interpretive contingency. The duty-bound agency articulated in his tafsir often privileges obedience as the paramount ethical posture, situating rights firmly within the framework permitted by sharīʿah. Instances where his commentary addresses female agency, such as the narrative of Maryam or the wives of the Prophet, tend to emphasize exemplary obedience and virtues framed by prescribed roles, thereby reflecting the androcentric hermeneutics characteristic of his epoch (Ibn Kathir 1995). This restricts the scope for recognizing the complex, often contestatory relationality of duties and rights that scholars like Ahmed argue for, particularly concerning gendered dimensions of agency.

-Contrasting with the critical nuances that Ahmed advances in questioning monolithic and androcentric readings, Ibn Kathir's tafsir serves as a historiographically essential referent that anchors the interpretive tradition in normative orthodoxy. His exegesis lays bare how duties and rights have traditionally been conceptualized in the Sunni Islamic scholarly corpus: as fixed prescriptions derived from divine text, functioning to preserve social order and religious conformity.

Yet, this classical stance does not entirely preclude negotiation or contextual application; Ibn Kathir's recognition of exceptions and graded responsibilities within particular narratives gestures at an embryonic awareness of interpretive flexibility, albeit confined within classical jurisprudential boundaries.

This underscores the importance of situating contemporary feminist and postcolonial analyzes within a genealogy of interpretation rather than presenting them as disjunct from tradition. Ibn Kathir's tafsir, for example, provides a textual and methodological substrate against which re-readings may be calibratedhighlighting the tension between fixed doctrinal mandates and evolving socio-ethical understandings of equity and justice. His work illustrates how duties and rights are not merely ethical abstractions but are institutionally embedded within Muslim communal life, enacted through jurisprudence and ritual practice, thus shaping lived experiences of agency and responsibility.

By critically engaging with Ibn Kathir's tafsir alongside hermeneutical frameworks like those proposed by Ahmed, scholars can better appreciate the dialectics of continuity and change in interpreting Quranic notions of duties and rights. This facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of how classical commentaries operationalize the balance between divine injunction and human accountability, offering a valuable counterpoint to legalistic reductionism while acknowledging the normative function such interpretations have played historically. Consequently, analyses of Ibn Kathir provide indispensable insights into the embeddedness of gendered duties and rights in Quranic narrative praxis and the potential openings or constraints classical tafsir poses for reimagining equity and agency in Muslim thought.

5.3.2 Contemporary scholarship on social equity themes in the Quran (Safi 2020)

Recent scholarship by Safi (2020) advances this ongoing discourse by reframing social equity themes in the Quran through a contemporary lens that foregrounds the dynamic interplay between textual universality and mutable socio-historical conditions. Safi's work departs from rigid exegetical boundaries characteristic of classical tafsir, such as Ibn Kathir's, by integrating critical hermeneutics with socio-political theory to interrogate how Quranic narratives articulate equity not merely as static prescription but as an evolving ethical ideal responsive to context. This reorientation reflects an epistemological shift towards recognizing the Quran as a living text whose social and moral imperatives must be revisited in light of present-day challenges to justice and inclusion.

Central to Safi's analysis is the argument that the Quranic concept of equity (al-qist) transcends formal legal equality or juridical parity; instead, it embodies an expansive egalitarian ethos that mandates the restructuring of social relations to mitigate historical marginalization and systemic asymmetries. Drawing upon the Quranic injunctions in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13) which emphasize the inherent dignity and equal moral worth of all humans irrespective of lineage or socio-political status, Safi elucidates how social equity is fundamentally anchored in a universalistic vision of ethical responsivity. This perspective problematizes classical stratifications embedded in traditional interpretations, such as gendered divisions highlighted by Ibn Kathir, by advocating for a more

inclusive application of equality that challenges patriarchal and hierarchical norms inherent in customary jurisprudence.

Safi's methodology explicitly situates Quranic discourse within broader frameworks of social justice theory, intersecting Islamic teachings with contemporary concerns including gender equity, economic redistribution, and minority rights. He reveals how Quranic narratives embed responsibilities not only at the individual level but extend to collective solidarities that demand structural reform, thus reconfiguring duties and rights as interdependent elements within a kaleidoscopic moral economy. For example, in explicating the Quran's emphasis on the rights of the poor, orphans, and women, Safi highlights interpretative openings that endorse proactive empowerment measures rather than mere protectionist obligations, marking a shift from preservation of status quo towards transformative justice.

Moreover, Safi (2020) critically appraises how language and semantics in Quranic verses concerning equity are multi-valent and context-responsive, warranting careful hermeneutical engagement beyond literalist exegesis. This is particularly salient in discussions on gender, where Safi challenges androcentric readings by foregrounding the Quran's underlying principles of mutual consultation (shura) and justice ('adl) as normative guides for equitable agency within social and familial structures. In doing so, he breaks from the static paradigms typified by Ibn Kathir's interpretation of masculine stewardship to propose a more dialogic model of social relations, wherein rights and duties are continuously negotiated and recalibrated to serve justice and human dignity.

The implications of Safi's findings resonate deeply when considered alongside preceding classical perspectives. While Ibn Kathir's tafsir delineates duties and rights within a relatively fixed hierarchical schema aligned with theological determinism, Safi's scholarship illuminates the Quran's potential as a source for progressive reinterpretation aimed at rectifying contemporary inequities. This dialogical tension underscores the necessity of undertaking critical rereadings that honor textual origins without ossifying their ethical import in ossified juridical categories. Safi's approach thus enriches academic understanding of equity in Quranic narratives by incorporating interdisciplinary tools that expand hermeneutical horizons and respond to the pressing ethical demands of modernity.

In sum, Safi's 2020 contribution represents a pivotal advancement in contextualizing social equity within Quranic exegesis, offering a nuanced framework that balances fidelity to textual sanctity with the imperative for justice-responsive interpretation. His work challenges reductive binaries of duty and right espoused in classical tafsir by reaffirming the Quran's emancipatory potentials, especially in addressing marginalized identities and systemic injustice. Consequently, Safi's scholarship is indispensable for contemporary projects seeking to harmonize Islamic ethical paradigms with pluralistic, egalitarian social realities, and thereby transforming the Quranic discourse on equity from a locus of prescribed hierarchy into one of dynamic, negotiated agency.

5.3.3 Hermeneutic approaches applied to Quranic narrative analysis (Panou 2017)

Building upon the reconfiguration of Quranic equity advanced by Safi (2020), Panou's (2017) exploration of hermeneutic models applied to Quranic narrative analysis offers a critical methodological complement that clarifies how interpretative strategies shape understandings of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within the text. Panou interrogates not only the content of Quranic narratives but also the frameworks through which these narratives are approached, thereby elucidating the ways hermeneutics fundamentally governs the epistemic access to the Quran's ethical paradigms. This focus is crucial for deepening the theoretical foundation required to contextualize concepts of equity and agency in Islamic scriptural discourse, as it systematically bridges classical exegetical traditions with contemporary hermeneutical theory.

At the heart of Panou's argument is an insistence that hermeneutic models are not neutral conduits but actively shape the ontological and ethical registers in which Quranic narratives are understood. Panou critiques reductive, literalist readings often prevalent in traditional tafsir that treat the Quran as a monolithic, static text, instead advocating for interpretative paradigms that foreground the narrative dynamism and polyvalence intrinsic to the Quran. This shift aligns with Safi's contention regarding the living, contextually responsive nature of Quranic discourse, yet Panou's focus centers on explicating the interpretative mechanisms that facilitate such responsiveness. For instance, he examines dialogical hermeneutics informed by Gadamerian philosophy, wherein understanding the Quran involves an active fusion of horizons between the interpreter's context and the textual world, underscoring the perpetual negotiation of meaning rather than fixed exegesis.

Moreover, Panou situates narrative analysis within a hermeneutic framework that highlights the interdependence of form and content in Quranic storytelling. He argues that narrative structuressuch as episodic repetition, parables, and moral exemplarsare not incidental literary devices but integral to conveying complex ethical injunctions on equity and responsibility. By applying Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, Panou demonstrates how Quranic stories function as agents that instantiate particular subjectivities, shaping the reader's conception of moral duties and social roles. This hermeneutic lens allows for the deconstruction of hierarchical or gendered narratives, revealing how agency and rights are negotiated within the text's moral economy rather than imposed as fixed categories. Consequently, Panou's approach elucidates interpretive openings where traditional readings, such as those critiqued by Safi, can be rethought to accommodate more inclusive and equitable social imaginaries.

The methodological rigor Panou brings extends to a critical engagement with the polyvalent semantics of key Quranic terms related to equity and duty. By employing semiotic and discourse-analytic tools alongside hermeneutic theory, he unpacks how terms such as 'adl (justice), qist (equity), and amanah (trust/responsibility) are embedded within narrative contexts that modulate their ethical valences. Panou demonstrates that these terms resist static legalistic definitions and instead operate as dynamic signifiers whose meanings are contingent upon narrative function and socio-historical positioning. This semantic complexity supports a more nuanced grasp of the

relationality between rights and duties in the Quran, showing that these concepts are co-constitutive and mutable rather than rigid binariesan insight that resonates with Safi's progressive exegesis.

Importantly,Panou's hermeneutic model advocates a critical reflexivity that acknowledges the interpreter's positionality, including gender, socio-political standpoint, and hermeneutical presuppositions. This reflexivity opens avenues for feminist and postcolonial readings that challenge androcentric and Eurocentric interpretive traditions, thereby enriching the discourse on agency within Quranic narratives. For example, Panou highlights hermeneutic strategies used by contemporary Muslim feminist scholars who employ contextualist and purposive approaches to reinterpret verses traditionally cited to enforce patriarchal authority, proposing instead models of shared responsibility and mutual agency consonant with the Quran's broader ethical vision. This dimension echoes Safi's call for reorienting Quranic equity beyond static hierarchies, confirming that hermeneutic frameworks are instrumental to realizing transformative readings attentive to social justice.

Collectively, Panou's contribution provides vital conceptual tools to unpack the mechanisms through which Quranic narratives articulate and negotiate equity, responsibilities, and rights. His application of diverse hermeneutic modelsranging from Gadamerian dialogical methods to Ricoeurian narrative theory and critical semioticsenables a multifaceted engagement that transcends binary exegetical paradigms characteristic of classical tafsir. By elucidating how interpretive praxis mediates the ethical content of the Quran, Panou advances a methodological foundation that complements the substantive reinterpretations proffered by Safi (2020). Such an integrative hermeneutic approach is indispensable for any scholarly endeavor aimed at contextualizing Quranic concepts of equity and agency in ways that respond thoughtfully to contemporary exigencies of justice, gender, and social responsibility.

5.3.4 Conceptualizing individual versus collective responsibility in sacred texts

Disentangling individual and collective responsibility within sacred texts, particularly the Quran, demands a nuanced appreciation of how these modalities interplay to construct ethical subjectivities and communal obligations. The Quranic narrative does not position responsibility solely as an atomized phenomenon confined to the individual; rather, it cultivates an ethically charged matrix where personal accountability (taklīf) is invariably tethered to collective welfare (maslahah) and social order. This dialectical relationship challenges reductive conceptions that isolate moral responsibility within individualistic frameworks dominant in Western liberal thought, inviting instead an integrative outlook that honors the complex social ontology embedded in Islamic epistemology.

The Quran consistently foregrounds the concept of individual responsibility through injunctions that affirm each person's accountability before God for their choices, deeds, and moral integrity. Verses such as "And every soul earns not [blame] except against itself" (Quran 6:164) encapsulate a foundational principle whereby ethical agency is inseparable from self-awareness and moral self-regulation. Individual responsibility in this regard encompasses both ritualistic dimensions

observance of commandmentsand ethical comportment manifest in justice (adl), truthfulness (sidq), and humility (tawadhu'). However, this personal accountability is never portrayed as atomistic autonomy divorced from social bonds; rather, it is enmeshed within a framework of mutual rights and duties that transcend the self.

Conversely, collective responsibility emerges prominently in Quranic discourse through the construction of the ummah as a morally responsible community, bound by shared ethical imperatives and mutual care. The notion that "those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, and establish regular prayer and give zakah, will have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve" (Quran 2:277) implicitly communicates the inextricability of communal piety and social justice. Collective responsibility in the Quran often pertains to safeguarding communal interestsupholding justice, protecting the vulnerable, and maintaining social harmonywhich necessitates individuals embodying virtues that nurture collective well-being. Moreover, the Quranic lexicon of responsibility frequently invokes the concept of amanah (trust), as in the verse "Verily, Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those to whom they are due" (Quran 4:58), stipulating that ethical duties are entrusted to the community as a whole, encompassing leaders and followers alike.

Intersecting these twin dimensions are Quranic injunctions that emphasize the indivisibility of individual and collective accountability, impacting social structures and ethical praxis. For instance, Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:2) admonishes believers with "Help one another in righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and transgression," which places the onus on individuals to act in ways that reinforce the communal moral fabric. This verse notably blurs the boundaries between individual agency and collective responsibility, illustrating a socio-ethical schema where personal conduct has ramifications beyond the self, influencing societal goodness or harm. Such interdependence resonates with Dunn's (2018) relational ontology, which underscores that agency is never exercised in isolation but is always situated within communal networks that condition moral flourishing.

The tension between individual and collective responsibility in sacred texts also manifests in the differential emphasis on duty and rights. While individual responsibilities emphasize inward moral discipline and accountability before divine judgment, collective responsibilities foreground outward-facing duties to others, often associated with social justice and redistribution. The Quranic concept of adl (justice) frequently serves as a bridge linking individual ethical behavior to communal equity. This is evident in verses urging believers to "stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourselves or your parents and relatives" (Quran 4:135), thereby mandating that individual moral courage supports the collective imperative of justicea principle that aligns closely with communitarian ethics that value the social embeddedness of moral agency.

Furthermore, the dynamic between individual and collective responsibility invites critical reflection on how sacred texts negotiate the allocation of ethical burdens in diverse social contexts, including gendered and minority experiences. For instance, Quranic narratives concerning prophetic communities often spotlight collective accountability while simultaneously delineating personal

moral agency in adhering to divine statutes amidst social challenges. This duality has implications for contemporary discourses on equity, where reconciling individual rights with communal duties necessitates hermeneutic sensitivity to historical contingencies and evolving socio-political realities. The integration of socio-ethical theories, such as care ethics and virtue ethics, facilitates reimagining agency within these intersectionsacknowledging that individual's are bearers of moral responsibility who simultaneously contribute to and are shaped by collective identities and solidarities.

By framing responsibility as an interconnected matrix within sacred texts rather than as mutually exclusive categories, analyses enriched by Dunn's (2018) insights foreground how Quranic ethics orchestrate a balanced interplay between personal duty and social cohesion. This conception challenges both the reductionist individualism prevalent in secular ethical paradigms and collectivist totalizations that risk subsuming personal agency. Instead, it embraces a pluralistic vision whereby equitable moral action is achieved through the harmonization of individual accountability with communal obligations, affirming that the ethical subject is both a sovereign agent and a custodian of the ummah's collective integrity. This tension and synergy thus lie at the heart of contextualizing responsibility in Quranic narratives, illustrating the text's ongoing relevance in contemporary debates on rights, duties, and equity.

5.4 Criteria for selecting representative Quranic passages and narrative genres

Selecting representative Quranic passages and narrative genres necessitates an approach grounded in both hermeneutic sensitivity and methodological rigor, reflecting the complex interplay of ethical concepts under scrutinynamely equity, responsibility, duties, and rights. Building upon the preceding analysis of individual and collective responsibility, this phase of selection must ensure that the chosen texts embody the dialectical relationship between personal moral agency and communal obligations, thereby illuminating how these modalities are integrated and contextualized within the Quranic corpus.

Foremost, the criteria for selection must privilege passages that explicitly articulate or implicitly gesture toward the normative frameworks governing ethical behavior and social justice. This entails identifying verses (āyāt) and extended narratives (qiṣaṣ or sīrah-like accounts) that concretely address notions of equitable treatment, moral accountability, and the reciprocal nature of rights and duties. For instance, passages such as Quran 4:135, which enjoins believers to uphold justice "even against yourselves or your relatives," articulate a principle that transcends private ethical conduct, underscoring a commitment to fairness that is uncompromising and socially oriented. Similarly, the verse "Help one another in righteousness and piety" (Quran 5:2) encapsulates the interdependence of individual and collective spheres of responsibility, making it a pivotal reference point for this inquiry.

In parallel, the hermeneutic dimension suggests prioritizing those narrative genres that reveal the lived ethical applications of Quranic injunctions. Stories involving prophetic communities, moral exemplars, or episodes of social regulation function as interpretive arenas where theoretical principles of equity and responsibility are embodied within concrete historical and social contexts.

The surah narrativessuch as the prolonged account of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph) in Surah Yusuf (12) offer rich material wherein individual virtue, collective welfare, and divine justice converge, permitting an exploration of how duties and rights manifest across personal and societal planes. These genres facilitate the unpacking of complex ethical scenarios, illustrating how Quranic ethics are enacted amid sociopolitical challenges, including issues of power, gender, and minority status. Additionally, selection must be informed by thematic coherence, ensuring that the passages collectively represent a holistic spectrum of ethical deliberations relevant to equity and agency. This means encompassing texts that delineate not only juridical and ritual responsibilities but also those that foreground social justice imperatives, such as the protection of the vulnerable (orphans, women, and disenfranchised groups), redistribution of wealth (zakah), and maintenance of communal harmony. The integration of rights-oriented versesfor example, those stressing mutual obligations among spouses (Quran 30:21) or emphasizing the sanctity of trusts and contracts (Quran 4:58)enables a nuanced examination of how individual and collective claims are balanced in the Quranic vision of a just society.

A further critical consideration arises from intertextuality and the socio-historical situatedness of the selected passages. Recognizing that Quranic verses sometimes respond to specific historical circumstances requires a criterion prioritizing passages whose ethical injunctions bear universalizable yet contextually grounded relevance. This guards against decontextualized readings that might obscure the dynamic nature of responsibility as presented in Islamic epistemology. By engaging with both Meccan and Medinan periodseach illustrating distinct emphases on individual spirituality and communal regulation, respectivelythe selection captures the evolutionary trajectory of ethical concepts within the Quran, encouraging an interpretive framework attentive to temporal, social, and theological nuances.

Moreover, linguistic and stylistic dimensions of the Quranic text demand careful attention. The selection process incorporates consideration of rhetorical devices, narrative voice, and genre conventions, which shape the reception and ethical weight of the passages. The Quran's unique compositioninterweaving direct divine address, parables, commandments, and exhortationsaffords varied modes of ethical engagement, each contributing distinctively to notions of agency and responsibility. For example, didactic parables dramatize ethical dilemmas and consequences, while legislative verses stipulate concrete duties, and collectively enriching the analysis of equity and rights within the sacred narrative landscape.

In sum, the criteria for selecting Quranic passages and narrative genres are multifaceted, anchored in the need to represent the integrative and complex nature of ethical subjectivities and communal duties within Islam. This strategic selection, informed by thematic relevance, narrative form, socio- historical context, and linguistic nuance, ensures that the embodied concepts of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights are neither abstracted nor fragmented but are apprehended within their dynamic textual and social realities. Such a comprehensive corpus facilitates a rigorous and contextually sensitive analysis, advancing an understanding of Quranic ethics that resonates with contemporary concerns around justice, agency, and social cohesion.

6 A comparative thematic study of women's rights in Meccan versus Medinan sūrahs; notions of responsibility in the stories of Mary and Eve

How Qur'anic legal directives and the hadith shape female agency; Shared duties across Biblical and Qur'anic narratives; Contrasts in responsibility models between these texts; and their effects on family and community structures:

6.1 Contextualization of women's rights discourse in early Meccan and Medinan surahs (Qur'an 33:35)

The discourse surrounding women's rights within the Qur'an exhibits notable distinctions when contrasting the early Meccan surahs with those revealed in Medina, and a closer examination of Qur'an 33:35 provides a nuanced understanding of this development. Surah Al-Ahzab (33:35) presents a pivotal locus wherein the Qur'anic articulation of gender equality in spiritual and moral accountability emerges with clarity. This verse enumerates a series of attributes and virtuessuch as submission, belief, obedience, patience, humility, charity, fasting, chastity, and remembrance of Godapplying them equivalently to both men and women, framing these qualities as pathways to divine forgiveness and a great reward. The deliberate inclusion of both masculine and feminine forms in the original Arabic text marks an explicit recognition of women's agency within the religious and ethical framework of the nascent Muslim community (Esack, 2005).

Contextually, the legal and social disturbances faced by the Medinan community necessitated a more explicit codification of roles and rights, contrasting with the more general, often allegorical or universal tone evident in the Meccan period. Early Meccan surahs tend to emphasize overarching spiritual principles and the fundamental unity of humanity before God without extensive legal prescriptions. This general spiritual egalitarianism progressively evolves into a more structurally defined set of directives in Medina, where questions of social order, gender roles, and communal responsibilities become pressing (Abou El Fadl, 2001). Qur'an 33:35 stands at this juncture, synthesizing the universal spiritual ideals of the Meccan phase with the emerging legalistic and societal particularities of the Medinan era.

The significance of 33:35 also lies in its implicit challenge to patriarchal norms prevalent in seventh- century Arabian society, which often marginalized women's spiritual and social standing. By explicitly highlighting equivalence in duties and rewards between the sexes, this surah not only affirms women's moral agency but also embeds it within the collective identity of the Muslim ummah. Such an approach can be construed as a theological foundation for gender equity, predicated on shared responsibility and reciprocal accountability rather than hierarchical differentiation (Mernissi, 1991). The linguistic precision of affirming attributes in both masculine and feminine grammatical forms further contests any essentialist readings that might reduce women's roles to mere domestic or supportive functions.

Moreover, the socio-historical context surrounding Medinan revelations, including surah 33, reflects an active negotiation of women's public and private roles amid the demands of state formation and community consolidation. For instance, this period saw the codification of rights and

responsibilities related to marriage, inheritance, and family relations, disciplines in which women's agency became legally framed and institutionalized. The verse's emphasis on patience, obedience, and chastity has traditionally been interpreted through juristic lenses that underscore relational duties, yet contemporary exegetical scholarship argues for a more comprehensive understanding encompassing both rights and responsibilities that promote women's ethical subjectivity and autonomous participation in society (Barlas, 2002).

In connecting these points to the broader theme of women's rights in the Qur'anic corpus, Qur'an 33:35 serves both as a culmination of spiritual egalitarianism introduced in early Meccan messages and as a precursor to later juridical elaborations on gender roles. The verse thus embodies a vital intersection where theology, gender, and social ethics converge, offering a foundational text for debates on female agency within Islamic legal and moral frameworks. Its emphasis on shared virtues lays the groundwork for understanding responsibility not as a static, gendered imposition but as a dynamic, reciprocal engagement integral to the flourishing of both individuals and the communal body.

These insights into the contextualization of women's rights discourse in surah 33:35 provide a crucial lens from which to approach the comparative analysis of equity and duties across Islamic and biblical narratives, especially when tracing the paradigms of responsibility illustrated in the stories of Maryam and Hawa. By situating this verse within the unfolding historical and legal milieu of early Islam, we gain a more textured appreciation of the Qur'anic strategy in affirming female moral agency while navigating complex communal imperatives.

6.2 Female agency and responsibility (Smith, 2020)

Female agency and responsibility within the context of Qur'anic exegesis is fundamentally informed by the dynamic interplay between the Meccan and Medinan surahs, as well as by the interpretive frameworks that scholars such as Smith (2020) have advanced to elucidate these themes. Building upon the analysis of Qur'an 33:35 and its role in bridging spiritual egalitarianism with juridical normativity, this study seeks to unravel the nuanced ways in which female agency is articulated, constrained, and enabled across diverse scriptural and hermeneutical registers. Central to this endeavor is the critical inquiry into how responsibility is allocated, internalized, and manifested by female figures in both religious texts and lived traditions, particularly when juxtaposed with theological narratives exemplified by Maryam and Hawa.

Smith (2020) identifies the need to move beyond simplistic dichotomies of oppression versus empowerment by framing research questions that interrogate how responsibility operates as a multifaceted constructmorally, legally, and sociallythat shapes female subjectivity within Islamic discourse. One pivotal question investigates how the linguistic and theological constructions of responsibility in the Qur'an correspond with, or diverge from, interpretive traditions found in prophetic hadiths, thereby revealing the layers through which female agency is legitimized or circumscribed in communal life. This entails a rigorous examination of theological texts alongside jurisprudential sources to discern the tensions and convergences between prescriptive norms and lived realities of women's roles.

Expanding from textual analysis, another core objective outlined by Smith involves situating the responsibility paradigms within broader socio-historical and comparative frameworksmost notably, the contrasting depictions of female figures in the Qur'anic stories of Maryam and Hawa, set against biblical narratives. These iconic portrayals encapsulate differing dimensions of agency: Maryam's embodiment of prophetic selection and spiritual autonomy versus Hawa's symbolic role in creation and relational dynamics. Analyzing these figures through the lens of responsibility elucidates how duties are framed not merely as burdens but as potential sites of ethical subjectivity and communal contribution. This approach challenges monolithic interpretations that either idealize or marginalize female participation, foregrounding instead the dialectics of duty and empowerment.

Smith further emphasizes an interdisciplinary methodology that integrates literary criticism, feminist theology, and legal hermeneutics, thereby addressing gaps in existing scholarship that often compartmentalize spiritual egalitarianism and legal prescriptivism. By contextualizing Qur'anic injunctions historically and textuallyrecognizing, for instance, the differential emphases in Meccan versus Medinan surahsthis research seeks to clarify the evolution of female responsibility from universal spiritual virtues to concrete socio-legal mandates. Such a trajectory offers critical insight into how agency is not static but transforms responsive to communal exigencies, theological reflection, and interpretive politics.

Moreover, the research explores how the notion of responsibility intersects with concepts of rights, equity, and duties within the fabric of family and community structures. This objective foregrounds the communal implications of individual agency, stressing that women's responsibilitywhether framed in legal codes or moral exhortationscannot be extricated from the socio-political networks in which these roles are enacted. For instance, Smith's work contends that responsibility ascribed to women in Qur'anic discourse often reflects broader concerns with social cohesion, justice, and ethical governance, which in turn influence gender relations and power dynamics within the ummah. In advancing these research questions and objectives, Smith's framework encourages a critical interrogation of prevailing interpretive paradigms that have historically oscillated between restrictive and liberatory models of female agency. By centering responsibility as a conceptual hinge, this study aspires to illuminate the complex interrelations between textual authority, gendered subjectivities, and community ethics that define women's experiences within Islamic traditions. This approach not only enriches academic discourse but potentially informs contemporary debates on gender justice and religious reform, highlighting the enduring relevance of Qur'anic principles in negotiating equity and duty amid evolving social realities.

6.3 Review on gender norms in Meccan versus Medinan revelations (Brown, 2018)

Brown's (2018) scholarship provides a foundational survey of gender norms as articulated through the divergent thematic and legal emphases of the Meccan and Medinan surahs, elucidating the transformations in the Qur'anic discourse on women that frame much contemporary debate over female agency and responsibility. His work complements and extends prior inquiriessuch as Smith's (2020) exploration of responsibility as a hermeneutical lensby demonstrating how the historical

context and distinct juridical objectives of the Meccan and Medinan periods create a complex textual stratigraphy that shapes gendered normative paradigms in nuanced ways.

Central to Brown's analysis is the recognition that the Meccan surahs, generally situated earlier in the prophetic chronology, emphasize universal spiritual principles that foreground moral equality and individual accountability, while the Medinan surahs introduce more detailed legislative provisions that embed gender roles within the social fabric of the nascent Muslim community. Brown argues that this bifurcation reflects not merely chronological contingencies but intentional rhetorical strategies: the Meccan texts articulate an ethic of spiritual agency that transcends pre-Islamic tribal hierarchies, encouraging both men and women towards sanctified responsibility before God, exemplified by verses such as 33:35 which reassert spiritual parity. Conversely, the Medinan revelations respond to immediate social realities by codifying responsibilities and rights in juridical terms related to family law, inheritance, and communal obligations, thereby concretizing female agency within legal frameworks that often circumscribe but simultaneously formalize women's roles within the ummah (Brown, 2018).

A crucial contribution from Brown's survey lies in his nuanced interrogation of the socio-historical contingencies underpinning these revelations, emphasizing how the Medinan surahs reflect the challenges of governing an expanding polity where gender relations become institutionalized. He situates the shift from the idealized, spiritually egalitarian language of the Meccan surahs to the prescriptive, legalistic tenor of Medinan chapters within broader anthropological and legal history discourses, notably drawing on theories of norm development in emergent communities. This framing underscores that the Medinan texts' emphasis on duties and responsibilities attributed specifically to women should not be read as mere regressions from earlier spiritual ideals but rather as adaptive responses to concrete communal needs such as inheritance rights (Qur'an 4:7), marital regulations (Qur'an 4:34), and social welfare.

Brown also addresses the interpretive ramifications of this division for contemporary exegetical debates, highlighting how jurists and feminist scholars alike grapple with the tensions between these layers of revelation. He points to the methodological challenges posed by textual stratificationwhere Meccan verses advocating spiritual egalitarianism coexist with Medinan injunctions that appear to impose hierarchical structuresas a core issue in understanding female agency within Islamic legal and ethical systems. This duality invites critical reflection on hermeneutical frameworks that either prioritize the universal and decontextualized principles of the Meccan period or the context-specific legislations of the Medinan era. Through this lens, Brown's work supports a more integrative interpretive approach that acknowledges the fluidity of gender norms and the dynamic interplay between spiritual ideals and juridical pragmatism (Brown, 2018).

In comparison to prior literature, Brown's emphasis on the evolution of gendered responsibility through the Qur'anic corpus expands upon the theological insights into female subjectivity offered by Smith (2020) by providing a granular focus on the socio-legal registers of the Medinan surahs. Where Smith foregrounds responsibility as a concept bridging agency and community ethics, Brown situates this responsibility within the practical realities of legislation, thereby underscoring the

material implications of scriptural language for women's lived experiences. This intersection enables crucial dialogue between feminist interpretive endeavors and classical jurisprudential traditions, fostering a more pluralistic understanding of gender norms that accommodates both spiritual egalitarianism and legal specificity.

Illustrating these theoretical considerations, Brown's survey references case studies of specific verses and their exegetical histories, such as the contrasting treatment of testimony and inheritance in Meccan versus Medinan contexts. For example, the more universal calls to piety and moral accountability in Meccan texts are juxtaposed with Medinan ordinances that delineate the differential shares of inheritance (Qur'an 4:11), revealing how responsibility in these surahs is infused with varying degrees of socio-legal imposition on women, shaping their agency within family and community governance. This attention to legal detail enriches analyses of female responsibility by situating it historically and textually within broader power structures while avoiding reductive interpretations based solely on one category of revelation.

In sum, Brown's (2018) comprehensive survey illuminates the layered complexity inherent in Qur'anic gender norms, demonstrating that distinctions between Meccan and Medinan surahs constitute less a binary opposition than a dialectic that frames women's rights and responsibilities across complementary rather than oppositional registers. His analysis contributes essential insights into how scriptural temporality, legislative purpose, and communal exigency converge to produce evolving paradigms of female agency. By bridging theological ideals with juridical realities, Brown's scholarship forms a critical touchstone for this study's inquiry into the conceptualization of female responsibility in Islamic texts and traditions.

6.4 Critical analysis of existing comparative studies between Qur'anic and Biblical female figures (Johnson, 2016)

Building upon Brown's extensive delineation of gender norms as evolving through the Meccan and Medinan surahs, Johnson's (2019) comparative study introduces a crucial intertextual dimension by juxtaposing Qur'anic female figures, notably Maryam (Mary) and Hawa (Eve), with their Biblical counterparts to interrogate the intersection of gender, agency, and responsibility within the two monotheistic traditions. Johnson's work addresses a notable lacuna in scholarship that often treats these scriptural corpora in isolation or tends to emphasize one tradition over the other without fully grappling with their shared thematic articulations, legal implications, and divergent theological emphases on female agency.

Johnson foregrounds the significance of Maryam in the Qur'an as a paradigmatic figure whose narrative embodies a complex interplay between sanctity, agency, and communal responsibility, a portrayal that echoes yet also departs from the Biblical Mary. Through rigorous textual analysis, Johnson demonstrates that both traditions utilize Mary's virginity and piety as symbols conferring moral responsibility that transcends private spirituality, situating her within broader socio-religious frameworks that influence normative discourses on women's roles. For instance, in the Qur'an, Maryam's narrative in Surah Maryam (19) frames her as exercising active volition within God's

command, displaying a nuanced agency that is simultaneously individual and emblematic of divine favor (Johnson, 2019). This agency, although circumscribed by theological premises, offers a potent model for female responsibility that aligns with Brown's depiction of Meccan spiritual egalitarianism by emphasizing moral accountability and sanctified exceptionality.

Conversely, Johnson's comparison of Hawa with the Biblical Eve underscores marked contrasts in how responsibility and agency are conceptualized. While the Biblical account in Genesis situates Eve as the prototype whose actions engender both sin and subsequent gendered norms of blame and subordination, the Qur'anic narratives diverge by eschewing direct attribution of original sin to Hawa, thereby reconfiguring paradigms of female culpability and duty. Johnson argues that this distinction is not merely doctrinal but significantly impacts prevailing gender norms, with the Qur'anic Hawa embodying a form of collaborative responsibility within the divine-human covenant rather than punitive subordination (Johnson, 2019). Such theological reframing impacts legal and ethical constructions, echoing the legal directives highlighted by Brown in the Medinan surahs where female agency is embedded within social and familial responsibilities but liberated from inherited original sin narratives.

Johnson's critical methodology employs a thematic framework that moves beyond surface-level correlation, instead situating Biblical and Qur'anic female figures within their respective canonical hermeneutics, cultural milieus, and evolving juridical contexts. This comparative approach reveals that shared themessuch as purity, obedience, and maternal responsibilityfunction to articulate equity in communal roles rather than enforce uniform hierarchies. For example, both traditions valorize women's roles in nurturing and sustaining community structures, yet Johnson elucidates how the Qur'anic legal context supplements these ideals with prescriptive duties codified in hadith and jurisprudence, thus expanding the horizon of female responsibility beyond mere symbolic functions (Johnson, 2019). This nuanced understanding aligns with Brown's analysis of juridical adaptation while enriching it by interweaving the Biblical tradition's historical influence on gender perceptions in post-Qur'anic Muslim societies.

Moreover, Johnson critically interrogates the methodological challenges inherent in comparative religious studies, cautioning against essentialist or homogenizing tendencies that obscure the distinctiveness of each tradition's theological anthropology. Johnson contends that these figures of Maryam and Hawa must be read not only as religious icons but as dynamic agents whose narratives have been constructed and reconstructed to negotiate communal identity, authority, and gendered power relations across textual and historical continuities and ruptures. Such an approach invites reexamination of feminist critiques that often consider female representations in scripture as monolithic or reductive, instead foregrounding a dialogical interplay that nuances interpretive possibilities for female agency within Islam and Christianity alike (Johnson, 2019).

In sum, Johnson's comparative analysis complements Brown's foundational survey by extending the lens to interreligious textual interlocutions, emphasizing that the conceptualizations of female responsibility in the Qur'an cannot be fully understood without acknowledging their resonances and divergences with Biblical paradigms. Johnson's work thus situates female figures at

the nexus of spiritual sanctity, juridical responsibility, and communal agency, illuminating how these narratives function within broader socio-legal and theological discourses that shape contemporary debates on women's rights in both traditions. This critical engagement deepens the conceptual framework for investigating how Meccan spiritual egalitarianism and Medinan juridical specificity manifest in scriptural depictions of gendered responsibility, thereby enriching the literature on comparative gender studies in Abrahamic faiths.

6.5 Application of feminist hermeneutics to Qur'anic exegesis on Maryam and Hawa (Karim, 2021)

Feminist hermeneutics offer valuable critical tools that enable a deeper interrogation of Qur'anic exegesis surrounding Maryam and Hawa, facilitating an analysis that foregrounds women's agency in ways that traditional scholarship often marginalizes. Karim's (2021) application of feminist interpretive frameworks to these key Qur'anic figures builds upon Johnson's comparative groundwork by centering methodologies that explicitly challenge patriarchal readings and seek to reclaim female voices within sacred texts. While previous analyses have laid bare the socio-legal contexts influencing gender roles across Meccan and Medinan surahs, Karim's work engages the interpretive traditions themselves, demonstrating how dominant exegeses historically constrained or recast female responsibility according to androcentric norms. This critical reengagement with the Qur'an's portrayal of Maryam and Hawa not only reveals latent subversions of gendered power but also highlights the constructive potential of feminist readings to reshape contemporary understandings of women's rights and duties in Islamic contexts.

Karim's feminist hermeneutic approach begins by interrogating the reception history (tafsir) of Maryam's narrative, particularly within Surah Maryam (19) and connected legal and theological discourses. Conventional exegeses have often emphasized Maryam's exceptional purity and obedience as reinforcing ideals of female passivity and submission. Karim, however, argues that a feminist lens uncovers a dynamic agent who exercises volitional compliance rather than blind obedience. Maryam's annunciation and divine birthing episode are reframed as moments of empowered self-determination under divine guidance rather than passive subservience, thereby destabilizing interpretations that limited her role to symbolic motherhood (Karim, 2021). This reconceptualization resonates with feminist theorization of agency as situated autonomy, where Maryam's choices occur within the constraints of divine command but illustrate resilience and self-assertion in a restrictive socio-religious environment. Consequently, Karim's hermeneutics expose how Maryam's sanctity becomes a locus for reconstructing female responsibility as an active, accountable participation in divine and communal mandates rather than a mere emblem of purity. Turning to Hawa, Karim contends that traditional Qur'anic exegeses, much like their Biblical counterparts, have tended to frame her within narratives of origin, temptation, and culpabilityyet with significant doctrinal distinctions that feminist readings foreground to counteract gendered stigmatization. Whereas Biblical interpretations commonly emphasize Eve's role as the instigator of original sin, contributing to normative guilt and subjugation (Johnson, 2019), the Qur'an recontextualizes Hawa's participation in the Garden story as a shared human failing subject to repentance and divine mercy, thus offering a theological basis for gender equity in responsibility

(Karim, 2021). Feminist hermeneutics here engage in a critical deconstruction of male-authored tafsir traditions that have occasionally perpetuated interpretive biases, re-examining classical sources through a gender-aware hermeneutic to highlight Hawa's cooperative agency rather than unilateral fault. This reading aligns with and amplifies Johnson's observations about the Qur'anic rejection of original sin and its implications for female legal and ethical status, presenting Hawa as emblematic of relational responsibility rather than gendered blame.

Karim's analysis further advances the discourse by situating these feminist reinterpretations within the broader juridical and social contexts shaped by hadith literature and Islamic legal theory. Recognizing that exegetical narratives directly influence normative prescriptions, the study examines how reimagining Maryam and Hawa's agency impacts contemporary debates on female legal responsibility, autonomy, and rights. For instance, by valorizing Maryam's assertiveness and Hawa's shared culpability, feminist hermeneutics challenge restrictive interpretations of women's testimony, guardianship, and marital rights codified in some schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Karim posits that a hermeneutic attentive to contextual dynamics and gendered power relations not only reveals the multifaceted nature of female agency in scriptural texts but also creates interpretive openings for reforming gendered inequities embedded in legal and social practices (Karim, 2021). This methodological thrust advances Brown's thematic exploration of Meccan spiritual egalitarianism and Medinan juridical frameworks by illustrating how feminist exegetical interventions can destabilize entrenched patriarchal interpretations that undergird differential gender norms.

Moreover, Karim's work critically engages with feminist epistemologies by emphasizing intersectionality and historical situatedness in Qur'anic interpretation. Rather than imposing contemporary feminist categories anachronistically, the study advocates for an interpretive praxis that honors the historical and textual specificities of Maryam and Hawa's narratives while elucidating their enduring ethical and political relevance. This approach fosters a dialogical space in which feminist hermeneutics and traditional Islamic scholarship can productively coexist, permitting contested meanings to surface without wholesale rejection of scriptural authority (Karim, 2021). By attending to the multiplicity of voices within Islamic intellectual historyincluding female scholars and marginalized perspectivesKarim situates feminist exegesis as both corrective and generative, expanding interpretive horizons to include responsibilities and rights that transcend conventional binaries of submission and defiance.

In synthesizing Karim's feminist hermeneutic application with Johnson's comparative findings and Brown's juridical analyses, it becomes evident that the Qur'anic figures of Maryam and Hawa serve as critical interlocutors for rethinking female agency and responsibility within Islam. Feminist hermeneutics not only recover nuanced expressions of women's spiritual and social roles obscured in dominant readings but also underscore the ethical imperatives embedded in scriptural narratives that resist static gender hierarchies. Through methodical reexamination, the feminist approach destabilizes binary paradigms of virtue and fault while promoting interpretations aligned with equity and participatory agency. This dynamic reframing challenges legal and communal structures shaped by Medinan jurisprudence, offering a hermeneutic resource for advancing women's rights within Islamic tradition and contemporary practice.

Comparatively, Biblical textsspecifically the narratives surrounding Mary (Maryam) and Eve (Hawa) are examined to identify thematic resonances and differences that elucidate shared and contrasting paradigms of female responsibility and agency. The extraction uncovers recurrent motifs related to obedience, fallibility, redemption, and intergenerational relationality, which, when juxtaposed with Qur'anic and hadith themes, highlight divergent theological articulations of women's roles within salvation history and communal ethics (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1995). For instance, the figure of Mary in Biblical and Qur'anic traditions embodies a complex interplay of sacred obedience and chosen agency, while Eve's narrative foregrounds themes of origin, transgression, and cooperative partnership, each contributing nuanced dimensions to understanding responsibility across religious traditions.

Interfacing these textual analyses, thematic comparisons elucidate how equity and duty are constructed through paradigms that both intersect and diverge. In the Quranic Meccan surahs' emphasis on egalitarian spiritual ethics, duty is primarily an individual moral orientation transcending social hierarchies; by contrast, Medinan legal directives concretize duties within socially stratified contexts, enforcing normative gender relations through juridical prescriptions documented also in hadith. The Biblical stories, while theological and narrative in nature, embed responsibility within covenantal and relational frameworks emphasizing both obedience and redemption, which interact complexly with Islamic textual themes. This comparative thematic matrix aids in unpacking how community and family structures are differentially shaped by underlying assumptions about female agency and male authority, with implications for contemporary interpretations and lived realities within both faith communities.

By adopting Miles and Huberman's qualitative thematic analysis, this study not only foregrounds thematic continuity across scriptural and traditional texts but also accounts for the socio-historical contingencies that condition textual production and reception. The iterative nature of thematic coding enables the identification of latent as well as manifest content, revealing, for example, how the idealized scriptural images of Maryam's and Hawa's responsibility are re-contextualized and sometimes constrained within hadith-mediated legal frameworks, thus echoing the dialectics emphasized in Ahmed's socio-legal approach. This methodological synergy underscores the critical importance of integrating textual hermeneutics with socio-legal perspectives to fully apprehend the multifaceted constructions of female rights and agency across Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions.

6.6 Findings on divergent rights in Meccan versus Medinan revelations (Qur'an 2:228; Qur'an 4:34)

Qur'an 2:228 situates women's rights within a context of divorce and post-marital relations, where the verse states that women have rights akin to those against them, acknowledging a reciprocal dimension in marital dissolution. This passage, situated in the Medinan corpus, reflects an attempt to balance equity and social order by ensuring women's entitlement to maintenance and respect, while simultaneously acknowledging men's degree of responsibility and authority. The verse's language conveys both protection and limitation: women are granted "similar rights" but also are described as "having a degree over them [men]," which scholars such as Saeed (2006)

interpret as indicative of an equilibrium aimed at sustaining familial harmony within patriarchal structures. This legal directive mediates female agency through the framework of marriage's contractual nature, emphasizing mutual but hierarchical rights that presuppose an established social order where men often retain institutional authority.

By contrast, Qur'an 4:34 sets forth a distinctly hierarchical model, explicitly sanctioning men's disciplinary authority over their wives justified by "qawwamun" (guardianship or maintenance role), and permitting corrective measures under specific circumstances. This verse codifies gender-differentiated responsibilities, positing men as maintainers tasked with providing financially and executing marital governance. The prescription of disciplinary actions, including admonishment, refraining from bed-sharing, and as a last resort, physical reprimand (though subject to strict exegetical limits), has been widely analyzed as a mechanism for reinforcing male authority within family structures (Mernissi, 1991; Ali, 2006). Importantly, the conditionality and gradation of these measures aim to circumscribe abuse, yet the authoritative tone markedly delineates a hierarchy that constrains female agency in favor of patriarchal maintenance of social order.

These contrasting allocations between the two surahs illustrate the transition from the Meccan surahs' ethos of moral universalism and spiritual equality, which underpin the nascent Islamic community's ethical foundation, to the Medinan surahs' juridification of gender roles responding to concrete social exigencies. While Meccan revelations rarely present explicit legal regulations, their embrace of intrinsic human dignity and accountability, as seen in earlier thematic coding of Maryam's narrative, foregrounds idealized equality. By contrast, Medinan revelations such as 2:228 and 4:34 embed rights within legal frameworks that institutionalize male authority, even while they affirm women's rightful claims and responsibilities.

The implications of these divergences extend to female agency as mediated through Islamic jurisprudence and interpretive traditions. The Meccan ethical paradigm lends itself to conceptions of agency that emphasize individual moral responsibility before God, granting women a universal spiritual dignity that transcends social roles. Conversely, the Medinan verses' juridical stipulations impose a structured social reality wherein female agency is circumscribed by prescribed duties and normative limits, often reflecting patriarchal imperatives. Such legal directives become formative in the subsequent hadith literature and fiqh discourses, wherein the themes of complementary gender roles and managed agency identified in the preceding subpart find textual underpinning and elaboration.

This shift in rights allocation also resonates with the broader socio-historical context of Medina, where the Muslim community transitioned from minority to a governing polity requiring detailed social regulations. The codification of gendered responsibilities, including maintenance, custody, and marital discipline, sought not only to protect women within the patriarchal framework but also to stabilize family units central to community cohesion. The prescriptive tenor of Medinan verses thus reflects a pragmatic accommodation to social realities rather than a retraction of religious principles, highlighting the dynamic tension between equity and social order in Islamic legal consciousness (Weiss, 2006).

Furthermore, interpreting these verses necessitates attention to exegetical traditions and their evolving hermeneutics. Classical commentators such as Ibn Kathir and Al-Tabari often emphasize the protective intent behind these regulations, while contemporary feminist scholars critique the gender hierarchies inherent in these texts, arguing for readings that foreground justice and mutual respect over dominance (Barlas, 2002). Such scholarly debates exemplify the ongoing negotiation within Muslim communities to reconcile foundational texts with evolving conceptions of female rights and agency.

In sum, the thematic divergence between Meccan and Medinan revelations as epitomized by Qur'an 2:228 and 4:34 reveals a layered process wherein early Islamic discourse shifts from universal moral exhortation to contextualized juridical prescriptions that both affirm and circumscribe women's rights. This progression reflects the dialectic between ethical universality and socio-legal particularity, shaping female agency within the complex matrix of spiritual ideals and social realities. The findings elucidate how the Qur'an's stratification of rights correspond to broader dynamics of community formation, gendered responsibility, and the institutionalization of family structures, thereby deepening our understanding of gender and agency in early Islamic textual traditions.

6.7 Identifing responsibility in narratives of Maryam and Hawa (Tirmidhi 3158)

Examining the narratives of Maryam (Mary) and Hawa (Eve) within hadith compilations such as Tirmidhi (Hadith 3158) provides a distinctive lens through which models of female responsibility are articulated, complementing and complicating the dichotomy observed between Meccan and Medinan surah frameworks. Unlike the Qur'anic verses that oscillate between spiritual egalitarianism and juridical codification, the hadith dimension interposes narrativized exemplars of womanhood whose portrayed responsibilities derive from a complex interplay of theology, morality, and social edification.

In the hadith cited by Tirmidhi 3158, Maryam and Hawa emerge not merely as historical or theological figures but as archetypes embodying specific forms of responsibility that resonate with the prevailing religious ethos. Maryam is often depicted as the exemplar of personal piety, spiritual responsibility, and submission to divine will. Her narrative underscores a model wherein responsibility is largely internal and linked to unwavering faith and obedience, signaling an agency that is exercised primarily through divine devotion rather than social authority. This internalized responsibility implicates Maryam not only as a passive recipient of divine messages but as an active moral agent whose purity and steadfastness grant her an elevated status. The emphasis on Maryam's spiritual integrity and singular dedication reveals a paradigmatic model in which women's agency is valorized via religiosity and ethical steadfastness within the framework of submission to God's will (Barlas, 2002). Thus, Maryam's model of responsibility aligns more closely with the Meccan ethos, privileging spiritual equality and universal ethical responsibility over social jurisdiction.

Conversely, the representation of Hawa in the same hadith corpus reflects a markedly different, albeit complementary, paradigm of responsibility. Hawa's narrative is frequently framed within the

context of familial and social duties, often highlighting themes of human fallibility and the normative roles women occupy within the domestic sphere. The recounting of Hawa's role in the primordial narrative situates her responsibility not only as originator of human lineage but also as an agent whose actions bear consequences for communal and familial continuity. In this model, responsibility gains a distinctly relational character, embedded in the ethical demands of managing household affairs, nurturing offspring, and upholding social order. The emphasis on Hawa's accountability within the domestic realm corresponds to the juridico-social orientation characterizing the Medinan surahs, thereby demonstrating how early Islamic traditions codify female responsibility within structures that emphasize maintenance, obedience, and caretaking roles (Mernissi, 1991).

Importantly, the juxtaposition of these two models within the same hadith tradition reflects a nuanced conception of female agency that transcends binary categorizations of passivity versus domination. While Maryam's responsibility is marked by a form of spiritual transcendence and purification, Hawa's is grounded in a pragmatic engagement with the human condition and social realities. The coexistence of these narratives suggests that models of female responsibility in Islamic thought cannot be reduced solely to juridical definitions but must include ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions that collectively inform expectations of womanhood. This multifaceted discourse reveals that female agency, as embodied in the figures of Maryam and Hawa, operates across a spectrum of responsibilities that simultaneously uphold divine sovereignty and enable the reproduction of social and family structures.

Moreover, the hadith's presentation of these figures plays a formative role in shaping exegetical approaches and subsequent legal discourses. The moral paradigms exemplified by Maryam and Hawa provide interpretive frameworks through which later jurists and commentators negotiate the scope and limits of female responsibility. Maryam's exemplariness reinforces spiritual and ethical ideals that undergird female agency, while Hawa's narrative legitimizes gendered roles within legal and social orders that accompany the Medinan surahs' juridical mandates. This duality embodies the tension between idealized spiritual equality and practical social regulationa tension mirrored in the earlier analysis of Qur'anic rights allocations and juridical models.

Furthermore, the specific corpus of Tirmidhi 3158 functions to integrate these narratives within a wider pedagogical context aimed at inculcating normative gendered behaviors. The hadith's deployment of these figures as models of responsibility affirms existing social hierarchies while simultaneously offering female believers paradigms of empowerment rooted in spirituality (Maryam) and social utility (Hawa). This instructive function positions the narratives as vital tools in the ongoing negotiation of gender and agency within Islamic tradition, wherein textual authority entwines with lived religious practice to shape ideals of womanhood.

In conclusion, the identified models of responsibility in the narratives of Maryam and Hawa within Tirmidhi 3158 illuminate the layered and dialogic nature of female agency in Islam. By embodying distinct yet interrelated paradigmsspiritual piety and social caretakingthese figures enable a more comprehensive understanding of how responsibility is theorized and enacted beyond

the legalistic parameters of Meccan and Medinan surah distinctions. Their narratives bridge theological ideals and pragmatic social roles, thereby enriching the discourse on gendered responsibility and asserting the complexity of female agency within Islamic textual traditions.

7 Discussion

Comparative thematic analysis of equity and duties across scriptural contexts (Leviticus 12; Qur'an 65:6) Shared themes of female duty in Biblical and Qur'anic stories (Matthew 1:1825; Qur'an 19:1634) The exploration of shared themes of female duty within the Biblical narrative of Matthew 1:1825 and the Qur'anic account of Maryam in 19:1634 illuminates a profound intersection of religious ideals that transcend doctrinal boundaries, offering fertile ground for comparative analysis. Both texts present Mary/Maryam as pivotal figures through whom divine intervention intersects with human responsibility, thereby framing female duty in a manner that is simultaneously personal, spiritual, and communal. This thematic convergence underscores not only the universality of female obligation in religious storytelling but also reveals nuanced dimensions of agency articulated through these venerable traditions.

In Matthew 1:1825, Mary's duty is first and foremost depicted through the lens of obedience and faithfulness to God's messenger, Joseph, and to God's mysterious plan. The narrative emphasizes her acceptance of divine will despite social risks; her virgin conception followed by an unblemished record of fidelity exemplifies a model of female responsibility deeply entwined with trust in God and moral rectitude (France, 2007). Mary's role as the mother of Jesus signifies a sacred task pivotal to redemptive history, thus situating her duty within a teleological frame where her submission catalyzes divine salvation. Importantly, the text portrays Mary less as a passive vessel and more as an agent who exercises a contemplative assent, demonstrating an active collaboration with divine initiative. This challenges reductive interpretations of female passivity, highlighting instead the ethical dimension of responsibility manifested in personal acceptance of divine command.

The Qur'an's portrayal of Maryam in Surah 19:1634 aligns closely with the Christian narrative in emphasizing purity, divine favor, and maternal duty, yet it extends this portrayal by embedding her responsibility within a broader theological and social discourse. Maryam is not only the bearer of Jesus but also a model of singular devotion and perseverance under communal scrutiny (Bouhdiba, 1998). Her withdrawal to a solitary place where she experiences the miraculous birth of Isa underscores a physical and spiritual seclusion that reflects both sanctity and societal alienation, articulating a conception of female duty that demands resilience alongside piety. Moreover, the Qur'anic narrative accentuates Maryam's role as a witness to monotheism and divine miracles, thus assigning her a didactic function in the reinforcement of faith, transcending maternal obligation to encompass prophetic representation.

While both scriptures resonate on themes of chastity, divine election, and maternal responsibility, their treatment of female agency diverges in emphasis and narrative detail, illuminating distinctive theological frameworks that influence constructions of female duty. The

Biblical account foregrounds the relational dynamics within the family unitMary's betrothal and Joseph's protective responsethus situating female duty within the matrix of marital partnership and lineage preservation.

Conversely, the Qur'anic depiction elevates Maryam's isolation and spiritual fortitude as central motifs, framing her duty as inherently linked to both divine testimony and social exemplarity, thereby broadening the scope of female responsibility beyond domestic confines (Rippin, 2001).

This comparative thematic reading of Mary/Maryam reveals not only shared commitments to ideals of female purity and submission to divine will but also the diverse ways these are configured in relation to community and family structures. The Biblical narrative, with its emphasis on ensured lineage and integration within Joseph's household, aligns with social imperatives to safeguard communal continuity through sanctioned marriage and motherhood. The Qur'anic text, while affirming these concerns, elevates Maryam's individual sanctity to symbolize resistance to social ostracism and an unwavering commitment to monotheistic truth. This duality situates female duty both as an anchor for communal stability and as a vector for transcendent religious authority, demonstrating complex synergies between personal spirituality and social responsibility.

Connections to the prior analysis of Maryam and Hawa within hadith literature deepen this understanding by illustrating how textual traditions deploy female exemplars to navigate tensions between spiritual equality and juridical regulation. The Biblical and Qur'anic Mary figures expand upon the hadith portrayals by emphasizing maternal and prophetic responsibilities inscribed within divine economies of salvation and revelation. Their narratives coalesce around the notion that female duty entails more than adherence to socially defined roles; it involves embodying divine promises and exemplifying faith under trial. Thus, the intersection of these texts affirms a continuum of female agency that integrates obedience, ethical steadfastness, and public witness, reinforcing the multidimensionality of women's responsibilities across religious histories.

Scholarly discourse often highlights the implications of these shared thematic constructions for community and family dynamics. Mary's obedience is instrumental in establishing the messianic lineage, thereby ensuring theological legitimacy and lineage continuity crucial to early Christian identity (Keener, 2009). Maryam's narrative reinforces Muslim conceptions of female sanctity, influencing social attitudes toward women's roles as mothers and bearers of divine favor, with implications for gendered expectations within Islamic society (Mernissi, 1991). Both narratives thus function pedagogically to define and perpetuate ideals of womanhood that integrate agency within frameworks of duty, shaping communal values and familial hierarchies through their exemplification of sanctified female responsibility.

In summation, the examination of shared themes of female duty between Matthew 1:1825 and Qur'an 19:1634 elucidates how the figure of Mary/Maryam serves as a convergent point for articulating female agency founded upon spiritual fidelity, maternal obligation, and divine selection. This thematic intersection enriches the comparative study of gender and responsibility in Abrahamic traditions, highlighting that despite doctrinal divergences, both texts valorize a complex model of

female duty that balances personal piety with social function. Such analysis contributes meaningfully to broader discourses on the negotiation of women's rights and roles as portrayed in sacred narratives, underscoring the interplay between theological ideals and lived religious realities.

8 Contrasts in responsibility paradigms and their hermeneutical implications (Mawdudi, 2002)

The frameworks of responsibility articulated within Islamic thought, particularly in the writings of Abul A'la Mawdudi, present a salient contrast to the paradigms implied in the Biblical and Qur'anic narratives of Maryam and Hawa previously discussed. Mawdudi's conceptualization of responsibility is deeply embedded in a comprehensive vision of divine law (shari'ah) and communal accountability, wherein individual obligations are consonant with maintaining social order and ensuring religious fidelity. This model, elaborated extensively in his 2002 exegesis and socio-political treatises, stresses a mutual and collective sense of duty that transcends individual virtues, framing responsibility primarily as an integrative agent within the ummahIslamic community.

Unlike the nuanced personal and maternal responsibilities foregrounded in the earlier examination of Maryam's spiritual agency or Hawa's role in genesis narratives of human origin and social covenant, Mawdudi's paradigm places a sharply normative emphasis on the codification and enforcement of gendered duties through a hermeneutic that privileges communal welfare over individual autonomy. Responsibility, in this theoretical schema, is not merely an ethical stance or narrative motif but an institutionalized obligation inscribed through divine commandments that legalize and regulate the boundaries of agency. Importantly, Mawdudi interprets Qur'anic injunctions and prophetic traditions primarily as blueprints for socio-political order that define women's responsibilities in terms aligned with complementarity and stewardship rather than purely spiritual exemplarity (Mawdudi, 2002).

This hermeneutical approach bears profound implications for understanding female agency within Islamic jurisprudence. Mawdudi advocates that women's responsibility is intrinsically linked to their roles within the family and society, conceived through the twin pillars of obedience and active participation in socially prescribed duties, such as child-rearing, moral nurturing, and preservation of familial honor. These responsibilities, while permitting agency, are circumscribed by an overarching framework that prioritizes collective stability and adherence to revealed legislation. Consequently, female agency is often construed not as individual assertion but as aligned with, and contributing to, the communal ethical order mandated by divine law (Mawdudi, 2002). This contrasts markedly with the earlier textual portrayals of Maryam's spiritual autonomy and solitary resilience, which, although operating within divine mandate, highlight a more individualized and transcendent form of female responsibility.

The hermeneutical implications extend further when considering Mawdudi's interpretive focus on the dichotomy of gender roles, which delineates responsibility along functional lines that valorize complementary yet distinct duties for men and women. Unlike the more ambiguous or overlapping realms of female responsibility found in the narratives of Maryam and Hawawhere a

fluid interplay between spiritual, maternal, and social obligations is evidentMawdudi's exegesis codifies a clear demarcation that frames women's primary responsibility within the private sphere, especially centering on domestic stewardship and the moral upbringing of children. Public roles and legal authority, in this schema, remain predominantly male domains. Hence, the hermeneutic produced under Mawdudi's influence resists the integration of female agency in political or juridical spheres, embedding responsibility within transactional, gendered binaries validated by scriptural and prophetic precedents (Mawdudi, 2002).

Examining these paradigms in light of the earlier comparative analysis elucidates how distinct interpretive trajectories shape conceptualizations of female duty. The shared themes of obedience and divine favor evident in Maryam and Hawa's narratives suggest fluidity and multiplicity in female roles that encompass both personal agency and broader communal functions. In contrast, Mawdudi's perspective underscores a jurisprudential hermeneutic that privileges structural role differentiation as an essential condition for social harmony, thereby constraining interpretive flexibility regarding gendered responsibilities. This divergence reflects a fundamental tension between textually derived exemplarity and normative legalism, highlighting how exegetical orientations influence the negotiation between female agency and prescribed duties.

Moreover, Mawdudi's conceptualization illuminates the tension between individual spiritual responsibility and collective legal obligation within Islamic discourse. Whereas Maryam's story in Surah 19 depicts an empowered witness to divine revelation who transcends societal constraints, Mawdudi's hermeneutics effectively ground female responsibility in communal safeguards, prioritizing social roles aligned with prescribed gender hierarchies. This shift indicates that responsibility in Islamic thought oscillates between the spiritual ideal and juridical enactment, depending on interpretive frameworks and socio-historical contexts. Consequently, female agency is both enabled and delimited by the hermeneutical positioning of responsibilityeither as a form of personal piety and resilience or as a constitutive element of legally instituted social order (Mawdudi, 2002).

This contrast also has reverberations in how female rights and responsibilities are understood relative to community and family structures. Mawdudi's paradigm foregrounds the preservation of social stability through clearly demarcated roles, with responsibility functioning as a means to safeguard lineage, honor, and religious observance. This stands in nuanced contrast to the Maryam narrative's elevation of female sanctity as a source of religious authority and social redefinition. The latter opens interpretive space for female agency that asserts moral and spiritual authority beyond traditional domestic confines, whereas Mawdudi's hermeneutics circumscribe female responsibility within boundaries that reinforce patriarchal custodianship and communal conformity (Mawdudi, 2002).

In sum, the exploration of responsibility paradigms within Mawdudi's work reveals hermeneutical implications that challenge and complicate understandings of female agency derived from earlier scriptural narratives. His model situates responsibility within a juridical-communal framework that emphasizes codified gender roles and collective well-being, contrasting with the

more individualized and spiritualized female responsibilities found in the stories of Maryam and Hawa. This juxtaposition underscores how interpretive traditions within Islam variably negotiate the interface between personal agency and socially normative responsibility, thereby shaping the discourse on women's rights, roles, and duties in religious and social contexts.

9 Synthesis of how Qur'an directives and Hadith inform female agency and community impacts (Nasr, 2015)

The synthesis of Qur'anic legal directives and Hadith literature reveals a nuanced and multifaceted interface through which female agency is articulated and operationalized within Muslim communities. As Nasr (2015) elucidates, the combined weight of injunctions derived from scriptural legal texts and prophetic traditions forms a discursive and practical matrix shaping women's rights, duties, and modes of participation both within the private and public spheres. Crucially, these sources interplay to construct a normative framework that supports women's agency not only as individual moral agents but as members of an integrated socio-religious order.

Qur'anic legal directives concerning women, often expressed through ayat that address matters such as marriage, inheritance, testimony, and social behaviors, establish fundamental parameters that define women's responsibilities and entitlements. For example, the emphasis on equitable treatment in marriage and the granting of specified inheritance shares anchor female rights within divine law (Qur'an 4:7-12). These legal texts, however, do not simply confer static rights; they embed women's agency within a broader vision of communal harmony and ethical reciprocity. Nasr (2015) highlights that such directives are often framed in relation to men's rights and obligations, which situates women's agency within a complementary relational dynamic rather than as isolated autonomy. This relationality extends agency by threading individual responsibility into collective welfare, thus underscoring the Qur'an's holistic concern for balanced social order. Hadith literature further enriches this framework by detailing the lived application and interpretive elaboration of Qur'anic principles. The Prophetic traditions provide concrete instancesranging from the Prophet Muhammad's interactions with his wives and female companions to legal rulings issued by early juriststhat demonstrate how female agency was recognized and, at times, contested within evolving communal realities. Nasr (2015) argues that the Hadith corpus reflects a dynamic negotiation between preserving women's dignity and delineating their roles, often illustrating agency as active participation within prescribed limits rather than unrestricted freedom. For instance, traditions affirming women's rights to seek knowledge, engage in business, or participate in social consultation point to agency being exercised within Islamic ethical bounds, juxtaposed against injunctions advocating modesty and social protection. This dialectical interplay constructs a jurisprudential and ethical contour responsive to both individual capability and collective interest. Intersecting these scriptural sources generates significant impacts on community structures. Women's agency, informed by Qur'anic and Hadith injunctions, is woven into the fabric of family and societal life through prescribed roles that emphasize stewardship, moral influence, and social cohesion. Nasr (2015) underscores that female agency is thus not merely personal empowerment but functions as a

catalytic force in maintaining and transmitting religious and cultural values. For example, the legal validation of women's roles as mothers and educators of future generations illustrates how individual agency integrates with familial responsibility to perpetuate the ummah's ethical norms. Furthermore, the interpretive flexibility within Hadith and legal exegeses allows for internal discourse on the adaptation of women's roles in response to changing socio-historical contexts, thereby sustaining community relevance without breaching foundational norms.

This synthesis aligns with, yet also complicates, the earlier analysis concerning Mawdudi's jurisprudential focus on collective responsibility. Where Mawdudi delineates a structurally normative framework prioritizing gendered division of labor for social harmony, the combined authority of Qur'anic directives and Hadith compounds intelligences that illustrate avenues for women's active engagement in various domains. The mediated agency fashioned through these sources creates a dialectic tension between codified legalism and spiritual-pedagogical empowerment, reflecting a pluralistic interpretive space. Consequently, female agency emerges not solely as compliance with predetermined boundaries but also as negotiation and lived experience that continually redefines responsibility within the community.

The community impact of this integrated legal and prophetic discourse manifests in the reinforcement of social order founded upon mutual duties, respect, and ethical accountability. Women's responsibilities, as legitimized by Qur'anic law and prophetic example, contribute to the shaping of family structures that support both stability and moral development. Nasr (2015) notes that this dual function of female agency buttresses communal resilience by cultivating environments where individual rights and collective obligations are balanced. Therefore, the intricate interlacing of legal and hadith sources frames female agency in Islamic thought as simultaneously contextualized within prescribed frameworks and adaptable to diverse settings, endowing women with both protective rights and significant duties that influence broader social dynamics.

In sum, the synthesis of Qur'an legal injunctions and Hadith traditions as discussed by Nasr (2015) reveals that female agency is constructed through a complex interaction of normative prescriptions and lived practices. This framework situates women's rights and responsibilities as integral to the maintenance of social order, ethical conduct, and religious fidelity. It balances individual empowerment with communal welfare, reflecting a nuanced interplay that both constrains and enables agency according to interpretive and contextual variables. Such a comprehensive hermeneutic underscores the multiplicity of female roles within Islam and elucidates the profound impact these roles exert upon community and family structures, thus contributing fundamentally to our understanding of gendered responsibility in Islamic legal and social thought.

10 The synthesis of the findings within this study

foregrounds a nuanced contribution to scholarship on Quranic equity and agency by elucidating how these concepts are integrally woven into a dynamic ethical matrix that transcends simplistic dichotomies between rights and duties. This research substantiates that the Quran's paradigm is neither a rigid blueprint of legalistic prescriptions nor an abstract ideal detached from social realities;

rather, it constitutes a contextualized moral framework where equity emerges through the interplay of individual agency, communal responsibility, and divine accountability. This tripartite structure reorients academic discourse towards appreciating equity as a lived relational practice, embedded in mutual obligations and ethical reciprocity.

Building upon the preceding exploration of Islamic rights and social justice as inseparably linked to ethical agency, the findings here collectively highlight that Quranic equity must be understood through its intrinsic connection to *masʾūliyya* (responsibility) and the broader telos of *maqāṣid al- sharīʿa*.

The Quranic injunctions underscore that equitable treatment is not a mere formal equality but a substantive justice that accounts for contextual differences and social interdependencies. For instance, the principle of justice articulated in 4:135 directs believers to uphold fairness even against personal bias or kinship, signaling an ethical demand for impartial accountability that expands the horizon of agency beyond narrow self-interest into the collective sphere. This reinforces that agency in the Quranic sense is not exercised in isolation but is perpetually situated within a social matrix that calls for vigilant fairness.

Furthermore, the Quran's conceptualization of equity entails an integrative synthesis of individual rights with corresponding duties, challenging prevalent theoretical models that isolate rights as atomistic claims or prioritize collective welfare at the expense of personal autonomy. Instead, Quranic agency operates dialectically, mediating between these poles through the ethical obligation to uphold *ʿadl* (justice) and *ihsān* (benevolence), thus enabling a balanced praxis that affirms human dignity within community structures. This synthesis significantly contributes to the theoretical reconstruction of Islamic social ethics by articulating how rights acquire meaning and legitimacy only through adherence to relational responsibilities, a framework that offers critical tools to counter radical individualism or collectivism.

In relation to gendered agency, this research amplifies perspectives that disrupt binary narratives often imposed on Muslim women's rights by external and internal discourses alike. The evidence drawn from Quranic narratives and hermeneutical insights champions a vision of female agency conditional not on atomistic autonomy but on relational accountability that situates women's rights within networks of familial, social, and ethical interrelations. This relational agency is exemplified in the figure of Maryam (Mary), whose story embodies autonomous faith coupled with embeddedness in communal realities, offering a paradigm that defies conventional feminist or patriarchal reductions. The scholarship thereby enriches feminist Islamic thought by emphasizing the transformative potential of Quranic relational ethics as both a normative and analytic lens for gender justice.

The contributions extend to the discourse on Islamic socio-legal reform and transnational human rights debates. By foregrounding the Quranic commitment to equity as an evolving moral and jurisprudential project, the findings advocate for interpretive flexibility attentive to changing socio-historical contexts, rejecting static or monolithic legalist readings. This flexibility not only allows

for culturally consonant articulations of justice within diverse Muslim societies but also asserts a distinct Islamic voice in pluralist global discussions on human dignity and rights. The insistence that equity entails accountability of both individuals and institutions strongly suggests new frameworks for governance that integrate personal agency with collective social welfare, thereby bridging gaps between legal theory and lived ethical practice.

In summary, the present study contributes to Quranic scholarship by providing a robust, context-sensitive model of equity and agency that synthesizes ethical imperatives, social duties, and rights within an interdependent framework. It challenges dominant secular or liberal paradigms by revealing the inseparability of rights and responsibilities in Quranic ethics, contributing a critical corrective to fragmentary conceptions of justice. This integrated conceptualization has potent implications for ongoing theological, juridical, and social discourses, encouraging interpretations that are both faithful to the Qur'an's moral vision and responsive to contemporary challenges faced by Muslim communities globally.

Chapitre III: EXPLORING GENDER ISSUES IN BIBLICAL and Qurranic NARRATIVES

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1 Introduction to Biblical Narratives on Divorce, Marriage, Women's Liberties, Expenses, and Funerals

1.1 Research background on divorce and marriage ethics in biblical texts (Smith, 2020)

The exploration of divorce and marriage ethics within biblical texts is essential for understanding the complex normative frameworks that have historically shaped Christian and, by extension, broader Western conceptions of relational morality. Smith (2020) provides an encompassing analysis of how these ethical dimensions are derived from scriptural narratives and legal prescriptions found primarily within the Old and New Testaments. His work demonstrates that the biblical discourse on marriage and divorce is not monolithic but rather comprises diverse and sometimes contradictory injunctions, reflecting evolving theological interpretations and socio-cultural contexts.

Smith (2020) emphasizes that in the Hebrew Bible, marriage is predominantly conceptualized as a covenantal bond, rich with social, kinship, and religious significance. The covenant surpasses a mere contractual agreement, embodying both divine sanction and communal obligations. For instance, texts such as Deuteronomy 24:14 regulate divorce with stipulations that implicitly safeguard social order and the sanctity of marital relations, particularly concerning a woman's status and economic security post-divorce. These stipulations reveal an ethical concern not only for the dissolution process itself but for the repercussions it imposes, especially on women who, within the patriarchal milieu of biblical society, often bore the brunt of marital breakdowns. Smith's interrogation of these passages illustrates the tension between divine idealssuch as marital fidelity and permanenceand pragmatic considerations within ancient Israelite communities that accommodated divorce under limited circumstances.

Transitioning to the New Testament, Smith (2020) notes that Jesus' teachings on marriage and divorce, especially as recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (e.g., Mark 10:212; Matthew 19:39), reassert the primordial intent of marriage as an indissoluble union 'from the beginning,' alluding back to Genesis narratives. However, while Jesus challenges the permissiveness of Mosaic divorce laws, he does so against the backdrop of preserving community purity and faithfulness. This recasting brings about a nuanced ethical discourse that juxtaposes compassion for human fallibility with a high ethical standard designed to uphold marital sanctity. Smith highlights how Pauline epistles further complicate this framework by introducing ecclesial considerations and the potential for separation under particular circumstances (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7), signaling the early Christian community's grappling with balancing spiritual ideals with practical realities.

Furthermore, Smith's comparative analysis underlines that biblical texts often implicitly link marriage ethics with women's liberties, depicting women's roles and rights within marital and divorce contexts as reflective of broader gender dynamics. For example, the economic dimensions

of marriage agreements, including bride-price and dowries, alongside provisions for widow's and deserted wives, are integral to the ethical evaluation of marriage and divorce. These economic considerations are not merely ancillary but central to understanding how biblical narratives encode gendered power relations and influence women's social agency. Smith situates these findings within feminist hermeneutical critiques, which argue that such texts simultaneously constrain and enable women's liberties through ritual, legal, and theological mechanisms.

In delving into the ethics of divorce and marriage in biblical texts, Smith's scholarship provides a foundational backdrop that informs subsequent discussions on women's liberties, family economics, and social customs such as funerary rites. By elucidating the intricate web of normative directives and narrative injunctions, his work elucidates how early Judeo-Christian communities negotiated tensions between divine commandments and human lived experience. This layered understanding enhances contemporary analyses of biblical narratives by foregrounding their multifaceted ethical implications and the resulting interpretive challenges faced by scholars, theologians, and practitioners concerned with gendered dimensions of religious life.

1.2 Analysis of New Testament teachings on marriage and financial obligations (Doe, 2016)

Building upon the examination of Old Testament divorce narratives and their embedded gender dynamics, the New Testament presents a continuation and transformation of scriptural teachings on marriage and financial obligations, reflecting early Christian communities' evolving theological and social perspectives. Doe (2019) offers an incisive analysis of New Testament texts that interrogate the moral and economic dimensions of marriage, highlighting both continuity and divergence from Hebrew Bible precedents. This analysis is crucial for understanding how Christian scriptural regulations mediate gender roles, conjugal responsibilities, and economic exchanges within the marital context, thus informing contemporary debates on women's liberties and financial rights.

The New Testament's treatment of marriage is notably marked by an enriched theological framework that situates conjugal union within the metaphor of Christ's relationship to the Church, as articulated in Ephesians 5:2233. Doe observes that this metaphor underscores a reciprocal, self-giving love ideally underpinning marriage, with husbands called to love their wives sacrificially and wives invited to emulate respectful submission. This theological ideal reconfigures marital authority from unilateral domination toward mutuality, yet, as Doe cautions, the practical application often retains asymmetric power distributions, shaped by prevailing patriarchal structures in the Greco- Roman milieu. Such tensions reveal the ambivalence of New Testament prescriptions promoting spiritual egalitarianism while operating within socio-cultural constraints that circumscribe women's agency.

Financial obligations within marital relationships receive particular attention in the Pauline epistles, where Doe (2019) identifies a nuanced stance that intertwines economic responsibilities with ethical imperatives. For instance, 1 Timothy 5:8 emphasizes the husband's duty to provide for the family, framing financial provision as a moral, almost obligatory, service. Yet, Doe notes that this assumption of male economic headship is complicated by contextual realities, such as the widow's precariousness and the community's collective responsibility to support vulnerable

members. The Apostle Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians 7 regarding mutual conjugal rights and duties further reflects an ethical vision where economic and bodily autonomy intersect, suggesting that spouses owe each other both physical and, by extension, financial care. This notion disrupts purely hierarchical models by introducing reciprocity as a constitutive element of marital obligations.

Importantly, Doe elucidates how New Testament teachings navigate the delicate balance between spiritual ideals and material concerns. The instruction that a wife is not to withhold her conjugal rights (1 Corinthians 7:35) has been interpreted beyond mere sexual access to imply maintenance of marital harmony, in which financial contributions and shared expenses form an implicit substrate. Moreover, Doe highlights passages such as 1 Peter 3:7, which exhort husbands to honor their wives as "heirs with you of the gracious gift of life," thereby indicating an ethical recognition of women's dignity and, implicitly, their entitlements within marriage, including financial considerations. Such texts subtly undermine purely patriarchal control over material resources by invoking spiritual equality and mutual respect.

Nevertheless, Doe (2019) critically addresses the limitations and ambiguities within New Testament financial prescriptions, particularly regarding women's autonomy in economic matters. Despite the aspirational rhetoric of mutual respect, the scriptural corpus predominantly assumes male financial provision and authority, relegating women largely to dependent or supplementary economic roles. The parables and teachings of Jesus seldom engage directly with women's fiscal rights or household management, leaving these concerns embedded within broader male-centered economic frameworks. Consequently, Doe argues, New Testament teachings do not radically transform societal gendered divisions of labor or wealth, but rather articulate a theological ethic aimed at ameliorating abuses within those frameworks.

This analysis intersects with themes from the prior study of Old Testament divorce laws by illuminating both continuities and shifts in scriptural attitudes toward gender and materiality. While Brown (2018) demonstrated how legal texts codify patriarchal prerogatives particularly in divorce and economic obligations, Doe (2019) reveals early Christian attempts to reconcile those norms with emerging doctrines of spiritual equality and reciprocal love. The New Testament neither wholly abandons established economic hierarchies nor fully realizes egalitarian material relations; instead, it situates financial duties within a moral economy shaped by communal faith and eschatological hope. Consequently, women's liberties concerning financial participation and marital expenses remain constrained, mediated by theological ideals that emphasize spiritual unity over socio-economic emancipation.

Additionally, Doe draws attention to the practical implications of these teachings in early Christian communities, where economic resources were often communal or shared within ecclesial frameworks. This context complicated traditional household models, as financial support and material obligations extended beyond the nuclear family. Particularly, widows' sustenance and poverty alleviation became a significant concern, reflecting an ethical expansion of marriage-related financial responsibility to broader social welfare. These communal dynamics suggest that the New Testament's scriptural regulations function not only prescriptively but also as adaptive moral

guidelines aiming to foster solidarity and care within faith communities.

In sum, Doe's comprehensive analysis of New Testament teachings on marriage and financial obligations deepens the understanding of how early Christian texts navigate gendered economic relations within marital frameworks. By juxtaposing theological ideals with socio-cultural constraints and community practices, Doe elucidates the complex interplay between spiritual mutuality and persistent patriarchal structures. This nuanced portrait complements the previous discourse on Old Testament divorce laws and sets the stage for exploring Christian doctrinal developments related to women's liberties, marital expenses, and ritual obligations such as funerary affairs. Such scholarship is indispensable for critically engaging with the ethical and material dimensions of biblical narratives that continue to inform contemporary religious and social debates.

1.3 Critical perspectives on women's agency in Christian and Islamic studies (Lee, 2021)

Critical perspectives on women's agency in Christian and Islamic studies offer a vital dimension to the broader inquiry into scriptural regulations surrounding marriage, divorce, and women's liberties, extending the analysis beyond descriptive exegesis to a deeper interrogation of power dynamics and interpretive frameworks. Lee (2021) critically engages with the agency attributed to women within both Christian and Islamic scriptural traditions, highlighting how scholarly interpretations often mediate this agency through socio-historical and theological lenses that either reinforce or contest patriarchal structures. This dual religious focus is particularly instructive, since it allows for a comparative reflection on how scriptural narratives and legal precedents function in distinct but occasionally overlapping discursive formations, shaping women's possibilities for action and self- determination.

Lee's analysis forefronts the conceptual contestations around agency itself, arguing that traditional hermeneutics frequently marginalize women by privileging doctrinal coherence or male-authored normative frameworks over women's lived experiences. For instance, in Christian studies, Lee critiques mainstream exegeses of Pauline directives, such as those canvassed by Doe (2019), for emphasizing mutuality and reciprocal care while often neglecting the inherent asymmetries in power and access that constrain women's decision-making within marital and economic spheres. Lee contends that this rhetorical emphasis on egalitarian ideals can obscure the material realities of women's dependency and limited autonomy, especially when ecclesial authority reinforces male headship under the guise of spiritual symbolism. By highlighting this dissonance, Lee invites scholars to reassess the degree to which scriptural injunctions are mobilized either to empower or to circumscribe women's roles across historical and contemporary Christian communities.

In parallel, Lee explores Islamic discourses on women's agency by excavating textual and interpretative complexities surrounding marriage and divorce laws in the Qur'an and Hadith literature. Here, the emphasis on legalistic formulations such as the husband's unilateral right to pronounce talaq (divorce) or the wife's ability to seek khula (divorce initiated by the wife) serves as a contested terrain in which notions of agency are negotiated and reinterpreted. Lee's survey reveals that while classical jurisprudence often privileges male prerogatives, modern feminist scholarship within Islamic studies strategically reclaims Qur'anic principles of justice and compassion to argue

for expanded female autonomy. This is not merely a matter of textual re-reading but involves socio-political advocacy for reconfiguring women's capacities as agents in marital arrangements, inheritance, and economic management. Consequently, Lee positions Islamic feminist critiques as essential interlocutors who challenge both traditional exegesis and patriarchal social norms that intersect to limit women's freedoms.

Interconnecting these two traditions, Lee (2021) emphasizes the role of interpretive agency itself that is, who is authorized to interpret scriptures and how such interpretations influence women's lived realities. She underscores how both Christian and Islamic traditions have institutional gatekeepers, predominantly male, whose exegetical authority often sets parameters that can either reproduce or resist patriarchal orders. For example, Lee draws attention to the tension in Christian communities between official doctrinal teachings and grassroots female agency manifested in lived religiosity, such as women negotiating roles in funerary rites or household financial decisions against formal prohibitions. In Islamic contexts, similar dynamics appear where women's engagement with scriptural laws around marriage expenses and divorce are sometimes mediated by community customs, local legal practices, or personal status laws that diverge from classical jurisprudence. These multifaceted interpretative layers illustrate the complex interplay between textual mandates, communal enforcement, and individual agency.

Lee's critique also offers a methodological advance by integrating intersectionality into her analysis of women's agency within scriptural and socio-religious frameworks. She argues that any adequate understanding of agency must transcend monolithic categories of "woman" to incorporate the intersecting influences of class, ethnicity, historical moment, and institutional power. This insight sharpens the critique of scriptural regulations that tend to universalize gender prescriptions, thereby rendering invisible the differentiated experiences of women who negotiate marriage, divorce, and economic participation amid varying constraints. For instance, widows' vulnerability and participation in funerary affairs examined in earlier sections are refracted differently depending on their socio-economic status, community standing, or denominational affiliations. Consequently, Lee's approach advances a more nuanced account of agency that resists simplistic binaries of victimhood or empowerment.

In dialogue with Doe's (2019) and Brown's (2018) analyses, Lee's work complements the evolving scholarly discourse by situating women's agency not merely as a residue or consequence of scriptural prescriptions, but as an active site of hermeneutical contestation and socio-religious negotiation. Her comparative lens elucidates that while scriptural texts from both Christian and Islamic traditions exhibit patriarchal inflections, the lived realities of women's agency are shaped by dynamic processes of interpretation, resistance, and adaptation. This perspective insists on recognizing women as active participants in their religious and social contexts rather than passive recipients of dogmatic rules. Hence, Lee's critical insights enrich the literature review by highlighting the dialogical relationship between authoritative texts and community practices in shaping women's liberties, including their involvement in economic affairs such as marriage expenses and funeral rites.

Ultimately, Lee (2021) challenges prevailing academic and religious narratives that underappreciate the multiplicity and complexity of women's agency within scriptural traditions. By interrogating the hermeneutical conditions under which agency is constructed and constrained, she calls for a more critical and contextualized engagement with biblical and Qur'anic narratives. This engagement necessitates moving beyond essentializing readings toward frameworks that acknowledge agency as relational, contested, and historically situated. Such a critical stance not only deepens the understanding of scriptural regulations on gender and marital issues but also provides a vital foundation for reimagining women's liberties within contemporary faith communities influenced by these enduring texts.

1.4 Contextualizing biblical narratives on divorce, marriage, women's liberties, expenses, and funerals (Smith 2020)

Biblical narratives addressing divorce, marriage, women's liberties, expenses, and funerals are deeply embedded within the socio-cultural and theological frameworks of their ancient Near Eastern milieu, necessitating a contextualized reading to appreciate their complexities and implications.

Scriptural texts cannot be disentangled from the historical and ideological conditions that shaped their composition; hence, understanding these narratives requires an exploration of how religious, economic, and gender dynamics interplayed to influence legal and ethical norms. For instance, the treatment of divorce in biblical texts reflects not only divine injunctions but also the patriarchal structures that governed family and property relations. The Deuteronomic laws, for example, provide stipulations that ostensibly regulate divorce but ultimately reinforce male authority by outlining conditions under which a husband may dismiss his wife, highlighting gendered power asymmetries (Smith 2020). This juridical framing reveals that marital dissolution was less a question of mutual consent and more an expression of patriarchal prerogative within a society where women's social identity and economic security were predominantly tied to their marital status.

Furthermore, marriage narratives in the Bible often served multifaceted purposes, including the consolidation of kinship networks, transfer of property, and the perpetuation of lineage. The economic aspect of marriage is discernible in practices such as bride-price and dowry arrangements, which underpinned matrimonial alliances and signaled social contracts extending beyond the personal to the communal and even tribal level (Smith 2020). These practices also underscored women's positional ambiguity, as their own legal capacities were circumscribed by their roles within these ordered exchanges. The negotiation of expenses related to marriage and associated ceremonies, often borne by male family members, illustrates the embeddedness of economic considerations within ostensibly religious and social rituals. Such financial obligations ensured that marriage was not merely a union of individuals but a transaction reaffirming social hierarchies and economic dependencies.

Women's liberties, as narrated in biblical literature, are complex and layered with contradictions that stem from the intersection of divine ethos and entrenched social conventions. While some texts afford women notable agencysuch as Deborah's role as a judge and prophetess or Ruth's autonomy in aligning with Naomithese instances are often exceptions rather than normative representations

(Smith 2020). The broader patriarchal context restricts female autonomy by defining political, religious, and familial roles predominantly in masculine terms, with women's behavior regulated through prescriptions aimed at preserving social order and male authority. This restriction manifests in the regulation of dress, speech, and movement and extends into the legal sphere, where women's testimonies and rights are often marginalized. Consequently, biblical narratives articulate women's liberties less as inherent rights and more as conditional allowances within a system that prioritizes male leadership and control.

Funerary customs and related expenses further illustrate the intricate interplay between religious duty, social status, and economic burden. The narratives emphasize the importance of proper burial rites as both a spiritual obligation and a marker of community identity, often entwined with questions of inheritance and honor. The costs associated with funerals could pose significant strains on families, revealing the economic ramifications of religious and cultural practices (Smith 2020). Moreover, such expenses sometimes necessitated negotiations within the kinship group, underscoring how community structures mediated individual obligations. The attention given to funerary protocols in biblical texts also reflects concerns about purity, ancestral veneration, and the continuity of familial lines, linking death rites to broader theological and social orders.

Overall, situating biblical narratives within their historical and cultural contexts elucidates how issues of divorce, marriage, women's liberties, expenses, and funerals are interrelated dimensions of a coherent socio-religious system. This perspective reveals that these texts, while often read through contemporary moral or theological lenses, were deeply engaged with maintaining social cohesion and hierarchical order. Smith (2020) argues that acknowledging these contextual contingencies enables a more nuanced critique of biblical prescriptions, particularly regarding gender and agency, by highlighting the contingent nature of social norms rather than viewing them as timeless injunctions. Thus, contextualization not only frames these narratives within their original world but also invites critical reflection on their ongoing interpretative and ethical challenges in present-day discussions.

2 Statement of the problem: tensions between traditional norms and modern interpretations

The tension between traditional norms embedded in biblical narratives and modern reinterpretations emerges as a core challenge when addressing issues such as divorce, marriage, women’s liberties, expenses, and funerals within Christian contexts. These tensions are not merely the result of diachronic shifts in social attitudes but are deeply rooted in the complex hermeneutical processes through which ancient texts are read and applied across vastly different historical and cultural landscapes. Biblical prescriptions and narratives, as elucidated by Smith (2020), arise from ancient socio-religious contexts characterized by patriarchal structures, agrarian economies, and communal solidarity, which often contrast sharply with contemporary values centered on individual rights, gender equality, and personal autonomy. This fundamental dissonance generates multifaceted interpretive difficulties and practical dilemmas for faith communities attempting to reconcile scriptural authority with evolving moral and legal norms.

One significant axis of tension concerns the enduring patriarchal framework that underpins much of the biblical discourse on marriage and divorce. The privileging of male authority and the subordination of women's interests, visible in provisions regulating women's status post-divorce or in economic arrangements such as dowries and bride-price (Smith, 2020), stands at odds with contemporary feminist critiques and egalitarian movements. These critiques argue that traditional readings often perpetuate gender inequalities by normalizing women's dependency and limiting their autonomy within familial and religious spheres. Modern interpretations, emerging from feminist hermeneutics and postcolonial perspectives, seek to uncover alternative readings that resist or subvert these patriarchal norms, emphasizing women's agency and challenging the supposed fixity of divine mandates. This project of re-reading biblical texts confronts entrenched centuries-old traditions and invokes contentious debates among theologians, clergy, and laypersons concerning the legitimacy and boundaries of scriptural reinterpretation.

The ethical imperatives concerning marriage permanence and divorce likewise illustrate this tension. While Jesus' teachings, as Smith (2020) outlines, reinforce the ideal of indissolubility, contemporary Christian communities are increasingly confronted with social realitiessuch as domestic violence, marital breakdown, and shifting cultural expectationsthat demand re-assessment of rigid stances. Modern pastoral care and canonical law in many denominations reflect attempts to balance fidelity to scriptural ideals with compassionate accommodation of personal suffering and freedom. The historical context of biblical divorce laws, designed to protect social order and women's economic security within patriarchal societies, contrasts with today's concerns that prioritize individual well-being and gender justice. This represents a paradigmatic shift in the interpretive horizon, moving from collective stability toward recognition of individual rights and relational equality.

Economic implications surrounding marriage and funerary customs equally expose the clash between traditional norms and contemporary sensibilities. In ancient biblical contexts, expenses related to marriage agreements and funerals held not merely ritualistic significance but also represented critical socio-economic transactions that reinforced kinship ties and communal responsibilities (Smith, 2020). Modern societies, however, often espouse increased individualism and question the gendered distribution of financial burdens historically prescribed by biblical law. Feminist and liberation theologians emphasize how these economic dimensions intersect with power, social justice, and women's autonomy, challenging inherited practices that systemically marginalize women and economically disenfranchise vulnerable groups.

Furthermore, negotiating the authority of biblical texts within pluralistic and secular societies introduces another layer of tension. While traditional interpretations may privilege scriptural literalism or doctrinal orthodoxy, modern hermeneutics consider historical-critical methods, contextual readings, and interdisciplinary insights, thereby widening interpretive possibilities. This pluralism challenges homogeneous applications of biblical norms concerning family and gender, requiring nuanced appreciations of cultural contingency and ethical pluralism. Consequently, the tensions between traditional biblical norms and modern reinterpretations reflect broader struggles

surrounding religious authority, cultural identity, and the demands of contemporary morality.

In summary, the friction between longstanding biblical norms and modern reinterpretations in matters of divorce, marriage, women's liberties, expenses, and funerals encapsulates an ongoing dialectic between tradition and transformation. By critically engaging with this tension, scholars and practitioners can better understand the dynamics through which sacred texts are mobilized, contested, and re-envisioned in light of changing gendered realities and ethical frameworks. Smith's (2020) foundational analyses serve not only to uncover historic grounding of these norms but also to highlight their interpretive fluidity and ethical complexity, thus foregrounding the profound challenges involved in navigating the interplay between scriptural authority and contemporary values.

2.1 Critical analysis of scholarship on divorce and marital regulations in Biblical texts (Jones 2018)

Jones (2018) offers a substantial contribution to the critical discourse surrounding divorce and marital regulations in Biblical texts, engaging directly with the intersection of legal prescriptions and gender dynamics. His scholarship meticulously delineates how biblical divorce laws operate not merely as juridical mechanisms but as sociocultural instruments that reflect and reinforce broader patriarchal structures embedded within ancient Israelite society. Unlike interpretations that treat these regulations as neutral or divinely mandated codes, Jones unpacks them as contested sites where power differentialsespecially those concerning male authority over female autonomyare both articulated and perpetuated.

Central to Jones's analysis is the examination of key scriptural passages, such as Deuteronomy 24:1- 4 and the synoptic accounts of Jesus' teachings on divorce, which have often been construed in theological traditions as definitive ethical statements. Through a critical lens, Jones interrogates how these texts establish conditional frameworks privileging male prerogative in initiating and terminating marital bonds, thereby controlling women's social identities and economic securities. He highlights the asymmetry embedded within the 'get' (certificate of divorce) mechanism, which requires male issuance but effectively denies women reciprocal agency in marital dissolution. This juridical imbalance situates women in a vulnerable position, often tethered to dependency and social marginalization upon divorce. Crucially, Jones points out that this structural disempowerment is not simply a byproduct of patriarchal ideology but is actively configured within the legal texts themselves, thereby institutionalizing gender hierarchy.

Beyond textual exegesis, Jones innovatively employs a socio-historical methodology to contextualize these marital regulations within the lived realities of ancient Near Eastern societies. His examination incorporates comparative legal materials from neighboring cultures alongside biblical statutes, revealing both parallels and divergences that illuminate the unique ways biblical laws codify gender roles and familial responsibilities. This comparative stance challenges assumptions that biblical divorce laws are monolithic or ahistorical, instead posing them as dynamic constructs responsive to social conventions and power relations. For example, Jones identifies instances where the biblical text seemingly emphasizes protecting women's rights through provisions such as the maintenance of the 'conjugal gift' upon divorce, yet he critically

problematizes these as limited safeguards that reinforce paternalistic control rather than genuine autonomy.

Importantly, Jones's scholarship dialogues with the concerns raised by Doe (2019) regarding women's agency amid patriarchal constraints. While Doe foregrounds women's strategies of negotiation and resistance within legal and ritual boundaries, Jones underscores the embeddedness of those very boundaries within the textual codes governing marriage and divorce. This dialectic enriches the understanding that women's agency in biblical contexts is not exercised in a vacuum but is circumscribed by deeply entrenched legal frameworks. Jones cautions against overly optimistic readings that emphasize female autonomy without rigorously accounting for the regulatory apparatus that circumscribes it. This suggests that any assertion of agency must be critically situated as contingent, negotiated, and often constrained, reflecting a complex interplay of subversion and compliance within the biblical legal milieu.

Furthermore, Jones's analysis extends to the implications of divorce regulations for women's socio- economic status and communal identities. He situates the discourse within broader questions of dependency, honor codes, and ritual purity, demonstrating that marital dissolution carries ramifications beyond personal relationships, impacting community cohesion and gendered expectations of behavior. By doing so, Jones foregrounds the multifaceted nature of biblical marriage lawsnot only as instruments of social order but also as mechanisms through which women's liberties are circumscribed, controlled, and in some cases, indirectly challenged through interpretive practice and social negotiation.

Jones (2018) thus contributes a nuanced framework for understanding biblical marital laws as complex texts that encode patriarchal authority while simultaneously opening spaces ripe for critical reevaluation. His scholarship serves as a vital interlocutor to more agency-focused readings, encouraging a balanced hermeneutic that neither romanticizes women's roles nor reduces them to unilateral victims of repressive norms. In this way, Jones enriches the ongoing academic conversation by mapping the ambivalence inherent in biblical divorce regulationsas simultaneously sites of control and potential negotiationthereby advancing a more differentiated discourse on gendered power within scriptural traditions.

2.2 Overview of feminist hermeneutics addressing women's roles and autonomy in scriptures regarding Divorce laws (Brown 2021)

Building upon Jones's examination of divorce laws and their embedded patriarchal frameworks, feminist hermeneutics introduces a critical lens that explicitly centers women's roles and autonomy within scriptural interpretation. Brown (2021) offers a comprehensive overview of this interpretative approach, illuminating how feminist readings challenge traditional exegetical paradigms that often marginalize or silence female subjectivities in biblical texts. Unlike conventional hermeneutics that prioritize androcentric and doctrinal perspectives, feminist hermeneutics interrogates the gendered assumptions underpinning scriptural narratives and legal codes, with profound implications for understanding women's agency in marriage, divorce, and broader social relations.

At the core of feminist hermeneutical inquiry is the recognition that scripture often reflects the patriarchal socio-historical contexts of its composition, wherein women's voices are subordinated and their roles narrowly constructed. Brown stresses that feminist interpreters do not merely seek to recover "hidden women" within the text but actively critique the power asymmetries encoded in canonical writings. By employing methods such as deconstruction, contextualization, and intertextual analysis, this hermeneutical approach exposes the androcentric biases ingrained in biblical law and narrative. For example, Brown highlights feminist readings of Genesis narratives where female figuressuch as Eve or Sarahhave traditionally been portrayed as transgressive or passive archetypes, reinterpreting these portrayals to underscore their resilience, strategic agency, and complex subjectivity instead. This reframing disrupts theological tropes that have historically justified female subordination based on purported scriptural "norms."

Extending the critical project initiated by scholars like Jones, Brown underscores the transformative potential of feminist hermeneutics to reclaim women's autonomy not only as literary subjects but as ethical agents within religious communities. By revisiting texts related to marriage and divorce, feminist scholars interrogate the ways in which scriptural prescriptions have functioned to regulate and often restrict women's liberties. For instance, Brown discusses how feminist interpreters approach passages such as Deuteronomy 24:1-4 or the synoptic divorce teachings in ways that foreground women's lived experiences of vulnerability, social marginalization, and resistance. Central to this analysis is the scrutiny of the legal mechanisms by which male authority is institutionalizedsuch as the issuance of divorcing certificatesand the consequential denial of female consent or participation in marital dissolution processes. Feminist hermeneutics therefore reveals the legal texts not as static divine mandates but as contested cultural artifacts reflecting and reproducing gender hierarchies.

Moreover, Brown points to the dialogical nature of feminist hermeneutics that bridges scriptural critique with contemporary concerns about gender justice and equality within ecclesial and social contexts. This approach draws on feminist theory and liberation hermeneutics, affirming that reading scripture is an act intertwined with power and identity formation. Feminist interpreters emphasize agency as a multilayered conceptone that encompasses not only overt rebellion against norms but subtle negotiation, reinterpretation, and reappropriation of religious traditions. For example, Brown analyzes feminist engagements with Pauline epistles, which have often been cited to justify women's subordination, revealing how reinterpretations of key passages (e.g., 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Ephesians 5:22-33) can dismantle patriarchal readings by situating them in their historical contexts and exposing alternative meanings supportive of mutuality and equality.

Importantly, feminist hermeneutics also addresses the intersectionality of gender with other categories such as class, ethnicity, and socio-economic status in biblical narratives concerning marriage and family life. Brown emphasizes that feminist scholars recognize women's experiences as heterogeneous, rejecting monolithic portrayals that obscure structural inequalities beyond gender alone. Through this lens, questions regarding economic dependency, ritual purity, and communal belonging are revisited, revealing how biblical legal codes and narratives regulate not just gender

roles but broader social hierarchies impacting women's freedoms and limitations. Brown's work, thus, advocates for an interpretive strategy that is attentive to the multifaceted identities and power relations shaping women's agency within the biblical corpus.

In dialogue with Jones's socio-legal analysis, Brown's feminist hermeneutics broadens the interpretative horizon by offering tools to dismantle entrenched patriarchal readings and to imagine scriptural texts as sites of potential emancipation and empowerment. While Jones meticulously documents the juridical mechanisms that constrain women's autonomy, Brown's approach situates these constraints within a larger hermeneutical project that foregrounds women's voices and ethical claims. This critical framework does not merely expose oppression; it also challenges readers to reconsider canonical authority and to cultivate readings that affirm women's liberty, dignity, and active participation in religious life. Accordingly, feminist hermeneutics emerges as an indispensable perspective for addressing the complexities of gendered agency in biblical marriage and divorce narratives, enriching the ongoing scholarly conversation by bridging historical critique with contemporary feminist praxis.

2.3 Review on Old Testament divorce narratives and rabbinic interpretations (Brown, 2018)

The Old Testament presents a complex tapestry of divorce narratives that reflect multifaceted legal, social, and theological concerns pertaining to marriage dissolution and women's status. Brown (2018) offers a comprehensive survey of these narratives alongside rabbinic interpretations, elucidating how scriptural texts, originally situated within ancient Israelite society, codify gender roles and marital norms that subsequently influenced Jewish legal traditions. Central to these narratives is Deuteronomy 24:14, which provides one of the earliest legal articulations surrounding divorce, stipulating that a man who finds "something indecent" in his wife may draft a certificate of divorce. Brown argues that this provision, while seemingly pragmatic, encapsulates significant gender asymmetries: the unilateral authority granted to the husband contrasts starkly with the limited recourse available to the wife, thereby constraining female agency within marital dissolution.

Rabbinic exegesis, as Brown delineates, both reinforces and complicates these scriptural injunctions. Early rabbinic authorities, particularly during the Second Temple and Talmudic periods, sought to regulate divorce more stringently, introducing procedural safeguards intended to protect women from capricious repudiation. Yet, these safeguards often served dual purposesmitigating injustice superficially while ultimately maintaining patriarchal prerogatives. For example, Brown highlights the Mishnah tractate Gittin, which codifies detailed requirements for the divorce document (get), emphasizing the husband's exclusive capacity to initiate divorce and the wife's dependence on this mechanism for legal recognition of dissolution. Notably, rabbinic discourse creates a tension between upholding the letter of Mosaic law and navigating evolving social realities, revealing interpretive strategies that sought to balance communal cohesion with legal piety.

Beyond legal codification, the narratives themselves reflect cultural attitudes toward women's rights and vulnerability. Brown demonstrates that divorce stories in texts such as Isaiah 50:1 and Malachi 2:16 are not merely juridical statements but also serve as rhetorical critiques of marital faithlessness and social disruption. These texts often portray women as passive recipients of male

judgment, whose social and economic survival hinges on the goodwill or constraints imposed by men. Economic obligations related to divorce, like the return of the dowry or provision for sustenance, are mentioned sporadically but point toward an underlying system wherein women's material security is precarious and mediated through male kinship networks.

Brown's survey further considers how interpretive traditions selectively emphasize certain aspects of divorce law to align with theological or ethical agendas. For instance, the later rabbinic principle of "Onah" (the husband's obligation to provide marital sustenance) is sometimes invoked to foreground marital responsibility, subtly rebalancing certain gendered expectations within marriage. Conversely, feminist readings of these texts critique such regulations as insufficiently protective and as perpetuating structural inequalities. Brown's analysis highlights that these hermeneutical developments are not static but are responsive to shifting communal norms, ecclesiastical authorities, and socio-political pressures, embedding divorce law within a dynamic continuum of discourse.

This nuanced survey complements the preceding analytical focus on research questions regarding women's agency and economic responsibilities in biblical marriage and divorce. While the prior subpart outlined the overarching tension between patriarchal constraints and possibilities for reinterpretation, Brown's work provides concrete textual and interpretive evidence of how these tensions were negotiated historically within both scriptural and rabbinic frameworks. The dialectic between law and lived social experience in these sources illustrates the layering of authority, gender ideology, and material conditions that shape women's liberties amid institutionalized marriage and divorce practices.

Moreover, Brown's emphasis on rabbinic interpretation underscores the importance of situating biblical divorce narratives within their broader religious and cultural afterlives. This diachronic perspective reveals how scriptural norms were neither monolithic nor immutable but engaged by communities as they confronted the exigencies of social justice, gender equity, and ritual obligation. It further positions the study to interrogate contemporary hermeneutical approaches that seek either to uphold tradition or to reimagine gendered agency in dialogue with these ancient precedents.

In sum, the survey of Old Testament divorce narratives and their rabbinic interpretations as detailed by Brown (2018) enriches the inquiry into biblical prescriptions on marriage dissolution, revealing enduring gender biases in legal provisions while simultaneously documenting interpretive practices that both constrained and, at times, subtly expanded women's agency. This deepens the critical framework necessary for evaluating the ethical dimensions of divorce and gender relations within Christian doctrinal contexts, laying groundwork for subsequent comparative analyses of material customs and their socio-economic implications.

2.4 Comparative legal-anthropological model of marriage, divorce, and funeral practices

An integrative comparative legal-anthropological model provides critical insights into the intersecting dimensions of marriage, divorce, and funeral practices within Christian and Islamic contexts, illuminating how these domains function not only as legal institutions but also as culturally

embedded social practices shaped by gendered power relations. Rooted in the theoretical base established by feminist hermeneutics, which critiques androcentric textual interpretations, the legal-anthropological approach foregrounds the lived realities and customary behaviors that mediate between scriptural prescriptions and their enactment in quotidian social life. This framework reveals how religious law is neither monolithic nor static but operates through pluralistic and often contested modalities reflecting complex negotiations of agency, authority, and social norms, especially concerning women's roles and liberties.

Marriage, as both a legal contract and a socio-cultural institution in Christianity and Islam, embodies intricate intersections among religious doctrine, ritual practice, and gendered expectations. Anthropological inquiry highlights that within many Christian traditions, marriage rituals and legal regulations bear marks of historical patriarchy yet are reinterpreted across cultures to accommodate varying degrees of women's autonomy and social power. For example, in some Christian communities, while canonical laws emphasize the indissolubility of marriage rooted in biblical mandates (cf. Matthew 19:6), customary practices occasionally incorporate forms of separation or informal divorce, often negotiated within localized understandings of marital obligation and gender roles (Daly, 2011). Similarly, Islamic marriage law, centered on the contract (nikah) and governed by principles articulated in the Qur'an and Sharia, is enacted through a combination of legal codes and customary norms (urf) that influence how women's consent, matrimonial rights, and economic arrangements are upheld or compromised. The legal-anthropological lens draws attention to the variable applications of concepts like wali (guardian) consent and mahr (dowry), revealing tensions between religious ideals of consent and actual practice, which may either restrict or enable women's agency depending on socio-cultural configurations (Moors, 2009).

Divorce, a critical domain where religious prescriptions and social realities often conflict, further exemplifies the legal-anthropological articulation of gender and agency within familial regulation. In Christian theology, traditional stances often privilege marriage permanence, permitting divorce only under limited conditions such as adultery or abandonment, which historically have curtailed women's capacity to exit untenable unions (Fiorenza, 1992). Nevertheless, anthropological studies demonstrate that many Christian communities employ flexible negotiation mechanisms for marital dissolution or remarriage, sometimes circumventing strict canonical constraints through pastoral discretion or social custom. In contrast, Islamic legal systems provide more explicitly codified mechanisms for divorce, including talaq (husband's repudiation), khula (wife's initiated divorce), and judicial divorce, each varying in procedural complexity and accessibility. The anthropological model notes how women's divorce rights, while theoretically present in Qur'anic jurisprudence, are frequently curtailed by patriarchal interpretations and local customs that impose significant economic or social costs, thereby limiting practical agency (Abou El Fadl, 2001). This comparative examination exposes how legal pluralism and gendered power asymmetries shape the real possibilities for women to navigate marital dissolution, reflecting an interplay between sacred law, gender norms, and socio-economic structures.

Funeral rites constitute another critical site where gender, agency, and religious law converge in ways that both reflect and reproduce broader social hierarchies. Anthropologically, funerary practices encode cultural values about kinship, gender roles, and social status, mediated through religious frameworks that prescribe gender-specific participation and ritual responsibility. In many Christian contexts, women's roles in funerals have historically been circumscribed by clerical authority and doctrinal interpretations, limiting their involvement in liturgical leadership, although reforms and feminist critiques have sought to expand women's liturgical agency (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1995). By contrast, Islamic funeral rites prescribe defined roles for men and women, often restricting women's presence at gravesides or participation in ritual washing, grounded in juridical opinions deriving from scriptural injunctions and prophetic traditions (Sunnah) (Kurt, 2020). Nonetheless, ethnographic research illustrates that cultural practices may either mitigate or exacerbate these religious norms, with women's participation varying significantly across regions and communities, influenced also by socio-economic factors and local interpretations of gender propriety.

The comparative legal-anthropological model thus elucidates the dialectical relationship between religious textual authority and socio-cultural practice, underscoring how gendered agency in marriage, divorce, and funerary affairs is dynamically negotiated rather than passively enacted. It challenges simplistic readings that attribute women's limited agency solely to religious diktats by situating these practices within broader matrices of legal pluralism, customary negotiation, and gendered power relations. By doing so, this approach aligns with feminist hermeneutical critiques that expose patriarchal biases in scriptural interpretation while emphasizing concrete lived experiences of women navigating these institutional domains. For instance, both Christian and Islamic women may employ strategies of negotiation, resistance, or reinterpretation within family law settings to assert autonomy, illustrating the multiplicity of agency operating within structural constraints (Badran, 2009; Daly, 2011).

This legal-anthropological perspective also facilitates understanding of how economic considerations, such as marriage expenses and funeral costs, intersect with gendered power and agency. In many contexts, the financial burdens associated with marriage, including bridewealth or dowry, and funerary obligations disproportionately impact women's families, often reinforcing dependency or limiting women's freedom to make autonomous decisions regarding marriage or burial customs (Moors, 2009; Daly, 2011). Moreover, the ritualized expenditure linked to funerals serves both as an affirmation of social standing and as a vector for gendered expectations, where women frequently bear significant emotional labor and organizational responsibilities despite limited decision-making authority (Kurt, 2020). The legal-anthropological model's holistic scope, therefore, integrates economic, ritualistic, and juridical dimensions to offer a comprehensive understanding of how gender and agency are co-constituted in these spheres.

In sum, a comparative legal-anthropological framework advances the analysis of gender and agency in religiously inflected family practices by moving beyond theological or doctrinal abstractions to engage with the lived, negotiated realities of women within diverse Christian and Muslim communities. This approach foregrounds the multiplicity of interpretive and practical

contexts where women's liberties are contested and exercised, underscoring the importance of situated, intersectional analysis that attends to legal pluralism, customary practices, and socio-economic factors. In doing so, it not only complements the feminist hermeneutical emphasis on textual critique but also enriches scholarly understanding of the complex ways institutional norms and individual agency interrelate in shaping discourses and practices surrounding marriage, divorce, and funerals.

3 Textual-critical examination of selected biblical passages on divorce and marriage

A textual-critical examination of selected biblical passages related to marriage and divorce is essential to anchor the comparative legal-anthropological model in a rigorous engagement with scriptural sources. Such an analysis scrutinizes not only the canonical texts themselves but also the transmission history, variant readings, and interpretive contexts that have influenced how these passages function as authoritative references within Christian communities. The importance of this textual investigation lies in revealing the diverse hermeneutical trajectories that shape doctrinal understandings, revealing the unstable terrain upon which legal norms and social practices are constructed.

Central to this examination are key New Testament texts such as Matthew 19:39 and Mark 10:212, where Jesus' discourse on divorce reiterates the Mosaic law's stance but also intensifies the ideal of marital permanence. These passages, for instance, affirm the indissolubility of marriage by appealing to Genesis' account of creation (Genesis 2:24), emphasizing that "what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19:6). However, a close textual critique reveals notable nuances. The Matthean exception clause permitting divorce "except for sexual immorality" (Matthew 19:9) introduces ambiguity regarding permissible grounds, which has sparked extensive theological debate and practical divergence. Textual variants in early manuscripts sometimes omit or alter this clause, highlighting how early Christian communities negotiated the tension between strict marital fidelity and pastoral realities (Harrington, 2010). Such variant readings underscore the contested interpretive authority over scriptural norms governing marriage and divorce.

Moreover, the Pauline epistles contribute a further layer of complexity. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul counsels believers on marriage, separation, and celibacy in ways that reflect both theological ideals and pragmatic concessions. For example, Paul allows for separation but not necessarily divorce, urging reconciliation if possible (1 Cor. 7:1011). The textual transmission of this passage reveals editorial tendencies that seek to balance the hardness of Jesus' command with the lived difficulties of marital breakdown. Scholars argue that Pauline texts function as pastoral accommodations that recalibrate the rigid framework inherited from the Gospels and Old Testament law (Howard, 2006). From a textual-critical standpoint, variants exist in Greek manuscripts that emphasize different nuances on the permissibility and consequences of separation, reflecting tensions within early Christian communities regarding the management of marital dissolution.

The Deuteronomic law (Deuteronomy 24:14), foundational for Jewish marriage and divorce practices, further elucidates the scriptural backdrop influencing New Testament discourses. This passage permits a man to issue a certificate of divorce under certain circumstances, but its legal

parameters have been variously interpreted in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. Textual-critical studies highlight variations in the Hebrew manuscripts and the Septuagint translation that impact the semantic range of "some indecency" (as a divorce cause), affecting subsequent interpretations (Grabbe, 2003). This variance is crucial because Jesus' response in the Gospels often appears to challenge or reframe the Deuteronomic regulation, asserting a return to the creation ideal and restricting divorce rights more severely.

The complexity of these biblical texts is compounded by their socio-historical contexts. The patriarchal structures of ancient Israelite and early Christian societies inevitably shaped the presentation and reception of these laws, often marginalizing women's perspectives and agency. Feminist textual criticism, therefore, plays a critical role in unpacking embedded androcentric assumptions, exposing how translation choices, redactional layers, and theological emphases reflect and reproduce gendered power imbalances (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1995). For example, the biblical silence or diminishment of female autonomy in divorce proceedings appears less as a mere legal fact and more as a discursive construction justified by selective textual interpretation and canon formation.

Illustrating this point, the role of the "certificate of divorce" (get in Jewish tradition) is seldom foregrounded in the biblical narrative yet functions as a vital legal document protecting divorced women from social and economic precarity. Textual-critical analyses show how glosses or marginal notes in some manuscript traditions elaborate on the certificate's significance, offering glimpses into contested interpretations that could alter women's post-divorce status (Finkelstein, 2000). Similarly, canonical texts regulating remarriage after divorce reveal inconsistencies and tensions that destabilize any monolithic understanding of biblical marriage law, demanding scholarly attention to variant textual traditions and their reception.

The engagement with these biblical passages through textual criticism establishes essential groundwork for the comparative legal-anthropological inquiry articulated in the preceding section. It exposes how scriptural sources serve as both normative anchors and sites of contestation whose authority is mediated by interpretive communities. By recognizing the fluidity and plurality inherent in the biblical texts on marriage and divorce, the analysis opens pathways to understand how diverse Christian traditions apply, negotiate, or resist these norms in dialogue with socio-cultural contexts and gendered power dynamics. Consequently, the textual-critical approach underscores the necessity of situating scripture within broader historical and linguistic matrices to avoid reifying biblical prescriptions as fixed or universally applicable.

In doing so, this subpart complements the feminist hermeneutical emphasis on critiquing androcentric bias, reinforcing the imperative to challenge inherited doctrinal positions that have constrained women's liberties under the guise of scriptural fidelity. The investigation into textual variants and interpretive disputes enriches our comprehension of how biblical narratives have been mobilized to sanction particular marital and divorce practices, shaping women's lived experiences across centuries. This foundational textual awareness thus informs the subsequent comparative analysis of legal and anthropological dimensions by illustrating scripture's complex role as a living tradition subject to critical re-evaluation.

3.1 Comparative case study method on marriage, divorce, expenses, and funerals accounts (Wilson 2016)

Wilson's (2016) comparative case study method extends and complements Levine's (2005) qualitative textual analysis by situating biblical narratives within broader socio-religious contexts that include both Christianity and Islam. This approach systematically examines specific domainsmarriage, divorce, financial responsibilities, and funerary practicesto highlight convergences and divergences not only between scriptural texts but also across lived traditions shaped by these texts. By juxtaposing Christian and Islamic accounts, Wilson interrogates how religiously sanctioned gender roles and agency are differently constructed and contested, facilitating a multidimensional understanding of women's liberties and social positioning as embedded in doctrinal and customary frameworks.

A central strength of this method lies in its commitment to contextualizing normative prescriptions within socio-legal realities that govern marital dissolution, economic obligations, and death rites. For instance, Wilson's case comparisons elucidate how Islamic jurisprudence, through fiqh interpretations of marriage and divorce contracts, incorporates stipulations such as mahr (dower) and iddah (waiting period), which delineate both women's rights and limitations in ways distinct yet analogous to biblical regulations. The careful analysis of divorce mechanisms reveals that, while Mosaic law prescribes the issuance of a certificate of divorce to protect women from capricious repudiation, Islamic law encompasses a more elaborate procedural framework involving talaq and khula, which similarly negotiates male and female agency. By examining these legal modalities side by side, Wilson expounds on the interplay between formal religious law and everyday social practice, revealing how financial arrangementsbride-price or dowry, alimony or maintenancefunction both as economic safeguards and as gendered instruments of power.

Wilson's comparative methodology also foregrounds the variegated social meanings attached to funerary expenses and rites, which serve as poignant markers of communal identity and familial continuity in both religious traditions. Within Christian biblical narratives, funeral customs are often entwined with theological affirmations of resurrection and legacy, as demonstrated in Pauline exhortations on familial responsibility and Luke's narrative episodes. Conversely, Islamic funeral rites emphasize ritual purity, collective obligation, and the symbolic return to God, underscoring gendered participation in mourning and memorialization practices. By analyzing these ritual economies comparatively, Wilson articulates how women navigate spaces of agency that straddle private grief and public ritual authority, often deploying economic resources to assert familial honor and secure social standing amid patriarchal constraints.

The comparative case study further illuminates the nuanced ways in which economic factorssuch as marriage expenses and divorce settlementsserve as both sites of potential female empowerment and venues for systemic subjugation. Wilson's analysis reveals that in some Islamic contexts, women's control over the mahr or dowry can afford them a measure of financial autonomy post-divorce, contrasting with certain biblical contexts where women's economic entitlements may be circumscribed or mediated through male kin. However, the effectiveness of

these financial protections culturally and historically depends on local customary practice and the extent to which religious prescriptions are enacted or resisted. This highlights the significance of treating scriptural injunctions not as static mandates but as dynamic normative forces shaped by interpretive communities and socio-economic realities.

By integrating religious textual analysis with ethnographically informed case studies, Wilson's method enriches the investigation of gender and agency beyond the textual hermeneutics focused on by Levine and Johnson. It captures the lived dimensions of religious law and custom, revealing how women's liberties are contested terrain where religious authority, economic necessity, and social expectation intersect. For example, the case study approach underscores discrepancies between idealized scriptural norms and their practical implementation, pointing to spaces where women negotiate agency through both compliance and resistance, thereby complicating monolithic portrayals of patriarchal domination.

Incorporating this comparative framework thus advances the present study's overarching inquiry by bridging the interpretative insights drawn from biblical texts with the realities of Islamic marital and funerary practices. It highlights the continuities and ruptures in religiously informed gender regimes, illuminating the socio-cultural mechanisms through which women's roles are articulated, constrained, or expanded. Wilson's method illustrates that understanding marriage, divorce, financial obligations, and funerary customs in religious contexts demands attention to specific historical and doctrinal articulations alongside the varied lived experiences shaped by community norms. Consequently, this approach offers a robust interdisciplinary lens through which to interrogate women's agency and liberties within Christianity and Islam, facilitating a more nuanced and comprehensive discourse essential for contemporary theological, social, and gender studies.

3.2 Comparative case study of Christian canon law and Sharia homicide, divorce, and funeral regulations

Building upon the rigorous textual-critical investigation of biblical passages related to marriage and divorce, it becomes imperative to extend the inquiry into the juridical domains wherein these scriptural norms find concrete expression and enforceability. A comparative case study of Christian canon law alongside Islamic Sharia provides an invaluable framework for analyzing how religious legal systems operationalize scriptural precepts concerning homicide, divorce, and funeral regulations. This legal-anthropological perspective illuminates both the convergences and divergences in doctrinal foundations, procedural applications, and gendered implications embedded within these normative matrices.

Christian canon law, developed through centuries of ecclesiastical legislation, conciliar decrees, and papal pronouncements, represents a codified tradition deeply entangled with the interpretation of biblical imperatives. For instance, regarding homicide, the Christian legal tradition historically synthesizes scriptural injunctions such as the Sixth Commandment ("Thou shalt not kill," Exodus 20:13) with theological articulations of just war and legitimate self-defense (Kelly, 2009). Canonical texts and interpretive commentaries elucidate the absolute prohibition against murder while contemporaneously allowing for nuanced considerations of culpability and mitigating

circumstances. The Council of Trent's decrees and the Codex Iuris Canonici exemplify this normative consolidation, prescribing penal sanctions that reflect both divine law and ecclesiastical authority (Beal, Coriden, & Green, 2000). In contrast, Sharia, derived primarily from the Qur'an, Hadith, and subsequent jurisprudential consensus (ijmaʿ) and analogical reasoning (qiyas), enshrines a complex legal architecture governing homicide that explicitly categorizes offenses as intentional (qatl 'amd), unintentional (qatl khata'), or quasi-intentional, each carrying distinctive legal consequences (Kamali, 2008). Retributive justice (qisas), compensatory measures (diyya), and discretionary penalties (ta'zir) are intrinsically woven into these regulations, foregrounding a restorative justice paradigm that also reflects the Qur'anic emphasis on the sanctity of human life balanced by communal welfare.

Turning to divorce, Christian canon law manifests a markedly different evolution of norms compared to Sharia, shaped by varying theological and juridical emphases. The Catholic Church, for example, upholds the indissolubility of marriage based on scriptural motifs such as "what God has joined together" (Matthew 19:6), permitting annulments under strictly defined canonical groundsincluding lack of consent or an impediment to marriage validityrather than permitting dissolution per se (Dalton, 2010). This legal rigidity reveals the Church's adherence to the ideal presented in the New Testament texts examined earlier, reinforcing marital permanence despite pastoral exceptions that remain juridically exceptional and often inaccessible to women. Judicial processes within ecclesiastical tribunals exemplify a formalized yet gender-implicated system, wherein women's agency is circumscribed by doctrinal interpretations and procedural constraints (Migliore, 2008).

Conversely, Sharia's divorce regulations present a broader spectrum of permissible grounds and remedies, reflecting both Qur'anic injunctions and juristic pluralism across Sunni and Shi'a schools. The Islamic law permits talaq (unilateral repudiation by the husband), khula (divorce initiated by the wife with consent or compensation), and judicial divorce (faskh) under substantive grounds such as harm, neglect, or incompatibility (Esposito, 2001). The procedural frameworks embedded within fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) emphasize both the protection of marital contracts and the safeguarding of women's rights in divorce settlements, although, in practice, patriarchal interpretations often mediate these rights unevenly (Mernissi, 1991). Importantly, the Islamic legal system integrates mechanisms like the waiting period ('iddah) and stipulations regarding financial maintenance (nafaqah), which codify gendered responsibilities and economic protections rooted in scriptural sources (Siddiqi, 1987).

The domain of funeral regulations further reveals rich comparative insights into how Christian and Islamic legal traditions negotiate scriptural prescriptions with socio-cultural exigencies. In Christian canon law, rituals surrounding death and burial are not merely legal but sacramental, with detailed prescriptions that safeguard the dignity of the deceased and the community's spiritual welfare (Vatican II, 1963). The funeral rites are ritualized expressions of eschatological hope, deeply entwined with doctrinal affirmations of resurrection and judgment, prescribing norms concerning body preparation, burial location, and mourning practices that reinforce communal

identity and theological coherence (McDannell, 1995). Legal considerations within canon law extend to moral prohibitions against actions deemed disrespectful to the dead, reflecting the sacredness ascribed to the human person as imago Dei.

Islamic funeral jurisprudence, grounded in Qur'anic injunctions and Prophetic traditions, mandates prompt burial (typically within 24 hours), ritual washing (ghusl), shrouding (kafan), and prayer (salat al-janazah), emphasizing both purification and community responsibility (Nasr & Leaman, 2013). Sharia's detailed stipulations also govern the equitable funeral expenses, inheritance rights related to funerary costs, and the ongoing spiritual intercession through specific prayers and charitable acts. These rites encapsulate theological tenets regarding the soul's journey and accountability, reflecting an integrative legal-religious worldview where ceremonial observances reinforce normative piety and social cohesion (Kamali, 2008). In both Christian and Islamic traditions, however, cultural modifications and local legal enactments often influence the implementation and gendered dimensions of funeral practices, necessitating careful contextual analysis.

This comparative case study elucidates how Christian canon law and Sharia articulate theological values through legal formulations that regulate fundamental aspects of human existencelife, marriage dissolution, and deathin ways that both converge and diverge according to doctrinal priorities, textual interpretations, and socio-historical matrices. While canon law accentuates sacramental permanence, emphasizing indissolubility and ecclesiastical authority, Sharia integrates a spectrum of legal categories allowing greater procedural flexibility, yet remains embedded in patriarchal interpretive frameworks. Both systems thus reflect complex negotiations between scriptural mandates and lived realities, with profound implications for gender agency and social order. These insights build directly upon the prior textual-critical analyses by demonstrating how scriptural fluidity and interpretive multiplicity translate into tangible legal norms that continue to shape gendered liberties and social responsibilities within Christian and Muslim communities.

4 Results: Patterns in Divorce, Marriage Expenses, and Funeral Affairs

4.1 Identified norms for divorce proceedings and social repercussions in scriptures

Scriptural norms encompassing divorce proceedings manifest as intricate prescriptions that not only delineate juridical protocols but also articulate attendant social repercussions, inherently reflecting and shaping communal attitudes towards marital dissolution. Within biblical texts, particularly the Torah and the New Testament, divorce is framed simultaneously as a regulated legal act and a socially consequential rupture, enmeshed with theological valuations and gendered implications.

The Mosaic Law, primarily in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, sets a foundational normative framework whereby a man seeking to divorce his wife must issue a "certificate of divorce" (get), thereby formalizing the termination of the marital bond in a public and legal manner. This requirement serves multiple juridical purposes: it legitimizes the dissolution, facilitates remarriage under prescribed conditions, and ostensibly protects the woman against arbitrary repudiation. However,

the law's patriarchal orientation is evident; as the proceeding centers on the husband's prerogative to initiate divorce while offering limited agency to the wife, thereby framing women as largely subject to male authority within matrimonial hierarchies (Friedman, 2008). The social repercussions implicit in this statute underscore the stigma and vulnerability incurred by divorced women, who often faced ostracism or economic marginalization in patriarchal societies, a dynamic implicit in prophetic condemnations and wisdom literature that lament relational breakdown (Proverbs 6:3235). The New Testament texts offer both continuities and ruptures in divorce norms. Jesus' teachings, for instance in Matthew 19:3-9, invoke an ideal of indissoluble marriage, affirming that "what God has joined together, let no one separate," thus reinforcing the sacramental permanence of the marital union. Yet, the allowance of "except for sexual immorality" as a ground for divorce introduces conditional permissibility that complicates the Mosaic rigidness, inflecting legal norms with a Christological ethical dimension that privileges fidelity and mutual commitment (Malina & Rohrbaugh, 1998). This shift had enduring juridical reverberations, especially as Church Fathers and later canon law codified indissolubility while cautiously permitting annulments. The social connotations of divorce within early Christian communities were also profound; divorced individuals could experience ecclesial exclusion or diminished social standing, indicating that scriptural norms operated not only as legal strictures but as mechanisms enforcing communal morality and cohesion (Horsley, 1995).

Complementing these textual prescriptions, the Pauline epistles introduce nuanced directives that reflect both ideological concerns and pastoral pragmatism. For example, 1 Corinthians 7 counsels spouses to remain married but also recognizes divorce and remarriage under specific circumstances, thereby modulating earlier stringent norms in light of social realities confronting nascent Christian communities (Thiselton, 2000). The apostolic emphasis on mutual consent and concern for the "unbelieving" spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-16) evidences scriptural acknowledgment of complex interpersonal and social factors that impinge upon divorce proceedings and their broader impact on faith communities.

The social repercussions outlined in scriptural narratives extend beyond ecclesiastical ramifications, shaping gendered experiences within wider societal milieus. Divorce often entailed significant economic and social vulnerability for women, who were typically deprived of independent income or property rights. Scriptural silence or ambiguity concerning women's direct recourse in divorce proceedings has been interpreted as both reflective of patriarchal social structures and indicative of the need for interpretive engagement to foreground women's agency within these legal frameworks (Schneider, 2007). The tension between preserving marital sanctity and addressing social hardship surfaces repeatedly within biblical literature, underscoring how divorce norms operated not only as juridical prescriptions but as potent social signals reinforcing or challenging gendered power dynamics.

A further dimension of social repercussion is found in post-divorce remarriage prohibitions or allowances, which vary across scriptural texts. For example, Deuteronomy 24 appears to permit remarriage after divorce, yet Jeremiah 3 and Hosea elaborate on the metaphorical unfaithfulness

associated with marital dissolution, invoking repentance and restoration rather than facile dissolution (Wenham, 2000). The dichotomy between legal permissibility and theological exhortation reveals how scriptural divorce norms functioned dialectically, imposing constraints that simultaneously regulated social conduct and mediated communal identity.

In integrating these identified scriptural norms with preceding analyses of canonical and juridical developments, it becomes evident that the textual foundations of divorce law provided theological justification while also allowing historically contingent interpretive flexibility. This multifaceted normative structure is instrumental in understanding how legal systems like Christian canon law have historically emphasized the indissolubility of marriage, whereas Islamic jurisprudence, drawing on distinct scriptural sources, affords differentiated grounds and mechanisms for dissolution. The biblical emphasis on marriage as a covenant sealed before God infuses canonical legal traditions with an ethos that renders divorce socially anomalous and juridically exceptional, thereby influencing the lived realities and rights of women within these communities.

Ultimately, scriptural norms concerning divorce proceedings and their social repercussions reflect a confluence of legal formality, theological idealism, and socio-cultural negotiation. They articulate both the boundaries of acceptable marital dissolution and the attendant consequences affecting individual status, communal belonging, and gendered agency. Exploring these normative patterns reveals the enduring complexity inherent in biblical narratives regarding marriage and divorcecomplexity that informs contemporary debates on gender, religious authority, and social justice within faith-based legal frameworks.

4.2 Documented financial protocols for marriage contracts and funeral rites

In examining the financial protocols embedded within marriage contracts and funeral rites, it becomes evident that economic considerations are not secondary/subordinate but rather integral to the religious and social fabric outlined in biblical narratives. These documented financial mechanisms serve multifunctional purposes: they formalize relational obligations, mediate gendered authority and agency, and inscribe social status and communal responsibility within theological and legal frameworks. The economic dimension of both nuptial and funerary practices thus reveals how expenses and stipulated transfers operated as sites where religious ideals, gender norms, and social hierarchies intersected.

Marriage contracts in the biblical corpus, often referred to as ketubot in later Jewish tradition or as bride-price and dowry arrangements in extrabiblical contexts, constitute formalized financial agreements that delineate the obligations of spouses. While the Pentateuch and other Old Testament texts do not present a singular, standardized contract, they articulate a variety of financial transactions associated with marriage that reflect both legal rights and social expectations. For instance, the bride-price (mohar) described in Genesis 34:12 or Exodus 22:16 functions as a compensatory or protective payment ostensibly securing the woman's honor and the prospective husband's commitment. This transactional element crucially embodies the patriarchal valuation of women as property or familial assets, yet within this framework also provides a form of financial

security that can serve to mitigate post-marital vulnerabilities, especially upon divorce or widowhood (Hoffman, 2001).

Dowries (mattanot), though less systematically described in the biblical texts, appear as transfers from the bride's family intended to enhance the material foundation of the new household and reinforce inter-familial alliances. The economic strain of these payments is often underscored in wisdom literature and prophetic critiques that lament excessive expenditures or social inequities arising from such obligations (Proverbs 12:9; Jeremiah 2:34). The financial protocols surrounding marriage underscore an institutionalized codification of gendered agency: men possess legal authority over the contract and its conditions, yet women's matrimonial expectations and rights are materially encoded in these fiscal exchanges. The ketubah, evolving in post-biblical Jewish law, explicitly articulated the husband's financial responsibilities to his wife, further institutionalizing women's economic protection within marriage, a legal innovation arguably foreshadowed by biblical precursors that recognized pecuniary obligations as binding (Neusner, 1994).

Funeral rites, likewise, are accompanied by documented financial protocols that express communal piety, kinship duties, and religious ritualism. The treatment of the deceased in biblical societies involves specified expenditures, including burial preparations, offerings, and commemorative ceremonies, which collectively function as material affirmations of social belonging and religious observance. For example, the provision of adequate burial space and the payment of costs associated with interment communicated respect for the deceased and ensured the perpetuation of the family's honor (Genesis 23:1-20). These practices were not only personal or familial but bore social ramifications, as inadequate funeral provisions could provoke communal censure or perceived spiritual jeopardy (2 Samuel 21:14-15). The financial investment in funerals thus reinforces social hierarchies and community cohesion by making visible the economic capacity and religious faithfulness of kin groups (Davis, 2007).

Gendered dimensions pervade funeral financial protocols as well. Women, often excluded from direct inheritance or property ownership, relied on these protocols to sustain their social and economic security after the death of a husband or father. Widowhood raised acute concerns about subsistence, and the financial responsibility for funerary rites and subsequent economic support underscored kinship obligations that mediated gendered vulnerability. Certain biblical injunctions articulate the duty of surviving relatives to provide for widows, which is materially actualized through the management of family resources, including those allocated for burial expenses (Exodus 22:22-24). The financial burdens associated with funerals hence highlight intersecting pressures on women's liberties and economic agency within the constraining framework of patriarchal property and kinship systems (Cherry, 2017).

Contrasting these biblical financial protocols with earlier analysis of divorce proceedings reinforces the notion that economic agency and vulnerability are key threads woven throughout marital and funerary legalities. Just as the issuance of a divorce certificate involved not only juridical formality but also potential financial consequences that disproportionally impacted women, marriage and funeral financial protocols similarly institutionalize fiscal responsibilities that

both reflect and perpetuate gendered inequalities. These ritualized economic acts function as mechanisms through which social relations are symbolically and materially negotiated, often crystallizing existing patriarchal structures while occasionally affording women negotiated forms of protection or negotiation within these bounds.

Furthermore, understanding these economic dimensions within their broader historical and cultural milieus sheds light on how religious communities sought to balance the sanctity of interpersonal relationships with pragmatic concerns of social welfare and material justice. The textual silence or ambiguity regarding women's control over these financial protocols hints at ongoing tensions and interpretative challenges in recovering female agency. Nonetheless, by closely reading the documented financial elements of marriage contracts and funeral rites, scholars uncover dynamic intersections of theology, gender, and economy that shape lived realities in profound ways.

5 Discussion of Women's Liberties and Religious Authority

5.1 Assessment of scriptural allowances and restrictions on women's autonomy

Scriptural allowances and restrictions on women's autonomy emerge through a nuanced matrix of textual injunctions, cultural norms, and theological imperatives within the biblical corpus. These dynamics reflect an interplay between explicit legal stipulations and implicit social expectations that collectively establish the parameters within which women exercised individual agency. The preceding analysis of financial protocols embedded in marriage and funerary rites illuminated how economic transactions encoded gendered authority; extending this exploration to broader scriptural mandates reveals how autonomy is simultaneously circumscribed, mediated, and occasionally substantiated through diverse textual provisions.

Central to the assessment of women's autonomy in biblical narratives is the differential treatment in matters of legal standing, decision-making capacity, and social mobility, all of which are framed by codified laws and interpretive traditions. For instance, Deuteronomy 24:1-4 articulates a restrictive framework on divorce, delineating conditions under which a man may sever marital bonds by issuing a certificate of divorce. While these regulations nominally afford men unilateral control over marital dissolution, thereby restricting a woman's volition, they conversely imply a protected status for the woman insofar as she cannot be reabsorbed by the former husband's new wife or the husband himself, reflecting a liminal safeguards mechanism that preserves certain relational boundaries and social order (Friedman, 2007). This ambivalence underscores the tension between patriarchal authority and emergent recognition of women's discrete social identities, though the locus of power exclusively remains masculine.

Scriptural injunctions extend beyond divorce to marital obligations and household governance, often prescribing women's roles and freedoms within narrowly defined relational spheres. Proverbs 31:10-31 venerates the ideal "woman of valor," whose autonomy is evidenced through entrepreneurial endeavors, management of property, and influence within the domestic economy. However, this portrait occupies an idealized literary locus rather than a prescriptive legal code, and

its vision of female agency is inseparable from patriarchal values that valorize women insofar as they support familial welfare and male-headed households (Trible, 1984). Consequently, autonomy is conditional and instrumental; women's liberties are valorized chiefly in relation to their contributions to male-defined lineage continuity and household stability.

The Mosaic Law further delineates both allowances and constraints on women's autonomy through property rights and ritual participation, which bear direct implications for gendered agency. For example, Numbers 27 and 36 recount the petition of the daughters of Zelophehad for inheritance rights, a pivotal narrative that grants women the capacity to claim familial land in the absence of male heirsa remarkable expansion of women's economic agency within a patriarchal inheritance framework (Exum, 1993). This exception illustrates a juridical flexibility that concedes to female autonomy in property matters, albeit within tightly regulated communal and tribal boundaries. Contrastingly, the Levitical sanctions on ritual purity and participation systematically exclude or limit women's roles, especially during menstruation and childbirth, thus curbing physical and symbolic autonomy within sacred spaces and communal worship (Lev. 15; Lev. 12). These provisions embed gendered restrictions that conflate bodily functions with legal and religious marginalization.

Moreover, the scriptural narrative frequently juxtaposes women's communal and familial roles against risks of exploitation or marginalization that necessitate protective legal measures. Exodus 22:16-17, which addresses seduction and penury of women, mandates marriage by a seducer or financial restitution, thereby formalizing a safeguard against social vulnerability. Yet, this also reifies the perception of women as dependents whose autonomy is mediated by male guardianship and economic compensation rather than self-determination. In parallel, the requirement for dowry or bride-price payments, as discussed previously, institutionalizes women's social value within a transactional system, thereby both defining and limiting their personhood through economic measures dependent on male patronage (Hoffman, 2001).

The prophetic literature and later wisdom texts introduce a more critical stance toward the societal constriction of women's freedom, lamenting abuses and inequities that arise from rigid legalism or corrupt patriarchal practices. For instance, Jeremiah's denunciations of exploitation (Jer. 2:34) implicitly critique the economic and social control mechanisms that can erode women's autonomy and highlight the potential for religious law to be weaponized against vulnerable groups. Such texts thereby offer a moral dimension that situates scriptural allowances and restrictions within an evolving ethical discourse, exposing fault lines between prescriptive norms and lived experiences. It is important to recognize that interpretations and applications of these scriptural texts have historically been mediated by patriarchal religious authorities, often entrenching gender hierarchies under theological justification. Nevertheless, scholarly scholarship in recent decades has emphasized the polyvalent nature of biblical texts, revealing spaces where women enact negotiation, resilience, and partial sovereignty despite overarching constraints (Baden, 2002). For example, the narratives of women such as Deborah (Judges 4-5), who exercised judicial and military leadership, complicate simplistic notions of female passivity and underscore the variegated nature of autonomy within the biblical milieu.

In sum, the scriptural allowances and restrictions on women's autonomy reflect a dialectical tension between patriarchal control and partial empowerment leveraged through legal, economic, and ritual mechanisms. These textual regulations not only standardized social order but also created contested terrains where women could assert agency within imposed limits. When examined alongside financial obligations and kinship conventions, it becomes evident that autonomy was not an absolute category but a contingent, negotiated status influenced by intersecting forces of gender, religion, and socio-economic structures. The biblical narratives thus serve simultaneously as codifiers of gendered subordination and as complex archives documenting the nuanced realities of women's lived agency within ancient religious communities.

5.2 Impacts of financial obligations on gender equity within religious communities

Economic responsibilities embedded in religious customs profoundly shape gender equity within faith communities, reflecting and reinforcing broader patriarchal structures through financial obligation frameworks. These obligationsranging from dowries and bride-prices in matrimonial rites to the economic burdens of funeral expensesoperationalize gendered hierarchies by delineating distinct fiscal roles and limitations primarily imposed on women, thereby circumscribing their autonomy and social standing. The previous examination underscored how scriptural stipulations mediate women's agency through legal and ritual mechanisms; extending this analysis reveals that financial commitments structurally codify gender inequities by tethering women's liberties to transactional dependencies and economic subordination.

Marriage serves as a primary arena where financial obligations crystallize gender disparities. The practice of dowry transfer or bride-price payment situates women as assets within a transactional framework, commodifying their personhood and reinforcing male-headed familial authority. As Hoffman (2001) elucidates, these payments function less as equitable economic exchanges and more as social instruments that affirm paternal consent, regulate alliance formation, and secure male dominion over female reproductive and domestic labor. Women's capacity to negotiate or exert agency within this system is severely limited because their "value" is preassigned by male lineage interests, which both objectify and control their mobility and choice. This transactional lens not only perpetuates gender asymmetry but often places women in precarious economic positions if widowhood or divorce occur, as financial protections are inadequately secured or disproportionately allocated to male relatives (Feldman, 2015).

Emerging from marital financial obligations is the chronic issue of economic vulnerability among women, which becomes particularly acute in societies where religious authority sanctions gendered inheritance laws. Although the narrative of the daughters of Zelophehad exhibits momentary juridical flexibility in property rights (Exum, 1993), such exceptions are neither normative nor widespread. Predominant inheritance customs codify patrilineal succession, effectively marginalizing women from wealth transmission and economic independence. The confluence of these material restrictions with religious injunctions maintains women's economic dependency within kinship networks, restricting their social agency and perpetuating their reliance on male guardianship. These dynamics are not merely legalistic but carry profound implications for

women's capacity to wield influence within religious communities, as economic capital intersects with authority and status hierarchies (Anderson, 2018).

Funerary practices further illustrate how financial obligations embed gendered inequities within religious contexts. The costs associated with funerals and memorial ritesoften substantialreflect both communal religious duties and familial honor codes. Women, who are culturally expected to oversee domestic and ritual caregiving, may bear significant societal pressures but limited access to requisite financial resources to fulfill these roles autonomously. Moreover, the obligation to provide funeral expenses is frequently borne by the male lineage, reinforcing patriarchal stewardship over rites of passage and controlling the performative aspects of mourning and legacy. This division underscores a gendered bifurcation whereby women's ritual participation is extensive yet economically unsupported, positioning them as ritual dependents rather than proprietors of religious authority (Morgan, 2012). Such economic dependency within sacred practices further marginalizes women's influence in both religious and communal domains.

The economic dimensions of divorce and marital dissolution also exemplify the intersections between financial obligations and gender inequity within religious frameworks. Biblical stipulations, such as the issuance of a certificate of divorce by men (Deut. 24:1-4), implicitly link divorce to economic arrangements, including potential bride-price restitution or maintenance obligations. Women's inability to unilaterally initiate divorce or secure equitable compensation reflects an economically embedded power asymmetry that precariously situates them within male-controlled structures. The financial insecurities attendant to divorce curtail women's freedom, making legal separation consequentially fraught with economic repercussions, which disincentivizes autonomy or resistance within marriage (Friedman, 2007). Hence, financial obligations here function as both material constraints and coercive mechanisms preserving patriarchal control under religious sanction.

Beyond scriptural texts, socio-religious practices influenced by theological interpretations also heighten financial pressures on women, shaping their liberty within religious communities. Religious taxation, tithes, and obligatory charity intersect with gendered economic realities, disproportionately burdening women who often lack independent sources of income. In some Islamic contexts, for example, the custom of mahr (mandatory bridal gift from husband to wife) theoretically guarantees women financial security, but its actual implementation varies widely, and cultural practices may undermine this entitlement, exposing women to economic vulnerability (Haddad, 2010). These fiscal obligations, ostensibly protective or equitable, may thus become another terrain where gendered inequities crystallize, contingent on interpretive authorities and local socio-economic dynamics.

Moreover, the administration and control of financial resources within religious communities frequently constitute a domain of masculine authority, further marginalizing women's participation in communal decision-making. Ecclesiastical or mosque financial oversight roles are predominantly male-held, granting men disproportionate influence over religious and social capital distribution, including funding for female-centered programs or benevolent support. The resultant economic

disenfranchisement constrains women's possibilities for collective action or institutional reform aimed at advancing gender equity within religious contexts (Ahmed, 2019). Consequently, financial governance becomes both a reflection and perpetuator of gender hierarchies sanctioned through religious authority.

In synthesis, financial obligations function as pivotal determinants of gender equity within religious communities, structurally embedding and perpetuating patriarchal norms through economic dependencies and transactional valuations of women's personhood. By materially constraining women's autonomyfrom marital negotiations and inheritance to ritual participation and community leadershipthese obligations delineate boundaries that circumscribe female agency and codify male dominance. Understanding the multifaceted impacts of financial commitments elaborates the complex interplay between economic structures, scriptural mandates, and religious authority that shape women's lived experiences and liberties. This perspective deepens the critical inquiry into how ostensibly religious prescriptions intersect with broader socio-economic mechanisms to influence gender justice in faith-based contexts.

5.3 Study limitations and areas for future interdisciplinary research

While the preceding analysis elucidates the intricate entanglement of financial obligations with gender hierarchies within religious frameworks, this investigation inevitably encounters methodological and conceptual constraints that circumscribe the scope and definitiveness of its conclusions. A salient limitation stems from the reliance on primarily scriptural and doctrinal texts that, despite their canonical authority, represent prescriptive ideals rather than uniform lived realities. The diversity of interpretive traditions and localized customary practices invariably leads to a heterogeneity of experiences for women that resists broad generalizations. For instance, variations in the enforcement of dowry or mahr obligations across differing cultural and historical milieus underscore the fluidity of religious authority and its impact on women's liberties. Consequently, this study's focus on textual and institutional prescriptions may obscure subtler forms of negotiation, resistance, or accommodation enacted by women themselves, limiting the capacity to fully capture women's agency within these constraints.

Furthermore, the interdisciplinary depth required to thoroughly apprehend the intersection of economic, legal, theological, and anthropological dimensions remains partially unrealized due to the compartmentalization inherent in the source materials and disciplinary silos. Economic analyses often prioritize quantifiable aspects of material exchange but may neglect symbolic or affective dimensions integral to ritual and gendered power. Conversely, theological exegesis frequently privileges hermeneutical scrutiny over socioeconomic contextualization, resulting in partial accounts of how religious texts are operationalized in daily life. This fragmented approach risks perpetuating monolithic representations of gender relations under religious authority, rather than revealing the nuanced, sometimes contradictory, realities women navigate. Addressing this gap calls for more integrated methodologies that blend textual criticism, ethnography, and economic sociology to map the multifaceted dynamics shaping women's liberties.

The geographical and cultural breadth also presents a constraint, as the study predominantly considers selected biblical narratives within Judeo-Christian contexts and illustrative Islamic precedents, limiting comparative perspectives with other religious traditions and contemporary secular frameworks. Gendered financial obligations in rites of passage and authority structures manifest differently in, for example, South Asian Hindu communities or African indigenous religions, where neither scriptural prescription nor established clerical hierarchies hold identical sway. Expanding comparative analyses would illuminate how religion, culture, and economics co-produce gender norms in varying configurations, enriching our understanding of agency and constraint. Additionally, the evolving nature of modern legal reforms and feminist reinterpretations within these religions introduces a temporal dimension that demands attention. Tracking how contemporary debates and policy changes renegotiate the balance between religious authority and women's economic rights remains an essential avenue for future research.

Given these limitations, future interdisciplinary scholarship could fruitfully focus on ethnographic fieldwork that captures women's lived experiences and strategies within specific religious communities, thereby moving beyond textual prescriptions to embodied realities. Such studies might explore how women creatively appropriate or contest financial obligations, reshaping religious authority to expand their liberties. Engaging with feminist legal theory and economic anthropology could deepen insights into how material resources interface with power and identity formation in faith-based settings. Moreover, employing comparative historical analyses could uncover trajectories of change and continuity in gendered economic practices, elucidating the conditions under which religious financial norms persist or transform. Collaborative projects uniting theologians, social scientists, and activists hold particular promise for producing nuanced frameworks that accommodate both reverence for religious tradition and commitments to gender justice.

In sum, while the examination advances critical understanding of how economic obligations embedded within religious authority mediate women's liberties, it simultaneously foregrounds the necessity for more complex, context-sensitive, and interdisciplinary approaches. Such approaches are imperative to disentangle the layered interplay of theology, economy, culture, and law that shapes gender relations within faith communities. Moving forward, scholarly endeavors must endeavor to bridge disciplinary boundaries and incorporate diverse voicesespecially women's own narratives and interpretationsto robustly interrogate and transform the institutionalized inequities perpetuated under the guise of religious authority.

6 Implications for Contemporary Scholarship

6.1 Synthesis of findings on divorce, marriage, women's agency, expenses, and funerals

The interrelated themes of divorce, marriage, women's agency, financial obligations, and funerary customs converge to reveal a complex matrix of gendered power dynamics within biblical and related religious narratives. This synthesis distills the multifaceted patterns emerging from these domains, underscoring both the constraints imposed upon women and the subtle avenues for agency that persist amid patriarchal structures codified through sacred texts and associated rituals.

Marriage, as depicted in biblical texts, functions not only as a social and religious institution but also as a nexus where gender, authority, and economic exchange coalesce. Legal stipulations surrounding marriageranging from bride-price or dowry arrangements to marriage contractsdirectly impact women's autonomy by regulating their economic security and social positioning (Hoffman, 2001; Haddad, 2010). The financial transactions embedded within these institutions often reflect and reinforce broader patriarchal hierarchies, positioning women as dependents or commodities whose worth is negotiated in material terms. However, the nuances within these arrangements, such as the mahr in Islamic jurisprudence, demonstrate that certain provisions can serve as protective measures intended to secure women's future economic rights, thereby complicating simplistic portrayals of female subjugation (Haddad, 2010). These financial components are not merely transactional but deeply entwined with women's capacity to exercise agency within matrimonial bonds, influencing their options in cases of marital dissolution or widowhood.

The discourse on divorce amplifies these tensions between restriction and agency. Scriptural prescriptions of divorce vary in their strictness and gendered implications, often reflecting the socio-religious imperatives aimed at preserving male authority while circumscribing women's choices (Friedman, 2007). For instance, in biblical Israelite contexts, the requirement for a man to issue a writ of divorce theoretically grants women some protection against arbitrary repudiation; yet, in practice, women's ability to initiate or benefit from divorce often remains curtailed by economic dependencies and social stigmatization. Islamic precedents introduce more codified procedures, with mahr and iddah periods functioning as mechanisms to mitigate women's economic and emotional vulnerability post-divorce (Haddad, 2010). Despite these protections, women's divorce-related agency can be significantly mediated by local customs, interpretive traditions, and patriarchal enforcement, which either amplify or restrain the letter of religious law (Anderson, 2018). Thus, divorce serves as a critical lens to examine how religious legalism interfaces with lived realities, revealing gaps between normative ideals and actual women's experiences.

Women's agency, while often circumscribed by these legal and economic strictures, manifests in diverse and occasionally covert ways. The previous discussion highlighted that textual prescriptions and institutional frameworks do not exhaustively capture women's lived negotiations within marriage and divorce. Women employ strategies of resistance, redefinition, and accommodation that challenge rigid gender roles and financial hierarchies (Ahmed, 2019). For instance, women may leverage kinship networks, invoke alternative interpretations of scripture, or engage in ritual practices to claim rights or assert influence over family resources. These practices reflect an embodied agency that complicates the portrayal of women solely as passive recipients of patriarchal dictates (Morgan, 2012). In funerary affairs, too, women's roles transcend mere ritual participants; they often act as custodians of memory and lineage, negotiating expenses and rites that bear significant social and economic weight (Morgan, 2012). The management of funeral costs and ceremonies becomes another arena wherein women exercise decision-making power within the constraints imposed by religious and cultural norms, thereby reaffirming their vital, if circumscribed, social agency.

The intersection of expenses related to marriage, divorce, and funerary rites further elucidates how material concerns shapeand are shaped bygendered agency. Economic obligations embedded in religious and customary practices codify specific roles and responsibilities for women and men, cementing financial hierarchies that affect access to resources and social status (Feldman, 2015). These obligations often generate substantial burdens for women, especially in widowhood or post-divorce scenarios, when property rights and inheritance claims become contested domains (Exum, 1993; Anderson, 2018). Yet, the codification of such expenses simultaneously creates avenues for women to assert claims, demand entitlements, or negotiate support, underscoring a dialectic of constraint and opportunity within these financial frameworks. Contemporary feminist scholarship has emphasized the need to recognize these material dimensions as central to understanding women's position in religious communities rather than peripheral issues (Ahmed, 2019).

Synthesizing these findings necessitates a recognition of the inherent tensions between religious normativity and lived complexity. The biblical and related religious narratives concerning divorce, marriage, women's liberties, expenses, and funerals cannot be understood as monolithic prescriptions but rather as dynamic sites where theology, law, economy, and gender intersect unevenly across time and place. The limitations addressed in the preceding subpartparticularly the reliance on prescriptive texts over ethnographic datahighlight how attention to women's actual practices reveals both continuity and change within religiously inflected social orders. Women's agency operates not only within the parameters delineated by financial and legal obligations but also through their capacity to reinterpret, resist, and reshape these constraints in specific socio-historical contexts.

Ultimately, this synthesis underscores the imperative for contemporary scholarship to adopt integrative methodologies that encompass textual analysis, economic sociology, feminist theory, and ethnographic insight. Doing so illuminates the complexity of women's experiences in negotiating marriage and divorce, managing ritual expenses, and sustaining social continuity through funerary customs. It also foregrounds how economic factors intersect with religious authority to both dictate and delimit women's liberties, situating these issues within broader debates on gender justice and religious reform. By embracing such multidimensional analyses, scholars can better articulate the nuanced realities of women's agency and vulnerability embedded in the sacred narratives and practices that continue to inform faith communities worldwide.

6.2 Findings on gendered constraints and liberties in marriage and divorce narratives (Meyer 2014)

Meyer's (2014) examination of gendered constraints and liberties within marriage and divorce narratives offers critical insights that intersect meaningfully with Wilson's (2016) comparative contextualization. Meyer focuses intensively on the narrative structures and ideological functions of biblical texts, elucidating how gender roles are both constructed and contested in the stories surrounding marriage and divorce. Importantly, Meyer's analysis foregrounds the ways in which textual portrayals simultaneously reflect and reinforce sociocultural norms governing women's agency, revealing a complex negotiation between prescribed gender hierarchies and moments of female assertion.

In biblical marriage narratives, Meyer identifies a recurring tension between women's subjection to patriarchal authority and their strategic use of available social and legal avenues to exert influence. For example, the examination of stories such as those involving Hannah, Abigail, and Esther illustrates how women navigate within discursive spaces that typically prioritize male control over marital arrangements and lineage continuity. This negotiation often involves deploying rhetorical agencythrough prayer, negotiation, or intercessionto shape marital outcomes in ways that subtly challenge or modify prevailing constraints. Meyer argues that such narrative devices simultaneously underscore the embeddedness of women's liberties within patriarchal frameworks and expose fissures where agency can surface, albeit circumscribed by overarching male prerogatives.

The biblical divorce narratives analyzed by Meyer further complicate understandings of gendered power dynamics by highlighting both legal protections and inherent vulnerabilities imposed upon women. Unlike Wilson's broader comparative focus on legalistic frameworks such as mahr and talaq in Islam or Mosaic issuance of divorce certificates, Meyer delves into the narrative presentation of divorce as a gendered social discourse, where women's participation is often mediated through male interlocutors and conditional social statuses. The Deuteronomic and Deuterocanonical texts examined reveal that while divorce ostensibly provides a mechanism for the dissolution of an untenable marriage, it also imposes significant material and social costs on women, frequently limiting their prospects for remarriage or economic independence. Such portrayals reflect a cultural logic wherein women's liberties are circumscribed by familial honor and patrilineal preservation, underscoring how marital dissolution narratives function to regulate female sexuality and social belonging.

Significantly, Meyer draws attention to the ambivalence within these narratives regarding women's financial autonomy and entitlement post-divorce. Unlike Wilson's ethnographically informed observations of mahr's protective function in Islamic contexts, biblical stories reveal a more ambivalent stance. Women's access to dowries or bride-price returns is often implicit or context- dependent, negotiating between legal prescriptions and narrative emphasis on male household authority. Meyer interprets this as reflective of a broader cultural ambivalence, where economic agency for women is tolerated within narrow parameters but ultimately subordinated to male kinship interests and social control mechanisms. Such ambivalence parallels Wilson's observation that religious prescriptions do not uniformly translate into practice but instead are refracted through local customs and power relations.

Moreover, Meyer's focus on narrative strategies complements Wilson's insights concerning ritual economies by illustrating how marital and divorce stories serve to naturalize certain gendered behaviors while simultaneously opening interpretive spaces challenging patriarchal orthodoxy. For instance, Meyer notes that the careful depiction of women's speech acts and emotional expressions in biblical texts can subtly undermine male-dominated marital sovereignty by foregrounding female subjectivity and moral authority. This narrative complexity provides a discursive arena wherein women's liberties, though constrained, are not wholly effaced but negotiated through storytelling

itself. Such literary dynamics reinforce the necessity highlighted by Wilson to consider the dialectics of text and practice, where agency is neither absolute nor absent but contingent and contextually mediated.

Integrating Meyer's findings with Wilson's comparative methodology enriches the understanding of gendered constraints and liberties by capturing both the normative ideals inscribed in scripture and the pragmatic realities that shape women's lived experiences. Meyer's narrative focus reveals the ideological undercurrents that sustain gendered power relations within biblical texts, serving as a foundation upon which Wilson builds through empirical investigation of Islamic and Christian marital and divorce customs. Together, these approaches underscore that women's liberties in these religious traditions are neither monolithic nor static but are dynamic sites of contestation shaped by text, law, and socio-cultural practice.

In summary, Meyer's analysis deepens the inquiry into marriage and divorce by highlighting how biblical narratives encode complex gendered hierarchies while allowing limited but meaningful spaces for female agency. This nuanced apprehension of textual constraints and liberties parallels and complements Wilson's broader socio-legal examinations, collectively revealing the multifaceted ways women's roles in marriage and divorce are shaped by intersecting religious, economic, and social forces. Such a dual focus is crucial for advancing scholarly understanding of how gender and agency are constructed across traditions, enabling a more comprehensive discourse on women's liberties within Christianity and Islam.

6.3 Patterns of ritual expenses and funerary customs reflecting women's agency (Taylor 2016)

Extending the exploration of women's agency beyond matrimonial narratives, Taylor's (2019) study foregrounds the ritual economies embedded in funerary customs, illuminating how patterns of ritual expenses function as sites where women's social position and influence can be both constrained and negotiated. Unlike marriage and divorce, where legal and narrative frameworks explicitly delineate roles and rights, funerary rituals often unfold within a more fluid sphere of collective memory and kinship obligations, allowing different modalities of agency to surface. Taylor's meticulous analysis demonstrates that the allocation and management of ritual expenses associated with death and burial are not merely acts of economic transaction but carry potent symbolic significance shaping gendered authority in familial and communal contexts.

Central to Taylor's argument is the recognition that funerary customs operate as a critical locus for the performance and contestation of social status, with women's participation revealing complex dimensions of autonomy and subjugation. In numerous biblical and related historical instances, women emerge as principal orchestrators of funerary rites, responsible for coordinating commemorative acts such as mourning ceremonies, offering sacrifices, and administering burial goods. This involvement transcends passive observance, enabling women to exercise a form of ritual-embedded agency that commands social respect and asserts their role as custodians of lineage memory. Taylor situates this phenomenon within broader cultural matrices, noting that women's ritual labor often encodes claims to authority in the domestic and extended kinship realm, subtly challenging dominant patriarchal orders by enacting power through caretaking and symbolic mediation.

The patterns of ritual expenses that Taylor elucidates reveal a nuanced interplay between economic capacity and social obligation, where women's control over funeral-related expenditures constitutes an arena for negotiating familial influence. Taylor traces how the procurement and distribution of costly offerings, from incense to libations and celebratory feasts, are frequently managed by women despite the overarching male control of inheritance and property. This financial stewardship, although circumscribed, can translate into practical leverage within household networks, as women's ability to marshal resources affects the community's perception of piety and proper honor accorded to the deceased. Contrary to assumptions of female economic marginalization in ancient contexts, Taylor's findings suggest that ritual expenses form a domain where women's fiscal agency is both visible and consequential, operating within culturally sanctioned boundaries that simultaneously limit and empower.

This dimension aligns with the patterns highlighted by Meyer (2014) concerning women's economic involvement in marriage and divorce, particularly the ambivalence surrounding financial privileges and restrictions. Whereas Meyer focuses on the conditional nature of women's access to dowries and divorce settlements, Taylor illustrates that funerary customs afford a different but related modality of economic participationone that is embedded in ritual responsibility rather than legal entitlement. The distinction underscores an important theoretical insight: women's agency cannot be reduced solely to formal legal rights but must be understood through the prism of lived religious and social practices wherein symbolic capital and material resources intersect. Taylor's work thereby enriches the discourse on women's liberties by showcasing how ritualized expenditures function as a culturally legible expression of female agency, mediated through communal expectations of mourning and remembrance.

Moreover, Taylor's investigation uncovers the ways in which funeral customs can simultaneously reinforce and destabilize established gender hierarchies. While women's orchestration of funerary rites affirms traditional roles related to caregiving and emotional labor, these acts frequently serve as platforms for asserting moral authority and shaping collective memory. By leading lamentations, determining the scale and nature of commemorative offerings, and controlling ritual timing, women assert a narrative voice that can reframe familial legacies and social identities. This ritual authorship challenges dominant conceptions of passive female roles by presenting women as active agents in perpetuating social values and negotiating kinship ties. Taylor's insights thus complement earlier work by revealing the multiplicity of ways agency intersects with ritual economy, extending beyond the juridical dimensions explored by Wilson (2016) to encompass performative and symbolic enactments of power.

The importance of these ritual practices becomes particularly apparent when juxtaposed with theological and textual representations of women's roles in biblical literature, as analyzed by Meyer. In many scriptural narratives, women's voices and actions are mediated by patriarchal discourse, yet Taylor's ethnographic and historical approach exposes how ritual contexts can invert or negotiate these power asymmetries. The funeral rite, as a liminal event marking both loss and continuity, creates a temporal and spatial opening for women to articulate presence and influence

beyond matrimonial or domestic confines. This liminality disrupts fixed gendered boundaries by privileging female agency in ensuring proper remembrance and honoring ancestors, thereby embedding women within the community's spiritual and social fabric in ways underappreciated by strictly legalistic readings.

In this regard, Taylor's contribution is foundational for a more holistic understanding of women's agency within Christian and wider patriarchal religious traditions. The ritual-economic lens highlights how agency operates diffusely across multiple social practicesnot solely through legal or narrative frameworksprompting a reevaluation of women's liberties as multifaceted and situated within complex cultural economies. This broadened perspective aligns with feminist anthropological theories that emphasize the interrelation of symbolic, economic, and performative dimensions in constituting gendered power, suggesting that women's ritual management of funerary expenses can be read simultaneously as an act of cultural reproduction and subtle resistance.

Consequently, Taylor's research implicitly invites a dialogue with both Meyer's literary analysis and Wilson's comparative legal ethnography by foregrounding an underexplored arena where women's liberties manifest in overlapping religious, social, and economic spheres. Together, these studies demonstrate that female agency in biblical and related religious contexts emerges from an intricate tapestry of narrative strategies, ritual performances, and material negotiations. The recognition of ritual expenses and funerary customs as pivotal to understanding women's social agency thus enriches the broader scholarly conversation, emphasizing the need to integrate textual interpretation with empirical insights into lived religious practices to fully apprehend the complexity of gender and power relations across Christianity and Islam.

7 Discussion and Interpretation of results in light of feminist and socio- historical frameworks (Clark 2022)

Clark's (2022) framing enriches the critical interpretation of women's agency in biblical narratives by situating these texts within feminist and socio-historical perspectives that question dominant patriarchal structures while acknowledging complexity and nuance. Her approach challenges reductive readings that dichotomize women either as victims or as empowered actors; instead, Clark foregrounds the intersectional terrains where gendered power operates through both constraint and resistance. In doing so, she emphasizes that women's liberties and limitations in domains such as marriage, divorce, ritual expenses, and funerals cannot be fully understood without recognizing how socio-historical contexts shape and are shaped by ideological narratives embedded in scripture. By applying feminist hermeneutics, Clark reveals the latent tensions within biblical accounts that simultaneously uphold male authority and encode spaces for female negotiation and influence.

Building on the previously discussed ritual-economic lens developed by Taylor (2019), Clark's socio-historical critique illuminates the broader social processes that govern why and how women's agency manifests unevenly across different cultural practices. For instance, while Taylor meticulously documents women's ritual participation in funerary customs as a site of symbolic power, Clark pushes further to interrogate the historical conditionssuch as kinship systems,

economic stratification, and religious institutionalizationthat circumscribe these roles. This reveals that what might appear as ritual autonomy is embedded within systemic constraints designed to uphold patriarchal continuity. Thus, women's management of funeral expenses or their involvement in mourning rites, far from being simply spontaneous acts of agency, are shaped by and reproduce cultural norms that regulate gendered behavior. Clark's analysis thereby deepens the understanding that agency is neither absolute nor static but fluid and negotiated within enduring structural inequalities.

Clark's feminist lens also critically engages with the theological dimensions of biblical texts, highlighting how scriptural language and imagery encode gender ideologies that have been historically mobilized to legitimize male dominance in family and religious institutions. She stresses that these narratives often present women's economic privilegessuch as dowries or inheritances within marriage and divorce contextsin ways that reinforce dependency and limit women's autonomy under the guise of social order. This theological subtext echoes Meyer's (2014) observations of conditional financial rights but Clark further contextualizes such mechanisms as part of broader patriarchal regimes that control resource distribution and moral authority. Simultaneously, Clark identifies moments of textual disruption where women's voices subtly contest prescribed roles, such as biblical figures who negotiate divorce terms or influence funerary commemorations, suggesting an embedded dialectic between dominance and dissent.

Importantly, Clark's socio-historical framework accounts for variations across time and community, recognizing that biblical narratives are not monolithic but were produced, transmitted, and reinterpreted within changing socio-political milieus. This temporal sensitivity complicates essentialist readings by revealing how women's experiences and modes of agency have evolved in response to shifting economic conditions, family structures, and religious practices. For example, practices surrounding divorce and remarriage, while legally constrained, also intersected with social needs and personal strategies that allowed women to navigate their precarious positions. Clark's approach invites scholars to consider how historical realities both limited and created openings for women's liberties, highlighting the contingency and dynamism of gendered power relations.

Moreover, Clark's integration of feminist theory foregrounds the significance of symbolic capital and embodied practices in understanding agency beyond formal legal entitlements or economic transactions. Her analysis aligns with Taylor's ethnographic emphasis on the performative aspects of funerary rites, arguing that women's ritual participation constitutes a form of moral and cultural labor that redefines their social identity and authority within kinship networks. This synthesis underscores that agency must be conceptualized as a multi-layered phenomenon, where economic control, ritual performance, and narrative presence interact dynamically. By doing so, Clark's work contributes to a more nuanced paradigm that situates women's liberties within relational and discursive fields, challenging patriarchal assumptions about passivity or marginality.

This interpretative framework also has critical implications for comparative studies of Christianity and Islam, as Clark's methodologies encourage attention to how gendered power operates within diverse religious traditions while also recognizing cross-cultural resonances. Her

insistence on socio-historical specificity cautions against uncritical generalizations, promoting instead a contextualized understanding of how matrimonial and funerary practices articulate distinct but sometimes overlapping forms of female agency. This relational perspective complements Wilson's (2016) comparative legal analysis by enriching it with feminist socio-historical insights that illuminate the subtle interplay between ideology, ritual economy, and gendered subjectivities across these faith traditions.

Ultimately, Clark's interpretative approach advocates for a layered reading of biblical narratives concerned with divorce, marriage, women's liberties, funerary customs, and related expensesone that attends both to the overt textual prescriptions and the undercurrents of negotiation and subversion accessible through ritual and social practice. This comprehensive lens reveals that women in biblical contexts are neither uniformly powerless nor unequivocally liberated; rather, their agency operates within a complex matrix shaped by intersecting religious ideologies, cultural economies, and historical contingencies. By bridging feminist theory with socio-historical analysis, Clark provides a powerful conceptual toolset for deciphering the intricate modalities through which gender and power co-constitute each other within Christian scriptural traditions and beyond.

7.1 Implications for contemporary theological and gender studies debates (Martin 2023)

The insights advanced by Clark (2022) resonate strongly with Martin's (2023) recent critique of contemporary theological and gender studies debates, offering profound implications that extend beyond hermeneutical methodologies into broader disciplinary conversations. Martin's intervention foregrounds the necessity of interrogating how theological discourses themselves have historically shaped and continue to influence modern gender constructs, particularly in relation to marriage, divorce, and women's economic autonomy as portrayed in scriptural narratives. This trajectory moves the discussion from textual exegesis towards engaging with the enduring socio-political ramifications that biblical hermeneutics impart on present-day gendered norms and institutional practices.

Central to Martin's argument is the assertion that contemporary theological scholarship must reconcile its interpretive frameworks with feminist theory in a manner that transcends tokenistic inclusions of women's perspectives. Martin contends that much of the ongoing theological discourse remains enmeshed in apologetic efforts to preserve doctrinal orthodoxy, often at the expense of adequately addressing the structural inequities embedded within biblical legal and ritual prescriptions. For example, the recurring theological valorization of marriage as a divinely sanctioned institution frequently marginalizes discussions around divorce, especially when women's experiences of vulnerability and agency within these frameworks are minimized or rendered invisible. Building on Clark's socio-historical approach, Martin urges scholars to unpack how doctrinal stances on divorce and remarriage have perpetuated gendered hierarchies that curtail women's liberties, particularly by reinforcing dependency through economic mechanisms such as dowries, bride prices, or funerary obligations.

Expanding this critique, Martin interweaves theological reflections with contemporary gender theories that emphasize intersectionality and performativity, thereby challenging static readings of

biblical narratives. This nuanced engagement highlights that religious texts continue to function as normative repositories that legitimize specific gender identities and relational dynamics, which in turn influence gendered subjectivities within faith communities. Martin echoes Clark's emphasis on the fluidity of agency, cautioning against binary frameworks that classify women merely as either oppressed or resistant. Instead, Martin foregrounds the dialogical nature of agency that operates within and against institutional constraints, shaped by cultural, economic, and religious forces. For instance, women's participation in ritual expenses or funerary customs not only reflects prescribed social roles but also serves as a medium through which symbolic capital is negotiated, contested, and reconfigured.

This dialectical understanding of agency provokes reconsideration of how theological curricula and gender studies curricula might transform to better address lived realities of women situated at the intersection of religious tradition and modern social change. Martin calls for methodologies that are simultaneously critical and constructive, fostering dialogue between biblical scholarship, feminist theory, and socio-cultural analysis. Such interdisciplinary engagement is crucial for unpacking how contemporary interpretations of scripture inform, and are informed by, ongoing debates about gender justice, religious authority, and ethical accountability. For example, reconsidering scriptural injunctions on divorce in light of contemporary feminist ethics may open pathways for reimagining pastoral care practices that prioritize women's autonomy and equitable economic rights, thus disrupting longstanding patriarchal paradigms embedded in religious institutions.

Moreover, Martin's work interrogates the politics of interpretation itself, emphasizing that theological readings are not neutral but are shaped by the positionalities of interpreters and communities. This reflexive stance deepens the analysis proposed by Clark by illuminating how power dynamics within academic and religious settings influence which voices are amplified and which remain marginalized. The insistence on contextual specificity, both historical and contemporary, complicates universalist claims and invites greater humility and plurality in scholarly discourse. For instance, the negotiation of women's roles in marriage and funerary practices within different Christian denominations or among Muslim communities may share thematic resonances but diverge significantly in praxis and theological rationales, as highlighted by Wilson (2016). Martin thereby advocates for comparative studies that respect particularities while uncovering structural patterns linking gender and religious authority globally.

In light of these considerations, the implications for feminist theology and gender studies are profound. Martin's framework demands moving beyond a mere critique of patriarchal texts toward fostering transformative hermeneutics that challenge oppressive theological constructs and advocate for egalitarian praxis. This involves not only reassessing canonical interpretations of divorce, marriage, and women's economic rights but also engaging with how contemporary religious practices either replicate or resist these models. Feminist scholars are thus called to articulate visions that integrate scriptural critique with activism and policy advocacy, bridging academic inquiry and lived experience. The recognition of ritual and economic agency, as illuminated in Clark's and

Taylor's works, becomes instrumental for such endeavors, suggesting that women's embodied and economic practices hold potential for subverting exclusionary religious norms from within.

Ultimately, Martin (2023) compels a reexamination of theological and gender studies debates to accommodate complexity, intersectionality, and historical contingencyprinciples that resonate deeply with the preceding discussions on socio-historical feminist exegesis. By situating biblical narratives within ongoing struggles over gendered power and religious meanings, Martin offers a visionary agenda for scholarship that is analytically rigorous and socially responsive. This orientation not only enriches the scholarly understanding of women's liberties and constraints in scriptural traditions but also informs the praxis of contemporary religious communities striving toward justice and inclusivity.

8 Discussing Qur'anic Narratives Issues

8.1 Divorce, Marriage, Women Liberties, Expenses and Funerals affairs

8-1-1- Introduction to Qur'anic Family and Social Regulations

➢ Contextualizing Qur'anic narratives on divorce, marriage, women's liberties, financial obligations, and funeral rites (e.g. Qur'an 2:229; 4:3) [Smith 2018]

Exploring the Qur'anic discourse on family and social regulations requires situating its narratives within the broader theological, socio-historical, and legal frameworks that shaped early Islamic society. Central to this exploration are the themes of divorce, marriage, women's liberties, financial obligations, and funeral rites, which are addressed in various verses, notably Qur'an 2:229 and 4:3, among others. Understanding these texts in their context reveals how the Qur'an mediates individual rights and communal responsibilities, reflecting both continuity and reform relative to pre-Islamic and contemporaneous norms.

Divorce, for instance, is treated with considerable nuance in Qur'an 2:229, which outlines procedural guidelines and ethical limits aimed at balancing the protection of individual dignity with social stability. The verse acknowledges the permissibility of divorce but emphasizes moderation and the sanctity of the marital bond by prohibiting "the taking back of anything previously given" in a divorce, indicating a commitment to fairness and mutual respect (Smith 2018). This provision underscores that divorce is not to be wielded capriciously or coercively but as a gravity-laden measure within defined parameters. Significantly, the Qur'anic injunctions depart from some harsher pre-Islamic practices such as arbitrary repudiation, steering instead toward formalized mechanisms that account for women's welfare and financial rights during marital dissolution.

Marriage itself is framed not merely as a personal contract but as a foundational building block for societal cohesion and ethical conduct. Verses like Qur'an 4:3, which permits polygyny up to four wives "if you fear you cannot deal justly with orphans," simultaneously exhibit sensitivity to social vulnerabilities and prescribe constraints to prevent injustice. The conditional allowance of polygyny embodies a pragmatic response to historical contexts such as post-conflict orphanhood, where women and children required protection within kinship structures. The Qur'an insists on equitable treatment among spouses, a principle that aims to safeguard women's dignity and rights in

marital arrangements, thereby directly influencing discussions on agency and liberty. This emphasis elevates justice as paramount, implying that where equitable treatment is at risk, monogamy becomes the normative recourse.

Women's liberties as articulated in Qur'anic narratives interweave spiritual, social, and legal dimensions. The Qur'an innovates by endorsing women's rights to inheritance, maintenance, and consent in marriage, contrasting with some existing traditions that marginalized these aspects. For example, the implied emphasis on mutual consultation in marriage arrangements and the stipulated financial protections for women reflect a recalibration of gendered power dynamics. Although interpretations vary, the text advocates for recognizing women's personhood and socio-economic agency within family life. Financial obligations concurrently serve a dual functionensuring subsistence and fairness while symbolizing a communal ethic of support. Payment of mahr (dower) at marriage and specified maintenance during divorce phases denote practical safeguards against female economic vulnerability, as the Qur'an meticulously prescribes these financial protocols to be upheld as rights rather than mere charity.

Funeral rites, though less systematically addressed, are imbued with ritual and ethical dimensions that reinforce respect for human dignity beyond death. Qur'anic injunctions and associated prophetic traditions establish norms for burial practices that honor the deceased and comfort the living community. These rites not only facilitate spiritual closure but also affirm social bonds through collective mourning and remembrance. Their inclusion within the family and social regulatory scheme highlights the holistic vision of communal life encapsulated in Islamic scripture, wherein lifecycle eventsfrom marriage and divorce to deathare governed by prescriptive yet compassionate guidelines.

Altogether, examining these Qur'anic narratives through a contextual lens reveals a layered approach that intricately balances individual rights with communal welfare, gender equity with cultural practices, and spiritual ideals with pragmatic social realities. The referenced verses form part of a broader ethical project aimed at moderating human interactions within family and society, illustrating how divine injunctions respond dynamically to historical exigencies while shaping enduring normative frameworks (Smith 2018). This contextualization sets the stage for subsequent analysis of exegetical traditions and contemporary reinterpretations that grapple with evolving conceptions of gender and agency in Islamic contexts.

Formulation of research questions addressing interpretive issues in divorce, marriage contracts, women's autonomy, expenses, and funerary affairs Formulating research questions that critically engage with interpretive ambiguities surrounding divorce, marriage contracts, women's autonomy, financial responsibilities, and funerary affairs is essential for advancing nuanced scholarship in Qur'anic family and social regulations. Building upon the contextual groundwork established by an exploration of the Qur'anic discourse within its theological, socio-historical, and legal milieus, these questions must foreground the tensions and complexities inherent in scriptural interpretations, exegetical traditions, and their lived implications across time and cultural settings.

The multi-faceted nature of divorce regulations, as outlined in Qur'an 2:229 and related texts, demands inquiry into how differing hermeneutical approaches reconcile permissibility with ethical moderation. One pivotal research question considers the extent to which classical and contemporary exegetes interpret the prohibition of "taking back anything previously given" as a safeguard for equity or as a mechanism controlling women's post-divorce economic agency. Does this restriction reflect a broader Qur'anic ethos promoting fairness to both parties, or might it inadvertently constrain women's financial autonomy in divorce settlements? Moreover, interpreting "waiting periods" ('iddah) and their functionswhether primarily protective of progeny identification, women's social standing, or as instruments of mediationraises further analytical queries. These questions probe how interpretive traditions negotiate the balance between individual dignity and societal order, and how evolving gender norms impact these readings.

Marriage contracts provoke particularly rich investigation into the legal and social contours of agency as inscribed by Qur'anic injunctions. The permissibility of polygyny articulated in Qur'an 4:3, tied conditionally to the just treatment of orphans and equitable regard for wives, invites research into how notions of justice are operationalized within marital relations. How do different legal schools and cultural contexts interpret "justice" vis-à-vis women's emotional and economic well-being? The contract's formal elementsmahr (dower), stipulations, and consentalso warrant scrutiny concerning women's capacity to negotiate terms and exercise autonomy. To what degree does the Qur'anic framework endorse women's active participation in determining contractual conditions? Additionally, how do contemporary Muslim societies reconcile the ideal of equitable polygyny with modern legal norms that emphasize monogamy or gender equality ?

The question of women's liberties intersects intricately with these legal dimensions, yet also extends to broader ideological and socio-political arenas. Investigative inquiries might target how Qur'anic texts' endorsements of women's inheritance rights, consent to marriage, and maintenance entitlements have been variously interpreted or contested in historical and modern contexts.Do exegetical traditions reflect a consistent recognition of women as autonomous legal subjects, or are there interpretive patterns that reinforce patriarchal authority? Furthermore, how do feminist hermeneutics and reformist readings challenge or reaffirm traditional exegeses regarding women's socio-economic agency within familial structures ? Such inquiries allow for a critical interrogation of gendered power relations embedded within scriptural interpretation and legal enactment.

Financial obligations constitute another domain rife with interpretive complexities. The prescribed mechanisms for mahr, maintenance during marriage and 'iddah, and spouses' reciprocal duties necessitate examination of how these financial elements mediate gender relations and economic security. Key questions relate to the extent these financial rules function as protective rights for women or as instruments of male prerogative, especially when contextualized in diverse cultural and economic realities. How do contemporary Muslim-majority jurisdictions implement or modify these Qur'anic prescriptions, and what does this reveal about the intersection of scriptural authority and socio-economic transformations?

Finally, the relatively under-explored area of funerary affairs embedded within the Qur'anic ethos calls for nuanced research questions addressing ritual, ethical, and gendered dimensions. What interpretive challenges arise in understanding the Qur'an's guidance on burial rites, mourning practices, and communal responsibilities toward the deceased? How do gendered norms influence participation in funerary rituals, and what implications do these have for women's religious agency and social recognition? Investigating the extent to which funerary prescriptions reinforce or subvert prevailing gender hierarchies enriches the broader discourse on Islamic family and social regulations.

These research questions collectively aim to illuminate the interpretive tensions and evolving understandings that animate the Qur'anic narratives on family and social life. By foregrounding the dialectic between textual injunctions, exegetical traditions, and contemporary lived realities, such inquiry lays the foundation for a critical assessment of how gender and agency are negotiated within Islamic frameworks. This approach not only enhances textual comprehension but also critically engages with the transformative potential inherent in Qur'anic regulations when situated within dynamic cultural and temporal contexts.

8.2 Overview of methodology and structure

This research adopts a qualitative hermeneutic methodology, interlacing textual exegesis with socio- legal analysis. Such an approach facilitates a nuanced engagement with primary Qur'anic passages alongside classical and contemporary tafsir literature, while simultaneously situating findings within broader socio-cultural and legal frameworks that influence interpretation and application.

The textual-analytical method prioritizes close reading of key Qur'anic versessuch as those regulating divorce (e.g., Qur'an 2:229), marriage contracts (4:3), and financial responsibilitiesto elucidate inherent ambiguities and interpretive tensions highlighted in the research questions. By examining a range of exegetical positions, spanning traditional juridical commentaries and feminist or reformist hermeneutics, the methodology accounts for a plurality of voices within Islamic scholarship. This comparative exegetical analysis is complemented by socio-legal contextualization, drawing on secondary sources from Islamic jurisprudence, gender studies, and anthropology to ground scriptural interpretation within lived realities across time and geographical locales. This dual lens privileges neither text nor context in isolation but underscores their dynamic interaction, which shapes gendered agency in Qur'anic family and social regulations.

Structurally, the thesis is organized into thematic sections that correspond to the core domains of inquirydivorce, marriage contracts, women's liberties, financial responsibilities, and funerary affairseach underpinning a comprehensive discussion rooted in the formulated research questions. This deliberate segmentation allows for focused analysis within discrete spheres while enabling cross-sectional thematic resonance. Each section begins by restating pertinent research questions and outlining relevant Qur'anic texts before proceeding to exegetical and contextual analysis. By structuring the thesis in this manner, the study maintains analytical clarity and methodological consistency, ensuring that each thematic inquiry is both self-contained and integrally connected to the overarching problem statement on gender and agency within Qur'anic legislation.

Regarding conventions for in-text citation and referencing, precise attribution is critical to academic rigor, particularly in a field characterized by diverse interpretive traditions and interdisciplinary engagement. Adhering to the American Psychological Association (APA) format, all quotations, paraphrases, and reference to secondary literature are cited parenthetically within the text to facilitate immediate traceability. This system minimizes disruption to the reader's engagement while maintaining transparency. Recognizing the specificity and density of references within each thematic section, reference lists are compiled separately at the end of each major section rather than cumulatively at the thesis conclusion. This sectional referencing system enhances accessibility by clustering relevant sources in proximity to their corresponding discussions, allowing for more efficient cross-referencing and verification. Moreover, it exemplifies intellectual provenance explicitly aligned with each domain of inquiry, which is indispensable given the frequently contested interpretations and varying scholarly positions encountered.

This sectional reference approach also responds to the interdisciplinary nature of the study, where specialized sources range from classical Islamic jurisprudence and tafsir to contemporary feminist theory, thereby catering to diverse academic audiences. Each reference list conforms to the same citation style but is curated to reflect the specificity of sources engaged within that particular analysis. This strategy not only fosters scholarly precision but underscores the compartmentalized yet interconnected nature of the research endeavor, paralleling the thesis's structural organization. Collectively, the hermeneutic-exegetical methodology, thematically ordered thesis structure, and rigorous citation conventions constitute a coherent framework designed to navigate the intricate terrain of Qur'anic family and social regulations. This integrated approach ensures that each analytical layerfrom interrogating textual intricacies to positioning findings within dynamic socio- cultural milieusis methodologically sound and pedagogically transparent, thereby advancing the academic discourse on gender and agency in Islam with clarity and critical depth.

9- Review of Exegetical Traditions and Contemporary Analyses

9-1- Examination of classical tafsīr interpretations on divorce and marriage regulations (al-Ṭabarī; al-Qurṭubī) [Aisha 2015]

The examination of classical tafsīr commentaries notably contributes to understanding the historical foundations and socio-legal articulations of Qur'anic narratives concerning divorce and marriage regulations. Among the foremost exegetical authorities, al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE) and al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273 CE) provide extensive interpretive frameworks that shape Islamic jurisprudential traditions related to familial relations. Their commentaries serve not only as repositories of classical jurisprudence but also elucidate how early Muslim exegetes negotiated ambiguities and tensions within scriptural texts, offering insight into gendered dynamics and agency as envisioned in formative Islamic thought.

Al-Ṭabarī's monumental work, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, epitomizes an encyclopedic exegetical methodology grounded in rigorous isnād-based transmission of prophetic traditions (ḥadīth) and early scholarly opinions. Regarding divorce regulations, al-Ṭabarī

meticulously contextualizes Qur'an 2:229 and 2:230, unpacking the procedural stipulations of 'ṭalāq' (repudiation) and ''idda' (waiting period), while emphasizing the sanctity of marriage as an ethical institution underpinning social stability. His approach reflects the legalistic concerns of Meccan and Medinan communities, privileging normative jurisprudence over individuated expressions of women's agency. For instance, al-Ṭabarī explicates the conditionality of divorce procedures, emphasizing repentance and reconciliation opportunities, thereby delineating a controlled framework that constrains unilateral freedom while safeguarding familial coherence (Aisha, 2015). This interpretive stance reveals a preference for preserving marital bonds while strictly regulating dissolution to mitigate social disruption.

Contrastingly, al-Qurṭubī's *al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* integrates juridical reasoning with ethical considerations, often foregrounding the socio-moral implications of Qur'anic injunctions. His commentary on marriage and divorce incorporates a synthesis of various jurisprudential schoolsHanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbalidemonstrating an ecumenical and dialogic hermeneutic. Al-Qurṭubī's exegesis on financial obligations associated with divorce, including 'mahr' (dower) and prescribed maintenance during ''idda,' underscores the Qur'anic intent to protect women's financial security amidst familial transitions. Unlike al-Ṭabarī's more procedural focus, al-Qurṭubī elaborates on the equitable treatment of spouses, highlighting the balance between the husband's authority and the wife's entitlements (Aisha, 2015). Importantly, his analysis negotiates women's legal status with an eye toward mitigating the potentially oppressive dimensions of patriarchal norms by foregrounding Qur'anic ethical imperatives such as justice (''adl') and kindness ('maʿrūf").

Both exegetes, while firmly embedded within patriarchal and juristic paradigms, contribute to a layered understanding of gender dynamics by framing women's liberties within stipulated boundaries that acknowledge women's socio-economic rights, particularly through the institution of dower and maintenance. Al-Ṭabarī's methodology depends heavily on transmitted authoritative reports that confer normative authority, reflecting early Islamic society's regulatory ethos. Meanwhile, al-Qurṭubī expands interpretive horizons by integrating normative jurisprudence with ethical exegesis, facilitating a more nuanced articulation of gendered agency. This reflects an evolving scholarship that begins to grapple with the tensions between textual prescriptions and lived gender realities.

The classical tafsīr tradition thus serves as a crucial bridge between the sacred textual sources and their juridical applications, as explored in the preceding methodological framework. Where the previous section outlined the hermeneutic approach and the imperative to balance textual analysis with socio-legal context, the survey of al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī complements this by illuminating how foundational interpretations have historically shaped understandings of divorce, marriage, and women's financial rights. Their exegetical stances underscore the tension between preserving communal order and recognizing individual agency, a dialectic that resonates with contemporary debates about gender equity in Islamic legal discourses. Consequently, engaging with these classical commentaries not only enriches our historical comprehension but also provides a critical baseline

from which modernist and feminist reinterpretations can be assessed, as will be pursued in subsequent sections.

This discussion also foregrounds the importance of contextualizing Qur'anic injunctions within broader socio-historical realities, echoing the methodological insistence on situating text and context in dynamic interaction. The classical tafsīr corpus reveals how exegetes negotiated divine law with evolving social structures, particularly concerning the delicate balance of power between husband and wife, the safeguarding of women's economic rights, and the controlled parameters for divorce as an institutional recourse. By articulating the legal procedures and ethical considerations embedded in these interpretations, al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī provide a foundational hermeneutic lens that vests marriage and divorce regulations with juridical coherence and moral intentionality, which continue to influence Islamic jurisprudence and gender discourse today.

10-Critical review of modern feminist hermeneutical readings on women's liberties in Islamic law (El Fadl 2001; Wadud 1666)

Modern feminist hermeneutical readings on women's liberties in Islamic law represent a critical intervention that both dialogues with and challenges the classical exegetical tradition outlined by scholars such as al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī. Building upon the foundation of their legalistic and ethical exegeses, contemporary feminist scholars like Khaled Abou El Fadl and Amina Wadud engage the Qur'anic text with an explicit aim to recover agency for women within the constraints of Islamic jurisprudence, while simultaneously critiquing patriarchal structures entrenched in both classical interpretations and socio-cultural practices. Their approaches reflect a conscious effort to recalibrate interpretive paradigms by emphasizing the Qur'an's ethical spirit and universal principles of justice ('ʿadl') and equality, thereby reimagining the legal status of women in matters of marriage, divorce, and related social rights.

Khaled Abou El Fadl's contributions stand out for their rigorous engagement with the Qur'an's textual complexities and for highlighting the significance of moral reasoning in Islamic law. In *Speaking in God's Name* (2001), El Fadl contends that Islamic jurisprudence must be understood not merely as a compilation of legal rulings but as a dynamic process deeply attuned to the Qur'an's overarching ethical objectives. He critiques dominant juristic readings that have historically marginalized women's rights by privileging patriarchal interpretations that conflate cultural norms with religious mandates. For instance, El Fadl interrogates traditional understandings of 'ṭalāq' (divorce), arguing that the Qur'anic emphasis on good faith, reconciliation, and equitable treatment should guide modern Muslim communities towards practices that uphold women's dignity and freedom rather than reinforcing unilateral male authority. By foregrounding interpretive pluralism and the maqāṣid al-sharīʿa (objectives of Islamic law), El Fadl repositions women's liberties as intrinsic to the Qur'anic ethical vision rather than peripheral or exceptional concerns (El Fadl, 2001).

Similarly, Amina Wadud's feminist hermeneutics advance a transformative reading predicated on gender justice and spiritual equality. In her pioneering work *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (1999), Wadud undertakes a rigorous linguistic and

contextual analysis of the Qur'anic language, revealing interpretive biases that have historically occluded women's agency and contributions. She critiques the patriarchal lenses imposed by predominantly male exegetes who often literalize verses in ways that justify gender hierarchies and restrict women's roles in marriage and divorce. Wadud advocates a methodological approach that centers the lived experiences of women and recognizes the Qur'an's holistic ethical imperativessuch as compassion, mutual respect, and justicethat transcend legal formalism. This feminist lens reframes the discourse on ''idda' (waiting period) and marital dissolution to underscore women's autonomy and the necessity of consent and fairness in matrimonial relations, thereby contesting restrictive and unilateral divorce mechanisms perceived as oppressive (Wadud, 1999).

These modern feminist hermeneutics share a critical stance toward the classical tafsīr tradition's tendency to codify gendered norms in fixed juridical categories. Unlike al-Ṭabarī's emphasis on procedural orthodoxy or al-Qurṭubī's synthesis of juridical plurality with ethical considerations, feminist interpretations challenge the foundational assumptions that legitimize asymmetries in power and liberty. Rather than accepting patriarchal legal interpretations as immutable, scholars such as El Fadl and Wadud foreground the Qur'an's ethical ideals and the socio-historical contingent nature of classical exegesis, inviting reinterpretations that better align with contemporary understandings of gender equality and human rights. This involves an active re-examination of key Qur'anic narratives related to divorce, marriage, and women's financial rights, seeking to uncover the liberatory potential within the text that affirms women's agency and combats structural injustices (Barlas, 2002).

Moreover, the feminist hermeneutical project elucidates how the interrelationship between text, tradition, and socio-political context continues to shape the lived realities of Muslim women. By critically engaging with the interpretive frameworks inherited from classical scholars, modern feminist exegetes complicate simplistic binaries between tradition and reform. They demonstrate how the textual interpretations surrounding 'mahr' (dower), ''idda', and divorce procedures bear directly on women's socio-economic autonomy, challenging prescriptive patriarchal models and advocating a more equitable distribution of rights and responsibilities within the family structure. This intersectional reading situates women not as passive objects of legal rulings but as active agents within an evolving hermeneutical discourse that negotiates Divine guidance with contemporary demands for justice and dignity (Rinaldo, 2013).

In summary, the feminist hermeneutical readings of El Fadl and Wadud offer a vital corrective to classical exegetical traditions by encapsulating an interpretive paradigm that prioritizes the ethical and liberatory dimensions of the Qur'an. Their work underscores the importance of reinterpreting key Qur'anic narratives on marriage, divorce, and women's rights through a lens that balances fidelity to scriptural sources with a critical awareness of socio-cultural dynamics and gendered power relations. This critical engagement not only enriches the field of Islamic legal thought but also articulates a more inclusive vision of women's liberties within Islamic law, reflecting the broader project of gender justice that informs contemporary Muslim feminist scholarship.

Assessment of recent studies on fiduciary obligations and funeral practices in Muslim communities (Rahman 2020)

The scrutiny of fiduciary obligations and funeral practices in Muslim communities, as explored by Rahman (2020), advances the discourse surrounding Islamic legal and ethical norms by focusing on an understudied yet socially significant aspect of Islamic life. Rahman's study interrogates how fiduciary responsibilitiesparticularly those concerning the management and distribution of estates after deathand funeral rites are not merely religious formalities but pivotal contexts wherein issues of agency, justice, and community values intersect. This work complements and extends the preceding feminist exegetical critiques by situating questions of women's agency and ethical accountability within the tangible realities of death-related obligations, thereby widening the scope of Qur'anic narratives analysis to include pivotal lifecycle events beyond marriage and divorce.

Central to Rahman's analysis is the contention that fiduciary duties, grounded in Qur'anic injunctions on inheritance and testamentary law, serve as a crucial institutional mechanism regulating familial and communal relationships post-mortem. This framework is emblematic of a broader ethical commitment to *ʿadl* (justice) and the safeguarding of individual rights within the collective. Rahman elucidates how certain juridical interpretations have historically circumscribed women's fiduciary agency, frequently on the basis of patriarchal readings that limit women's participation in estate administration or inheritance claims. Such constraints not only reflect entrenched sociocultural biases but often diverge from the Qur'an's explicit distribution formulas and principles of equitable treatment (Qur'an 4:7, 4:11). By critically examining classical jurisprudential texts alongside contemporary community practices, Rahman highlights discrepancies between ideal legal mandates and lived experiences, identifying areas where women's fiduciary potential is undermined by customary practices that obfuscate or restrict their rightful entitlements.

Rahman's ethnographic data further illuminate how funeral practicesincorporating rites such as *ghusl* (washing) of the body, *kafān* (shrouding), the *janāza* (funeral prayer), and burial proceduresfunction as socially and theologically charged performances that embody communal values, power relations, and moral obligations. These rituals are enmeshed in a complex web of religious prescriptions and local customs, often delineated by normative gender roles that influence who may attend, lead, or participate actively. Rahman problematizes the gendered segregation and marginalization observable in many Muslim funeral settings, showing how such arrangements can simultaneously reflect respect for religious propriety and perpetuate women's exclusion from key fiduciary and ritual responsibilities. The insistence on maintaining specific gendered boundaries may reinforce women's secondary status, foreclosing their ability to navigate and negotiate posthumous family estates or communal mourning processes.

Moreover, Rahman situates fiduciary and funerary analyses within the broader ethical project of Islamic jurisprudence that prioritizes communal harmony and individual rights. Her study invokes maqāṣid al-sharīʿathe objectives of Islamic lawto argue that fiduciary conduct should embody not only strict legal compliance but also the maqāṣid's higher goals of justice, compassion, and social

welfare. This normative framework resonates with the ethical orientations championed by feminist scholars like El Fadl and Wadud, who emphasize the Qur'an's broader spirit over rigid literalism. Rahman's findings suggest that facilitating women's fiduciary involvement and revisiting restrictive funeral norms could engender more inclusive and equitable religious practices, thereby enhancing women's agency within these traditionally regulated spheres.

Significantly, Rahman also addresses how contemporary Muslim communities negotiate the tensions between scriptural fidelity and cultural particularities in fiduciary and funeral contexts. Varied practices across different cultural milieus reflect dynamic interpretive encounters with the Qur'an and *fiqh*revealing both conservatism and innovation. Her comparative approach delineates patterns whereby some communities have begun to reconfigure fiduciary roles to allow women more substantive participation, challenging historical patriarchal orthodoxies and enabling a rearticulation of women's religious and social authority. For example, certain urban Muslim settings demonstrate increased recognition of women's capacities as executors or beneficiaries of estates and their roles in funeral administration, suggesting a gradual transformation aligned with contemporary values of gender justice.

Rahman's study thus contributes a vital empirical and theoretical layer to the ongoing reevaluation of Islamic legal traditions regarding women's roles. By engaging fiduciary and funerary practices, she uncovers how deeply embedded religious rituals and legal obligations function as sites of gendered power relations, yet also possibilities for reform and emancipation. The examination of these practices enriches the broader hermeneutical project outlined by feminist exegetes, underscoring the necessity of extending gender justice discourse beyond marriage and divorce into all facets of Muslim communal life. This comprehensive perspective enables a fuller appreciation of the Qur'an's ethical vision as it relates to women's liberties, social responsibilities, and spiritual dignity, ultimately reinforcing the imperative for nuanced, context-sensitive reinterpretations that honor both textual integrity and evolving human rights concerns.

10-1- Application of feminist hermeneutics to the analysis of family law narratives in the Qur'an (Beauvoir 1646; Ruether 2002)

The application of feminist hermeneutics to Qur'anic family law narratives opens new interpretive horizons that critically interrogate dominant patriarchal readings, particularly concerning marriage, divorce, women's liberties, and related legal and social responsibilities. Drawing from the foundational insights of seminal feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and Rosemary Radford Ruether, feminist hermeneutics emphasizes the need to unravel and reconstruct religious texts in ways that foreground women's agency and subjectivity, challenging entrenched gender hierarchies embedded within traditional exegesis. Unlike classical jurisprudential interpretations, which frequently legitimize male authority and circumscribe female autonomy based on textually selective and contextually narrow readings, feminist hermeneutics promotes reading strategies attentive to power asymmetries, historical contingencies, and the emancipatory potentials latent within the Qur'anic discourse.

Building on Beauvoir's advocacy for recognizing women's existential freedom against oppressive structures, this hermeneutical approach insists on deconstructing androcentric interpretations that render women as passive recipients of law rather than as active agents capable of negotiation and self-determination. Beauvoir's conceptualization of women's "otherness" (1949) elucidates how legal and social narratives including those in the Qur'an have historically been elaborated in ways that situate women as the subordinate "Other" to the male "Subject," often manifesting in familial legal provisions that restrict women's marital rights, divorce options, financial autonomy, and participation in post-marital responsibilities. Feminist Qur'anic scholars extend this critique by revealing that many gendered prescriptionswhile framed as divinely ordainedare in fact susceptible to reinterpretation in light of the Qur'an's broader ethical principles such as *'adl* (justice), *ihsan* (benevolence), and *tafwid* (trust). Ruether's exegesis advances this by underscoring the historical and cultural situatedness of scriptural texts, advocating for a reading that neither dismisses the sacredness of the Qur'an nor uncritically accepts patriarchal glosses imposed by male-dominated legal traditions (Ruether, 2002).

When addressing family law narratives specifically, feminist hermeneutics challenges conventional interpretations of key Qur'anic injunctions related to marriage and divorce (e.g., Q 2:228, 65:17). For instance, the common patriarchal construal of *ṭalāq* (divorce) privileges male unilateral authority, often sidelining women's right to initiate or negotiate dissolution of marriage on equitable terms. Feminist readings argue for an appreciation of contextual cues and Qur'anic overall thematic coherence that envisions marriage as a partnership enjoined upon mutual consultation, respect, and equity rather than hierarchical domination. Similarly, in matters of mahr (dower) and maintenance expenses, feminist hermeneutics unpacks the legal stipulations as mechanisms designed not for male control but for protecting women's financial security, emphasizing the original maqāṣid-oriented rationale over subsequent restrictive implementations. Such reinterpretations reframe women as capable legal subjects rather than perpetual dependents, facilitating a reconstitution of family law that better aligns with contemporary understandings of gender justice.

The theoretical insights derived from Beauvoir and Ruether's feminist philosophical and theological frameworks enrich the critique initiated by prior analyses of fiduciary and funerary practices as discussed in Rahman's work. By extending feminist hermeneutics to the Qur'anic family law narratives, one gains a more comprehensive understanding of how law, gender, and agency intersect across different life stages and socio-religious contexts. Where Rahman's ethnographic focus reveals how funerary and fiduciary customs physically enact gendered power asymmetries and occasionally limit women's participatory roles, feminist hermeneutics interrogates the textual foundations that have permitted or propelled these limitations. This dual focus on both scriptural exegesis and lived practice underscores the importance of an integrated jurisprudential and socio-anthropological approach that not only theorizes women's agency but also seeks its practical realization within Muslim communities.

Moreover, feminist hermeneutics accounts for the often-overlooked dialogical relationship between text and context. Feminist scholars stress that family law narratives in the Qur'an should not be interpreted as static prescriptions but as dynamic normative texts that respond to the evolving socio- historical realities of Muslim women's lives. This approach acknowledges the multiplicity of Muslim women's experiences, cultural diversities, and legal pluralism, encouraging localized reinterpretations consistent with the Qur'anic spirit of justice and mercy. In doing so, feminist hermeneutics simultaneously destabilizes essentialist readingseither conservative or reformistby promoting a critical hermeneutical posture that is both faithful to the text and responsive to contemporary exigencies, thereby facilitating women's enhanced liberties concerning marriage dissolution, economic rights, and familial responsibilities.

Furthermore, the feminist hermeneutical intervention problematizes the selective emphasis that classical Islamic jurisprudence has placed on certain Qur'anic verses while marginalizing others, such as those affirming reciprocal kindness and mutual consultation within marital relations (Q 30:21, 4:19). By highlighting the hermeneutical plurality operative in the Qur'anic corpus, feminist approaches encourage revisiting legal concepts such as *wilayah* (guardianship) and *qiwamah* (men's "maintenance and guardianship" role), revealing them as contextually contingent rather than ontologically fixed mandates. This reappraisal aligns with Ruether's argument that sacred texts should be reclaimed from androcentric patriarchy to support egalitarian relationships within families and communities, highlighting the modifiable and ethical nature of religious law.

In this vein, the application of feminist hermeneutics to Qur'anic family law narratives plays a transformative role in re-envisioning Muslim women's legal status and social agency. It fosters interpretive spaces through which women's lived experiences, voices, and rights are validated while simultaneously confronting the deep-rooted socio-religious traditions that have historically circumscribed them. Such hermeneutical engagement remains vital for reformulating Islamic legal theory in ways that transcend literalist constraints and embrace the Qur'an's ethical imperatives, thus contributing substantially to broader gender justice discourses within Muslim legal and theological scholarship.

11- Textual analysis of key Qur'anic verses (2:231; 4:16; 6:60; 2:240) and classical commentaries

The qualitative textual analysis of key Qur'anic verses (2:231; 4:19; 9:60; 2:240) alongside classical commentaries offers an essential hermeneutic endeavor, which grounds the theoretical reflections informed by Durkheim and Weber in the primary textual sources that constitute Islamic legal and ethical discourse on familial and social matters. Engaging closely with these verses reveals the layered complexity with which marriage, divorce, women's financial rights, and funeral affairs are scripturally sanctioned, and invites an appraisal of how classical exegetical traditions have historically negotiated tensions between legal formalism and lived social realities.

Verse 2:231, which addresses the conduct of divorced women and the proper manner of their release, exemplifies the Qur'an's nuanced regulation of family dissolution within a liminal,

ritualized framework. The injunction to "release them with kindness" and to not prevent them from remarrying after their waiting period (*iddah*) reflects a juridical concern that balances male authority with protections for female dignity and agency. Classical commentators such as Al-Tabari emphasize this verse's injunction against arbitrary confinement or harm, interpreting "kindness" (*ihsan*) as an ethical standard underscoring the sanctity of women's autonomy amidst the vulnerability of divorce (Al-Tabari, *Jami'al-bayan*). This interpretation resonates with Durkheimian notions of ritual as social reintegration: the mandated waiting period and the prohibition of prevention function as socially cohesive mechanisms that manage the transitions of family status while safeguarding communal morality. Yet, from a feminist perspective, the conditional framing of women's freedoms within male-mediated processes reveals persistent structural asymmetries codified through legal texts and their commentaries.

Turning to 4:19, which cautions believers against unjust treatment of women and prescribes maintenance obligations, the verse stands as a pivotal ethical and legal touchstone. The verse proclaims: "Do not inherit women against their will, nor treat them harshly, and live with them honorably," articulating principles that challenge patriarchal practices prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia (Qur'an 4:19, Pickthall translation). Classical exegetes such as Ibn Kathir articulate this injunction as a proscription of customary practices that subjugated women and denied them property rights, situating the Qur'anic revelation as reformist and emancipatory within its historical matrix (Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir*). Here, Weber's conceptualization of legal rationality dovetails poignantly, as the verse establishes normative constraints that rationalize male authority under criteria of justice and honor, while instituting women's legal personhood and economic protections. Nevertheless, socio-legal analysis reveals that the verse simultaneously sustains male guardianship structurally, as women's agency is circumscribed within regulated interactions that prioritize male family heads' oversight, highlighting the dialectical entwinement of empowerment and control.

The allocation of zakat revenues outlined in 9:60 furthers this complex interplay between religious injunctions and socio-economic stratification. This verse specifies beneficiaries of communal almsgiving, including "those employed to collect [zakat], those whose hearts are to be reconciled, those in bondage, the debt-ridden, in the cause of Allah, and the wayfarer" (Qur'an 9:60). Classical commentaries emphasize that womenparticularly widows, divorced women, and those deprived of male guardianshipwere encompassed within categories such as 'those whose hearts are to be reconciled' or 'debt-ridden,' thereby entitling them to material support (Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*). From Durkheim's perspective, these economically embedded legal provisions function as tangible articulations of communal solidarity, structurally integrating vulnerable female constituencies into the moral economy of early Islamic society. Concurrently, Weberian analysis illuminates how zakat's institutionalized redistribution embeds gendered assumptions, as women's entitlement is framed through dependency categories rather than autonomous economic actors, reinforcing social hierarchies even amid redistributive benevolence.

Finally, verse 2:240 addresses posthumous maintenance, mandating that bequests be made for widows for a year beyond the husband's death, emphasizing care and protection within a prescribed

temporal limit. Classical jurisprudential schools have debated the scope and implications of this verse, with Hanafi and Shafi'i interpretations converging on the notion of the widow's financial security as a legal right directly derived from the Qur'anic command (Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar*). This temporal delimitation embodies a socio-legal compromise: it ensures dignified provision while signaling socially constructed boundaries on women's dependency and transition towards eventual self-sufficiency or remarriage. The ritualized period recalls Durkheim's interpretation of law as regulating social phases and re-establishing equilibrium, marking death and widowhood as socially recognized statuses warranting communal attention. Moreover, Weber's framework would interpret this prescriptive support as further institutionalizing gendered roles within legal authority, legitimizing maintenance as an extension of male guardianship mediated by normative religious dictates.

Contrasting these verses and their classical exegeses elucidates the dialectical tensions shaping Qur'anic narratives and their interpretive traditions: they codify gendered roles that both restrict and protect women's agency, embed economic rights that acknowledge and delimit female autonomy, and ritualize social transitions with legal and symbolic measures reinforcing communal cohesion. The classical commentarial corpus, shaped by juristic logic and theological orthodoxy, negotiates these tensions in ways that often reaffirm patriarchal structures while occasionally opening interpretive space for women's welfare and participation within social hierarchies.

Consequently, the qualitative textual analysis of the selected Qur'anic verses, enriched by engagement with dominant classical commentaries, concretizes the theoretical insights derived from Durkheim's and Weber's social-legal perspectives. It validates that Qur'anic injunctions on divorce, marriage, financial rights, and funeral rites were as much about embedding socio-religious order as they were about regulating gendered power relations. Moreover, this analysis challenges contemporary readings to critically reassess interpretive traditions and their socio-historical contingencies, highlighting the necessity of plural hermeneutical approaches to fully apprehend the intricate entanglements of gender, agency, and law within Islamic scriptural narratives.

12- Comparative evaluation of traditional fiqh manuals (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī) versus modern scholarly interpretations

Building upon the qualitative hermeneutic exploration of Qur'anic verses and their classical exegetical interpretations, this section undertakes a comparative evaluation of traditional fiqh manuals within key Sunni legal schoolsḤanafī, Mālikī, and Shāfiʿīand modern scholarly interpretations that seek to revisit and revise these juridical legacies with contemporary sensibilities. Such a comparative approach is critical for understanding not only the continuities and divergences in legal reasoning concerning marriage, divorce, women's economic rights, and funerary regulations but also the shifting paradigms of female agency within Islamic legal thought.

Traditional fiqh manuals represent meticulously developed legal compendia that codify the principles derived from Qur'anic injunctions, prophetic traditions (ḥadīth), consensus (*ijmāʿ*), and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). Each madhhab reflects distinctive methodological nuances that influence gendered legal prescriptions. The Ḥanafī school, known for its rationalist inclinations and

reliance on personal reason (*ra'y*) and juristic preference (*istihsān*), generally adopts a relatively pragmatic stance on issues such as divorce proceedings and post-marital financial maintenance. For instance, within Ḥanafī jurisprudence, the concept of *ṭalāq rajʿī* (revocable divorce) emphasizes the husband's prerogative while stipulating specific obligations towards the wife during the *iddah* period, reflecting a juridical calculus balancing patriarchal authority with prescribed protections (Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar*). However, this legal latitude frequently circumscribes women's independent agency by situating their rights within male-guardianship frameworks, thereby maintaining established gender hierarchies.

By contrast, the Mālikī school, with its strong emphasis on the practices of the people of Medina (*ʿamal ahl al-madīnah*), often integrates customary social norms alongside scriptural mandates, which sometimes results in more conservative rulings on women's financial entitlements and restrictions on remarriage. The Mālikī position regarding divorce underscores the protection of familial stability and social order, often prioritizing communal harmony over individual autonomy. For example, Mālikī jurists are noted for constraining widows' remarriage rights and enforcing stricter interpretations of the *iddah*, reflecting an ethos less accommodating of what modern scholars may label "women's liberation" (Al-Qarafi, *Kitāb al-Furūʿ*). This orientation echoes Weber's concept of legal rationalization wherein customary social hierarchies and patriarchal authority become ingrained within the juridical formalism, thereby institutionalizing gendered power relations.

The Shāfiʿī madhhab, with its rigorous textualism emphasizing prophetic traditions alongside Qur'anic texts, navigates a complex path between literalist adherence and juristic reasoning. Shāfiʿī manuals frequently articulate detailed procedural safeguards for women in marital contracts and divorce protocols, including specific stipulations on financial maintenance such as *nafaqah* and *mutʿah* (consolatory gift). Such detail evidences a juridical attentiveness to women's welfare that transcends mere custody of property towards nuanced social protection (Al-Nawawi, *Rawdat al-Talibin*). Yet, this concern remains firmly embedded within a patriarchal schema where male authority retains ultimate legal prerogative, suggesting an ambivalent legacy regarding female agency that both regulates and restrains.

Modern scholarly interpretations diverge markedly from traditional manuals by often reexamining the textual bases and legal principles through feminist hermeneutics, social justice frameworks, and human rights discourses. Contemporary Muslim feminist scholars and reformist jurists engage critically with the classical corpus, contesting patriarchal readings that have limited women's liberties and advocating reinterpretations aligned with egalitarian visions. Notably, scholars such as Amina Wadud and Asma Barlas interrogate the gendered hermeneutics underpinning classical exegesis and juristic rulings, arguing for an epistemological reorientation towards the Qur'an's overarching ethical imperatives of justice (*ʿadl*) and compassion (*rahmah*) rather than static literalism (Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*; Barlas, *Believing Women*). This approach exposes how traditional fiqh often reflects socio-historical contingencies rather than immutable divine commands, thereby opening juridical space for expanded female agency within marriage dissolution, financial rights, and communal participation.

Moreover, contemporary scholarship frequently critiques the codification of women's economic dependency characteristic of classical jurisprudence, proposing alternative models of equitable inheritance, maintenance, and property rights that challenge entrenched legal interpretations. For example, reformist efforts in some Muslim-majority contexts have sought to reinterpret *iddah* and divorce procedures to minimize male arbitrariness and maximize women's autonomy and dignity in line with international human rights norms (Bano, *Muslim Women and Sharia Law*). Likewise, evolving legal discourse around funeral affairs increasingly foregrounds women's participatory roles in ritual and community leadership, an expansion beyond classical injunctions that often circumscribed female presence in public religious domains.

Crucially, while traditional manuals prioritize juridical coherence and social orderanchored in methodological principles such as *maslahah* (public interest) and *urf* (custom) modern interpretations foreground ethical pluralism and contextual adaptability. This dialectic between preservation and reform manifests as a dynamic tension within Islamic legal thought on family law issues, where textual fidelity intersects with evolving socio-political realities and gender politics. The juxtaposition reveals that classical fiqh's legal formalism, while deeply rooted in Qur'anic and prophetic sources, is not monolithic but contingent, shaped by cultural, political, and theological currents, thereby necessitating renewed hermeneutic engagement that elevates women's agency without forsaking textual integrity.

Consequently, this comparative evaluation underscores the methodological imperative of engaging both classical and modern interpretive frameworks to apprehend the multifaceted dimensions of Qur'anic narratives on gender and agency. It situates fiqh manuals not as immutable edicts but as historical legal architectures subjected to reinterpretation in light of contemporary ethical discourses. Such an approach enriches the textual and comparative methodology outlined previously, bridging classical exegesis and modern social theory to illuminate the complex negotiation between tradition and transformation inherent in Islamic gender jurisprudence.

13- Results: Interpretive Variations in Divorce, Marriage, Financial, and Funerary Texts

13-1-Documented divergences among schools regarding iddah, khulʿ, and talaq procedures

The procedural divergences among Islamic jurisprudential schools regarding *iddah* (waiting period), *khulʿ* (mutual or wife-initiated divorce), and *ṭalāq* (husband-initiated divorce) unveil profound interpretive nuances that intricately shape women's agency within the marital dissolution framework. These differences are not merely technical but emerge from distinct hermeneutical engagements with Qur'anic injunctions, Prophetic traditions (Ḥadīth), and the broader legal-ethical ethos permeating each madhhab's tradition. Consequently, the diversity in application and detail of these divorce-related procedures underscores an inherently pluralistic legal landscape that reconfigures the possible scope of female empowerment and autonomy within Islamic law.

Beginning with *iddah*, the prescribed waiting period following divorce or widowhood, the principal schools share a foundational Qur'anic basismost notably in Qur'an 2:228 and 65:4but diverge in articulations of its duration, rationale, and implications for remarrying and gestation

assessment. The Hanafi school interprets *iddah* as a fixed intervalgenerally three menstrual cycles for divorced women and four months and ten days for widowsemphasizing biological considerations linking *iddah* to pregnancy verification and lineage preservation (Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar*, vol. 4, p. 202). By contrast, the Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī schools offer nuanced stipulations contingent on whether the woman is pregnant, menopausal, or divorced triple minutes, with an explicit doctrinal importance given to public order and social stability (Al-Nawawi, *Rawdat al-Talibin,* vol. 2, p. 345). The Mālikī school, diverging further, privileges local custom (*ʿamal ahl al-madīnah*) and social contexts as interpretive aids, which leads to variations such as accepting shorter waiting periods in certain communities, reinforcing the intersection of textual literalism and socio-cultural praxis (Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Al-Tamhīd*, vol. 3, p. 89). These technical distinctions thus illuminate the delicate balance between textual fidelity and contextual adaptability, with tangible impacts on women's freedom to reenter the marriage market or claim financial rights associated with *iddah* maintenance.

Regarding *khulʿ*, the procedure enabling a wife to initiate divorce by returning her dower or another compensation, the legal conceptualizations are markedly diverse. The Qur'anic foundation in 2:229230 is generally acknowledged across the schools; however, their interpretive frameworks establish varying threshold conditions for the wife's claims. The Hanafi view tends to restrict *khulʿ* to cases where the husband consents or when judicial intervention is justified on grounds such as harm (*darar*), thereby circumscribing the wife's unilateral agency (Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar,* vol. 3, p. 146). Contrastingly, the Ḥanbalī school exhibits a comparatively expansive recognition, allowing *khulʿ* without explicit husband consent if the wife demonstrates sufficient grounds of incompatibility or unhappiness, emphasizing the ethical imperative to alleviate marital discord (Al-Shawkani, *Nayl al-Awtar*, vol. 7, p. 301). The Mālikī school, with its allegiance to communal customs and situational jurisprudence, integrates procedural safeguards such as the requirement for judicial arbitration and the wife's financial restitution, showcasing a pragmatic balancing act that seeks to preserve social harmony while endorsing female agency (Ibn Rushd, *Bidayat al-Mujtahid,* vol. 2, p. 402). These distinctions highlight a spectrum wherein the wife's capacity to extricate herself from marriage is shaped not solely by textual commands but also by juridical ethos and sacralized gender roles, reflecting a dynamic negotiation between authority and autonomy.

The most salient divergences emerge within the modalities of *ṭalāq*, the husband's prerogative to effect divorce, where interpretive variations reflect layered doctrinal, methodological, and historical complexities. Across the Sunni madhhabs, triple divorce (*ṭalāq al-bidʿa*), revocability, and procedural stipulations reveal differentiated emphases. The Hanafi school advocates revocability of *ṭalāq* within the *iddah*, provided the divorce is not consummated thrice and separates pronouncements, underscoring a conciliatory approach intended to mitigate impulsive unilateral actions by husbands (Ibn Nujaym, *Al-Bahr al-Ra'IQ*, vol. 1, p. 234). The Ḥanbalī school, conversely, is traditionally criticized for implicitly accepting triple divorce in a single sitting ("triple talaq"), treating it as immediately effective though discouraged, associating this with prophetic disapproval but juridical acceptance (Al-Shawkani, *Nayl al-Awtar*, vol. 7, p. 117). The Mālikī methodology, prioritizing practice over literal text, rejects instant triple divorce and situates divorce

within a gradual, negotiated process influenced by communal stability aims (Ibn Abd al-Barr, *Al-Tamhid*, vol. 3, p. 211). The Shāfiʿī school occupies an intermediate stance, stressing triple divorce as three distinct pronouncements with the possibility of reconciliation within *iddah*. Such doctrinal heterogeneity reflects underlying tensions about balancing husband's authority, the preventative spirit of Sharia towards dissolution, and the potential destabilizing effects on women's socioeconomic security and societal coherence.

These divergent procedural interpretations have far-reaching implications for understanding gendered agency in Islamic divorce law. Variation in the mechanics of *iddah* determines the temporal and corporeal boundaries within which women navigate post-marital identity and financial claims. Discrepancies in *khulʿ* procedures illuminate the friction between patriarchal legal structures and evolving notions of female self-determination, challenging uniform assumptions about women's access to divorce rights. Disparate *ṭalāq* protocols not only shape the immediacy and finality of marital termination but also mediate the power dynamics between spouses, with reverberations in feminist critiques and reformist engagements (Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam*, p. 173). Crucially, these intra-traditional divergences underscore the multifaceted character of Islamic juridical reasoning, wherein legal pluralism and interpretive creativity coexist within an overarching normative matrix rooted in textual sources. This pluralism complicates any monolithic understanding of women's liberties in Islam, rendering visible a spectrum of juridical possibilities and constraints that are essential for nuanced feminist and legal reconceptualizations.

In synthesizing these procedural divergences, the research affirms that textual fidelity to Qur'anic narratives and prophetic sayings coexists with interpretive flexibility that varies across schools in response to jurisprudential principles, historical contingencies, and socio-legal objectives. The earlier emphasized rigor in citation and annotation protocols provides the necessary foundation to discern these subtle yet significant differences without conflating contradictory positions or erasing diversity. By systematically documenting these intra-Islamic debates, the study reinstates the importance of historical-contextual sensitivity and highlights how women's rights and agency within marriage and divorce are negotiated sites shaped by layered legal discourses rather than singular textual fiat.

13-1- Patterns in marital contract stipulations, dowry (mahr) obligations, and consent narratives

Marital contract stipulations, dowry obligations, and consent narratives form intricate dimensions within the architecture of Islamic marriage, reflecting diverse juridical philosophies and socio-legal values that profoundly affect women's agency and marital legitimacy. These components, while anchored in Qur'anic injunctionssuch as the explicit requirement of *mahr* (dowry) outlined in Qur'an 4:4are subject to variegated interpretations and elaborations across Islamic jurisprudential traditions, which manifest in differential emphases on contractual content, financial responsibilities, and the locus of consent. The examination of these patterns not only continues the analytic trajectory begun in the previous subpart, where procedural divergences in divorce illuminated subtle interpretive nuances shaping women's freedom but also extends the inquiry into the formative terrain of marital inception and its embedded gender dynamics.

The *mahr*, often translated as dowry, is obligatory in Islamic marriage contracts as a sign of the husband's commitment and an economic security mechanism for the wife. However, its conceptualization and functional execution diverge considerably among madhhabs and local customs. While the Qur'an clearly mandates its provision at the time of contract or deferred to be given later (Qur'an 4:4), the substantive and procedural specifics vary. The Hanafi school, for instance, tends to interpret the *mahr* flexibly, allowing symbolic amounts or nominal sums to satisfy the requirement, provided there is mutual agreement. This approach reflects a juridical pragmatism that privileges contract sanctity and social harmony over rigid financial stipulations (Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar*, vol. 2, p. 98). Conversely, the Mālikī tradition often insists on a *mahr* commensurate with the wife's social status and customs, viewing it as a substantive economic right deserving protection to safeguard women's dignity and material welfare (Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Al- Tamhīd*, vol. 1, p. 115). The Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī schools navigate a median course, entrenching *mahr* as an indispensable contractual element with clear stipulated terms but allowing deferred payment schedules to accommodate economic contingencies (Al-Nawawi, *Rawdat al-Talibin*, vol.1, p. 234; Al-Shawkani, *Nayl al-Awtar*, vol. 4, p. 167).

Beyond the financial dimension, the framing of marriage contracts also entails varying configurations of consent and agency. Classical jurists uniformly affirm the necessity of valid consent from both parties, particularly the woman's, drawing on prophetic examples and Qur'anic principles of mutual agreement (Qur'an 2:232). Yet the operationalization of consent and its prerequisites differ markedly. The Hanafi school places considerable weight on the guardian's (*walī*) role in safeguarding the woman's interests while simultaneously affirming her right to explicit consent, aligning with a legal-theoretical model that posits marriage as a partnership requiring mutual assent but within patriarchal oversight (Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar*, vol. 1, p. 44). Contrastingly, Mālikī jurists emphasize the woman's autonomous will to enter marriage, minimizing the guardian's veto power unless protective or public interest considerations arise, thereby endorsing a more pronounced female agency within contractual negotiations (Ibn Rushd, *Bidayat al-Mujtahid*, vol. 1, p. 88). The Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī doctrines articulate consent as indispensable and non-negotiable, reinforcing the requirement of the woman's explicit verbal or tacit consent, but these are framed within their respective editorial norms regarding guardianship and social propriety (Al-Nawawi, *Rawdat al-Talibin*, vol.1, p. 152).

This juridical plurality translates into diverse narrative constructions about consent in classical and later legal discourses. Consent is portrayed variably as a solemn contractual prerequisite, a protectable right subject to guardian mediation, or as an autonomous expression of personal will, each rendering different limitations and freedoms for women's capacity to engage in or dissolve marital ties. The narratives surrounding consent also intersect with practices of arranged versus self-initiated marriages in various Muslim contexts, encapsulating tensions between traditional kinship authority and emergent notions of individual rights and liberties. Contemporary scholarship underscores how these divergent interpretations affect women's practical liberties: those in contexts dominated by strict guardianship models may experience constrained agency, whereas more fluid conceptions of consent facilitate nuanced female participation in marital formation (Badran,

Feminism in Islam, p. 93; Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 77).

Another significant locus of variation concerns the treatment of stipulated conditions (*shurut*) in marriage contracts, which women or their representatives may negotiate to address economic, social, or personal contingencies. These stipulations can encompass rights such as the wife's prerogative to pursue education, engage in employment, or initiate divorce through *khulʿ*, and their recognition varies significantly. The Hanafi school, with its formalistic contractual orientation, typically allows such conditions, provided they do not contravene Sharia, confirming the contract's flexibility as a vehicle for women's expanding agency (Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar*, vol. 2, p. 112). In contrast, some Mālikī and Ḥanbalī authorities view conditions that constrain or excessively empower the wife with skepticism, emphasizing community norms and marital stability to regulate the scope of permissible stipulations (Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Al-Tamhid*, vol. 1, p. 134; Al-Shawkani, *Nayl al-Awtar*, vol. 6, p. 202). The negotiation and enforcement of such conditions reveal the dialectics between legal formalism and socio-cultural realities, illustrating how contractual liberties can mitigate overarching patriarchal structures by embedding women's rights within the very fabric of marriage documentation.

The dowry itself functions not solely as a gift but as a multi-faceted institution entwined with women's financial security and marital status. Notably, jurists distinguish between prompt *mahr* (*muʿajjal*) payable immediately at marriage and deferred *mahr* (*muwajjal*), which becomes payable upon divorce or widowhood. This bifurcation manifests divergent protective aims: *muʿajjal* serves as an upfront recognition of women's autonomy and dignity, whereas *muwajjal* assumes the role of a delayed financial safeguard (Ibn Nujaym, *Al-Bahr al-Raʾiq*, vol. 1, p. 102). The extent to which deferred *mahr* is enforceable in cases of divorce, especially under unilateral initiations such as *ṭalāq* by the husband, also varies among madhhabs, with legal repercussions for the economic empowerment of divorced women. For example, the Mālikī school is known for rigorous enforcement of deferred dowry payments to divorced or widowed wives as an extension of marital rights, while the Hanafi tradition sometimes incorporates judicial discretion to temper these obligations depending on the circumstances (Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Al-Tamhid*, vol. 2, p. 97; Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar*, vol. 3, p. 212). Such fiscal mechanisms underscore how the *mahr* regime intersects with broader efforts to institutionalize women's economic protections within matrimonial jurisprudence.

The intersection of contract stipulations, dowry obligations, and consent narratives thus reveals a deeply textured field where textual mandates, jurisprudential reasonings, and social ethics converge and sometimes conflict. These facets collectively shape the conditions under which marriage is formed, maintained, or dissolved, thereby affecting the degree to which women can exercise autonomy, financial security, and legal recognition within marital frameworks. By situating these patterns in dialogue with the preceding analysis of divorce procedures, it becomes apparent that marriage's contractual moment serves as a foundational site for gendered agency that influences subsequent developments in marital dissolution and post-marital entitlements. The variability across schools elucidates not only the plurality of Islamic legal thought but also the

potential avenues and constraints encountered by women seeking to assert rights amid the interplay of textual fidelity, customary practice, and juridical creativity.

13-2- Identified norms for zakāh-financed funeral expenses and inheritance- related rites

Socio-religious norms governing zakāh-financed funeral expenses and inheritance-related rites illustrate a complex intertwining of religious obligations, communal welfare imperatives, and gendered dimensions of economic agency. The Qur'anic injunctions explicitly anchor these practices within an ethical framework aimed at social justice and equitable redistribution, as exemplified by the commands regarding zakāh disbursement and the detailed prescription of inheritance shares (*fara'id*) in Surah An-Nisa (Qur'an 4:712). However, it is within the interpretive elaborations by classical and contemporary jurist's that these textual principles acquire variegated contours affecting both communal obligations and individual entitlements, especially those of women.

The allocation of zakāh funds to cover funeral expenses exemplifies a normative intervention wherein communal resources are mobilized to ensure dignified rites while alleviating financial burdens on the deceased's family. While the Qur'an designates zakāh recipients in Surah At-Tawbah (9:60) to include the poor and indebted, classical exegeses such as those by Al-Qurtubi (*Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*) contend that funeral costs may be legitimately drawn from the general zakāh treasury to maintain social cohesion and prevent hardship (Al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami'*, vol. 7, p. 331). This utilization underscores a juridical latitude permitting zakāh as a mechanism of communal support extending beyond individual almsgiving and into ritual-economic domains. Nevertheless, this latitude is contingent upon local normative consensus and fiscal sufficiency within the zakāh pool, with juristic opinions diverging on whether funeral costs constitute an individual duty borne by heirs or a collective zakāh responsibility. The Mālikī school, for instance, tends to emphasize family responsibility for such expenses, limiting zakāh use to more destitute individuals (Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Al-Tamhīd*, vol. 2, p. 145), whereas the Ḥanbalī tradition allows broader application of zakāh funds to funeral rites under conditions of need (Ibn Qudamah, *Al-Mughni*, vol. 4, p. 116). This variance highlights an interpretive tension between personal filial duty and community-based welfare ethics that directly influences how financial care in funerary customs is institutionalized, with attendant implications for women as both heirs and participants in ritual practices.

Inheritance-related rites, intimately linked to the distribution of the deceased's estate, further reveal intricate normative constructs whereby textual prescriptions interface with gendered economic rights and customary practices. The fixed shares allocated in Qur'an 4:1112 codify explicit entitlements for daughters, wives, mothers, and siblings, aiming to embed fairness and prevent arbitrary dispossession. Yet beyond these legal provisions, the performative nature of rites surrounding inheritance, including ceremonies, communal announcements, and the ritualistic settling of debts and legacies, encode social meanings that influence women's agency as beneficiaries. Scholars like Mohamed El-Fadl have emphasized the hermeneutical challenges arising from the divergence between the Qur'anic egalitarian ethos and patriarchal customary interpretations that often marginalize female heirs through informal adjustments or pressure for renunciations (El-Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, p. 181). This dynamic situates inheritance rites as

contested spaces where juridical authority, customary norms, and female financial agency intersect. Moreover, the administration and disbursement of inheritance funds frequently involve male guardians or executors, whose interpretive discretion can either facilitate or inhibit women's access to their prescribed shares. Legal treatises such as Al-Shawkani's *Nayl al-Awtar* articulate that while the Qur'anic shares are mathematically precise and non-negotiable, the practical enforcement relies heavily on social structures and judicial enforcement, which are susceptible to interpretive flexibility and patriarchal mediation (Al-Shawkani, *Nayl al-Awtar*, vol. 5, p. 199). Notably, women's entitlements may be deferred or subordinated to collective family interests, reflecting a juridical and sociocultural interplay that shapes not only the economic realities but also the agency experienced by female heirs. The Hanafi emphasis on contractual formalism in marriage suggested in the preceding analysis resonates here in the insistence on clear testamentary articulation as a means of safeguarding women's inheritance rights (Ibn Abidin, *Radd al-Muhtar*, vol. 3, p. 276), underscoring continuity between matrimonial financial stipulations and post-mortem economic justice mechanisms.

The bond/focal point of zakāh-funded funeral expenses and inheritance rites also reflects shifting conceptions of community responsibility vis-à-vis individual rights. The communal coverage of certain funeral costs via zakāh embodies a collective ethic of care designed to uphold dignity beyond the capacity of nuclear family units, yet this is calibrated against strict inheritance laws that prioritize equitable apportionment to heirs, including women. This balance illustrates broader socio-legal negotiations in Islamic jurisprudence between welfare solidarity and property rights, with gendered consequences profoundly affecting women's socio-economic statuses after the dissolution of marital ties. Women's capacity to actualize their inheritance rights and benefit from collective zakāh support thus signals broader patterns of agency circumscribed within interpretive frameworks that continuously mediate textual norms and lived realities.

In sum, the normative frameworks regulating zakāh-financed funerary expenditures and inheritance- related rites embody significant interpretive diversity that germinates from the Qur'anic text but blossoms into complex juridical and social arrangements with direct bearing on women's financial security and agency. They connect back to earlier analyses of marital contract stipulations and dowry obligations insofar as both domains concern economic protections grounded in divine commands yet interpreted through multifaceted lenses, revealing both continuity and tension in the gendered articulation of financial rights and religious duties. The careful study of these patterns is indispensable for understanding how Islamic legal discourse shapes the material and ritual conditions of women's post-marital existence, pointing to avenues for both preservation and reform within evolving socio-religious landscapes.

14- Summative answers and synthesis of findings

The synthesis of findings elucidated throughout this research reveals a nuanced and multifaceted engagement with Qur'anic narratives surrounding divorce, marriage, women's liberties, expenses, and funerary affairs, demonstrating that these subjects cannot be adequately apprehended through monolithic or static interpretations. The research questions posed aimed to uncover how interpretive communities both scholarly and lay navigate classical jurisprudential paradigms in light of socio-cultural realities, and how such negotiations affect women's agency within these interrelated domains. Summatively, the evidence affirms that gender-sensitive readings of the Qur'an, when combined with dynamic hermeneutic approaches, engender evolving conceptions of rights and responsibilities that articulate both continuity with tradition and responsiveness to contemporary justice concerns.

The thematic synthesis confirms that divorce and marriage, as legally and socially significant institutions in Islam, are inscribed with gendered power dynamics that have historically circumscribed women's autonomy but are increasingly subject to contestation. As the prior analysis of interpretive agency demonstrated, scholarly communities engage with the Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah framework to reexamine classical rulings such as those on talaq (divorce pronouncement), polygyny, and contractual stipulations to highlight principles of equity and safeguard women's substantive freedoms (Kamali, 2008).

A related thematic axis emerges in the treatment of women's economic entitlements, including mahr, nafqah, and inheritance, which the research identifies as both pivotal to women's material agency and indicative of broader gendered negotiations within Islamic law. The reinterpretations championed by reform-minded scholars employ ethical imperatives embedded in the Qur'ansuch as justice ('adl) and benevolence (ihsan) to challenge reductive legalistic readings that have historically minimized women's financial autonomy (Bano, 2012).

Concurrently, lay communities operationalize these reinterpretations by embedding them into customary practices, negotiating between religious idealism and communal traditions, often mediated by gendered power hierarchies. This dialectic underscores the symbiotic relationship between textual authority and social praxis, whereby normative frameworks are both top-down and bottom-up phenomena.

Funerary affairs, encompassing ritual participation, economic obligations linked to death, and inheritance distribution, represent yet another critical thematic domain wherein gendered rights and liberties are actively renegotiated. The research highlights how traditional prescriptions, frequently limiting women's involvement in funerary rites or their inheritance shares, are challenged by progressive interpretive efforts that emphasize the Qur'an's explicit guidelines encouraging equitable economic treatment of heirs (Qur'an 4:7, 4:11). Importantly, community-based movements, often led by women's groups or local religious leaders, manifest practical strategies to bridge the gap between juridical ideals and customary restrictions. These actions not only foster awareness but also recalibrate communal norms, situating women's rights within both religious legitimacy and cultural acceptability (Oppenheimer, 2014).

In conclusion, the synthesis underscores that meaningful reform in areas of divorce, marriage, women's liberties, expenses, and funerary affairs within Islamic contexts is contingent upon the confluence of scholarly exegesis and grassroots interpretive praxis. The dynamic interplay between these spheres enables reinterpretations that are at once faithful to Qur'anic principles and attuned to contemporary ethical demands for gender justice. Moreover, the reflective methodological stance taken herein advocates for interdisciplinary and multi-sited approaches that honor the pluralistic, situated, and dialogical character of Islamic law as it interfaces with gendered lived realities.

Chapitre IV: How Do Biblical Narratives portray Female and Couple Agency in Biblical Versus Quranic Narratives

CHAPTER IV: HOW DO BIBLICAL NARRATIVES PORTRAY FEMALE AND COUPLE AGENCY IN BIBLICAL VERSUS QURANIC NARRATIVES

1 Historical context of Biblical and Quranic narratives on female agency

The historical context of Biblical and Quranic narratives concerning female agency is essential to understanding the origins and development of gender roles within these religious traditions. The cultural milieus in which these texts emerged were deeply patriarchal, yet they also encompassed complex social, political, and theological dynamics that shaped how female figures were portrayed and perceived. Examining these backgrounds reveals the interplay between divine authority, community norms, and individual agency that informs the depiction of women such as Esther, Deborah, and Miriam in the Bible, alongside prominent female figures and couples in the Quran.

The Hebrew Bible's narratives, originating within the ancient Near Eastern societies, reflect a temporal span ranging roughly from the 12th century BCE through the post-exilic period. These societies were characterized by hierarchical tribal structures and legal codes that typically marginalized women's public roles, imposing strict limitations on their social, economic, and religious participation (Frymer-Kensky, 2002; Trible, 1984). Nonetheless, within these constraints, the stories of women like Deborah, a prophetess and judge, or Esther, a queen who exercises political influence, illustrate moments in which female agency is both recognized and valorized. These figures serve dual roles: as embodiments of divine will and as agents navigating complex sociopolitical terrains. The tension between constricted societal expectations and the narrative space carved out for women highlights the nuanced construction of agency, often mediated by religious mandate and patriarchal structures (Brueggemann, 1997).

In contrast, the Quran emerged in the 7th century CE within the Arabian Peninsula, a context markedly different yet with certain continuities in its tribal and patriarchal fabric. Arab society was organized around kinship and tribal allegiance, with particular emphasis on honor and social coherence (Peters, 1994). Islamic scripture, while rooted in shared Abrahamic traditions, engages with prior narratives but also rearticulates them within its own theological framework emphasizing tawhid (unity of God) and prophetic infallibility. The Quran's references to female figures such as Maryam (Mary), the mother of Jesus, reflect an elevated spiritual status, often framed within themes of piety and purity (Sells, 1999). Moreover, the Quranic narratives extend to couples such as Adam and Hawwa (Eve), whose stories exhibit moral and cosmological significance. Female agency here is entwined with divine decree but also marked by a redefinition of roles within both the family and the wider religious community.

It is imperative to consider the oral and textual transmission practices that influenced how these narratives were preserved and interpreted. In the Biblical tradition, multiple authors and redactors contributed to the shaping of female characters' roles, often blending historical memory with theological agenda (Alter, 1981). The plurality of voices within the text allowed for diverse portrayals: while some passages emphasize submission, others highlight leadership and prophetic

authority. Similarly, the Quran's compilation process, as well as its exegetical traditions (tafsir), play a pivotal role in how female agency is understood. Tafsir literature showcases a spectrum of interpretative strategies, sometimes reaffirming traditional patriarchal readings, while other times elevating the status of women through their direct relationship with God (Allen, 2000).

Understanding the historical context also requires acknowledging the influence of neighboring civilizations and religious traditions on Biblical and Quranic texts. The Ancient Near East, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaanite cultures, informed Biblical narratives both in content and worldview, especially in depictions of female divine and semi-divine figures (Barton, 2010). Similarly, the Quranic narratives reflect dialogue with Judeo-Christian antecedents but also exhibit innovations responding to the social realities of early Islamic society. These cross-cultural interactions complicate simplistic readings and underline how female agency in these texts is inextricably tied to the broader historical and religious matrix.

Furthermore, the political and theological aims of the authors or communities behind these texts cannot be divorced from their portrayals of gender. Both Biblical and Quranic narratives employ female agency not merely as a reflection of societal roles but as a theological device to communicate divine justice, providence, and moral instruction. For instance, Esther's story serves not only to demonstrate individual courage but also to affirm communal survival amid diaspora and persecution (Coogan, 2009). In the Quran, Maryam's portrayal simultaneously exemplifies female virtue and affirms the miraculous nature of Jesus's birth, underscoring the Quranic emphasis on divine intervention and mercy (Esposito, 2002).

In sum, the historical contexts of Biblical and Quranic narratives provide indispensable insight into the multifaceted construction of female agency. These texts emerged from patriarchal frameworks, yet they harnessed narrative and theological motifs to articulate diverse expressions of women's power, autonomy, and spiritual significance. This background sets the foundation for a comparative analysis of specific figures such as Esther, Deborah, and Maryam, as well as couples like Adam and Eve or Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, revealing how these narratives continue to influence contemporary understandings of gender roles within religious communities.

1.1 Application of feminist hermeneutics to sacred text interpretation (Belsey 1663; Ruether 2002)

The application of feminist hermeneutics to sacred text interpretation offers a critical lens through which prevailing representations of female agency within biblical and Quranic narratives can be interrogated and re-imagined. Feminist hermeneutics, as articulated by scholars like Catherine Belsey (1993) and Rosemary Radford Ruether (2002), challenges traditional, often patriarchal, exegetical frameworks by foregrounding gender as a pivotal axis for analyzing how texts construct, restrict, or enable women's subjectivities and capacities for action. This approach does not merely assert women's presence in scripture but investigates the very modalities through which female characters are portrayed as agentsagents who negotiate power, resist subordination, or participate in theological and communal discourse.

Belsey's feminist critique foregrounds interpretative practices that expose how sacred texts have been historically mediated through androcentric cultural and ecclesiastical structures. Her insistence on the hermeneutic tension between text and interpreter recognizes that meanings are neither fixed nor transparent but are contingent on the socio-political positioning of readers. Belsey (1993) contends that feminist hermeneutics disrupts the "textual silence" imposed on women by unmasking patriarchal ideologies embedded in language and narrative form. This involves a process of rereading that uncovers "hidden transcripts" and marginalized voices, thereby opening up space for a multiplicity of feminine experiences and agency that traditional interpretations often efface or subordinate.

Ruether's work further elaborates on the emancipatory potential of feminist hermeneutics by integrating historical-critical methods with liberation theology, thereby positioning biblical texts as contested sites where gender, power, and theology intersect. Ruether (2002) highlights how feminist exegesis reconstructs female biblical figures not merely as victims or passive recipients of divine will but as dynamic participants in salvation history and community formation. By emphasizing agency, Ruether's interpretative framework challenges conventional readings that render figures such as Esther or Deborah into simplistic stereotypes and instead recovers their strategic interventions, rhetorical assertiveness, and spiritual authority.

Applying such feminist hermeneutical insights to the narratives of Esther, Deborah, and Mariam provides a nuanced understanding of female agency that transcends reductive binaries of passivity and dominance. For example, Esther's calculated risk-taking and deployment of royal influence illustrate how agency is exercised within constraints imposed by gendered and political structures (Ruether, 2002). Deborah's role as prophetess and judge similarly defies normative expectations of female submission by demonstrating leadership that blends spiritual authority with military strategy, thereby reconfiguring conceptions of gendered power within a biblical context. In Islamic scriptural interpretations, Mariam is often portrayed with a distinct agency rooted in spiritual purity and divine election, but feminist hermeneutics encourages critical engagement with how such portrayals interact with broader discourses on women's roles within Islamic tradition and jurisprudence (Belsey, 1993).

The comparative dimension of feminist hermeneutics also facilitates dialogue between biblical and Quranic texts, revealing dissimilarities and convergences in how gendered agency is constructed and legitimated. Such dialogue illuminates how textual traditions produce gender roles not in isolation but through complex theological, social, and historical processes. For instance, feminist hermeneutics critiques static or monolithic readings of Adam and Eve by highlighting their relational agency and mutual accountability in biblical texts, while contrasting these with Quranic narratives that emphasize distinct aspects of their symbolic and theological functions (Belsey, 1993; Ruether, 2002). This approach underscores the necessity of contextually sensitive readings that avoid universalizing assumptions about female agency across traditions.

Moreover, feminist hermeneutics intersects with interpretative methods that highlight the relationality of agency, a concept particularly pertinent in analyzing couples' dynamics such as

Adam and Eve or Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The critical insight here is that agency is not merely an individual attribute but is often co-constructed through interpersonal and socio-religious negotiations. Feminist interpretations draw attention to the dialogic nature of these relationships, where power is contested, shared, or resisted in multiple registers, reflecting broader gender ideologies. This resonates with Johnson's (2020) analysis of biblical couples' agency and complements the interdisciplinary perspectives advanced by Ahmed (2016) on gendered agency within both biblical and Islamic contexts.

In elaborating on these hermeneutical strategies, feminist scholars advocate a methodology that is simultaneously critical and constructive: critical in deconstructing patriarchal readings, and constructive in proposing alternative narratives that valorize female voices and experiences. This dual orientation reconfigures sacred texts as dynamic, living documents whose meanings evolve in conversation with the interpretative communities they engage. Consequently, feminist hermeneutics is not just an academic exercise but holds profound implications for contemporary gender discourse, challenging entrenched religious norms and inspiring re-evaluations of women's roles within faith communities.

In summary, the integration of feminist hermeneutics as developed by Belsey and Ruether significantly enriches the analysis of female agency in sacred texts by dismantling conventional exegetical limitations and reconstructing interpretative possibilities. This lens enables a more critical, pluralistic engagement with biblical and Quranic narratives, facilitating deeper comprehension of how gendered agency is narrated, contested, and realized. Such an approach is imperative for advancing scholarly inquiry that aligns theological reflection with contemporary concerns regarding gender justice, equality, and empowerment within religious traditions.

1.2 Reviw of scholarly interpretations of female agency in Esther, Deborah, and Mariam (Brown 2016)

Scholarship concerning female agency in biblical texts, particularly the narratives of Esther, Deborah, and Mariam, reveals a complex and often contested terrain. Brown's 2019 comprehensive survey foregrounds how these women are variously interpreted as embodying political acumen, spiritual authority, and subversive power, thereby challenging simplistic or monolithic understandings of gender roles in sacred literature. Her analysis situates these figures not merely within their immediate scriptural contexts but also within broader hermeneutical frameworks that reflect evolving feminist and postcolonial readings.

Esther's agency, as articulated by Brown, is often construed as a form of strategic diplomacy and covert resistance. The narrative portrays Esther as a Jewish queen who negotiates her survival and that of her people through calculated self-presentation and appeals to royal authority (Brown 2019, 156-160). Brown highlights that many scholars emphasize Esther's adept manipulation of courtly protocols to thwart Haman's genocidal plan, underscoring a form of female agency that operates within patriarchal constraints yet effectively subverts them. This reading nuances earlier interpretations that cast Esther as a passive figure; instead, Brown shows how her silences and revelations function rhetorically, demonstrating a sophisticated embodiment of power that reconfigures traditional gender expectations (Brown 2019, 162). Moreover, Brown connects this

portrayal to a broader discourse on Jewish diaspora identity and survival, suggesting that Esther's agency operates not only on a personal level but also as a collective symbol of resilience.

In expanding the scope, Brown traces Deborah's agency to a distinctly prophetic and judicial capacity, one that transcends gendered roles prevalent in ancient Israelite society. Unlike Esther's indirect exertion of influence, Deborah's leadership is overt and recognized, as she holds titles of prophetess and judge, embodying religious and military authority (Brown 2019, 180-185). Here, agency is intertwined with divine sanction; indicating that Deborah's power is legitimated by her role as an intermediary with Yahweh. Brown critically assesses feminist scholarship that reads Deborah as a proto-feminist icon, cautioning against anachronistic impositions yet affirming that her narrative destabilizes the assumption that authoritative roles are exclusively male domains within scripture (Brown 2019, 187). This dynamic illustrates how agency is not merely about individual capacity but also about the negotiation of institutional and theological frameworks that condition female authority.

Turning to Mariam, Brown acknowledges the more limited biblical textual corpus but expands analysis through intertextual engagement with Quranic narratives and later Jewish and Christian traditions. Mariam's agency is frequently linked to her unique status as a virgin mother and a prophetess, roles that confer both spiritual authority and vulnerability (Brown 2019, 205-210). Brown's survey of scholarship reveals tensions surrounding Mariam's depiction: on one hand, she is exalted for her piety and divine favor; on the other, her agency is often circumscribed by patriarchal paradigms that emphasize chastity and obedience. However, Brown draws attention to interpretations that foreground Mariam's vocal defense and lamentation (as seen in texts like the Magnificat in Luke), which can be read as expressions of agency through speech and theological participation (Brown 2019, 212). This observation underscores a recurrent theme in studies of female agency in sacred texts: the interplay between voice, silence, and power.

Across these figures, Brown's 2019 analysis elucidates a spectrum of agency that operates within and against the boundaries of patriarchal structures, revealing female characters who engage in complex negotiations of power, gendered expectations, and religious identity. Importantly, Brown situates these biblical embodiments of agency alongside their reception history, demonstrating how subsequent interpretative traditions have alternately mobilized or muted female agency to serve doctrinal, cultural, or political ends (Brown 2019, 225-230). Such historical contingency indicates that agency is neither fixed nor inherently empowering but contingent upon context and interpretation.

The insights from Brown thus complement and deepen the methodological foundation laid in the preceding subpart, particularly regarding feminist hermeneutics and historical-critical approaches. By foregrounding the multidimensional nature of agency and emphasizing narrative and reception complexities, Brown's survey bridges analytical rigor with sensitivity to gendered power dynamics. This provides a vital interlocutor for the forthcoming comparative examination that extends to Quranic portrayals of Mariam, and related couples' narratives, offering a nuanced framework for assessing the broader implications of scriptural gender constructions in contemporary discourse.

1.3 Analyses of Adam and Eve's joint agency:

That represent a critical but comparatively underexplored dimension within biblical scholarship, particularly when contrasted with the extensive focus on singular female figures like Esther, Deborah, and Mariam. Johnson's 2021 study rigorously interrogates the collaborative dynamics of agency embodied by the primordial couple, thereby challenging entrenched readings that traditionally emphasize Eve's culpability and foreground male dominance post-fall. Central to Johnson's argument is the notion that Adam and Eve constitute a relational unit whose narrative functions not merely as a chronological origin of humanity but as a complex site where gender, responsibility, and agency intersect in mutually constitutive ways.

Johnson contests the dominant exegetical paradigms rooted in patristic and later doctrinal traditions that often depict Eve as the primary agent of transgression. Instead, she draws on a close textual analysis of Genesis 1-3 to assert that both Adam and Eve exercise forms of agency that are simultaneously autonomous and interdependent. For example, the sequential narrative provisions that show Adam knowingly partaking in the forbidden fruit after Eve's initial transgression reveal a shared complicity and active engagement with divine commandment, rather than mere passivity or secondary involvement (Johnson 2021, 42-45). This reframing subverts dichotomous gender interpretations that cast Adam as the innocent party and Eve as the instigator, suggesting instead a joint negotiation of moral subjectivity and accountability within the Edenic context.

Johnson further elaborates on the implications of this joint agency by situating the narrative within broader hermeneutical frameworks informed by post-structuralist and feminist theory. By interrogating the power relations embedded in the text including the dynamics of voicing, naming, and dominion she elucidates how Adam and Eve's interactions with each other and with the divine articulate a proto-social contract about authority and autonomy that transcends simple gender binaries (Johnson 2021, 51-60). This theoretical approach reframes the couple's story as an early example of negotiated agency, where traditional patriarchal readings are destabilized by the recognition of Eve's subjectivity as equally significant and historically co-constitutive.

In extending this perspective, Johnson draws attention to how the narrative's portrayal of joint agency disrupts later theological and cultural appropriations that have been used to justify rigid gender roles. She demonstrates that readings emphasizing Eve's susceptibility reinforce a gendered hierarchy that marginalizes female autonomy, whereas acknowledging the co-agency of Adam and Eve invites a more egalitarian interpretive stance (Johnson 2021, 68-72). This shift has profound implications for contemporary discussions about gender roles within religious communities, offering a textual foundation to critique androcentric models of authority. Johnson's work thereby resonates with feminist biblical scholarship's broader objectives but moves beyond critiques focused solely on female figures by highlighting the relational and dialogic nature of gendered agency.

Moreover, Johnson's comparative analysis engages with reception history and later Jewish, Christian, and secular interpretations that reconfigure Adam and Eve's roles to suit varying ideological ends. By charting how different traditions have either obscured or emphasized their joint agency, she reveals the contingent and mutable character of biblical gender constructs (Johnson

2021, 90-95). This historical lens underscores the importance of context in shaping interpretations and cautions against static readings that elide the complexity of the initial narrative. Johnson's work thus complements the insights gleaned from the preceding subpart on female agency by broadening the scope from individual female protagonist to dyadic cooperation, highlighting how notions of gender and power are co-produced in sacred texts.

In light of Johnson's analysis, the Adam and Eve narrative can be read not merely as a cautionary tale of disobedience and punishment but as an early scriptural articulation of shared human agency, fraught with gendered tensions yet resistant to reductionist binaries. This approach enriches our understanding of biblical gender dynamics by emphasizing relationality and mutuality in agency, which can inform comparative theological reflections on similar couples in the Quranic tradition and beyond. The implications for contemporary gender discourse are significant, as reframing foundational narratives of origin to emphasize joint rather than hierarchical agency challenges both scriptural and societal norms, supporting more nuanced and inclusive models of gender roles within religious contexts.

1.4 Agency portrayal in Esther, Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, Solomon and Sheba

Formulating research significance concerning the portrayal of agency in figures such as Esther, Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, and the couple Solomon and the Queen of Sheba necessitates a nuanced approach that foregrounds the multidimensionality of female agency as depicted within biblical and Quranic narratives. Building on the preceding discussion surrounding the theological and cultural contexts that inform these portrayals, these inquiries must address how agency is articulated, limited, or enabled through narrative strategies, character roles, and theological motifs. The selected figures offer a fertile ground for comparative analysis, as their stories encapsulate varying modes of agencypolitical, spiritual, relational, and moralthat intersect with the gender ideologies embedded in their respective traditions.

One central research question thus explores the forms and manifestations of female agency within the biblical accounts of Esther and Deborah, juxtaposed with Mariam's representation in the Quran. How do these narratives construct female subjectivity in relation to power, autonomy, and divine interaction? This query invites exploration of agency not merely as overt authority or decision- making but as subtle negotiation within patriarchal constraints, encompassing both public and private spheres. For instance, Esther's strategic use of influence in the Persian court challenges traditional notions of female passivity, while Deborah's dual role as prophetess and judge embodies a rare institutionalized leadership for a woman in ancient Israelite society (Meyers, 1988). Mariam's narrative, in contrast, foregrounds spiritual agency anchored in piety and obedience to God, complicating secular understandings of empowerment by privileging a theological conception of exemplary womanhood (Wadud, 1999). Such an inquiry requires examining how textual features such as narrative voice, characterization, and intertextual references reinforce or mitigate expressions of agency.

Another significant question concerns the relational dimension of agency as it emerges in biblical couples, specifically Adam and Eve, and Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. How do these

stories model gendered configurations of joint or contested agency, and what implications do such models have for perceptions of authority and partnership ? The primordial narrative of Adam and Eve represents a foundational discourse on gender complementarity, responsibility, and culpability, often interpreted through paradigms of obedience and transgression that shape subsequent ideological constructions of male and female roles (Trible, 1978). Conversely, the encounter between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba illustrates a diplomatic and potentially enigmatic interaction that has invited multiple readings concerning female sovereignty, wisdom, and the dynamics of intercultural gender politics (Marlowe, 2007). Investigating these narratives involves unpacking the interdependence of individual and shared agency, illuminating how power relations within couples reflect and reproduce broader societal norms or contestations thereof.

A further dimension worthy of rigorous questioning pertains to the theological implications embedded in these portrayals: To what extent do biblical and Quranic texts link female agency to divine sanction or spiritual virtue, and how does this theological framing influence contemporary interpretations of gender roles? This question foregrounds the critical interplay between human autonomy and divine authority, which both enables and delimits female agency in sacred narratives. Biblical characters like Deborah are portrayed as instruments of God's will, their leadership legimitized through prophetic authority, while Quranic figures such as Mariam embody a sanctified model of compliance fused with remarkable agency within the parameters of religious piety (Wadud, 1999). Parsing these theological nuances enables scholars to trace how religious doctrines inform gender expectations and to consider the tensions that arise when agency is both celebrated and constrained by sacred mandates.

Moreover, addressing how intertextual dialogues and hermeneutic traditions influence the historical and contemporary reception of these figures sharpens the research focus. Scholars might explore: In what ways have exegetical traditions shaped or reconfigured the understanding of female agency in these narratives, and how do such interpretations interact with modern gender discourse? Rabbinic and Islamic commentaries have long mediated the reception of figures like Esther, Deborah, and Mariam, often reflecting patriarchal or reformist agendas aligned with their sociocultural milieus (Mernissi, 1991). Understanding how these interpretive legacies contribute to ongoing debates about women's roles within religious and secular domains is critical for linking textual studies with contemporary gender theory.

Collectively, these research questions form an integrated framework that facilitates an in-depth comparative analysis of gender and agency across biblical and Quranic texts. They reflect the need to balance textual exegesis with historical-contextual awareness and contemporary theoretical insights, ultimately advancing scholarship on how religious narratives negotiate female autonomy within and beyond their original epochs. The answers to these questions hold significant implications not only for academic understanding but also for informing dialogues on gender justice and religious tradition in modern societies.

Establishing a clear methodological framework is essential to rigorously compare the portrayals of female and couple agency within biblical and Quranic narratives. This comparative study

necessitates an interpretative approach that is both textually grounded and sensitive to the theological, historical, and cultural milieus from which these narratives emerge. The inquiry is situated at the intersection of literary analysis, feminist hermeneutics, and religious studies, ensuring that the nuanced expressions of agency are neither flattened nor anachronistically imposed. Emphasizing a close reading of the primary textsspecifically Esther, Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, and Solomon and the Queen of Shebaenables the identification of narrative strategies, characterizations, and thematic motifs that construct or constrain agency in ways that reflect and challenge their respective patriarchal contexts.

The scope of the study hinges on a comparative hermeneutic methodology that respects the linguistic and canonical particularities of the Bible and the Qur'an, while remaining critically alert to intertextual resonances and divergences. Given the textual complexity, a qualitative content analysis is employed to dissect narrative structure, characterization practices, and theological symbolism. Through this method, the study interrogates how power relations, gender ideologies, and spiritual dynamics are encoded within these sacred texts, illuminating the channels through which agency is articulated or suppressed. For instance, examining Deborah's portrayal as both prophetess and judge involves analyzing the language that legitimizes her leadership through divine endorsement, while Mariam's narrative requires attending to Quranic formulations that intertwine piety with instances of active engagement with God's revelation. Such textual scrutiny foregrounds the variegated modalities of agency that transcend simplistic binaries of passivity and empowerment.

A vital methodological dimension concerns the systematic protocol for in-text citations, which reflects academic rigor and respect for source integrity. This study adopts a standardized citation style aligned with the Chicago Manual of Style, which offers clarity and consistency in referencing both primary sacred texts and secondary scholarly sources. When citing biblical and Quranic passages, the approach favors the use of standardized chapter and verse identifiers, referencing a single authoritative translation per tradition to maintain coherence across the comparative analysis. For biblical texts, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) is utilized due to its scholarly acceptance and ecumenical orientation, while the Sahih International translation is selected for the Qur'an given its balance between literalness and readability. This careful selection ensures that textual variations do not obscure analytical parallels or differences. Each citation is contextualized within the argument, allowing the reader to trace how specific verses or narrative elements substantiate claims about agency.

The comparative scope extends beyond textual exegesis to incorporate critical engagement with secondary literature that offers theological, feminist, and socio-historical interpretations. The interdisciplinary nature of the inquiry necessitates dialogue across disciplines; for example, feminist readings of Esther and Deborah (Meyers, 1988) are juxtaposed with scholarly assessments of Mariam's role through feminist Islamic hermeneutics (Wadud, 1999). This deep intertextual engagement enriches the analysis by situating ancient narratives within ongoing scholarly debates and contemporary gender discourse. Equally important is the inclusion of perspectives that highlight

the reception history of these figures, analyzing how exegetical traditions shape or contest the boundaries of female agency within religious communities. The study, therefore, employs a hermeneutical reflexivity that remains conscious of the researcher's own interpretive lens while foregrounding the voices of multiple academic contributors.

Furthermore, this investigation consciously delimits its scope to the canonical texts and does not extensively explore extra-canonical or apocryphal sources. While such texts can significantly inform historical understandings, focusing on the canonical corpus enables a concentrated comparison of the most authoritative narratives that influence mainstream religious gender ideologies. The temporal and cultural breadth of the biblical and Quranic materials is acknowledged, but the analysis privileges thematic and characterological dimensions over exhaustive historical-critical reconstruction. This choice aligns with the study's goal of elucidating how gendered agency is narratively constructed and the theological implications therein, rather than reconstructing precise historical conditions.

In sum, the methodological overview combined with clearly defined in-text citation protocols establishes the foundation for a systematic and nuanced comparative study. By integrating literary-critical tools, theological awareness, and feminist theory within a coherent citation framework, the study promises to illuminate how agency is variably fashioned in these pivotal religious texts, with implications for both scholarly discourse and contemporary understandings of gender roles.

2 Review of scholarship on female agency in Biblical narratives

The scholarship addressing female agency in biblical narratives has evolved considerably over recent decades, expanding from traditional exegetical readings to incorporate feminist, postcolonial, and interdisciplinary perspectives that critically interrogate how agency is constructed and represented within scriptural accounts. Notably, early scholarship often marginalized or idealized female biblical figures, portraying them either as passive recipients of divine will or as symbolic archetypes, thus overlooking the complex and dynamic ways these women exercised influence in their socio-religious milieus. More contemporary studies, however, aim to recover and articulate the multifaceted expressions of agency embedded within t

hese texts, recognizing that female actors in biblical narratives frequently navigate constraints imposed by patriarchal structures while simultaneously enacting power within those frameworks.

A seminal contribution to this field is Carol Meyers's "Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context" (1988), which foregrounds the historical and cultural contexts influencing female agency in the Hebrew Bible. Meyers challenges simplistic dichotomies between passivity and empowerment, demonstrating that women such as Deborah functioned as active leaders and prophets, wielding both social and theological authority that transcended normative gender boundaries of their time. This approach situates agency not merely as an individual attribute but as embedded within broader communal and ritual contexts, thereby complicating modern projections of autonomy onto ancient figures. Scholars following Meyers have further nuanced these interpretations by emphasizing the narrative strategies that biblical texts employ to legitimize or circumscribe female agency, often through divine sanction or prophetic charisma, as seen in the characterization of Deborah in Judges 45.

Feminist biblical hermeneutics has been instrumental in reshaping perceptions of female agency, often focusing on rereading canonical texts through lenses attentive to gendered power relations and ideological functions. For instance, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's pioneering work explores how biblical narratives simultaneously reflect and reproduce patriarchal norms while offering spaces of resistance, agency, and negotiation. Through attentive analysis of Esther's narrative, feminist critics reveal layers of strategic silence, rhetorical persuasion, and subversive action that challenge simplistic accounts of her character as merely a passive instrument. Esther's agency thus emerges as relational and situational, rooted in navigating court politics and religious identity under duress. This conceptualization aligns with theoretical frameworks that problematize agency as a spectrum encompassing acts of survival, covert resistance, and overt leadership rather than unilateral empowerment (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992).

More recently, intersectional approaches have diversified this discourse by embedding biblical women within matrices of ethnicity, class, and sexuality, thus enriching understandings of their agency in complex social milieus. For example, studies on Mariam in the Quranic contextwhile primarily rooted in Islamic exegesishave revitalized comparative biblical scholarship by highlighting how scriptural representations of women's voices and actions are shaped through the intersection of piety and political realities. Translating this back into biblical scholarship, such perspectives inspire reevaluations of figures like Deborah and Esther, emphasizing how notions of holiness intersect with social power to produce particular gendered subjectivities. This cross-pollination is crucial for comparative hermeneutics, as it emphasizes that agency is never a fixed attribute but contingent upon discursive, theological, and performative factors (Tucker, 2010).

The question of narrative agency also draws critical attention to the portrayal of couples, as these relational dynamics impact the scope and expression of female agency. For instance, the stories of Adam and Eve are frequently interpreted through the prism of embodying foundational gender roles and original sin discourses that have historically restricted women's agency within Judeo-Christian traditions. However, recent scholarship seeks to complicate these narratives by exploring the co- constitutive aspects of coupledom, where agency is negotiated within interactional frameworks rather than solely assigned by hierarchical decrees (Frymer-Kensky, 1992). Similarly, the interactions between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba invite diverse interpretations that traverse political diplomacy, gendered wisdom, and spiritual exchange, offering alternative models of female agency that encompass intellectual and sovereign capacities.

Despite these advances, challenges remain in disentangling the often ambivalent or contradictory narrative cues surrounding female agency in biblical texts. Some voices within scholarship caution against anachronistic impositions of modern feminist categories that may distort or overlook the historical particularities and theological intentions of the texts. This caution encourages a hermeneutical humility that balances critical inquiry with sensitivity to the texts' religious and literary contexts, acknowledging that biblical portrayals of women are embedded in complex matrices of authority, subjectivity, and communal identity.

Importantly, the reception history of these female figures further complicates academic understandings of agency, as interpretive traditions within Judaism, Christianity, and beyond have frequently reconfigured these narratives to serve doctrinal, ecclesiastical, or socio-political ends. This diachronic dimension reveals how constructions of agency are dynamic and contested, shaped as much by later reading communities as by the original narrative frameworks. Consequently, scholarly engagements with biblical female agency increasingly incorporate reception studies to trace how gendered identities and roles have been formed, challenged, and transformed over time, thereby linking ancient textual agency with contemporary gender discourses and lived religious experiences.

In this way, the survey of scholarship demonstrates a vibrant and evolving field characterized by methodological pluralism and theoretical depth. The shifting conceptualizations of female agency inherit the foundational work of textual and historical criticism while embracing feminist and interdisciplinary critiques that emphasize the narrativity of agency itself. This rich scholarly landscape provides the necessary backdrop against which the present comparative study situates its own textual and hermeneutical inquiry, striving to navigate the tensions between textual fidelity and critical reinterpretation that define the ongoing exploration of gender and agency in sacred scriptures.

3 Review of studies on agency in Quranic female figures

The corpus of scholarship addressing female agency within Quranic narratives presents a multifaceted field that both intersects with and diverges from the study of biblical female agency, thereby offering complementary insights into gender dynamics in religious texts. Building upon the critical frameworks developed in biblical studies, Quranic scholarship has progressively moved beyond reductive portrayals of female figures as passive or purely symbolic by foregrounding the complexity of their roles as agents within the socio-religious fabric of early Islamic communities. Such scholarship often grapples with the unique doctrinal, linguistic, and hermeneutical contours of the Quranic text, which, while distinct from biblical traditions, similarly employs narrative strategies that negotiate female subjectivity and authority.

A pertinent body of work emphasizes the portrayal of Mariam (Mary), the mother of Jesus, as a paradigmatic example of female agency in the Quran. Unlike the more ambivalent or socially constrained depictions of women in certain biblical accounts, Mariam occupies a privileged prophetic and spiritual status, underscored by her dedicated chapter (Surah Maryam) and multiple Quranic references that articulate her piety, virtue, and direct communication with the divine (Quran 19:16-36). Scholars such as Asma Barlas (2002) argue that Mariam's narrative foregrounds an agency rooted in spiritual autonomy and divine selection rather than social power, thereby expanding the conceptual parameters of agency within Islamic theology to include modes of empowerment not contingent on patriarchal validation. Furthermore, her virgin birth narrative serves both theological and gendered functions, positioning her as a liminal figure whose agency transcends conventional gender norms by aligning with divine intervention. This theological framing challenges prevailing notions of female passivity by attesting to a form of agency that is simultaneously transcendent and representative.

Beyond Mariam, the Quranic text enshrines other female figures whose agency has been the subject of rigorous exegetical and literary analyses. For example, the account of the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis), found primarily in Surah An-Naml (27:20-44), illuminates facets of political and intellectual agency. The queen's diplomatic engagement with Solomon reflects an articulation of sovereign independence and strategic acumen, qualities that some exegetical traditions and contemporary feminist scholars emphasize as emblematic of potent female leadership within the Quranic paradigm (Buccellati, 2010). The narrative underscores her capacity for rational deliberation and religious openness, as she ultimately acknowledges Solomon's prophetic authority. Such portrayals both affirm female authority in governance and negotiate religious orthodoxy, thereby illustrating the Quran's nuanced engagement with gendered power.

Another dimension of female agency emerges in traditions surrounding the wives and daughters of the Prophet Muhammad, whose lived experiences and religious roles are frequently integrated into interpretive discourses. For instance, Aisha, the Prophet's wife, is often highlighted for her intellectual rigor and jurisprudential influence, establishing a historical precedent for female religious authority and agency within early Islam (Ahmed, 1992). Although her narrative arises more fully in Hadith literature and classical historiography rather than the Quran itself, the hermeneutical frameworks derived from the Quranic emphasis on the dignity and moral responsibility of women inform scholarly considerations of such figures' agency.

Moreover, female agency in the Quran manifests through narrative devices that provide women with voices of prayer, lamentation, and supplication, enabling expressions of subjectivity and interaction with divine will. The story of the wife of Pharaoh, often identified as Asiya, exemplifies this dynamic; her steadfast faith in the face of oppression (Quran 66:11) reveals a form of agency grounded in spiritual resistance and moral courage. Analytical scholarship by Fazlur Rahman and others underscores how such narratives extend the understanding of agency beyond social or political spheres, situating it within the realm of personal conviction and ethical autonomy.

Comparatively, the Quran's portrayal of female agency is frequently mediated through an interplay between textual literalism and interpretive expansiveness. Whereas biblical figures like Esther and Deborah are inserted within complex socio-political matrices that emphasize leadership amid male- dominated hierarchies, Quranic female figures often embody agency through their exemplary faith and obedience to God's will, reflecting Islamic theological paradigms that prioritize submission coupled with divine favor as a locus of empowerment. This theological underpinning nuances the discourse on agency by complicating Western feminist categorizations of power and autonomy, prompting scholars like Laleh Bakhtiar (2007) to advocate for contextualized readings that attend to the scriptural and cultural particularities shaping female subjectivity.

The methodological diversification that characterizes Quranic studiesinvolving historical-critical analysis, feminist hermeneutics, and postcolonial perspectivesenables a richer appreciation of female agency within Quranic narratives. For instance, Fatema Mernissi's seminal works reveal how patriarchal interpretations have historically obscured the potentialities of female agency embedded in the texts themselves, calling for a reclamation of interpretive spaces that honor women's active

participation and influence within early Islamic history and scripture (Mernissi, 1991). This recovery project resonates with developments in biblical studies but also charts distinct trajectories by engaging with Islamic legal traditions, linguistic nuances of Arabic rhetoric, and the Quran's unique didactic style.

In sum, the literature on agency in Quranic female figures reveals a dynamic and evolving scholarly landscape that interrogates fundamental theological concepts alongside social realities. These studies enrich comparative inquiries by underscoring how agency is constituted not solely through socio-political actions but also through spiritual devotion, epistemic authority, and relational negotiation within divine frameworks. Recognizing the plurality and complexity of female agency in the Quran thus challenges simplistic binaries of empowerment and subjugation, inviting a more textured understanding of gender in sacred narratives that can inform broader discourses on religion, power, and identity.

4 Comparative religion perspectives on gender roles in Holy scriptures

The comparative analysis of gender roles in scripture inevitably necessitates a nuanced understanding of how both the Bible and the Quran articulate and construe female agency within their respective religious traditions. Scrutinizing the portrayal of women across these sacred texts reveals profound divergences and convergences shaped by differing historical, theological, and literary contexts, each with distinct implications for gender roles. Unlike the Quranic narratives discussed earlierwhere female figures such as Mariam and the Queen of Sheba are often situated within frameworks of spiritual autonomy or divinely sanctioned political sovereigntythe biblical texts tend to foreground female agency through interactions with communal, legal, and royal institutions, thereby embedding women's actions within explicit socio-political arenas.

The Bible, particularly within its Old Testament corpus, presents female figures whose agency frequently emerges in the negotiation of patriarchal constraints via strategic intervention. Esther and Deborah serve as paradigmatic examples of such agency. Esther's narrative, traditionally situated within the Persian court milieu, exemplifies a complex mode of agency that intertwines personal risk, royal proximity, and communal salvation. Her ability to mobilize influence at the highest level of political power exemplifies a calculated exercise of agency that transcends gender limitations, albeit one that remains dependent on her capacity to navigate male-dominated power structures (Rosenberg, 1992). Deborah, alternatively, embodies a markedly different mode of agency as both prophetess and judge, she occupies an authoritative religious and militaristic leadership role, managing judicial functions and leading Israelite armies (Judges 45). This intersection of spiritual and martial power disrupts normative gender expectations, allowing Deborah to serve as a rare model of direct female authority unmediated by male figures. The biblical construction of her narrative underscores a form of agency that legitimizes female leadership on theological and communal grounds, thus expanding conceptions of gender roles within biblical historiography.

Conversely, the Quranic text, as previously noted, situates female figures like Mariam and Bilqis within paradigms that emphasize divine favor and obedience, framing agency primarily as spiritual and moral fortitude rather than sociopolitical command. This distinction fosters contrasting hermeneutical readings; biblical female agency often appears explicitly linked to worldly governance and communal deliverance, whereas Quranic female agency more frequently manifests through exemplification of piety, submission, and intermediary roles between the divine and human realms (El-Zein, 2010). For instance, whereas Esther's narrative revolves around political survival and advocacy, Mariam's story emphasizes her singular devotion and chastity, symbolizing a transcendent form of agency rooted in theological exceptionalism rather than political maneuvering. Further complexity arises when considering couples' agency within these scriptures. The archetypal pair of Adam and Eve in the Bible introduces foundational gender paradigms deeply informed by notions of origination and fallibility, with Eve's role historically interpreted as both companion and initiator of transgression (Gen 3). Such interpretations have profoundly influenced subsequent theological and social discourse on gender roles, often anchoring female agency to themes of temptation and inherent susceptibility. In contrast, Quranic narratives present Adam and his unnamed spouse within a cosmogonic framework that emphasizes collective accountability and repentance without disproportionately assigning blame, hence reframing gendered agency within a more egalitarian theological anthropology (Quran 7:19-27). This recalibration challenges exegetical traditions that have historically relegated women to subsidiary moral status, thereby offering alternative perspectives on early gender role constructions.

Engagement with royal couples, such as Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, elucidates how scriptural portrayals of gendered agency transcend individual narratives to encompass dynastic and diplomatic dimensions. The Bible offers limited elaboration on the Queen of Sheba, primarily acknowledging her as a visiting dignitary bringing tribute (1 Kings 10). This account implies recognition of female authority but stops short of an elaborate depiction of agency or political sophistication. The Quranic narrative, in contrast, imbues Bilqis with a multifaceted character, highlighting her intellectual discernment, religious openness, and sovereign decision-making capacitytraits that command respect within the text's broader didactic aims (Sells, 1999). This disparity accentuates differing narrative strategies and theological emphases: while biblical texts may portray female figures in more circumscribed roles, Quranic narratives often amplify the symbolic and didactic potential of female sovereignty and inter-religious dialogue.

Engaging both scriptures in comparative feminist hermeneutics reveals the contingent and constructed nature of gender roles, shaped by cultural-historical milieus and theological teleologies. The biblical emphasis on law, covenant, and corporate identity fosters narratives where female agency is frequently mediated through relationalityto clan, tribe, or monarchythereby highlighting collective stakes in acts of female intervention. Meanwhile, the Quranic corpus, generally more oriented toward universal moral instruction and individual accountability, frames female agency within paradigms of faithfulness, resilience, and submission intertwined with moments of exceptional divine favor. Such differences do not render one tradition more progressive but rather illustrate variant pathways through which religious texts negotiate female empowerment and social roles.

The implications of these comparative perspectives extend beyond historiographical interest; they influence contemporary theological debates and gender role constructions within their respective faith communities. Recognition of the multiplicity of agency formsspiritual, political, judicial, or diplomaticcompels reinterpretations that transcend simplistic binaries of oppression and liberation. Additionally, scholarship attentive to intertextual resonances and divergences enriches dialogue aimed at reconciling scriptural authority with evolving social understandings of gender equality, offering models that respect textual particularity while opening avenues for transformative readings. In summary, the comparative examination of biblical and Quranic gender roles foregrounds a dynamic interplay between tradition, textuality, and agency. Both scriptures present female figures whose agency is simultaneously constrained and elevated by theological frameworks, ritual functions, and narrative strategies. Their study underscores the necessity for contextual and multidisciplinary approaches that account for complex spiritual, political, and social dimensions, thereby advancing scholarly efforts to interpret gender roles in sacred texts with both rigor and sensitivity.

5 Identified gaps regarding couples' agency across sacred texts

Although extensive scholarship has illuminated the contours of female agency within biblical and Quranic narratives, a critical gap persists in the systematic exploration of couples' agency as a distinct analytical category across these sacred texts. While prior analyses have predominantly focused on individual female figures' modes of agencyestablishing frameworks of spiritual authority, legal negotiation, or political influencethe intricate dynamics that couples embody as relational unit's remain insufficiently theorized. This neglect overlooks how gendered agency is often co-constituted within matrimonial and dyadic contexts, where the interplay between male and female roles can reinforce, subvert, or reconfigure normative gender paradigms embedded in scripture.

One notable gap emerges in the relatively fragmented portrayal of biblical couples, such as Adam and Eve or Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, where their joint agency is frequently subsumed under predominantly singular narrative voices or theological motifs. For instance, the Genesis account situates Eve as a pivotal figure whose agency is intricately tied to both creation and disobedience, yet Adam's agency is often foregrounded as coeval with or even superseding Eve's, which complicates a balanced treatment of their mutual agency (Walzer, 2013). Moreover, the biblical texts rarely depict the couple engaging as a cohesive unit exerting collective agency; instead, their actions and decisions often serve didactic or etiological functions that reinforce distinct gendered roles within patriarchal frameworks. The Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon, albeit indicative of female sovereign agency, is presented unilaterally regarding her personal agency rather than as a component of a conjugal or diplomatic partnership with Solomon, thus leaving their dyadic interaction largely unexamined (Blenkinsopp, 2008).

Similarly, within the Quranic corpus, while female figures such as Mariam and Bilqis manifest pronounced autonomous agency, the treatment of couples' agency remains comparatively peripheral and underdeveloped. The Quran's articulation of Adam and his spouse is notable for its theological

emphasis on shared human responsibility; however, the spouse remains unnamed and lacks the narrative specificity that would allow for a sustained examination of mutual agency. This anonymity contributes to an underrepresentation of dyadic agency as a theme, and thus the examination of gender agency focuses predominantly on individual exemplars rather than couple-based dynamics (Madigan, 2001). Furthermore, even in the case of royal couples, the interaction between partners is seldom elaborated upon with an eye toward jointly exercised authority or negotiated roles. Bilqis's interaction with Solomon is depicted more as a political and spiritual encounter than as a conjugal alliance with mutual agency, mirroring a broader narrative tendency to isolate feminine agency from marital partnership contexts.

Another gap lies in the methodological limitation of existing comparative studies, which often employ discrete readings of female agency either within biblical or Quranic frameworks without systematically juxtaposing how couples' agency as a construct is shaped by divergent theological and socio-cultural matrices. The discourse tends to treat gendered agency as a unidimensional attribute possessed by individual actors, thus eliding the complex relational dynamics that couples inevitably instantiate. Such relational agency could include negotiation, co-rule, conflict resolution, or complementary authority that potentially destabilizes hegemonic gender dichotomies. A more dialogical and intersectional approach to scriptural heterotopias of coupledom would enrich understandings of how gender roles co-evolve in tandem rather than in isolation (Butler, 2004).

These gaps are consequential for contemporary hermeneutical endeavors aimed at reimagining gender roles within faith communities. Without critically engaging couples as relational agents, interpretations risk perpetuating reductive binaries of male dominance and female passivity or exceptionalism. This limits the scope for envisioning gender justice that acknowledges relational interdependence and mutual empowerment inherent in marital or partnership frameworks. Moreover, unpacking couples' agency in sacred texts could challenge existing patriarchal exegeses by highlighting scriptural instances where agency is distributed, shared, or contested within dyads, thus offering alternative models for contemporary gender ethics.

In response, emerging scholarship suggests that an integrated hermeneutic attentive to the symbiotic interactions between male and female figures within couples may reveal undercurrents of resistance and negotiation that complicate simplistic gender role prescriptions. For example, feminist and queer readings of Genesis and Qur'anic cosmogonies increasingly emphasize the fluidity and co- constitution of identities and agency within the first human pair, suggesting a fertile site for reexamining the relational nature of human agency beyond archetypal essentialism (Freedman, 2001). Similarly, reappraisals of royal couples might focus on diplomatic and theological narrative strategies that encode nuanced dimensions of gender power, sovereignty, and alliance-building, thus reconceptualizing couples' agency as an axis of both authority and transformation.

Addressing these gaps necessitates a multidisciplinary approach that combines biblical and Quranic criticism, gender studies and relational sociology to re-contextualize couples' narratives within their broader communal and cosmological frameworks. This endeavor must also remain

sensitive to the textual complexity and hermeneutical diversity within and across traditions, resisting a homogenizing impulse in favor of appreciating scriptural particularities. By-doing so, scholarship can advance more comprehensive and nuanced models of gender and agency that resonate with the lived realities and interpretive challenges of faith communities navigating tradition and modernity.

6 Defining agency in religious, feminist and narrative theories

In approaching the concept of agency, within religious studies, particularly those concerned with sacred texts, agency is often interlinked with theological notions of providence, free will, and obedience to divine commands. Agency in this context may be circumscribed by divine sovereignty, wherein human characters embody agency insofar as their actions align with or resist God's will. This theological framing tends to posit agency not merely as autonomous self-determination but as situated within a covenantal relationship that entail both constraints and empowerment. For example, in the biblical narrative, Esther's "agency" partially derives from her strategic alignment with God's providential plan, which legitimizes her political interventions (Trible, 1984). Similarly, Mariam's (Mary's) agency in the Qur'an is deeply infused with notions of divine selection and purity, thus framing her active participation in salvation history within a divinely mediated modality (Mernissi, 1991). Such religious articulations necessitate balancing the paradox of human initiative against divine orchestrationa concern that complicates standard secular definitions of agency anchored in individualist autonomy.

Feminist theory, by contrast, approaches agency as a transformative praxis entailing resistance to patriarchal structures and the reconfiguration of gendered power relations. Pioneering feminist scholars problematize simplistic binaries of active male/passive female and seek to uncover diverse modalities of women's agency in historically marginalized contexts (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality emerges here as a vital concept, emphasizing that agency cannot be disentangled from intersecting identities such as class, ethnicity, and religion, which shape the possibilities and limitations of action. Feminist theorists often critique the classical liberal notion of agency as overly individuated, advocating instead for relational and embodied models that recognize how agency manifests through negotiation, partial compliance, and subversion within constraining environments (Jaggar, 2001). In the study of sacred texts, such perspectives illuminate how female biblical and Qur'anic characters articulate agency not simply through overt acts of power but through subtler forms like speech, silence, or embodied presence, thus challenging hegemonic narrative constructions (Brooten, 1996).

Narrative theory introduces another crucial dimension by framing agency as discursively constructed and mediated through storytelling practices. From this standpoint, agency is both enacted by characters within a narrative world and conferred by narrators and readers through interpretive frameworks. Scholars such as Seymour Chatman and Mieke Bal emphasize that narrative agency involves the capacity to influence story outcomes via intentions, decisions, or affectwhile also acknowledging the limits imposed by narrative conventions and authorial designs (Bal, 1997; Chatman, 1978). This analytic angle foregrounds how biblical and Qur'anic texts

intentionally shape perceptions of agency by virtue of their theological agendas, literary artistry, and audience expectations. For instance, the depiction of Eve's initiative in Genesis is imbued with layers of meaning that serve to moralize about disobedience and the human condition, suggesting that agency within these narratives operates not only descriptively but normatively (Tanner, 2005). Likewise, the Qur'anic portrayal of Mariam intersects narrative agency with paradigms of chastity and divine favor, configuring agency as a testimonial function within prophetic historiography (Campo, 1991). Thus, narrative theory compels an examination of the dramaturgical and rhetorical means through which agency is enacted and represented, extending beyond the cognitive capacities of characters to encompass textual strategies.

Crucially, integrating these disparate conceptions enables a more nuanced understanding of agency in scriptural contexts. The religious-theological frame reminds us of the manner in which divine- human relations inflect agency with teleological and ethical dimensions. Feminist theory sharpens our focus on gendered power asymmetries and the dynamic potential for contestation and subversion. Narrative theory situates these forces within the medium of textual production and reception, underscoring that agency is not merely a property of characters but also a dialogic construct shaped by authorial intent and communal memory. This integration facilitates a more holistic appraisal of biblical and Qur'anic portrayals of agency as relational, performative, and ideologically charged phenomena.

Entwining these theoretical perspectives offers a vital platform to revisit the prior consideration of couples' agency. Where religious frameworks may privilege divine sanction for joint action, feminist approaches illuminate the gendered negotiations and power asymmetries embedded within such dyadic relations. Narrative theory, meanwhile, draws attention to how textual depictions either dramatize or efface the mutual dimensions of agency between partners. Together, these theories provide the conceptual tools to interrogate how joint agency in figures like Adam and Eve or Solomon and the Queen of Sheba can both reaffirm and subvert patriarchal scripts encoded in sacred narratives. Moreover, this synthesis opens space to explore how these constructions resonate with or challenge contemporary understandings of gender roles and relational authority within faith communities.

In sum, defining agency through the prisms of religious, feminist, and narrative theories reveals its inherently complex, contextualized, and contested nature within biblical and Qur'anic texts. Such definitional clarity is indispensable for advancing critical scholarship that seeks to map the contours of female and couples' agency across scriptural traditions, thereby enriching hermeneutical debates and informing socially engaged interpretations of gender, power, and identity.

7 Intersecting constructs of gender roles and divine authority

The intricate symbiosis between gender roles and divine authority in scriptural narratives constitutes a pivotal axis around which portrayals of female and couple agency are constructed and understood. This nexus is not merely a backdrop but a dynamic field that actively shapes how charactersparticularly womenare positioned in relation to power, responsibility, and religious legitimacy. Within both Biblical and Qur'anic texts, gender roles emerge as socially and theologically inflected constructs that intersect with divine prerogatives, thereby mediating the extent and manner in which agency is attributed, exercised, or constrained. The divine authority that permeates these narratives functions simultaneously as an enabler and a regulating force, embedding individual and collective agency within frameworks of sacred sanction and moral order.

7.1 In Biblical narratives, gender roles are often articulated through covenantal language and patriarchal social structures that grant divine authority a distinctly mediated dimension. Female figures such as Esther and Debora navigate these prescriptive roles within contexts that amplify the tension between their social identities and the transcendence of divine empowerment. Esther's agency, for instance, unfolds within the circumscribed roles of queen and intercessor, roles steeped in gendered expectations of influence primarily through persuasion and mediation rather than direct authority. Yet, the divine orchestration behind her survival and liberation of the Jewish people reframes her actions as both politicized and sanctified (Trible, 1984). Similarly, Debora's unique position as both prophetess and judge defies conventional patriarchal categorizations by exhibiting overt, public leadership that is unequivocally justified through divine calling (Brooten, 1996). This duality foregrounds how divine authority sanctions female authority while simultaneously reinforcing gendered paradigms that govern how and where such authority can manifest, underscoring a conditional rather than absolute agency.

7.2 While Qur'anic portrayals of female agency articulate these intersecting frameworks differently, reflecting divergent theological emphases and juridical conceptions of divine authority. Mariam's narrative exemplifies the fusion of gendered identity and divine election, where purity, submission, and prophetic favor coalesce to form a model of exemplary femininity that is simultaneously agentive and transcendent (Mernissi, 1991; Campo, 1991). Her silence in the Qur'an often contrasts with the explicitness of biblical figures' actions, signaling a mode of agency that privileges spiritual communication and moral exemplariness over overt political intervention. The divine voice and intervention in Mariam's story affirm her status not only as chosen but as a paradigmatic figure whose agency is suffused with divine intimacy and protection. This dynamic positions divine authority not as an external imposition but as an intrinsic component of female subjectivity and agency, merging theological purity with social expectation. The result is a portrayal that emphasizes obedience intertwined with empowerment, where gender roles map onto divinely ordained purposes, thus framing agency as an expression of fidelity as much as effectiveness.

The overlapping constructs of gender and divine authority also manifest in how couples' agency is narrated, whereby male and female roles are interdependent and often hierarchically ordered within theological cosmologies. The relationship of Adam and Eve in the Bible, for example,

encapsulates a foundational schema wherein gender difference becomes the medium through which divine authority is exercised and contested. Eve's role in the Fall narrative articulates an ambivalent agency that is marked both by initiation and subsequent sanction, situating female agency within a framework of temptation and responsibility (Tanner, 2005). This sexualized and moral characterization of gender roles intertwines closely with notions of divine authority that govern sin, redemption, and social order. Conversely, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba exemplify a more dialogic coupling where agency is relational yet asymmetrical, reflecting divine favor granted primarily through Solomon's kingship but acknowledged through the Queen's diplomatic and intellectual acumen (Crenshaw, 1991). Here, the intersection of divine authority and gender roles articulates a model of agency that is collaborative yet bounded by hierarchical recognition.

A cross-traditional comparative lens reveals that while both Biblical and Qur'anic texts locate female and couple agency within the interplay of gender and sacred authority, the modalities through which this interplay is expressed diverge. Biblical narratives tend to present a more dialectical engagement, wherein women's agency negotiates patriarchal constraints against the background of covenantal promises and prophetic mandates. Meanwhile, Qur'anic presentations emphasize harmonizing divine will with gender-specific roles that valorize spiritual exemplarity and prophetic lineage. This variance is of critical significance for contemporary gender studies as it complicates monolithic readings of religious texts and highlights the hermeneutical plasticity through which divine authority regulates and enables agency.

Understanding these intersecting constructs consequently necessitates recognizing the multidimensional nature of agency as both theologically sanctioned and socially constructed. Divine authority, far from being a monolithic determinant, interacts with gender roles in a dynamic, context-sensitive manner that shapes the scriptural imagination of agency. This interaction not only frames characters' actions but also informs interpretive traditions that inscribe normative identities and behaviors. As such, scrutinizing the confluence of gender and divine authority extends beyond textual analysis to encompass broader discourses on power, legitimacy, and identity within religious communities and contemporary gender politics. The complex entanglement of these constructs reveals the enduring significance of scriptural portrayals in shaping gendered notions of authority and agency across historical and cultural terrains.

7.3 **Criteria for selecting Esther,** Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, Solomon and Sheba passages The selection of passages featuring Esther, Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba is predicated upon several methodological imperatives that align with the analytical framework previously established. Central to this selection process is the pursuit of narratives that yield rich, multifaceted articulations of female and couple agency within intersecting theological and social registers. Each chosen passage exemplifies distinct configurations of empowerment, relational dynamics, and narrative treatment that collectively illuminate the variegated expressions of agency in Biblical and Qur'anic traditions, thereby enabling a comparative and critical exploration consistent with the study's overarching objectives.

Esther and Deborah are canonical figures whose narratives in the Hebrew Bible provide paradigmatic instances of female agency exercised within patriarchal and theocratic milieus. The Esther narrative is selected for its intricate representation of political agency mediated through strategic self-representation, rhetorical prowess, and courtly influence, while negotiating the constraints of gender and ethnic minority status (Trible, 1984). Through Esther's calculated intervention to avert the genocide of her people, the text foregrounds a form of agency that is both mediated by divine providence and enacted through human initiative, affording a fertile ground to examine the nuances of autonomy and empowerment previously outlined. Similarly, the account of Deborahas prophetess and judgeembodies a rare confluence of spiritual authority and judicial-political leadership, exemplifying agency that is overtly divinely sanctioned yet socially dislocating given prevailing gender norms (Brooten, 1996). The selection of this passage arises from its capacity to foreground an active, public exercise of female authority that challenges normative assumptions about gendered power in scriptural contexts.

In juxtaposition, Mariam's portrayal in the Qur'anic texts offers a contrasting model of female agency characterized less by overt sociopolitical agency and more by spiritual identity, prophetic association, and moral exemplarity (Campo, 1991). The Qur'an's relative brevity regarding Mariam, combined with its emphasis on divine selection and purity, highlights a different axis wherein agency is construed as intimate alignment with divine will and prophetic legitimacy. This selection thus enables a probing of how agency rooted in spiritual obedience and symbolic presence might contest or complement the more performative and dialogic forms evident in Biblical exemplars. Furthermore, the passivity or silence of Mariam within the narrative aligns with textual strategies identified in the preceding section, inviting reflection on the differential narrative mechanisms that configure female agency across the two-scriptural corpora (Mernissi, 1991).

The inclusion of Adam and Eve's narrative addresses the foundational dyadic model of couple agency in the Biblical tradition, encapsulating primordial themes of creation, transgression, and relational authority. This passage is indispensable due to its theological and literary centrality and the profound implications it carries for gendered constructions of agency, blame, and hierarchization (Tanner, 2005). The dynamics between Adam and Eve offer a rich site for interrogating how relational and hierarchical contexts shape the expression and reception of agency, particularly given Eve's pivotal yet ambivalently portrayed initiative. By including this couple's interaction alongside those of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, whose own narrative is marked by cross-cultural engagement and political symbolism, the study situates agency within both conjugal partnership and diplomatic encounter paradigms.

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are selected for their exemplification of couple agency at the intersection of gender, authority, and intercultural dialogue. The Queen of Sheba occupies a liminal space, wherein her agency is encoded through diplomatic negotiation, recognition of Solomon's divinely mandated authority, and subtle exertion of influence without overriding patriarchal constructs (Crenshaw, 1991). This narrative furthers the investigation of relational contexts by illustrating how female agency operates dialogically with male sovereign power, elaborating on the

asymmetrical yet interactive nature of couple agency within scriptural storytelling.

Collectively, these passages were chosen because they richly embody the four analytical criterianarrative autonomy, source of empowerment, relational context, and textual strategiesthus permitting a holistic appraisal of agency that attends to diversity of form and function across Biblical and Qur'anic texts. The selection also reflects an intentional balance between overt political and spiritual agency, individual and relational dynamics, and textual complexity, enabling the comparative dimension of the study to be rigorously pursued. By focusing on these emblematic figures and their canonical narratives, the study endeavors to elucidate not only how agency is constructed within sacred traditions but also how these constructions reverberate through contemporary understandings of gender roles in religious and social contexts.

7.4 Analysis framework: Portrayals of female and couple agency within Biblical and Qur'anic texts The thematic narrative analysis framework employed in this study offers a methodologically rigorous approach to elucidating the multifaceted portrayals of female and couple agency within Biblical and Qur'anic texts. Building upon the careful selection of passages each distinguished by their rich narrative complexity and theological importthe framework situates agency not merely as a static attribute but as a dynamic construct unfolding through narrative structures, character interactions, and embedded ideological discourses. This analytical lens recognizes that agency in sacred texts is negotiated through layers of narrative voice, authorial intent, and received tradition, thereby necessitating a mode of analysis that transcends reductive interpretations and attends attentively to nuance, contradiction, and intertextual resonance.

Central to this framework is the conception of narrative agency as an interplay between autonomy and constraint, where characters' actions are embedded within power-laden social and divine matrices. The methodology draws inspiration from feminist literary criticism, particularly the narrative hermeneutics advanced by scholars such as Phyllis Trible (1984) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1992), who emphasize the importance of reading biblical texts against grain and as sites of both oppression and resistance. In adapting these principles, the framework interrogates how Esther's rhetorical strategy, Deborah's juridical authority, Mariam's prophetic embodiment, and the coupled interactions of Adam and Eve as well as Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, are constructed through narrative techniques such as focalization, characterization, and dialogic exchange. These narrative components are systematically analyzed to reveal how agency is encodedsometimes subtly, other time's overtlywhile also remaining attentive to silences, absences, or marginalizing narrative strategies.

Moreover, the thematic narrative analysis framework incorporates a comparative intertextual dimension, essential for unpacking the variances and convergences between Biblical and Qur'anic portrayals. Recognizing the distinct theological paradigms and literary genres of these corpora, the approach allows for a nuanced examination of agency as it is thematized differently within, for instance, Hebrew prophetic literature versus Qur'anic revelation and exegesis. This comparative orientation is facilitated by thematic coding that highlights recurrent motifssuch as divine selection, obedience, transgression, and diplomatic negotiationand their contrasting narrative deployments.

Such coding enables systematic identification of how narrative autonomy is granted or withheld, how empowerment is sourcedbe it through divine mandate, socio-political maneuvering, or spiritual purityand how relational contexts influence the structure and reception of agency.

A distinctive feature of this framework lies in its attentiveness to gendered narrative strategies and the broader socio-historical contexts that inform textual production and reception. Drawing on feminist and postcolonial theoretical insights, the analysis critically interrogates how gender ideologies are inscribed and transmitted through narrative form, and how these in turn reflect and shape communal norms and expectations about female and couple agency. For example, the framework examines how Esther's narrative navigates ethnic minority identity alongside gendered constraints in a Persian imperial context, or how Mariam's portrayal in the Qur'an encapsulates a valorization of chastity and prophetic lineage that diverges from the notably politicized agency in the Hebrew Bible. Similarly, the relational dynamics in the Adam and Eve narrative invite consideration of hierarchical agency models influenced by patriarchal interpretations, while the Solomon-Queen of Sheba episode affords insight into the negotiation of female authority within diplomatic and intercultural exchanges.

This methodological framework further foregrounds the critical role of narrative voice and point- of-view, recognizing that the construction of agency is mediated not only by the characters' actions but also by how the narrator represents, evaluates, or withholds agency within the text. The study supports Gérard Genette's narratological concepts of focalization and narrative reliability to assess how female and couple agency is framed, either empowering or circumscribing the figures under analysis. For instance, the occasional narrative silencing or invisibilization of Mariam's voice in the Qur'an contrasts with the vibrant rhetorical presence allocated to Esther, highlighting divergent narrative strategies that have theological and social ramifications. This focus on narrative mediation encourages a critical awareness of the interpretive challenges posed by sacred texts, which often embody layered and contested meanings that influence contemporary gender constructions.

In applying this thematic narrative analysis framework, the study privileges a holistic yet differentiated mode of inquiry that respects the textual integrity and theological specificity of the scriptural passages while enabling critical reflection on the socio-religious ideologies they perpetuate or challenge. This analytical rigor ensures that agency is not simplistically equated with overt power or autonomy but is understood as a complex, contextually situated phenomenon that operates within and against dominant discourses. The methodology thereby advances a nuanced comparative theology that is sensitive to historical particularities and attentive to the ongoing significance of these narratives in shaping modern conceptions of gender roles within religious communities.

8 Socio-historical and narrative context of Esther and Deborah

The socio-historical and narrative context of the Book of Esther is essential to understanding the multifaceted portrayal of female agency within this biblical text. Positioned within the corpus of the Hebrew Bible, Esther's story unfolds against the backdrop of the Persian Empire during the Achaemenid period, approximately the fifth century BCE, a context markedly distinct from the earlier Israelite monarchic settings of many biblical narratives. This temporal and cultural milieu influences both the narrative strategies deployed and the subtleties of female agency articulated in the text. Unlike prophetic or legislative writings grounded in Israelite covenantal ideology, Esther's narrative occupies a liminal space shaped by diaspora experiences, imperial politics, and courtly hierarchies, conditions that inform the modes and possibilities of Esther's influence within the story. The setting in the Persian imperial court under King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) is noteworthy for several reasons. The Persian administrative system, which governed a vast and culturally heterogeneous empire, created distinctive power dynamics that both constrained and enabled Esther's agency. As a Jewish woman taken into the king's harem, Esther's positionality was ambivalentsimultaneously marginal as a subject and potentially central due to her proximity to royal power. Scholars have emphasized that the Persian context of the narrative serves as an intertextual site illustrating complexities of minority existence, assimilation, and survival in imperial contexts (Grabbe, 2004). Esther's navigation of court politics and her role as an intercessor for her people must therefore be read against these imperial realties, underscoring how her agency operates within structures that combine both severe limitations and unique openings.

Narratively, Esther's story is structured as a court tale employing motifs common to ancient Near Eastern and Achaemenid storytelling traditions, such as the ascent of a foreign woman to queenship, the fall of a rival, and the deliverance of a threatened group. This genre specificity shapes the presentation of female agency in nuanced ways. Esther is portrayed less as a prophetic leader with overt religious authority (in contrast to Deborah, for example) and more as a strategic actor who leverages her beauty, wit, and positional influence to effect political change. The text reveals a narrative tension between Esther's use of silence and speech; moments of reticence juxtaposed with her decisive intervention before the king epitomize a form of agency circumscribed by courtly decorum and gender expectations (Bergsma, 2015).

The sociocultural implications of Esther's gendered role also reflect the anxieties and hopes of the Jewish diaspora community. The narrative emerges from a context where Jewish identity had to be maintained and negotiated under foreign dominion, and Esther's agency is linked to communal survival. Her actions articulate a mode of agency that is both personal and collective, underscoring the interplay between individual initiative and communal destiny. This collective dimension complicates simplistic readings that might reduce Esther's role to mere personal ambition or passive victimhood; instead, it foregrounds a political agency that operates through mediation and representation within patriarchal structures. Cohen (1999) argues that Esther's narrative demonstrates "a subtle but powerful form of female leadership," where the protagonist's maneuvering within elite power spheres ensures the protection and flourishing of her people.

Moreover, the narrative's religious undercurrents, while more implicit than in prophetic texts, contribute to shaping Esther's agency. Unlike other biblical books, the Book of Esther conspicuously lacks explicit mention of God, prayer, or religious ritual, prompting interpretations that the story's theological framework is embedded in divine providence operating behind the scenes (Schneiders, 1984). This absence invites reflection on how female agency is legitimized and enacted within a narrative world where human action, particularly Esther's and Mordecai's, is central. The absence of overt divine intervention positions Esther's diplomatic skill and courage as pivotal, reinforcing an agency that is pragmatic and situationally responsive rather than overtly sacred. This paradox intensifies the gender dimension in Esther's portrayal: her agency is realized precisely through navigating secular power structures, illustrating alternative models of leadership available to women in biblical literature.

Interpreting Esther's agency within this socio-historical and narrative framework is further enriched by comparative reflections with other biblical women, such as Deborah, whose context and narrative form differ markedly. Whereas Deborah functions primarily as a charismatic, divinely appointed judge and prophetess within Israelite tribal society, Esther's agency is cast in terms of tact, representation, and survival within imperial patriarchy. The contrast illuminates how varied historical and cultural contexts shape the possibilities and expressions of female agency, a dynamic that this study's broader comparative aimjuxtaposing biblical with Qur'anic narrativesintends to elucidate. Understanding Esther's setting as a diasporic court tale highlights how agency may manifest both in overt leadership and in subversive, contextually mediated forms.

In light of the ethical and methodological considerations discussed previously, comprehending Esther's socio-historical and narrative context guards against anachronistic or reductive readings that either overstate or underestimate her autonomous capacity. It emphasizes the necessity of situating textual analysis in attuned historical awareness and narrative genre sensitivity, enabling a nuanced appreciation of how female agency is both constructed and constrained by the social and political realities of ancient empires. This groundwork thus provides a critical foundation for a responsible hermeneutical approach that respects the complexity of the text and its embedded gender dynamics.

9 Esther's strategies of agency in the Persian court

Esther's modes of agency within the Persian court reveal a complex interplay between self-presentation, strategic silence, and diplomatic intervention, navigated within the confines of both imperial power structures and gendered expectations. Building upon the socio-historical and narrative context outlined previously, it becomes evident that Esther's agency is neither purely individualistic nor overtly revolutionary; rather, it is exercised through carefully calibrated actions shaped by the liminality of her position as a Jewish queen in a foreign empire. The very architecture of her influence is embedded in the subtleties of court intrigue, courtly etiquette, and the intricate balance of appearing compliant while pursuing a transformative agenda.

At the core of Esther's strategy lies her adept utilization of court rituals and the performative dimensions of queenship. Unlike prophetic figures who command authority through explicit divine mandate and public pronouncement, Esther's ascent to influence depends significantly on her ability to navigate the aesthetic and social codes of the Persian royal harem. Her beauty and comportment are foregrounded in the narrative as assets that secure royal favor, yet this external allure is inseparable from her intellectual acumen and emotional intelligence. Through calculated appearancessuch as her measured initial silence when first introduced at court (Esther 2:15-18) and her deliberate pacing in revealing her Jewish identity and Mordecai's plight, Esther exploits expectations of female decorum to mask her purposeful agency under the guise of submissiveness. Scholar Amy-Jill Levine emphasizes that Esther's silence should not be read as passivity but rather as a strategic posture enabling concealment and timing necessary for survival and success within the Persian milieu (Levine, 1999).

This strategic silence culminates in Esther's pivotal revelation to King Ahasuerus, where the queen shifts from a seemingly compliant figure to a decisive intercessor, negotiating not only for her personal safety but for the survival of her entire people. Her decision to forgo standard court procedures and approach the king unsummoned (Esther 4:16) constitutes a radical exercise of agency, challenging rigid royal protocols and risking death. This moment articulates a paradox whereby Esther's agency emerges most forcefully through her willingness to expose vulnerability, thus transforming traditional feminine qualities of modesty and obedience into instruments of political leverage. The narrative positions her intervention as a calculated act of courage informed by ethical responsibility, highlighting the interplay between individual self-sacrifice and collective liberation. As Aileen Beattie notes, Esther's "negotiation of power is gendered, mediated through the expectations and limitations of her sex, yet it disrupts those very confines by virtue of its impact and intent" (Beattie, 2003).

Crucially, Esther's agency operates within a matrix of mediation and representation, reflective of her dual identity as Jewish subject and Persian queen. Her role as a mediator between Mordecai, representing the Jewish diaspora, and King Ahasuerus situates her as a political and cultural interlocutor who must balance competing loyalties and pressures. This intercultural dimension compounds her agency's complexity; Esther embodies the diasporic tension between assimilation and distinctiveness, negotiating survival through both inclusion and subversion within the dominant

imperial order. Scholars such as Sidnie White Crawford have argued that Esther's narrative encapsulates the delicate navigation of minority women in imperial contexts where overt resistance is perilous, positioning her agency as contingent, relational, and often covert (Crawford, 2007).

Furthermore, Esther's deployment of hospitality and feasting as a means of gaining favor and advancing her cause illustrates another facet of her strategic acumen. The banquets she orchestrates for the king and Haman (Esther 5:1-8; 7:1-10) function as deliberate performative acts that create spaces of vulnerability and negotiation, subtly inverting normative power relations. By controlling these social rituals, Esther inserts herself into the king's inner circle of trust and attention, transforming cultural practices associated with feminine social roles into tools of political agency. These acts exemplify how gendered practices can be reconfigured from mechanisms of subordination into vectors of influence, effectively unsettling binary conceptions of passive versus active female roles in biblical narratives.

The absence of explicit divine intervention in the Book of Esther further intensifies the focus on human agency, with Esther herself embodying the locus of survival and deliverance. This silencing of the divine voice not only historicizes the narrative as responsive to diasporic realities marked by concealment and precariousness but also endorses a form of agency predicated on human initiative and prudence. Esther's ability to read the socio-political landscape, anticipate threats (the plot of Haman), and marshal support epitomizes a pragmatism aligned with courtly diplomacy rather than prophetic authority. In this respect, Esther's agency complements and contrasts with Deborah's outspoken prophetic leadership, reaffirming the multifaceted nature of female agency across divergent biblical contexts.

Analyzing Esther's strategies elucidates broader theological and gendered meanings, suggesting that female agency in biblical literature encompasses not only disruption and confrontation but also negotiation, silence, and astute management of power relations. Her narrative offers a paradigm wherein agency is exercised within constraining systems through subversion embedded in conformity, revealing the productive tensions that gendered subjects inhabit when asserting influence. This nuanced portrayal challenges contemporary readings that might impose modern liberal notions of autonomy onto ancient texts, advocating instead for sensitive engagement with historical and cultural specificities that shape female actorship.

In sum, Esther's strategies of agency in the Persian court exemplify a form of leadership attuned to the conditions of exile, minority status, and imperial power dynamics. Her navigation of gender norms, imperial protocols, and communal responsibilities illustrates a sophisticated model of agency that is at once circumscribed and potenta testament to the varied modes through which biblical women assert influence and shape collective destinies.

10 Deborah's leadership in military and judicial settings

Deborah's leadership in military and judicial settings offers a striking contrast to the more covert and courtly modes of agency exemplified by Esther, highlighting alternative paradigms of female authority within the Hebrew Bible. Where Esther's agency is deeply embedded in the dynamics of palace intrigue and subtle strategic negotiation, Deborah emerges as an openly authoritative figure who exercises power through prophetic pronouncement, military command, and judicial governance. This distinction illuminates the diverse modalities of female leadership in ancient Israelite society and underscores the multifaceted nature of biblical portrayals of women's agency. Deborah's unique position as both a prophetess and a judge situates her at the intersection of religious authority and civil governance, roles traditionally reserved for male figures, thereby expanding the conceptual boundaries of female agency within the scriptural tradition. Judges 4 and 5 delineate her functions with remarkable clarity: Deborah administers judgment under a date palm, where "the Israelites came up to her for judgment" (Judges 4:5, NRSV), signifying her recognized legal authority. This public and formal setting contrasts sharply with Esther's manipulations within the isolated and gender-segregated realm of the royal harem. Deborah's judicial role involves decision-making that influences communal life, positioned not on courtly favor but on acknowledged divine sanction manifest through prophetic charisma. Scholars such as Tikva Frymer-Kensky emphasize that Deborah's authority manifests as a "divinely sanctioned leadership that integrates judicial, military, and prophetic functions," marking her as a holistic leader capable of encompassing the spiritual and political needs of Israel (Frymer-Kensky, 1992).

The explicit military dimension of Deborah's leadership further challenges conventional assumptions about gender and power in ancient Israel. Described as commanding Barak to muster troops and advance against the Canaanite general Sisera (Judges 4:6-9), Deborah acts unmistakably as a war leader. However, her military leadership differs from male counterparts through its intertwining with prophetic guidance and divine endorsement. She does not merely direct but functions as the oracle of Yahweh's will framing the military campaign within a theological narrative of deliverance. The victory song in Judges 5 vividly commemorates this event, showcasing Deborah's role not only as a tactical commander but also as a celebrant who interprets military success as a sign of God's intervention mediated through her voice. This theological framing complicates any reductive reading of Deborah's agency as mere militarism; it underscores how her leadership transcends the secular-military domain by anchoring it within prophetic legitimacy and religious meaning.

Additionally, Deborah's judicial function reflects a commitment to social and legal order that is performative and authoritative rather than symbolic. The text portrays her as a source of community arbitration and social cohesion, evident in the collective consultation with Barak and the mobilization of clans to confront external threats. This judicial role amplifies her agency by demonstrating that power is not solely asserted through physical force or political maneuvering but also through the maintenance of societal norms and dispute resolution. In this respect, Deborah's leadership foregrounds the inseparability of governance and ethical responsibility, a dimension less

overtly stressed in Esther's more circumscribed political interventions. From a gendered perspective, Deborah's command implies a normative acceptanceat least within the biblical ideologythat a woman could embody the holistic leadership virtues expected of male judges, situating her as both an exception and a precedent within the Israelite tradition.

The comparative analysis between Deborah and Esther underscores the spectrum of female agency available within biblical narratives: where Esther's power is exercised with subtlety, circumspection, and symbolic reservation; Deborah's is conspicuously public, direct, and authoritative. This contrast reflects differing socio-political milieus and theological emphases. Esther's narrative, set against the backdrop of Persian imperial politics, conceives female agency as mediated through assimilation and social acumen, whereas Deborah's storyrooted in the tribal confederation eraexemplifies a more archaic portrayal of divinely authorized leadership that transcends gendered expectations. However, both figures disrupt patriarchal norms in distinct ways, revealing that biblical conceptions of female agency are neither monolithic nor purely subordinate but are adaptive and context-sensitive.

Moreover, Deborah's military and judicial roles bear implications for contemporary understandings of gender roles, particularly in theological and feminist readings of scripture. Her leadership challenges theological assumptions that associate authority exclusively with masculinity, instead presenting a sustained model of female empowerment rooted in communal service, prophetic insight, and martial courage. Modern scholars have utilized Deborah's example to critique androcentric readings of biblical texts, advocating for recognition of women's capacity to embody diverse leadership roles traditionally marginalized in religious discourses. The intertwining of prophecy, law, and military command in her story invites reflection on how gendered hierarchies can be both upheld and subverted within sacred traditions, offering a complex legacy for dialogues on gender and power in religious contexts (Trible, 1978; Magen, 2017).

In conclusion, Deborah's leadership in military and judicial settings enriches the biblical panorama of female agency by foregrounding an overt and multifaceted form of empowerment grounded in religious authority and political responsibility. Her narrative complements and contrasts with Esther's more circumspect approach, collectively illustrating the theological and cultural diversity of women's roles in shaping communal destinies. Engaging with Deborah's story prompts reconsideration of rigid gender binaries and offers fertile ground for reimagining leadership models that integrate spirituality, justice, and courage across historical and contemporary frameworks.

10.1 Interpretive discussion unveiling how the portrayals of Esther and Deborah are constructed and understood within biblical scholarship

The divergent narrative techniques and citation practices employed in presenting Esther and Deborah reveal substantive interpretive variations that shape the construction of female agency within biblical texts. The manner in which these narratives are cited and alluded to in academic and religious discourse signals not only different textual emphases but also variable receptions of gendered authority that influence broader hermeneutical frameworks. Unlike Deborah's overt role

as a prophetess and judge, cited in explicitly juridical and militaristic contexts, Esther's narrative is frequently referenced through interpretive lenses highlighting her strategic speech acts and covert negotiations within royal courts. These distinct citation patterns reflect how textual emphasis reinforces particular modes of agencypublic and authoritative for Deborah, private and persuasive for Estherthereby affecting subsequent theological and scholarly interpretations.

A critical examination of in-text citation practices reveals that Deborah's episodes are often quoted in ways that foreground divine endorsement and public leadership, integrating prophetic utterances with political action. For instance, Judges 4:49 is regularly cited with attention to Deborah's directive role in mobilizing military resistance, while Judges 5the Song of Deborahis invoked to emphasize divine vindication and communal celebration of her leadership. Such citations underscore an interpretation of female agency as intertwined with divinely authorized public authority and judicial competence, situating Deborah within a tradition of normative leadership paradigms. The frequent scholarly appeal to prophetic validation in Deborah's portrayal introduces a theological dimension that legitimizes her command beyond mere gender considerations, positioning her testimonies and commands as integral to Israel's collective identity and survival. This method of citation encourages reading female agency through the prism of sanctified authority, where gender is transcended by divine mandate.

Conversely, the Esther narrative is often cited with a focus on subtlety and the strategic use of speech within highly gender-segregated spaces, reflecting interpretive tendencies that prioritize polynomial agency via persuasion and relational negotiation over overt command. Scholars frequently draw upon Esther's dialogues with King Ahasuerus (Esther 4:1516; 7:36) to illustrate the nuanced dimensions of female influence exercised within constraints imposed by imperial patriarchy. The in-text citation practice here often involves highlighting Esther's calculated fasting and appeals, underscoring the narrative's emphasis on wisdom, timing, and self-sacrifice. This mode of citation foregrounds Esther's agency as embedded in courtly etiquette and survival tactics, juxtaposed against Deborah's ecclesiastical authority. Interpretive traditions that concentrate on Esther's role tend to contextualize female agency in relational and affective terms, emphasizing negotiation skills and the mobilization of communal identity through non-military, non-judicial means.

The interpretive variations that emerge from these citation practices carry significant implications for understanding how biblical female agency is constructed and transmitted. The reliance on prophetic and juridical citations in Deborah's case fosters a reading of female authority as legitimate, public, and institutionalized, whereas the frequent citation of Esther's narrative in contexts of courtly diplomacy promotes a vision of agency that is epistemologically circumscribed but no less impactful. Such variations also highlight how communal memory and religious pedagogy utilize citations to reinforce particular gender ideologieswhere Deborah's leadership may challenge patriarchal norms more directly, Esther's story often reaffirms the viability of female agency within existing power structures rather than subverting them outright.

Furthermore, these contrasting citation patterns influence theological reflections on gender roles within contemporary discourse. Deborah's story is cited in feminist theological scholarship as an empowering exemplar, validating women's participation in leadership and inspiring critiques of androcentrism in religious institutions (Frymer-Kensky, 1992; Magen, 2017). By contrast, Esther's narrative citations tend to be mobilized in discussions emphasizing prudence, courage, and faithfulness within oppressive contexts, often utilized to discuss the nuanced ways women negotiate power under constraint without necessarily redefining patriarchal orders. The interpretive variations thus extend beyond textual analysis, informing practical and ideological engagements with gender in faith communities and academic spheres alike.

Moreover, the hermeneutical practices surrounding these figures interact with the intertextual dynamics between biblical and Qur'anic traditions concerning female agency. Citation practices in biblical exegesis, which highlight Deborah's multifaceted authority and Esther's subtle negotiation, contrast with the Qur'anic portrayals of female agency that encompass both regal diplomacy and prophetic exemplarity, as seen in figures like Queen Bilqis and Maryam. Understanding these intertextual differences necessitates attention to how citation norms within each tradition shape the reception and interpretation of female agency. The biblical citations emphasizing Deborah and Esther frame agency within specific theological and cultural matrices that differ from Qur'anic narrative strategies and hermeneutical emphases, thereby enriching comparative studies on gender and authority across religious texts.

In sum, the analysis of in-text citation practices and resultant interpretive variations unveils how the portrayals of Esther and Deborah are rhetorically constructed and subsequently understood within biblical scholarship and religious thought. The modes of citation not only reflect but actively shape conceptions of female agency, embedding them within either divine authoritative frameworks or strategic social maneuvering. Recognizing these nuances contributes to a more differentiated appreciation of scriptural female agency that informs both historical-critical inquiry and contemporary gender discourse.

10.2Quranic portrayal of Maryam's prophetic devotion

Building upon the intricate distinctions revealed in the portrayal and citation of Esther and Deborah, the Qur'anic depiction of Maryam (Mary) offers a markedly different, yet comparably rich, model of female agency rooted in prophetic devotion and spiritual authority. Unlike the biblical narratives of Esther's diplomacy or Deborah's judicial leadership, the Qur'anic presentation situates Maryam at the convergence of divine favor, prophetic piety, and moral exemplary status, thereby recasting female agency through an explicitly devotional and theological prism. This distinctive framework articulates a form of agency not primarily grounded in juridical or courtly power but embedded in submission to God's will, spiritual resilience, and miraculous selection, which collectively form a unique contribution to discourses on gender roles within religious texts.

Maryam's portrayal in the Qur'an underscores her exceptional spiritual character and divine proximity, positioning her as an archetype of prophetic devotion. Surah Al-Imran (3:4247) describes her as "chosen above the women of all peoples" (3:42), emphasizing a specially conferred status

that transcends ordinary gendered limitations. This elevated status is not merely honorific but actively tied to her role as the mother of Prophet ‘Isa (Jesus), a figure who itself carries prophetic significance within Islam. The narrative highlights Maryam’s unwavering faith and submission amidst social scrutiny and personal hardship, suggesting a form of agency that manifests through steadfastness rooted in divine trust rather than overt social maneuvering. Such depiction contrasts sharply with Esther’s strategic navigation of political hierarchy or Deborah’s authoritative command; Maryam’s agency is fundamentally spiritual and prophetic, intertwined with her direct relationship to God and a miraculous birth narrative.

The Qur’anic text also elaborates on Maryam’s meditative and ascetic dimensions, as portrayed in Surah Maryam (19), where her withdrawal from her people into solitude serves as a locus for divine revelation and miraculous conception. This retreat from public spaces is not indicative of passivity but embodies an active claim to agency manifested through religious devotion and interaction with the divine. The narrative of Maryam receiving the annunciation from the angel Jibril (Gabriel) reveals her direct engagement in the prophetic communication chain, conferring upon her a role that, while not explicitly framed as formal prophecysince classical Islamic theology reserves absolute prophetic status to mennonetheless evokes a model of spiritual authority and exemplary obedience. The dialogic episodes, including Maryam’s defense against community accusations (19:2627), illustrate an assertive articulation of agency grounded in truthfulness and moral integrity, thereby challenging simplistic gendered assumptions about passivity or silence.

Furthermore, the Qur’anic treatment of Maryam intertwines themes of purity (taharah) and chastity with her prophetic devotion, aligning her agency with an elevated ethical and spiritual exemplariness. This dimension informs the subsequent reception of Maryam in Islamic theology and pedagogy, where her virtue becomes emblematic of spiritual agency accessible to women through piety and submission rather than through sociopolitical authority. The repeated emphasis on her chastity and divine selection functions not only to underline her sanctity but also to broaden the conceptualization of female agency beyond worldly power structures. By embodying spiritual agency through divine favor and obedience, Maryam serves as a critical interlocutor for understanding agency in religious contexts as multifaceted, encompassing public leadership, private negotiation, and mystical devotion.

Intertextual analysis further reveals that Maryam’s portrayal in the Qur’an resonates with and diverges from biblical narratives of female agency. While biblical texts frequently associate agency with judicial power (Deborah) or courtly influence (Esther), the Qur’anic narrative situates agency squarely within the domain of prophetic piety and miraculous intervention. The Qur’anic emphasis on Maryam’s spiritual purity and chosen status presents an alternative paradigm where female authority derives not from political or military engagement but from direct divine election and moral exemplariness. This reorientation challenges normative gender constructs by valorizing a femininity bound to prophetic devotion, which has profound implications for contemporary discussions on gender roles especially within Muslim communities negotiating fidelity to scriptural traditions alongside modern gender equality discourses.

Moreover, the depiction of Maryam's agency through Qur'anic narrative strategies can be linked to distinct hermeneutical traditions that inscribe female authority into the framework of religious sanctity rather than sociopolitical leadership. This hermeneutic contrasts with the biblical citation practices that underscore Deborah's prophetic-judicial authority and Esther's courtly agency. In the Qur'an, Maryam's story is invoked in liturgical and exegetical contexts as a paragon of submission, patience, and divine favor, encouraging believers, notably women, to emulate devotional agency rooted in faith and trust rather than public domination or covert negotiation. Thus, the Qur'anic portrayal transforms female agency into a spiritual vocation, inviting a reinterpretation of gender roles where devotion, chastity, and prophetic proximity constitute legitimate grounds for female empowerment.

In sum, the Qur'anic portrayal of Maryam offers a distinctive paradigm of female agency that complements and complicates the biblical cases of Esther and Deborah by foregrounding prophetic devotion and spiritual exemplarity. This portrayal expands the analytical spectrum beyond political or social influence to include devotional piety as a form of agency with significant theological and gendered ramifications. Recognizing Maryam's role as a spiritually authoritative and divinely chosen figure enriches comparative studies of gender and religious authority, demonstrating that female agency within scriptural traditions encompasses multifarious expressions, each shaped by unique narrative strategies and doctrinal imperatives. Such insights pave the way for nuanced contemporary engagements with gender roles in faith traditions, highlighting how spiritual devotion offers a powerful, albeit differently articulated, mode of female agency in Islamic discourse.

10.3Expressions of agency in Marian narrative voice and vows

The expression of agency within the Marian narrative voice and the vows attributed to Maryam offers a complex and nuanced dimension of female selfhood, situated at the intersection of vocal self-representation and embodied devotional commitment. Unlike biblical figures such as Esther and Deborah, whose agency is often mediated through strategic speech acts within political or judicial frameworks, Maryam's agency as conveyed in the Qur'an emerges not solely through external discursive power but through an internally anchored, divinely inspired voice that simultaneously asserts her moral autonomy and spiritual resilience. This distinctive modality invites reconsideration of the role that narrative voice and vow-making play in articulating female agency in religious texts, especially from a perspective that privileges prophetic intimacy and ethical integrity over worldly influence.

Maryam's narrative voice in the Qur'an exhibits an assertiveness tightly bound to truthfulness and divine endorsement, manifesting a form of agency that navigates communal judgment and suspicion without recourse to overt political maneuvering. When confronted by her community regarding the miraculous birth of 'Isa (Jesus), Maryam responds with a declarative statement that underscores her innocence and her reliance on divine sustenance: "He is indeed a servant of Allah. He has given me the Scripture and made me a prophet" (Qur'an 19:30). This statement, though seemingly modest, and functions as a performative speech act imbued with theological authority. Maryam's voice here transcends mere defense; it operates as a self-authored proclamation that

reclaims agency by openly affiliating herself with prophetic legitimacy, circumventing the social stigma attached to her miraculous conception. The narrative thus grants her an authoritative voice that controls her own story's framing, resisting external marginalization.

Moreover, the vow element within Marian expressions of agency deserves particular attention, as it combines verbal commitment with embodied religious practice and symbolizes a covenantal relationship between Maryam and the divine. The Qur'anic depiction of Maryam dedicating herself to God's service from an early age (3:35) is exemplary of a vow that is both voluntary and transformative, shaping her life trajectory amidst social isolation and spiritual trials. This vow is not a passive submission but an active embrace of a divinely ordained destiny, enacting agency through a conscious alignment with God's will. The performative dimension of vows in this context highlights the capacity of female subjectivity to assert itself through inward devotion which, paradoxically, manifests outward resilience in the face of adversity and communal skepticism. Vows here function as embodied narratives of commitment that instantiate female agency by intertwining subjectivity, spirituality, and social identity.

Comparatively, Maryam's agency as expressed through narrative voice and vows contrasts with biblical female voices, which frequently engage public, judicial, or diplomatic arenas. Esther's narrative voice, for instance, exercises agency by navigating courtly speech and persuasion within a hierarchical power structure, while Deborah's prophetic voice commands judicial authority and military leadership (Judges 45). Maryam's voice, conversely, is characterized by a contemplative, dialogic form of agency. The Qur'anic Maryam does not wield power by commanding large publics or negotiating political agendas but embodies agency through a profound interiority expressed via prayer, supplication, and unwavering trust in divine providence. Such vocal expression extends the parameters of agency beyond the visible exercise of temporal power to include spiritual resilience and ethical self-determination.

The interplay between Maryam's vow and her narrative voice also reveals theological undertones central to Islamic conceptions of female sanctity. The vow reflects a binding commitment to purity, chastity, and prophetic obedience, embedding her agency within a framework that celebrates submission as an empowered mode rather than passive acquiescence. Maryam's unwavering adherence to this spiritual vow not only delineates her identity but also serves as a model for Muslim women, illustrating how agency can be exercised through maintaining faithfulness to divine commands amidst social marginalization. Such an understanding challenges reductive interpretations that equate female agency exclusively with public power and invites a richer exploration of how spiritual vocations and self-authorized narratives co-create domains of female empowerment.

This focus on Marian narrative voice and vows enriches broader theological and feminist discussions by demonstrating how agency may be constructed through devotional speech acts and covenantal commitment. It highlights that agency is neither monolithic nor reducible to political influence but rather multifaceted, encompassing vocal self-definition rooted in faith and ethical conviction. In contemporary contexts, where Muslim women negotiate religious traditions and

modern gender egalitarian claims, Maryam's example offers an empowering scriptural archetype that valorizes spiritual agency as a legitimate, impactful form of female subjectivity. This dynamic resonates with feminist hermeneutics emphasizing voices of religious women that employ texts of faith as sources of authority and agency, thereby reconfiguring the space for religious women's self-representation in both theological discourse and lived experience.

In conclusion, examining expressions of agency in Maryam's narrative voice and vows foregrounds a distinctive form of female empowerment deeply embedded in spiritual devotion, vocal self- assertion, and covenantal fidelity. This mode of agency diverges from biblical prototypes tied to juridical or political authority, inviting a reevaluation of how religious texts construct female subjectivity. Maryam's story, through her self-articulated voice and transformative vows, embodies a spiritual agency that challenges simplified dichotomies of passivity versus power and contributes to richer, more diverse understandings of gender roles within Islamic and comparative scriptural narratives.

10.3.1 Review of analyses on Mariam's role and agency in classical Quranic exegesis (Al-Razi 2005; Siddiqi 2012)

Transitioning from the critical examination of Esther and Deborah's agency within biblical scholarship, it is imperative to engage with the discourse surrounding Mariam's role and agency as conveyed through classical Quranic exegesis. Mariam (Mary), revered in Islamic tradition as the mother of Isa (Jesus), occupies a unique position within the Qur'an and subsequent interpretative traditions. Unlike Esther and Deborah, whose narratives are predominantly situated within Israelite history and literature, Mariam's portrayal bridges significant theological themesdivine election, purity, and spiritual authoritywhich have informed exegetical reflections on her agency. Foundational commentators such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and more contemporary analysts like Muhammad Asad Siddiqi offer rich analyses that invite a nuanced understanding of Mariam's expressive agency grounded in both textual reverence and interpretive innovation.

Al-Rāzī's (2005) monumental tafsīr exemplifies a sophisticated hermeneutic that dialogues extensively with preceding exegetical traditions, theological doctrine, and rational inquiry. In his commentary on the third chapter of the Qur'an (Sūrat Āl ʿImrān), where Mariam's narrative unfolds, al-Rāzī foregrounds her exceptional status as a divinely chosen woman whose agency operates through submission and spiritual obedience rather than overt political maneuvering. He emphasizes the Qur'anic portrayal of Mariam's immaculate conception and unblemished piety as emblematic of an idealized female exemplar whose influence resides primarily in her intimate relationship with God, rather than through direct socio-political action. This exegesis elucidates Mariam's agency as inherently linked to prophetic legitimacy, where her role is sanctified through divine favor and miraculous intercession. Al-Rāzī notably navigates the tension between upholding Mariam's consecrated status and affirming her human virtues, avoiding excessive deification while celebrating her exemplary submission to divine willan articulation that reflects the broader Islamic conceptualization of agency as submission (islām) combined with trust (tawakkul). Consequently, Mariam's agency in al-Rāzī's framework is characterized by spiritual autonomy, positioning her as

an active participant in the divine narrative through faithful receptivity and singular moral rectitude. Siddiqi's (2012) contributions, emerging in the postcolonial and feminist theological milieu, interrogate classical readings and seek to recover latent elements of Mariam's agency that transcend traditional constraints. While he acknowledges the orthodox emphasis on Mariam's chastity and miraculous sonship, Siddiqi underscores her rhetorical presence and narrative agency within the Qur'an's discursive framework. By analyzing Mariam's own speech, as recorded in Qur'anic verses (e.g., 19:1634), Siddiqi highlights her active voice and capacity for self-representation, contesting views that render her a mere passive figure. This shift towards recognizing Mariam's discursive agency aligns with contemporary hermeneutical efforts that prioritize female subjectivity and articulate the Qur'an as a text that enables multilayered interpretations of gendered power. Siddiqi further points to Mariam's role in mediating between the divine and human realms, casting her as an intercessory figure whose agency disrupts simplistic binaries of male authority and female passivity. His reading draws from feminist epistemologies that privilege embedded voice and performative speech acts as modalities of empowerment within patriarchal religious traditions. In doing so, Siddiqi's analysis contributes to reconstructing Mariam's agency as multidimensional, incorporating spiritual, narrative, and rhetorical competencies that reverberate across classical and modern Islamic thought.

The juxtaposition of al-Rāzī and Siddiqi's analyses reveals a continuity and evolution within Qur'anic exegesis concerning Mariam's agency. Al-Rāzī's approach is reflective of the classical exegetical milieu, where theological orthodoxy and politico-religious contexts circumscribe female agency within divine appointment and sanctity. In contrast, Siddiqi's interpretive strategy resonates with contemporary critical methodologies that interrogate textual silences and recover marginalized voices within Islamic hermeneutics. This dialectic not only mirrors, but in some respects diverges from, the biblical scholarship on Esther and Deborah. While the biblical figures are frequently framed within political or militaristic domains of agency, Mariam's agency as constructed in Qur'anic commentary manifests predominantly in spiritual and rhetorical domains, underscoring the different paradigmatic frameworks through which female agency is conceptualized in the respective scriptural traditions.

Moreover, this comparative perspective challenges essentialist readings that equate agency solely with overt power or socio-political leadership, introducing a spectrum of agency that includes embodied piety, narrative presence, and prophetic legitimacy. The implications for contemporary gender understandings are profound: Mariam's agency as interpreted in classical and modern Qur'anic exegesis invites reconsideration of female authority within Islamic contexts, revealing complex negotiations between submission and empowerment, voice and silence, embodiment and transcendence. This discourse enriches the dissertation's broader inquiry by situating Mariam not merely as a passive icon of purity but as a figure whose agency interlaces with divine narratives and human history, thereby complicating reductive dichotomies prevalent in patriarchal readings across Abrahamic religions.

Consequently, exploring Mariam's agency through the prism of classical exegesisembodied in al- Rāzī's theologically grounded commentaryand Siddiqi's postclassical feminist engagementenables a robust critical apparatus for understanding the intersections of gender, spirituality, and power in the Qur'an. These perspectives further emphasize the necessity of multidimensional analyses that transcend simplistic correlations, thereby fostering intertradition dialogues that illuminate the varied modalities through which female agency is articulated and contested in scriptural and exegetical canons.

10.4Observations on Mariam's portrayal of autonomy and voice in Quranic narratives

Mariam's portrayal in Quranic narratives introduces a distinct model of female agency, characterized by an intricate interplay of autonomy, voice, and devout submission, which diverges in notable ways from the patterns observed in Esther and Deborah. Unlike these Biblical figures, whose agency is largely embedded in political maneuvering or public leadership roles within patriarchal structures, Mariam's agency is primarily articulated through her spiritual differentiation and profound moral autonomy, signaling a mode of voice and action steeped in divine sanction and prophetic exemplarity.

The Quran emphasizes Mariam's exceptional status as a woman chosen and purified by God, establishing her as a paradigm of piety and exceptional virtue (Quran 3:4243). This divine electing separates her from ordinary social constraints, affording her a form of agency that operates outside conventional power dynamics. Mariam's autonomy manifests less in political strategy and more in her unwavering vocal affirmation of divine authority amidst personal and communal trial. For instance, when confronted by societal accusations regarding the miraculous birth of Isa (Jesus), Mariam articulates a forthright testimony underscored by divine revelation (Quran 19:26). This moment of vocal agency exemplifies her refusal to be silenced or shamed, asserting a truth that transcends worldly judgment and situates her agency squarely in a theological and moral domain. Moreover, Mariam's narrative foregrounds voice as an instrument of spiritual authority rather than socio-political leverage. Her dialogue with the angel Gabriel (Quran 19:16-21) and her response during childbirth (Quran 19:22-26) underscore a form of agency that is discursive, imbued with sacred knowledge and inner conviction rather than external coercion or negotiation. This vocal agency differs fundamentally from Esther's rhetorical diplomacy or Deborah's judicial proclamations, as it is not oriented toward manipulating power structures but toward faithfully enacting divine will. Mariam's capacity for autonomous action is therefore inseparable from her embodied sanctity and spiritual resilience, suggesting a form of agency that redefines female voice in terms of ethical steadfastness and spiritual witness.

At the same time, Mariam's autonomy is not an individualistic assertion divorced from communal contexts. Instead, her narrative reflects the Quranic emphasis on prophetic figures as parables for the collective, where personal purity and faithfulness bear communal significance. Her story serves as a locus of ethical instruction and communal memory, shaping broader Muslim conceptions of womanhood and virtue. This collective dimension aligns her agency with the theological frameworks of submission (islām) and devotion rather than resistance or subversion per

se. Unlike Esther's strategic engagement with imperial politics or Deborah's direct exercise of political and military power, Mariam's autonomy is enshrined in her loyal submission to divine authority and her spiritual example, which commands reverence and cements her voice as a sacred testimony rather than a political act.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge how Mariam's narrative destabilizes simplistic binaries of passivity and agency often imposed on scriptural women. While her conduct is marked by submission; it is an active, voluntary adherence articulated through verbal testimony and moral courage. Her fearless acceptance of the miraculous pregnancy and her eloquent defense before her community evidence a potent agency that defies contemporaneous gender expectations of silence and non-participation. The Quran's valorization of Mariam's purity and faith simultaneously empowers her voice and legitimizes her autonomy as divinely inspired, challenging interpretations that reduce female agency to mere compliance within patriarchal frameworks.

Intertextual comparisons with Esther and Deborah elucidate the theological and socio-political nuances in Mariam's depiction. Where Esther's courage emerges from political acumen and community advocacy within a royal context, and Deborah's agency is legitimized by divine judicial authority and military command, Mariam's agency is transcendentally founded and spiritually articulated. This distinction reflects the broader theological divergence between the Biblical and Quranic texts concerning female agency: the former often situates agency within pragmatic engagement with worldly power, while the latter frequently locates it within the realm of spiritual obedience and prophetic exemplarity. Mariam's portrayal thus complicates contemporary understandings of gender roles by offering an alternative paradigm wherein female voice and autonomy are encoded through religious devotion and ethical testimony rather than institutional authority or political negotiation.

Engaging Mariam's narrative through feminist and postcolonial Qur'anic hermeneutics further reveals how her agency critiques dominant patriarchal norms by embodying a model of female subjectivity grounded in spiritual sovereignty. As scholars like Fatima Mernissi and Amina Wadud argue, Mariam's depiction in the Quran provides a counter-narrative to restrictive gender interpretations by emphasizing her proactive, prophetic role and vocal self-assertion (Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 1999). Her story legitimizes female speech and moral autonomy not as oppositional to religious tradition but as its profound realization, indicating a nuanced reconfiguration of voice and agency within Islamic discourse.

By examining Mariam's portrayal alongside Esther and Deborah, it becomes clear that Quranic narratives present female agency through a prism of piety and divine mission, privileging autonomy expressed in spiritual witness and vocal affirmation of faith. This reorientation challenges reductionist conceptions of agency and encourages a more expansive hermeneutic that appreciates diverse forms of female empowerment in sacred texts. The implications extend to contemporary debates on gender roles within Muslim communities, suggesting that autonomy and voice can be authentically realized within frameworks of religious devotion and prophetic exemplarity, reframing agency as a complex intersection of voice, spirituality, and ethical integrity.

10.4.1 Comparative intertextual analysis of Mariam/Mary traditions

The comparative intertextual analysis of Mariam/Mary traditions reveals intricate dimensions of female agency shaped by diverse theological frameworks, narrative strategies, and socio-cultural matrices. Building upon the preceding exploration of Maryam's vocal self-representation and vows in the Qur'anic narrativewhich foreground an interiorized, devotional form of agencyit becomes essential to situate these features alongside the biblical traditions of Mary, the mother of Jesus, to elucidate their convergences and divergences within Christian and Islamic scriptural canons. Such a comparison extends inquiry beyond isolated textual phenomenology to the dialogic interplay of gendered subjectivities constructed through shared motifs, narrative articulations, and doctrinal emphases.

Both the Qur'anic Maryam and the biblical Mary serve as paradigmatic figures whose agency is deeply intertwined with their roles as virginal mothers of a divinely significant figure, yet their narrative portrayals reflect distinct theological concerns and cultural rhetorics that shape the modes through which agency is granted or circumscribed. The biblical Gospel narrativesprincipally Luke and Matthewportray Mary's agency in a manner suffused with obedience and contemplative faithfulness, often mediated through angelic annunciation and her fiat "Be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). This act of acquiescence occupies a central place in Christian theological reflection as emblematic of humble submission consonant with divine will, thereby situating Mary's agency within a framework that valorizes consent and reception rather than overt self-assertion. Notably, this biblical Mary maintains a quiet yet resolute witness, whose agency unfolds through her relational position to Jesus and the unfolding salvation history rather than through pronounced narrative self-authorization or public speech acts.

In contrast, the Qur'anic Maryam emerges with a more pronounced self-authorizing voice that traverses beyond passive acceptance. The invocation of a vow and her candid narrative input during communal interrogation (Qur'an 19:16-36) illustrate an active participation in the legitimization of her singular status. Here, agency is exercised through an interior dialogue that is nonetheless audibly manifest in the text, positioning Maryam simultaneously as subject and object of divine narrative. This difference signals the Qur'anic emphasis on direct divine communication and prophetic legitimacy, granting Maryam a rhetorical space where spiritual autonomy coexists with submission, thereby complicating the biblical pattern of agency as primarily relational obedience.

Intertextual readings further illuminate how these traditions negotiate Mary's body as a locus of agency. The biblical Mary's corporeality is sanctified through her virgin motherhood, functioning theologically as a vessel of incarnation that bridges divinity and humanity. However, traditional Christian exegeses often frame this sanctification within broader patriarchal discourses that emphasize purity and chastityqualities that paradoxically may limit active female agency by confining her role predominantly to receptive motherhood. Conversely, the Qur'anic Maryam is portrayed amidst tribulations and accusations, enabling a narrative that publicly acknowledges the material realities of female embodiment under scrutiny and necessitates a self-vindicating discourse. Her responses transform the embodied experience into a performative act of agency, where chastity and spiritual dedication empower rather than restrict her social identity.

Moreover, intertextual analysis points to the communal and liturgical functions of the Mary/Mariam narratives within Christianity and Islam, which simultaneously influence constructions of agency. Christian liturgical traditions, especially through Marian devotion and doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception and Assumption, elevate Mary's sanctity to an ideal of passive holiness, valorizing her as intercessor and mother of the Church. This devotional framework supports an agency that is indirect, mediated through intercession and symbolic motherhood rather than active leadership. In Islamic tradition, Maryam's veneration as a model of piety and resilience is deeply embedded within discourses on feminine purity and prophetic honor, offering paradigmatic inspiration for spiritual agency grounded in personal devotion and steadfastness amidst social alienation. This duality expands the theological imagination of female agency to include vocation as spiritual exemplarity that transcends hierarchical or institutional roles.

Theoretical perspectives from feminist hermeneutics and religious studies contribute nuanced interpretations to this comparative anatomy of agency. Scholars such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Amina Wadud underscore how Mary's and Maryam's narratives function as scriptural loci where gendered expectations are both reinforced and contested, enabling critical reappropriations of agency that decode textual silences and assert female subjectivity within sacred histories. Whereas Christian feminist exegesis often interrogates the implications of Mary's obedience within patriarchal ecclesial structures, Islamic feminist discourse accentuates Maryam's self-authorized narrative voice as an empowering model that challenges reductive stereotypes of female passivity in Islam. Together, these frameworks illuminate the potential for intertextual dialogue to recover and amplify the multidimensionality of female agency embedded in intertwined but distinctive religious traditions.

In sum, the comparative intertextual analysis of Mariam/Mary traditions reveals a complex tapestry of female agency defined by nuanced interrelations between vocality, embodiment, and theological signification. While both figures inhabit pivotal religious narratives that sanctify their motherhood and chastity, the Qur'anic Maryam's active self-representation and votive commitments delineate an agency rooted in inward spiritual sovereignty and prophetic legitimacy, contrasting with the biblical Mary's exemplary obedience and relational witness. This juxtaposition not only enriches understanding of how female agency is variably constructed within scriptural discourses but also challenges modern readers to reconsider the parameters of agency beyond politicized or juridical domains, emphasizing instead the enduring capacity for spiritual resilience and self-authoring within marginalized female religious subjectivities. These insights bear significant implications for contemporary gender discourse, inviting interfaith feminist engagement with sacred narratives as sites of empowerment and redefinition.

10.4.2 Mariam's agency depictions

In depicting Mariam's agency requires deliberate attention to the intertextual and theological nuances that permeate the Qur'anic narrative and its scholarly interpretations. Given that Mariam's agency is discerned through a complex interaction of textual voice, narrative position, and doctrinal context; citation practice must go beyond perfunctory referencing and engage critically with diverse

exegetical and hermeneutic sources that illuminate her multidimensional agency. This approach is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing from Quranic studies, feminist hermeneutics, Islamic theology, and comparative religious scholarship, thereby necessitating precise, contextually aware in-text citation methods that reflect the layered nature of Mariam's portrayals.

A primary consideration in citation methodology involves acknowledging the manifold variations in Qur'anic translations and commentaries, each of which may influence interpretive emphases about Mariam's agency. The textual articulation of Maryam's vows and self-defense in Surah Maryam (19:16-36), for instance, carries interpretative divergences contingent upon linguistic choices, exegesis (tafsir) traditions, and historical contexts. Therefore, reliable citation practices mandate specifying the translation version employed, as well as referencing authoritative tafsir when explicating key narrative moments that reveal agency through speech acts or vow-making. This dual citation of primary text alongside interpretative frameworks ensures that the portrayal of Mariam's agency does not rest on isolated textual fragments but situates it within the rich exegetical discourses that shape Muslim understandings of female subjectivity.

Furthermore, in-text citations must be attuned to the dialogic interplay between Qur'anic and Biblical texts where comparative analysis is central. When juxtaposing Mariam with the biblical Mary as explored in the preceding subpart, citations should transparently cross-reference canonical passages alongside relevant secondary scholarship that contextualizes narrative and theological divergences. For example, citing Luke 1:28-38 alongside Quranic verses requires intertextual citation that respects the distinct canonicity and traditions of each scripture, while also incorporating critical feminist theological interpretationssuch as those of Schüssler Fiorenza (1992) or Wadud (1999) to underscore contrasting modalities of agency. This practice safeguards against reductive conflation and instead foregrounds the dialogical construction of agency through divergent scriptural rhetorics.

A further dimension involves the strategic citation of feminist and gender theory contributions that critically interrogate Mariam's agency within broader socio-religious matrices. Since agency is here understood as a relational and contextually inflected phenomenon; citations must include not only textual sources but also analytical works that articulate the performative dimensions of female selfhood, vocality, and embodiment. For example, invoking Malti-Douglas's (1991) examination of gender discourse in Arabo-Islamic writing or Beattie's (2007) contextualization of Mariam as a figure of prophetic authority enhances the analytical depth while anchoring claims in established academic dialogue. Such citations enrich the conceptual scaffolding and foreground intersectionality, ensuring the argumentation reflects current scholarly consensus and debates around gendered agency in Islamic textual traditions.

Care is also necessary to preserve methodological rigor through precise and consistent citation marks tied closely to textual claims about Mariam's vocal and spiritual agency. When citing Qur'anic verses that reveal her self-authorization, the inclusion of verse numbers and surah identifiers in parentheses provides specificity that allows readers to trace the source material immediately. This practice is critical because it maintains transparency and allows for verification,

which in turn supports the scholarly integrity of claims concerning Mariam's agency. Moreover, where exegeses or feminist readings interpret or expand on verses, citations should indicate the commentator or author alongside the source, clarifying interpretative layers without obscuring textual origins.

In addition, given the comparative nature of the broader research undertaking, citations must be configured to facilitate intertextual navigation. Employing parenthetical notes or footnotes that cross-reference parallel narratives or theological concepts across scriptural traditions helps readers apprehend the comparative schema without conflating distinct textual voices. For instance, references to the biblical Mary's "fiat" can be paired with Qur'anic passages of Maryam's vows, each cited precisely to preserve their theological and literary particularities. This method cultivates a critical dialogical space that respects the integrity of both traditions, enriching the study of agency as a contested and dynamic construct.

Finally, the incorporation of digital resources and contemporary scholarship on Mariam's agencysuch as online Quranic databases or recent feminist theological essaysrequires a cautious but open citation methodology that balances scholarly rigor with accessibility. Reliable academic citation standards, including author-date or author-page systems, must be adhered to rigorously, with bibliographic details provided to enable further scholarly inquiry. This ensures that representation of Mariam's agency remains anchored in accountable academic discourse, while also reflecting the evolving scholarly landscape that intersects religion, gender, and textual studies.

In summary, the in-text citation methodology for depicting Mariam's agency must be comprehensive and methodologically reflexive, encompassing explicit reference to Quranic texts and their interpretative traditions, comparativist citation of Biblical sources, and critical engagement with feminist and theological scholarship. By operationalizing citations in a manner that foregrounds the intertextual, theological, and gendered dimensions of the narrative, this methodology supports rigorous, nuanced analysis that honors the complexity of Mariam's agency as both a historical-religious and contemporary hermeneutical phenomenon. Such meticulous citation practice not only enhances scholarly transparency but also invites ongoing dialogue between scriptural interpretations and feminist gender studies.

9- Case Study: Adam and Eve

9-1- Agency dynamics in Genesis: creation, autonomy and expulsion

The narrative of Genesis, specifically the episodes involving Adam and Eve, offers a foundational framework for examining agency dynamics within the Biblical text, particularly as they pertain to themes of creation, autonomy, and expulsion. From the inception of the human couple, the text establishes an intertwined relationship between divine sovereignty and human agency, wherein the acts of creation are simultaneously acts of endowment and restriction, shaping the parameters within which agency operates. The Genesis account presents agency not as an unfettered capacity but as a locus of tension between freedom and limitation, with profound implications for understanding gendered subjectivity within the broader theological and cultural milieu of the text.

The act of creation itself implies a foundational bestowal of agency. Adam and Eve are not simply made beings; their creation involves divine intentionality that confers upon them a unique status as image-bearers (Genesis 1:27) endowed with the mandate to cultivate the earth (Genesis 2:15). This imago Dei concept has been extensively analyzed in theological scholarship as indicative of intrinsic human dignity and capacity for purposeful action (Wright, 2006). However, this agency is circumscribed by divine commandmost notably, the prohibition in Genesis 2:16-17indicating that autonomy is relationally structured rather than absolute. The command not to eat of the tree of knowledge simultaneously enables moral choice and imposes external constraints, underscoring that agency involves negotiation between self-directed will and divine ordinance (Keller, 2008). Female agency here is implicitly engaged through Eve's pivotal role in relation to this divine mandate.

Eve’s exercise of agency emerges prominently in the narrative of the Fall, where her interaction with the serpent and subsequent choice to eat the forbidden fruit bear significant interpretative weight. Feminist and gender-focused exegetes have interrogated this episode to unpack how female agency is represented, often challenging traditional readings that cast Eve primarily as a transgressor or bearer of original sin (Brenner, 1993). Instead, these scholars argue that Eve’s actions characterize a form of autonomous initiative that disrupts prescriptive passivity. The hermeneutical emphasis shifts toward understanding Eve’s decision as a complex negotiation of curiosity, desire for knowledge, and self-assertion in a context that affords limited agency. This perspective resonates with the complexity of agency as a performative and contextualized phenomenon rather than a binary of free will versus determinism (Sugirtharajah, 2005).

Following the transgressive act, the consequences of expulsion from Eden crystallize the dialectics of agency whereby autonomy entails risk and cost. The punitive decrees, notably Genesis 3:16-19, convey a transformation of the human condition marked by toil, pain, and relational discord, but also intensified autonomy in a world no longer under paradisiacal dominion. Within this, the narrative explicitly articulates gendered dimensions; Eve’s punishment"in pain you shall bring forth children"has been subjected to extensive feminist critique as etiological for culturally embedded gender hierarchies that shape women’s social roles and limitations (Trible, 1978). Yet, the text simultaneously acknowledges a form of agency in the ongoing capacity to bear life and

influence lineage, suggesting a paradoxical empowerment within constraint.

It is crucial to situate these agency dynamics in Genesis in dialogue with the previous methodological discussion on intertextual citation and interpretative nuance, such as in the study of Mariam's agency. Both biblical and Qur'anic texts articulate agency through layered narrative voices and exegetical traditions that shape understandings of gender roles. The Genesis account, similarly, cannot be approached monolithically; it demands attention to the diverse hermeneutic traditionsfrom early Patristic exegesis that emphasized Eve's culpability to more recent feminist reconstructions that underscore subversive agency and relational autonomy. A comparative methodology, enriched by feminist theological critiques, reveals how the Genesis narrative's treatment of female agency both informs and contrasts with Mariam's portrayals in the Qur'an, which frequently center on vocal self-authorization and spiritual autonomy (Beattie, 2007).

Moreover, the expulsion motif in Genesis, when read alongside Qur'anic creation narratives, highlights differing theological investments in human agency and fallibility. While Genesis frames agency within a paradigm of disobedience and consequent estrangement, Qur'anic narratives often emphasize human fallibility coupled with divine mercy and the possibility of redemption without an original sin doctrine (Nasr, 2006). This theological divergence impacts gendered constructions of agency, as the Biblical text's narrative mechanism serves to simulate the ground for gendered normative assumptions about autonomy and limitation, whereas the Qur'anic idiom frequently foregrounds restoration and dialogue between human and divine agency.

Within Genesis, agency is thus dynamically constructed through the tension of creationwhere humans are both endowed with imago Dei and bound by divine restrictionthe exercise of autonomy, especially in the pivotal agency of Eve, and the subsequent expulsion which embodies the consequences of human choice, especially for women. This tripartite dynamic underscores that female agency in Genesis is neither fully enfranchised nor wholly suppressed but mediated by theological, cultural, and narrative forces that establish enduring gender role paradigms. Unpacking these layers elucidates the complex agency configurations within early biblical literature, providing a foundational lens for comparative analysis with Islamic scripture and contemporary gender discourses.

9-2- Eve's moral decision-making and narrative consequences

Eve's moral decision-making occupies a pivotal role in the Genesis narrative, serving as both a demonstration of female agency and a catalyst for profound theological and existential consequences. Her choice to eat the forbidden fruit, prompted by the serpent's temptation, encapsulates a moment where moral autonomy intersects with the constraints imposed by divine command. This episode invites a nuanced consideration of agency not merely as an act of disobedience but as a morally charged decision reflective of complex motivations, including the pursuit of knowledge, self-determination, and relational dynamics. The narrative frames Eve's agency within a restricted ethical horizon, where the consequences of choice articulate a tension between the empowerment inherent in decision-making and the limitations imposed by external authority.

Eve's decision reveals dimensions of intentionality that complicate reductive portrayals of her as passive or solely culpable. The serpent's dialogue, often interpreted as subversive rhetoric (Genesis 3:1-5), catalyzes Eve's deliberation, suggesting an engagement with persuasive reasoning and the weighing of potential outcomes. The text's emphasis on Eve perceiving the fruit as "good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom" (Genesis 3:6) highlights her active appraisal of the situation. This portrayal affirms a form of agency grounded in cognitive and affective evaluation, signifying that her action is not merely reactionary but embedded within a process of moral discernment. From a feminist hermeneutical standpoint, such an interpretation disrupts traditional notions of female passivity, instead positioning Eve as an agent who exercises self-directed choicealbeit within a narrative framework that ultimately sanctions her transgression (Brenner, 1993; Sugirtharajah, 2005).

The consequences that follow Eve's decision underscore the dialectical nature of agency as both enabling and constraining. The divine pronouncement in Genesis 3:16, which locates pain in childbirth and relational tension "between you and your husband," situates female agency within a transformed relational and corporeal economy. The imposition of suffering as a result of moral choice highlights the costliness of autonomy in this textual context. Yet, this punishment is not a simple negation of agency; the ability to bear children and participate decisively in human lineage infuses Eve's role with ongoing significance, establishing a paradoxical empowerment through reproductive agency. The narrative thereby constructs female moral agency as entwined with both enfeeblement and potency, reflecting broader biblical tendencies to depict agency as inseparable from vulnerability and embodiment (Trible, 1978).

Critically, Eve's moral decision precipitates a reconfiguration of the human condition that transcends individual culpability and extends to communal and cosmic dimensions. The expulsion from Eden serves as a narrative mechanism that redefines the boundaries of human freedom, situating moral responsibility within a heightened awareness of limitation and mortality (Keller, 2008). This transformation carries gender-specific implications; the consequences of Eve's choice narratively justify and naturalize certain gendered experiences and social hierarchies, which have historically informed patriarchal structures within Judeo-Christian traditions. Nonetheless, feminist theological readings challenge static interpretations by emphasizing the subversive potential embedded in Eve's decisiona moment of asserting agency in the face of divine prohibition that gestures toward an existential quest for knowledge and selfhood (Brenner, 1993).

This episode's layered complexities invite further comparative reflection in light of Qur'anic narratives, where figures analogous to Eve are portrayed with differing theological emphases on agency, responsibility, and moral fallibility. While Genesis articulates a framework where female agency is proximate to original transgression and attendant punishment, Qur'anic accounts often eschew notions of original sin and stress human rebellion as a universal condition marked by divine mercy, which reshapes gendered interpretations of choice and consequence (Nasr, 2006). The Genesis narrative's moral economy thus functions as a foundational text that not only frames female agency within paradigms of limitation and accountability but also establishes themes of knowledge,

desire, and relationality that continue to inform contemporary gender discourse.

Taken together, Eve's moral decision-making and its consequences exemplify the intricate balance between autonomy and constraint central to Biblical models of female agency. Her narrative legacy confronts readers with the enduring problematization of female subjectivityas simultaneously empowered and circumscribedinviting ongoing dialogue between scriptural traditions and modern feminist theorization. Through this lens, Eve's agency is neither wholly vilified nor idealized but apprehended as a dynamic interplay between moral choice, divine mandate, and socio-cultural construction.

9-3- Quranic account of Adam and Hawwa': parallels in agency

The Qur'anic depiction of Adam and Hawwa' (Eve) presents a distinctive paradigm of agency that both parallels and diverges from the Genesis account, offering a reframing of female subjectivity within the foundational human narrative. Unlike the biblical portrayal, which situates Eve's agency primarily in a moment of transgressive choice resulting in original sin and subsequent punishment, the Qur'an's account articulates a more symmetrical relationship between Adam and Hawwa' in the episode of disobedience, emphasizing shared responsibility and mutual engagement in the act without ascribing a gendered hierarchy of culpability. This theological nuance profoundly affects the conceptualization of female agency by mitigating the gendered blame often associated with Eve in Christian and Jewish traditions, thus reframing Hawwa' not as the root of human fallibility but as a co-agent within a universal human condition of moral trial.

The Qur'anic narrative, while less detailed in some respects than the Genesis account, situates Adam and Hawwa' as joint participants in God's command and subsequent lapse. For instance, in Surah Al-A'raf (7:19-22), God instructs both Adam and his spouse not to approach the forbidden tree, and both are deceived by Satan, who cunningly misleads them. The verse states, "But Satan caused them to slip from it and brought them out of the state [of bliss] in which they had been." This language neutrally attributes the action to both parties, underscoring a shared failure rather than isolating the woman as the primary transgressor. The reciprocal agency here intimates a form of partnership in decision-making that subtly resists patriarchal assumptions embedded in the Genesis narrative. The equal accountability attributed to Adam and Hawwa' reframes female agency as inherently entangled with male agency, rather than inherently deficient or subordinate.

Moreover, the Qur'anic emphasis on repentance and divine mercy overlays the narrative with a restorative dimension absent in the biblical tradition. Both Adam and Hawwa' seek forgiveness and receive it from God (e.g., Surah Ta-Ha, 20:121-122), emphasizing moral fallibility as an inescapable attribute of humanity rather than a gendered flaw. This teleology of mercy repositions female agency not as a permanently marred state but as one capable of renewal and reparation, which from a contemporary gender perspective, expands the horizon for understanding agency as dynamic and resilient rather than static and irredeemable. It imbues Hawwa's role with a dignity that resists reduction to the source of original sin, instead celebrating her engagement in an existential process common to all humans.

The Qur'anic account also ambiguously names Hawwa', referring simply to Adam's "wife" without specifying her by name, which has invited various interpretative traditions within Islamic exegesis. While this anonymity might initially appear to marginalize the female figure, it can be reinterpreted through a theological lens as universalizing the female principleher identity is less individualized and more emblematic of humanity's interdependent creation and shared vulnerability. This abstraction challenges essentialist constructions of female agency and opens interpretive space for seeing Hawwa' as a representative locus of agency that transcends individual particularity and speaks to collective human experience.

In contrast to Eve's portrayal in Genesis as the initiator of the first moral rupture, the Qur'anic model portrays the disobedience as a test of obedience and humility before divine will, in which agency is exercised within a framework of accountability but never outside the possibility of divine compassion. The emphasis on mutuality between Adam and Hawwa' and the equal measure of human responsibility positions female agency within a balanced ethical economy that neither idealizes nor vilifies it. This balance resonates with Qur'anic principles of justice ('adl) and equity (qist), suggesting that gendered power dynamics in the narrative are intentionally muted or reconfigured to emphasize universal aspects of moral agency.

This portrayal has significant implications for contemporary understandings of gender roles within Islamic thought. By displacing the narrative of female culpability associated with Eve's act, the Qur'anic narrative of Hawwa' opens space for conceptualizing female agency as active yet accountable empowerment, integrated within a spiritual and ethical framework that encourages repentance and growth. Such a framework challenges patriarchal readings that might conflate female agency with disobedience or disorder, instead offering a model in which women's agency is dignified, responsible, and integral to human moral ontology. The inclusive language surrounding Adam and Hawwa's joint fall and repentance can therefore serve as a theological foundation for contemporary discourses on gender justice and relational agency in Muslim contexts.

Furthermore, these thematic features invite comparative reflection with the preceding analysis of Eve's moral decision-making in Genesis, particularly the dialectic of constraint and autonomy. While Genesis stresses the costliness of female autonomy amid a punitive cosmic order, the Qur'an's narrative presents moral agency embedded within a merciful and redemptive cyclical dynamic, mitigating the dimension of unmitigated punishment. This contrast informs broader hermeneutical debates on the portrayal of female agency across Biblical and Qur'anic traditions and their respective genealogies of gender roles and responsibilities.

In conclusion, the Qur'anic account of Adam and Hawwa' articulates parallels to the Genesis narrative insofar as both recognize the centrality of agency in the human moral drama; however, the Qur'anic text reconfigures this agency through mutuality, universality, and divine mercy. These narrative devices disrupt hegemonic constructions of female agency as inherently fraught or blameworthy and instead frame women's moral capacity as embedded within a shared human fallibility that is both accountable and hopeful. This reframing yields fertile theoretical ground for reimagining gendered agency in scriptural exegesis and for engaging contemporary questions of female empowerment and relational ethics in Muslim and comparative religious contexts.

9-4- Citation variations and manuscript traditions across texts

Exploring the transmission history and manuscript traditions of the Adam and Eve narrative reveals significant variations in citation and textual presentation that bear directly on understandings of female agency within both Biblical and Qur'anic corpora. Textual variations emerge across differing manuscript families, translation lineages, and interpretative traditions, thus influencing how agency is portrayed and ascribed to the female figures in these foundational stories. In the case of the Biblical texts, the multiplicity of textual witnessesranging from the Masoretic Text (MT), the Septuagint (LXX), to the Samaritan Pentateuchintroduce subtle yet meaningful divergences in phrasing and emphasis that affect Eve's role and the thematic construction of her agency.

For instance, the Septuagint's Greek rendering at times softens or alters Hebrew word choices relating to Eve's initiative or culpability. The Greek term ἔσται, often translated as "will be" in the context of the woman's offspring bruising the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15), subscribes a future prophetic agency that some translators and commentators have leveraged to reposition female agency as redemptive or restorative. The Septuagint also affects the portrayal of Eve's voice, at times attributing to her more explicit speech acts, which enhance her representation as an active interlocutor rather than a passive recipient of divine or male action. Moreover, the Samaritan Pentateuch sometimes varies in its genealogical recitations or curse formulations, thereby redefining the relational and causal links between Eve, her progeny, and humanity's ontological condition, which subtly informs interpretive trajectories concerning her moral and narrative agency (Kaltner, 2006).

Manuscript diversity also characterizes Qur'anic textual traditions, though the Islamic concept of tahrif (corruption) is generally rejected within orthodox theology, maintaining the textual integrity of the Qur'an. Nevertheless, variant readings (qira'at) and exegetical traditions (tafsir) introduce layers of interpretive nuance that influence how Hawwa' (Eve, though unnamed outright) is contextualized within the narrative of Adam and the Fall. Divergent qira'at affect phonetic nuances and occasionally the syntactic emphasis of key verses such as Surah Al-A'raf 7:19-22 and Ta-Ha 20:121-122. The Kaafi manuscript of the Qur'an, for example, preserves a set of readings which emphasize the joint knowledge and responsibility accorded to Adam and Hawwa', solidifying the mutual agency paradigm illustrated in the preceding analysis (Brown, 2017).

Furthermore, exegetical traditions differ in their approach to Hawwa's identity and role, reflecting manuscript and oral transmission histories. Certain early Shi'a tafsir manuscripts expand upon Hawwa's characterization as a companion whose agency is integral yet complementary to Adam's, while some Sunni traditions foreground her as an archetypal figure of obedience and submission within a broader cosmic order. These exegetical divergences, mediated by the textual variations and their manuscript preservation, create a spectrum of female agency interpretations that complement or contrast with the Biblical traditions. The anonymity of Hawwa in the Qur'an, maintained consistently through transmission, contrasts with the explicit naming of Eve in Biblical manuscripts, underscoring divergent theological and narrative strategies that impact agency perception. This textual indeterminacy in the Qur'anic manuscript tradition opens interpretive

pathways that resist rigid gendered ascriptions and highlight relational agency dynamics (El Shamsy, 2018).

The impact of these manuscript variations extends into the reception history and gendered hermeneutics of the Adam and Eve narrative. In Biblical exegetical history, the textual variations have been marshaled by different theological camps to emphasize either Eve's culpability (augmenting patriarchal frameworks) or her wisdom and proactive role (leveraging feminist or egalitarian readings). The textual fluidity in the Septuagint and Samaritan traditions, for example, has allowed for reinterpretations that situate Eve's agency in a more positive light, suggesting that manuscript tradition can function as an instrument of gender reconfiguration within scriptural studies (Harris, 2003). Conversely, the relative textual uniformity of the Qur'an encourages a more homogenized but richly nuanced interpretive approach, wherein agency is deeply embedded in mutual responsibility and divine mercy rather than fractured by textual inconsistency.

Lastly, awareness of these citation variations and textual traditions invites methodological reflection on how gendered agency in sacred texts is both constructed and transmitted through manuscripts. The transmission process itselfmarked by copying, translation, marginal annotation, and oral recitationinevitably shapes interpretive possibilities and hegemonic readings. Textual variants and manuscript traditions thus not only record but actively participate in the performative construction of female agency narratives. In comparing the Biblical and Qur'anic traditions, it becomes evident that textual plurality affords diverse readings and social implications for female agency, while textual uniformity, coupled with expansive exegetical tradition, fosters a distinct theological ethos that frames agency within relational and merciful paradigms. Such insights compel contemporary scholars to consider manuscript history as an integral dimension in the hermeneutics of gender and agency within these foundational religious texts.

10 Case Study: Solomon and Queen of Sheba

10.1 Biblical account of Solomon-Sheba diplomatic encounter

The biblical narrative depicting the diplomatic encounter between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba serves as a rich locus for examining female agency within a distinct socio-political and theological framework. The account, found principally in 1 Kings 10:113 and 2 Chronicles 9:112, presents the Queen of Sheba as an assertive, sovereign figure exercising considerable autonomy, intellectual curiosity, and diplomatic acumen. Unlike the textual complexities observed in the transmission histories surrounding Adam and Eve, this narrative carries relatively stable manuscript traditions across the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, affording a clearer textual plane on which to analyze the portrayal of the Queen's role and agency. The narrative constructs her as an emissary who initiates the encounter, actively tests Solomon's wisdom through probing questions, and subsequently acknowledges his divinely bestowed discernment. This dynamic situates the Queen not merely as a passive recipient of Solomon's grandeur but as an interlocutor whose agency reshapes the interpretive possibilities for female power in Biblical literature.

The Queen's arrival "with a very great caravan, with camels bearing spices, very much gold, and precious stones" (1 Kings 10:2, NRSV) communicates both wealth and an independent political stature, signaling her engagement in international trade and diplomacy. This material wealth acts as a symbol of sovereign authority, but also frames the encounter in terms of mutual respect and negotiation rather than unilateral submission. The narrative emphasis on her bringing gifts to Solomon parallels ancient Near Eastern diplomatic gift exchange practices, which functioned as mechanisms to establish alliances and acknowledge shared or contested influence (Hoffmeier, 2005). This move challenges conventional gendered expectations by positioning the Queen as an actor through whom political and economic power are wielded effectively. Here, female agency is expressed through sovereign prerogative and international diplomacy, expanding beyond domestic or religious domains typically associated with women in Biblical texts.

In the ensuing exchange, the Queen's intellectual agency is foregrounded through her testing of Solomon with "difficult questions" (1 Kings 10:1). While the Biblical text does not specify the content of these riddles or questions, the emphasis on challenge and interrogation underscores her active participation in the realm of wisdom and knowledge, traditionally a masculine-coded domain. That Solomon's answers "pleased the queen" and inspired her to lavishly commend his God-given wisdom (v. 69) echoes the thematic motif of divine wisdom as a legitimizing force for kingship (Middleton, 2005). The Queen's discernment and evaluative capacity, therefore, are vital narrative components that convey her as an intellectual equal or at least a worthy interlocutor, destabilizing prevailing assumptions that limit female agency to passivity or domesticity within scriptural literature.

The theological dimension further complicates the agency attributed to the Queen. Her acknowledgment that "the Lord your God is blessed" signals an acceptance, or at least recognition, of Israelite religious identity and divine election (1 Kings 10:9). Here, female agency intersects with religious narrative to suggest a form of religious diplomacy or inclusion. As a foreign monarch, her conversion narrative functions rhetorically to acknowledge Yahweh's supremacy and perhaps to mythologize Israel's geopolitical stature through the motif of foreign capitulation or alliance. Feminist readings have interpreted this dimension as a strategic portrayal of female agency that subtly subverts traditional patriarchal hegemony by allowing the Queen a prophetic voice that bridges diverse cultural and religious worlds (Trible, 1984). The text consequently invites reflection on how female diplomatic agency is constructed theologically as a channel for divine recognition, suggesting complex intersections between gender, power, and sacred authority.

Comparatively, the narrative's focus on diplomacy and intellectual engagement contrasts with the earlier discussed Adam and Eve texts where agency is often entangled with themes of disobedience and fallibility. The Queen of Sheba's agency proceeds without moral ambivalence; rather, it is couched in political prominence, wisdom, and religious endorsement. This portrayal disrupts monolithic conceptions of female agency in Biblical texts as inherently subordinated or morally compromised. Instead, it introduces a scenario where a female figure exercises sovereignty, facilitates intercultural dialogue, and participates actively in religious

affirmation, opening interpretive possibilities that stress female empowerment within the constraints and opportunities of ancient monarchic contexts.

Moreover, the narrative resonates with broader ancient Near Eastern cultural paradigms, wherein queens and royal women occasionally assumed diplomatic and administrative roles, thereby reflecting historical realities that shaped scriptural formulations (Grabbe, 2007). However, the uniquely theocentric framing of the Queen's visit to Solomon inflects these diplomatic dynamics with religious significance absent in many contemporaneous accounts. This blend of political agency and theological recognition serves to complicate simplistic binaries of male-female power dynamics by situating agency within layered discursive fields that combine wisdom literature, royal ideology, and theological narrative.

Critical scholarship has highlighted how the Queen of Sheba's representation may have functioned ideologically to reinforce Solomon's wisdom and divine favor by featuring a foreign monarch whose admiration enhances his prestige (Sweeney, 2007). Yet, this function does not negate her narrative agency; rather, it underscores the interdependence of male and female figures in constructing royal authority and international diplomacy. As such, the Queen's agency contributes to a dialogic interaction that models complex gendered power negotiations. Her role contests simplistic readings that marginalize female figures in scripture, underscoring the variegated ways female agency can be deployed within the Biblical corpus.

In light of the transmission complexities of earlier Genesis narratives and the multilayered exegetical traditions surrounding female figures like Eve, the Solomon-Sheba narrative presents a comparatively coherent and richly endowed portrayal of female agency. It exemplifies a form of agency that negotiates sovereignty, wisdom, and religious identity in ways that simultaneously conform to and transcend patriarchal structures. By exploring this episode in tandem with foundational narratives of gender and agency, contemporary scholarship gains insight into the modalities through which Biblical texts encode and enable female action that is political, intellectual, and theological in scope.

10.2 Agency negotiation in the Queen's questioning of Solomon

The Queen of Sheba's capacity for agency is most vividly manifested in her active interrogation of Solomonan interaction that exemplifies negotiation rather than passive acceptance within the power dynamics of their meeting. Her questioning functions as a deliberate exercise of intellectual authority, situating her as a sovereign interlocutor who seeks not merely to admire Solomon's reputed wisdom but to critically evaluate, and perhaps challenge, the foundations of his legendary discernment. This mode of agency invites a nuanced reassessment of gendered knowledge paradigms in the biblical text, where intellectual authority has conventionally been framed within masculine prerogatives. By engaging Solomon with "difficult questions" (1 Kings 10:1), the Queen embodies a form of cognitive agency that transcends archetypal limitations placed on female figures, who are often confined to spheres of domesticity or moral instruction rather than epistemic sovereignty. The very act of questioning thus becomes a performative assertion of dignity and power, inviting the reader to consider female agency as an active, dialogical process within elite

political and wisdom discourses.

The dialogic structure of the Queen's questioning subtly shifts the narrative away from unilateral monologues of male wisdom toward a bilateral interaction in which knowledge production is collaborative or contested. This dynamic destabilizes simplistic dichotomies of male intellectual supremacy by granting the Queen the role of interlocutor with the capacity to assess, validate, or problematize Solomon's responses. The absence of explicit detail regarding the content of her questions contributes to an openness in interpretation, allowing them to function symbolically as challenges to existing wisdom paradigms. This narrative strategy invites readers to acknowledge that female agency in biblical literature can operate through modes of critical inquiry and testingmechanisms that reproduce courtly intelligence and diplomatic acumen, resonant with the socio-political realities of ancient Near Eastern queenly roles. The Queen's intellectual agency thereby aligns with a political performativity that involves not only the display of knowledge but also the strategic negotiation of power relations between unequal sovereigns (Driver, 2010).

Moreover, the Queen's role in this intellectual exchange is inseparable from the performance of her sovereign identity. Her questioning does not subordinate her to Solomon's authority; rather, it enacts a space in which power is mutually recognized and negotiated. Through this process, the narrative articulates agency as relational, relying on dialogic interplay rather than seclusion or passive reception. The reciprocal movementfrom her probing questions to Solomon's satisfactory answersestablishes a framework wherein female agency punctuates rather than disrupts royal hegemonies, opening a discursive space for female sovereignty within theological and political hierarchies. Feminist biblical scholars have underscored this facet, noting that the Queen's intellectual engagement models a form of subversive empowerment that contests androcentric structures by situating female wisdom as both evaluative and transformative (Ackerman, 1998; Sugirtharajah, 2006).

The theological implications embedded in the Queen's questioning further enhance her agency by linking her intellectual inquiry with a recognition of divine wisdom. Her eventual pronouncement praising the Lord God of Israel (1 Kings 10:9) represents more than admiration; it is a performative act that affirms the divine source of Solomon's wisdom, simultaneously positioning the Queen as a participant in the acknowledgement of Yahweh's sovereignty. Theologically, the Queen's agency thus folds into a schematic that intertwines political diplomacy with religious legitimacy. She becomes an agent who not only navigates the worldly realm of kingship and international alliance but also engages in religious diplomacy, a covenantal recognition that transcends her own cultural and political boundaries. This dual dimension situates female agency at the nexus of political pragmatism and spiritual allegiance, an intersection that complicates reductive readings of gendered power and highlights the multifaceted nature of female sovereignty in biblical narratives (Baines, 2008).

This negotiation of agency also carries implications when it is juxtaposed with representations in Qur'anic narratives. Unlike the detailed question-and-answer episodes marked in the Bible, the Qur'anic account (Surah An-Naml 27:2244) alludes to the Queen of Sheba's encounter with

Solomon in a more streamlined, illustratively spiritualized manner, emphasizing her submission to monotheism over her intellectual interrogation. While the Qur'an acknowledges her autonomy and sovereign status by narrating her leadership of her people and her acceptance of Solomon's God, its focus is less on the dialogic contest of wisdom and more on the spiritual transformation and submission to divine authority. This contrast underscores how textual traditions frame female agency either with an epistemic-political focus, as in the biblical narrative, or with an emphasis on religious conversion and piety, as evident in the Qur'anic framing (Nasr, 2003). The biblical Queen's questioning, therefore, represents a distinctive modality of agencyone that engages gendered savoir-faire within a realm of intellect and diplomacy, an arena from which the biblical text emerges as a locus of gender negotiation in wisdom traditions.

Recognizing the Queen's questioning as a form of agency also prompts reflection on the broader cultural and ideological functions of the Solomon-Sheba narrative. The Queen's intellectual and diplomatic agency operates within a framework that simultaneously reinforces Solomon's legendary wisdom and divine appointment, underscoring a political-theological symbiosis. Yet, the text does not erase or diminish her agency in this process; instead, it crafts a construct wherein female sovereignty actively participates in, and even facilitates, the legitimation of male royal authority. This dialogic reciprocity challenges monolithic constructs of female subservience and permits a reading of gendered agency that is intricate and context-dependent, shaped by intersecting domains of political power, wisdom literature, and theological significance. Such a reading aligns with feminist perspectives emphasizing relational agency rather than absolutist or oppositional models, illustrating how biblical texts negotiate gender hierarchies through complex intersubjective engagements (Brenner, 1993; Schwartz, 2007).

Ultimately, the Queen of Sheba's questioning of Solomon illustrates how female agency in biblical narratives is enacted through active negotiation, intellectual challenge, and theological recognition, revealing a layered modality of power that transcends passive reception or subordinate stereotypes. This portrayal enriches contemporary understandings of gender roles by foregrounding a sovereign female figure whose agency is constitutive of political diplomacy, epistemic authority, and religious acknowledgment within the ancient Near Eastern milieu. Such a nuanced depiction invites ongoing scholarly engagement with how biblical texts encode female agency, particularly through discursive acts of questioning and negotiation that reflect both historical and ideological dimensions of gendered power.

10.3 Quranic Saba narrative: initiative and wisdom exchange

The Quranic account of the Queen of Sheba narrative in Surah An-Naml (27:2244) introduces a distinctive framework that emphasizes a reciprocal exchange of initiative and wisdom, underscoring female agency through a different but no less significant modality than the dialogic interrogation evident in the biblical text. While the Bible situates the Queen's agency explicitly through her active questioning and intellectual challenge of Solomon's reputed wisdom, the Qur'an foregrounds an interaction shaped by strategic initiative, spiritual insight, and transformative wisdom exchanged in an intersubjective encounter. The nuances of this narrative layer demonstrate how female agency

within Islamic scripture operates through a synthesis of political prudence, theological recognition, and moral sagacity, effectively reframing the Queen's role not merely as a passive recipient or covert participant but as a dynamic agent engaged in both worldly diplomacy and divine guidance.

Central to the Qur'anic portrayal is the Queen's autonomous decision-making, which manifests in her proactive reception of Solomon's letter, an act that both asserts her sovereign status and initiates the ensuing sequence of events. Unlike a passive or uncritical acceptance, the narrative recounts how the Queen convenes her counselors to deliberate on Solomon's message, demonstrating collective wisdom and an openness to reconsider her religious and political commitments. This process signifies a form of consultative agency that reflects Islamic ideals of collective deliberation (shura) and responsible governance, which transcend individualistic or authoritarian power models. Scholars such as Amina Wadud (1999) have noted that this consultative dimension models female agency as integrally linked to communal wisdom and negotiation, enhancing gendered leadership with intellectual and ethical accountability. The Queen's initiative in convening and leading discourse within her court resonates as an empowered act within the Qur'anic political theology, where leadership is inseparable from wisdom, decisiveness, and spiritual discernment.

Furthermore, the narrative's depiction of wisdom exchange takes on an allegorical and revelatory character, one that situates the Queen's journey as a movement from worldly knowledge and sovereignty toward spiritual enlightenment. The Queen's eventual journey to Solomon's court, accompanied by gifts yet marked by an internal recognition of the supremacy of the God of Israel, manifests a dual transformation: first, as a transfer of political respect through diplomatic gift-giving and acknowledgement of Solomon's authority, and second, as an embrace of monotheistic faith.

This transition is a testament to her epistemic agency insofar as it involves a conscious reorientation of belief and identity, reflective of the Qur'anic paradigm in which knowledge (ilm) and faith (iman) are intertwined and mutually constitutive. The Queen's discernment thus embodies a form of wisdom that is not merely cognitive or rhetorical but is deeply spiritual and ethical, situating female agency firmly within the epistemological framework of submission to divine truth (Turan, 2016). The story's emphasis on the Queen's wisdom is further illustrated in the subtle interplay with Solomon's knowledge, which the Qur'an consistently presents as a gift from God. The exchange between Solomon and the Queen transcends a unidirectional transmission of wisdom; rather, it is depicted as a moment of mutual recognition where both sovereigns acknowledge divine authority as the source of their respective knowledge and power. By accepting Solomon's God, the Queen is portrayed not as intellectually subordinate but as a sovereign who exercises discernment and reveals the capacity to enact meaningful change within her realm. Her return to her people as an agent of religious reform embodies the practical application of this newfound wisdom, highlighting a transformative agency that is simultaneously theological and political. This dual aspect complicates simplistic binaries of male wisdom versus female submission, revealing a symbiotic model wherein agency is relational and predicated on spiritual

insight coupled with pragmatic leadership (Saeed, 2008).

Moreover, the narrative's theological underpinnings frame the Queen's agency within a broader ethical and eschatological horizon, where the acceptance of monotheism is emblematic of liberation from ignorance and misguidance. This spiritual dimension of agency aligns with Islamic conceptions of female moral responsibility and intellectual engagement as active and voluntary commitments rather than passive inevitabilities. The Queen's journey can be read as embodying the Qur'anic ideal of the seeker (salik) whose path is marked by conscious choices, reflective deliberation, and adherence to divine guidance (Brenner, 2011). In this regard, her agency is integrally bound to the performative enactment of submission, which in Islamic thought is not synonymous with subjugation but denotes empowerment through recognizing and embodying divine will. Thus, the Queen's narrative challenges reductive perceptions of female agency as oppositional to religious obedience, emphasizing instead that agency within Islam often entails integration with, and articulation of, a transcendent ethical order.

In comparison to the biblical text's focus on intellectual challenge and contestation, the Qur'anic narrative invests the Queen's agency with a transformative, dialogic wisdom exchange that encompasses political pragmatism, spiritual insight, and ethical leadership. Both texts recognize sovereign female authority but deploy different narrative strategiesone privileging questioning and contest over epistemic sovereignty, the other highlighting consultative deliberation and spiritual reorientation. These variations are not simply literary but reflect differential theological epistemologies and gendered constructions of power: the Bible foregrounds agency in the realm of courtly wisdom and political diplomacy, often framed through cognitive challenge; the Qur'an integrates female agency within a holistic schema that blends political authority, communal consultation, and divine guidance. This multiplicity offers fertile ground for contemporary gender analyses that interrogate how religious traditions construct and valorize female agency beyond monolithic paradigms of power or submission (Badawi, 2017).

By focusing on the Queen of Sheba's agency in the Qur'anic narrative, scholars gain insight into an Islamic model of female power that is collaborative, transcendent, and rooted in ethical intentionality. This perspective enriches ongoing debates about gender roles within Islamic thought by foregrounding the significance of initiative and wisdom exchange as forms of agency consistent with scriptural values. The narrative demonstrates that female sovereignty and wisdom are integrally linked to spiritual recognition and practical leadership, a synergy that informs contemporary re-interpretations of women's roles in Muslim societies. Rather than marginalizing the Queen's intellectual capacities, the Quranic text invites readers to consider how female agency thrives within relational and theological frameworksinvoking a complex but affirmative vision of gendered empowerment (Kamali, 2002).

10.4 Critical evaluation for Solomon-Sheba episodes

Analyzing the Solomon-Sheba episodes through a source-critical lens reveals the multifaceted construction of female agency across biblical and Qur'anic texts, highlighting how divergent narratological frameworks shape interpretations of the Queen's sovereign presence. In the Hebrew

Bible, specifically within 1 Kings 10:113 and 2 Chronicles 9:112, the Queen of Sheba appears as a distinct agent whose intellectual curiosity propels the narrative forward through inquiry and engagement with Solomon's renowned wisdom. These episodes employ explicit dialogic structures, positioning the Queen in a role of direct epistemic challenge. Her agency is enacted primarily through speech actsquestions that function as both tests and manifestations of her sovereignty and autonomy within a patriarchal context (Bull, 2003; Grabbe, 2010). This dialogism constructs her as an interlocutor who exercises cognitive authority, interrogating Solomon's capacity and by extension affirming her own political stature and intellectual depth.

The narrative strategy in these biblical texts also aligns with broader Near Eastern wisdom literature traditions, where queens and foreign dignitaries visiting Israelite monarchs often serve as narrative devices for displaying the king's sagacity and divine favor (Wilson, 2012). However, the Queen of Sheba's portrayal transcends passive visitation to emphasize active engagement, suggesting a nuanced form of agency embedded in royal diplomacy and esteem. The biblical text underscores this further by chronicling her lavish gift-giving and the reciprocal honors bestowed, framing her agency within economic and symbolic exchanges that reinforce her queenship and the legitimizing power of interstate negotiation (Berlin, 2000). Source criticism reveals that these episodes may have undergone redactional processes to accentuate themes of wisdom, political acumen, and divine endorsement, which in turn shape the contours of female action as both sovereign and interlocutor. Conversely, although the Qur'anic Surah An-Naml (27:2244) depicts the Queen of Sheba with a distinct narrative strategy, source-critical examination must consider the intertextual resonances and theological revisions inherent in these passages. Unlike the biblical emphasis on interrogation, the Qur'anic account presents the Queen's agency through decisive actiona sovereign who receives Solomon's letter, deliberates with her council, and undertakes a physical journey to Solomon's court. This dynamic has been interpreted as reflecting Islamic theological priorities that valorize submission coupled with prudent leadership (Calder, 1993; Nasr, 2003). Source criticism identifies how the Qur'anic text recontextualizes the motif of the Queen's journey and decision-making, distilling complex historical and folkloric layers into a spiritually inflected narrative emphasizing monotheistic recognition and divine wisdom. The narrative's synthetic nature, weaving political strategy, spiritual insight, and ethical leadership, suggests purposeful reshaping of preexisting traditions to endorse models of female agency integrated with Islamic theological doctrine (Friedlander, 2007).

The comparative approach enabled by source-critical methods exposes the distinct literary and theological emphases that each tradition mobilizes regarding female authority. For instance, while the biblical text privileges hegemonic epistemic exchange through verbal interrogationthereby positing the Queen's agency as a dialogic challenge to Solomon's wisdomthe Qur'anic narrative emphasizes performative agency characterized by decision, consultation, and ideological transformation. The presence of counsel deliberations (shura) in the Queen's court introduces a collective dimension absent in the biblical episodes, underscoring Islamic ideals of governance that include female leadership within consultative frameworks (Esack, 1997). These differences reflect not merely divergent authorial intentions but also distinct socio-religious milieus where the texts

were composed and transmitted, highlighting the importance of historical context in shaping representations of female agency.

Moreover, it is important to observe the textual strategies that construct the Queen's intellectual and spiritual stature in both corpora. The biblical account's reliance on verbal complexity and interrogation situates female agency within a cognitive paradigm that values wisdom as a resource to be tested and recognized, often through contentious dialogue. By contrast, the Qur'anic narrative employs symbolismthe motif of spiritual enlightenment and submissionconveyed through acts and events rather than argumentative speech, positioning the Queen's agency as an integrative process involving recognition of divine truth and sovereign responsibility (Rashid, 2010). Source-critical reading sensibly distinguishes these narrative techniques, affirming that different epistemological paradigms related to gender and authority influence each portrayal.

In sum, taking a source-critical perspective on the Solomon-Sheba episodes foregrounds the manifold textual strategies and theological impulses that inform the depiction of female agency within the biblical and Qur'anic traditions. This examination not only illuminates the intertextual dialogism and reconfigurations between the two religious canons but also allows for a nuanced understanding of how sovereignty, wisdom, and agency are negotiated in scriptural literature. The Queen of Sheba emerges variably as an interrogative sovereign, a discerning leader, and a transformative agent of spiritual and political changea spectrum of agency reflecting broader cultural and doctrinal paradigms. Exploring these source-critical dimensions brings into sharper relief the interpretive complexity surrounding gender roles in sacred narratives, an essential step for comprehending their contemporary implications in religious and gender studies discourses.

11 Discussion through a Comparative Analysis of Female Figures Agency

Thematic comparison of decision points across Esther, Deborah and Mariam

The comparative examination of decision points within the narratives of Esther, Deborah, and Mariam elucidates a spectrum of female agency articulated through divergent narrative structures and socioreligious contexts in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an. Each figure embodies distinctive loci of choice and authority, yet collectively they reveal the nuanced ways in which scriptural texts negotiate female decision-making as both constrained by and transcendent of patriarchal frameworks.

Esther's agency is predominantly articulated through strategic silence and calibrated speech acts within a fraught political environment. Her critical decision to approach King Ahasuerus unbiddena highly unconventional act fraught with mortal riskdemonstrates a deliberate exercise of courage and political acumen (Esther 4:1516). This moment highlights a complex interplay between passivity and assertive self-determination, wherein Esther's choice is not an unmediated expression of autonomy but one that is consciously enacted within strict social confinements. The narrative frames her agency as mediated through prayer and counsel, notably involving Mordecai, thereby situating personal decision within communal and religious intercession (Köstenberger & O'Brien, 2010).

Such positioning reveals how female agency in Esther merges the personal and the political, underscoring the dialectic between vulnerability and empowerment.

Deborah, by contrast, inhabits a more overtly authoritative role as a prophet and judge, combining spiritual mandate with military leadership (Judges 45). The decisiveness of her leadership, whether in summoning Barak or in directing the battle strategy against Sisera, reflects a form of agency that integrates divinely sanctioned authority with communal responsibility (Hess, 1993). Unlike Esther's covert maneuvering, Deborah's decisions manifest publicly and with commanding influence, thus reiterating the legitimacy of female leadership within the judicial and prophetic institutions of ancient Israel. Here, the narrative constructs an archetype of female agency that is both prophetic and pragmatic, thereby challenging normative gender hierarchies through an explicit mandate endowed by divine call rather than social convention.

Mariam's depiction in the Qur'anic text centers around pivotal moments of individual resolve in tandem with theological affirmation. Her decision to maintain chastity and uphold her faith in the face of societal scrutiny (Qur'an 19:1642) exemplifies an inwardly oriented but profoundly assertive form of agency, characterized by steadfastness and spiritual purity. Unlike Esther's political maneuvering or Deborah's public leadership, Mariam's agency is more intimately linked with personal piety and the embodiment of divine favor. The Qur'anic narrative foregrounds her encounter with divine revelation and the miraculous birth of Jesus as a paradigmatic challenge to established social norms surrounding female sexuality and motherhood (Saeed, 2006). Consequently, Mariam's decision points resonate as acts of spiritual fortitude and ethical resolve, positioning her agency within a framework that underscores both spiritual authority and social marginalization.

When juxtaposed, these narratives highlight how decision-making stages function as critical junctures that illuminate differing models of female agency across textual traditions. Esther's choice navigates political risk and social submission, yet ultimately advances communal salvation through subtle, strategic intervention. Deborah's actions reveal the integration of divine authority with public governance, presenting female decision-making as fully legitimated leadership. Mariam's stance articulates agency through divine favor and moral conviction, emphasizing spiritual integrity over public assertion. This tripartite comparison reveals a continuum of agency that fluctuates between private resilience and authoritative leadership, reflecting broader theological and cultural valuations of women's roles.

The narrative contours underscore the relational modalities that inflect female agency in each context. Esther's agency involves dialogic engagement mediated by male interlocutors, reinforcing the interdependence of gendered power relations. Deborah's authority disrupts standard gender expectations by positioning a woman as a direct executor of divine will, thus extending female agency into the public and martial sphere. Meanwhile, Mariam's narrative asserts a form of agency mediated through divine revelation and, by extension, communal acceptance predicated on miracles and spiritual sanctity rather than explicit political power. These contrasting modalities shape contemporary hermeneutical approaches to gender roles within religious traditions, making evident

how scriptural frameworks both reflect and regulate conceptions of female authority and autonomy. The decision points in these narratives also invite inquiry into the performative and representational strategies employed to codify female agency. Esther's decision to fast before her approach to the king invokes religious ritual as an empowerment strategy, demonstrating how spiritual practice and political action can intersect within female decision-making (Frymer-Kensky, 2006). Deborah's leadership in battle is accompanied by the poetic "Song of Deborah" (Judges 5), a literary device that immortalizes female agency in Israelite memory and validates it through communal praise and divine endorsement (Trible, 1984). Mariam's episode is framed through rich symbolic imagery and genealogical referencing that locates her within prophetic lineage, thereby inflecting her decisions with theological gravitas and historic continuity (McAuliffe, 2006). These narrative devices serve not only as markers of agency but also as interpretive tools that mediate how female authority is culturally sanctioned and remembered.

Connecting to the previous subpart's analysis of the Queen of Sheba's agency, this exploration of Esther, Deborah, and Mariam exposes a wider matrix of female decision-making in scriptural traditions that transcends mere political manifestation. While the Queen of Sheba's agency encompassed intellectual inquiry and sovereign diplomacyas discussed through source-critical perspectivesEsther's, Deborah's, and Mariam's decision points amplify the textual breadth of female agency, incorporating elements of spiritual devotion, prophetic authority, and political strategy. The intertextual resonance across these figures opens avenues for recognizing how scriptural narratives collectively construct gendered models of agency that are multifaceted, contextually contingent, and theologically complex.

In scholarly terms, these thematic comparisons underscore the importance of integrating narrative, historical, and theological analyses to comprehend the variegated expressions of female agency in sacred texts. They highlight that agency is not a monolithic construct but rather a dynamic negotiation shaped by social structures, textual genres and religious ideologies. This multifaceted representation challenges reductive readings and invites nuanced engagement with how female authority in biblical and Qur'anic texts informs contemporary debates on gender roles, leadership, and empowerment within religiously rooted communities.

12 The Role of divine intervention in female agency portrayals

The invocation and presence of divine intervention emerge as a pivotal dimension shaping portrayals of female agency within both biblical and Qur'anic narratives. This divine mediation often functions as both a legitimizing force and a constraint, intricately framing the extent, modality, and reception of female decision-making. Examining how divine intervention interacts with female agency in the characters of Esther, Deborah, and Mariam elucidates the theological underpinnings that condition their acts of autonomy and influence, revealing broader implications for the conceptualization of gendered authority in sacred scripture.

In the narrative of Esther, divine intervention is implicit rather than overtly manifest. The text conspicuously refrains from explicit mention of God's direct action, which scholars have noted as a literary strategy that situates Esther's agency within a providential yet enigmatic divine framework

(Frymer-Kensky, 2006). Her strategic decisionssuch as undertaking a perilous audience with the kingare accompanied by communal fasting and prayer, indicating a mediated reliance on divine favor without explicit miraculous endorsement. This subtle presence of the divine effectuates a tension between human initiative and divine sovereignty; Esther's agency is simultaneously empowered by and dependent upon this invisible divine orchestration. Such a narrative choice arguably reflects a theological ambivalence toward the visibility of divine action in political realms, reinforcing female agency as exercised through faithful risk and communal intercession rather than miraculous spectacle. Thus, divine intervention in Esther's story operates not as direct empowerment but as an omnipresent context that sanctifies and frames her limited yet impactful actions.

Deborah's narrative contrasts with Esther' s in articulating a more explicit and authoritative mode of divine intervention, which directly sanctions and invigorates female agency. As both prophetess and judge, Deborah occupies a unique role where divine command and revelation form the foundational source of her authority (Hess, 1993). Her summoning of Barak and prophecy regarding the outcome of battle are couched in unequivocal divine mandate, making her leadership an extension of God's will rather than mere personal endeavor. This theological legitimation not only validates her role in a patriarchal society but also elevates her agency to a performative embodiment of divine justice. The "Song of Deborah" (Judges 5) further immortalizes this divine-human nexus, celebrating female agency as divinely inspired and historically consequential. Here, divine intervention transcends sanction and becomes an active force empowering female leadership in the public and martial domains. Deborah's story presents a paradigm where female agency is integrally fused with prophetic voice and divine endorsement, challenging gendered presumptions about authority and offering a model where agency is inseparable from spiritual vocation.

Mariam's portrayal in the Qur'an situates divine intervention not merely as endorsement but as the very locus of her agency. The miraculous annunciation and virgin birth narrated in Surah Maryam (Qur'an 19:1642) mark her agency as profoundly reliant on, and constituted by, divine action. Unlike Esther's cautious human initiative or Deborah's prophetic commission, Mariam embodies a form of agency that is inseparable from God's direct interference in natural order. This theological framing emphasizes purity, obedience, and submission as not limitations but as sources of spiritual strength and social redefinition (Saeed, 2006). Mariam's encounter with divine revelation underpins her personal resolve, transforming female agency into a performative witness to God's power and mercy. Her narrative thus reconfigures agency away from political or military domains, foregrounding instead an intersubjective relationship with the divine that confers authority predicated on miraculous grace. This portrayal challenges contemporary assumptions that active agency must manifest in overt action, suggesting alternative modalities grounded in spiritual experience and divine favor.

The comparative dimension of these texts reveals that divine intervention operates variably across scriptural traditions, shaping female agency in ways that reflect distinctive theological emphases and cultural contexts. Where Esther's agency is circumscribed and obscured by a silent divine presence, Deborah's is public, sanctioned, and authoritative; Mariam's agency is

transcendent, indelibly tied to divine miraculousness. These differential patterns highlight the multiplicity by which sacred narratives negotiate female autonomysometimes as a participatory cooperation with hidden providence, sometimes as explicit execution of divine will, and at other times as embodiment of divine power itself.

Moreover, divine intervention in these portrayals invariably modulates the reception and legitimacy of female agency within patriarchal social orders. Agency sanctioned or enacted through divine means tends to transcend social limitations, reifying women's roles in leadership, prophecy, or exemplary piety. Yet this empowerment is not without constraints; reliance upon divine authority often circumscribes agency within prescribed theological frameworks, delimiting possibilities of female autonomy to contexts compatible with religious ideals (Köstenberger & O'Brien, 2010). For instance, Esther's agency remains embedded within communal intercession and ritual dependency, which underscores gendered boundaries of action. Similarly, Mariam's status as a paradigmatic figure is intimately connected to her exceptional divine favor, implicitly framing agency as contingent upon holiness rather than normative female capacity. Deborah's explicit divine commission illustrates how sanctioned agency can affirm female authority but primarily within the role of religious functionary rather than autonomous political actor.

The nuanced interplay between divine intervention and female agency thus invites reconsideration of how sacred texts articulate authority and autonomy for women, complicating contemporary hermeneutics and feminist readings. Recognizing that divine mediation both empowers and regulates female agency enables a deeper understanding of scriptural narratives as sites where gendered power is negotiated rather than simply affirmed or resisted. This dialectic offers valuable insight into ongoing discussions on gender roles within faith communities, illustrating that conceptualizations of female agency are inherently theological as well as socio-cultural, and that divine-human interfacing remains a critical framework through which female authority is narrated and interpreted.

12.1 Gendered power and women's voices within hierarchies of authority

The architecture of gendered power within narrative structures and the deployment of speech acts in biblical and Qur'anic texts critically shapes the portrayal of female agency, reflecting and reinforcing underlying cultural, theological, and ideological assumptions about gender roles. Narrative structure, encompassing the organization of plot events, focalization, and characterization, not only frames the possibilities of female action but also situates women's voices within hierarchies of authority and discourse. Simultaneously, speech actsencompassing the performative functions of language such as commanding, requesting, promising, or testifyinginstantiate power relations at the level of communication, revealing how and to what extent women exercise or are restricted in acts of speech that convey agency.

In analyzing Esther, Deborah, and Mariam through this lens, it becomes apparent that the narrative architectures codify differing modes through which female characters negotiate power and voice. Esther's narrative is intricately structured around moments of silence and veiled communication, privileging indirect speech acts and strategic silence over overt verbal authority.

The text often highlights Esther's measured speech, calibrated for royal audiences, and her reluctance or inability to speak directly about her intentions until critical junctures (Frymer-Kensky, 2006). This reticence is not merely retelling decorum but functions narratively as a form of constrained agency, where Esther's interlocution is filtered through the performative conventions of courtly interaction and communal mediation. Her speech acts, especially her petitions to the king, manifest as calculated and relational rather than declarative or confrontational commands. This dynamic underscores a gendered distribution of speech power: Esther's voice gains efficacy not in its volume or public proclamation but in its strategic timing and alignment with collective ritual acts such as fasting, situating agency within a mediated, communal context that circumscribes individual female autonomy.

Deborah's story disrupts this paradigm with a narrative structure that foregrounds direct divine authorization and public speech acts that embody authoritative leadership. The Book of Judges allocates substantial narrative space to Deborah's pronouncements, commands to Barak, and prophetic declarations, positioning her as both oracular mouthpiece and executive judge (Hess, 1993). Her voice is intertwined with divine mandate, functioning as performative speech that not only conveys information but enacts power by summoning military and judicial action. The narrative focalization aligns with Deborah's perspective in moments of decisive judgment, amplifying the authority of her speech acts as catalysts for historical change. Importantly, the speech acts Deborah performsimperatives, promises, and prophetic affirmationsare unmediated by gendered restrictions, illustrating how divine sanction negotiates the social limits on female discourse, enabling an explicit public and political agency that transcends conventional female silence in patriarchal settings. Her narrative presence exemplifies an inversion of typical gendered speech hierarchies, modeling female speech as performatively efficacious and authoritative.

Mariam's narrative in the Qur'an represents a different modality wherein speech acts are heavily intertwined with divine revelation and testimony, underlining a performative agency rooted in spiritual exemplarity rather than public command. The Qur'anic account of Mariam frequently situates her speech within dialogues with angels, God, and the community, emphasizing declarative and witness-bearing speech acts that assert both piety and truth (Saeed, 2006). Her response to divine annunciation and later her defense before the people function as speech acts that establish her moral and spiritual agency through verbal testimony, thereby reconfiguring female agency as a sacred communicative act. Moreover, the Qur'anic text's strategic focalization on Mariam's words contributes to her authority, as these speeches are not filtered through male intermediaries but presented directly, granting her a distinctive voice within the religious narrative. Nevertheless, her speech acts remain embedded within an overarching discourse of obedience and submission to divine will, illustrating how agency in this context is harmonized with theological ideals that prescribe modes of female communication aligned with spiritual humility rather than political assertiveness.

These three narratives collectively demonstrate that gendered power dynamics in narrative structure and speech acts operate through a dialectic between allowing voice and constraining it

within socially and theologically determined parameters. Esther's story exemplifies female agency performed through silence, indirectness, and communal intercessiona negotiation of voice that reflects the subtleties of courtly and gendered power relations. Deborah's narrative disrupts traditional gendered speech norms by presenting a female figure whose authoritative speech acts function as instruments of divine mandate and political command, thus challenging patriarchal limits on female discourse and agency. Mariam's account conveys a model of agency where spoken testimony and divine communication confer sanctity and authority, illustrating how speech acts perform roles beyond sociopolitical leadership to encompass spiritual embodiment and exemplary piety.

Critically, these variations highlight how narrative structures do not merely recount events involving women but actively encode gendered expectations and possibilities through the ways female speech is depicted, structured, and valued. Speech acts become arenas in which power relations are enacted and contested, revealing that the limits of female agency are often mediated through culturally specific performance rules regarding who may speak, when, and with what authority. This interrelation between narrative structure and speech act theory draws attention to the performativity of gender itselfas Judith Butler (1990) has theorizedshowing how sacred texts participate in the construction of gendered identities by shaping normative frameworks for female expression and leadership.

The implications of these insights extend to contemporary understandings of gender roles within religious traditions informed by these texts. Recognizing the narrative and linguistic mechanisms by which female agency is enabled or circumscribed in sacred scripture underscores the complexity of interpreting female authority today. Contemporary faith communities grappling with theological and hermeneutic questions about women's roles must consider that the performative conditions of speech and the framing of narrative agency are not static but shaped by historical, textual, and cultural contingencies. Thus, engaging deeply with the gendered power dynamics embedded in narrative structures and speech acts opens pathways for reimagining female agency as both historically situated and dynamically interpretable, challenging rigid prohibitions while honoring the nuanced ways sacred texts negotiate authority for women.

12.2 Comparative Analysis of Couples' Agency

Agency patterns in Adam/Eve versus Solomon/Sheba narratives The comparative examination of agency patterns in the narratives of Adam and Eve versus those of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba reveals distinct theological and literary mechanisms through which female agency is articulated, negotiated, and circumscribed within Biblical discourse. These divergent portrayals illuminate varying conceptualizations of gendered subjectivity and relational dynamics, as well as the socio-religious frameworks underpinning scriptural constructions of authority and influence. Diverging from the foundational origin story of Adam and Eve, which foregrounds paradigms of relational dependency and ontological distinction, the Solomon-Sheba narrative introduces a cross-cultural encounter that foregrounds female diplomatic agency and intellectual engagement, complicating binary notions of gender hierarchy.

In the Adam and Eve account, agency is predominantly framed within the parameters of creation, temptation, and fallibility; wherein Eve's role is often interpreted through the lens of transgression and secondary positioning relative to Adam. This dynamic traditionally reflects patriarchal theological interpretations that ascribe to the female figure a function defined by derivative existence and moral culpability, evident in the textual depiction of Eve as both the initiator of disobedience and a catalyst for human estrangement from divine favor (*Genesis* 2:18-25; 3:1-24). The implications of this framing extend beyond narrative detail, as scholarly discourse (e.g., Ruether, 1983; Grant, 1984) critically interrogates how the link between Eve's agency and sin reinforces gendered stereotypes of female irrationality and susceptibility, consequently shaping subsequent doctrinal attitudes towards women's epistemic and moral capacities. Within this context, one observes that Eve's agency, while present, is circumscribed by a narrative economy privileging male experience as normative, effectively casting female action within a paradigm of cautionary exemplarity rather than autonomous empowerment.

Conversely, the Solomon and Queen of Sheba narrative, notably captured in *1 Kings* 10:1-13 and echoed in Qur'anic exegesis (though with key variations), presents a markedly different modality of agency wherein female authority is articulated through political acumen, intellectual parity, and sovereign diplomacy. The Queen of Sheba emerges as an emblem of female wisdom and assertiveness who actively engages Solomon in a dialogic exchange of riddles and philosophical correspondence, as portrayed in the Biblical text: "She came to Jerusalem with a very great caravan… and came to Solomon, and talked with him of all that was in her heart" (1 Kings 10:2, NRSV). This interaction underscores the woman's capacity to traverse cultural and geopolitical boundaries, exercising agency through strategic negotiation and participation in governance discourses. Scholars such as Exum (1996) and Ahn (2002) emphasize how the queen's portrayal disrupts simplistic patriarchal binaries by foregrounding a female sovereign whose authority is acknowledged and respected by the male king, thereby situating female agency not merely as relational but as constitutive of political sovereignty and intellectual parity.

Importantly, this narrative reveals a more complex interplay between gender and power, wherein the Queen of Sheba's agency is not constructed in oppositional terms but rather met with recognition and reciprocation, thus challenging reductive interpretations of female passivity. The queen's agency operates through performative speech acts and embodied presence, reinforcing Butler's (1990) conception of gender as performative and contingent, enacted within specific socio-cultural parameters but capable of subverting dominant norms. Furthermore, the narrative's theological framing situates her not as a transgressor but as a dignitary whose wisdom is divinely sanctioned, offering a counterpoint to the foundational narrative of female fallibility in Eden. This perspective is supported by feminist theological readings (e.g., Trible, 1984; Silva, 2016), which highlight the emancipatory potential embedded within such portrayals, suggesting a nuanced spectrum of female agency within Biblical literature.

The contrast between the Adam/Eve and Solomon/Sheba narratives thus reflects divergent modes of female agency: the former predicated upon origins, obedience, and the conferral of

identity through relational dependency, the latter predicated upon sovereignty, dialogue, and the assertion of autonomous wisdom. This disparity invites broader reflection on the literary and ideological functions these narratives serve within their scriptural traditions, particularly in the construction of normative gender roles. The Edenic narrative's focus on transgression can be understood as foundational to a theological anthropology that links human nature with fallenness, thereby situating female agency within a paradigm of cautionary moral contingency. In contrast, the Queen of Sheba narrative, by showcasing female wisdom and diplomatic prowess, offers an alternative schema that legitimates female influence in socio-political spheres, suggesting that within the biblical canon, agency is multifaceted and context-dependent rather than monolithic.

Moreover, comparative attention to Qur'anic narratives, which often recast these figures or their thematic analogues, further enhances understanding of gendered agency as interpreted within different theological frameworks. For instance, while the Qur'an does not present a direct parallel to the Queen of Sheba's narrative with Solomon in equivalent detail, the account in Sura An-Naml (27:20-44) invites a reevaluation of female agency within Islamicate contexts, emphasizing the Queen's intellect and submission to divine truth differently than the Bible, thus complicating comparative assessments (Fadlallah, 1996; Saeed, 2006). Similarly, the Qur'anic reinterpretations of Adam and Eve tend to emphasize shared responsibility and spiritual equality more explicitly, which contrasts with the hierarchical and culpability-oriented portrayal in Genesis (Esack, 2005). This comparative layer reinforces the necessity, earlier underscored by the cross-referencing methodology, to situate each narrative within its specific theological, historical, and literary milieu to avoid reductive or simplistic characterizations.

In summation, the agency patterns in Adam/Eve versus Solomon/Sheba narratives encapsulate the complex dialectics of gender, power, and authority in biblical texts. While Adam and Eve illustrate a paradigmatic narrative of relational identity entwined with notions of sin and subordination, the Solomon and Queen of Sheba account reveals dimensions of female agency characterized by sovereign authority and intellectual engagement. These contrasting depictions underscore that female agency in sacred scripture is neither uniform nor static but is expressed through variegated textual strategies that both reflect and inform cultural understandings of gender roles. Consequently, any contemporary theological or gender-analytical discourse must reckon with this heterogeneity,recognizing that scriptural narratives encompass multiple, sometimes contradictory, paradigms of female capacity, authority, and performative action.

12.2.1 Female autonomy and authority in the narratives of Adam and Eve versus Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

The comparative examination of agency patterns, having established the divergent contours of female autonomy and authority in the narratives of Adam and Eve versus Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, naturally leads to a critical interrogation of the underlying models of decision-making that shape these portrayals. Specifically, the tension between shared decision-making and hierarchical frameworks emerges as a pivotal axis through which gender relations and agency dynamics are structured within these sacred texts. This subpart explores how these modalities of interaction not

only reflect theological and cultural assumptions but also encode normative prescriptions for gendered agency within the couple, thereby influencing subsequent interpretive traditions and contemporary understandings of gender roles.

Hierarchical decision-making models, most saliently embodied in the Adam and Eve narrative, situate agency within a clearly delineated power asymmetry that privileges the male figure as the ultimate decision-maker and moral authority. Eve's agency, while not entirely absent, is subsumed within an ordered relational schema wherein her actions are ultimately mediated and judged according to their impact upon Adam and, by extension, the divine injunctions. Genesis 3 narrates how Eve's initiative in eating the forbidden fruit is construed as a breach of the divinely established hierarchy: her act precipitates not only personal disobedience but also a distortion of the ordained patriarchal order, as Adam's subsequent complicity further entrenches this structural relationship (*Genesis* 3:6-17). The implications of this narrative extend beyond its immediate plot to affirm a theological justification for male leadership and female submission within the marital and social realms, thus embedding hierarchical decision-making as a normative framework that circumscribes female autonomy.

This hierarchical model is buttressed by traditional exegesis and theological reflections that interpret Adam's primacy as divinely ordained, reinforcing a teleological gender order. As observed by Ruether (1983) and Grant (1984), the predicate of female subordination emerges not merely as a descriptive detail within the narrative, but as a prescriptive paradigm that informs canonical and extrabiblical juridical discourses. The embeddedness of this hierarchy within the foundational creation narrative seeks to naturalize male authority and female compliance as integral to cosmic and social order, thereby limiting the scope of shared agency and collaborative decision-making within couples. Consequently, the Eve figure serves as a hermeneutical touchstone for cautionary reflection on the perceived risks of female autonomy and the necessity of male governance, a theme that reverberates throughout patriarchally inflected religious and cultural traditions.

In stark contrast, the Solomon and Queen of Sheba narrative exemplifies a mode of shared decision- making characterized by dialogue, mutual respect, and intellectual parity, thereby challenging hierarchical presuppositions. The biblical text richly portrays a negotiated encounter wherein the Queen exercises her agency through conversation, inquiry, and the testing of Solomon's wisdom, rather than through unilateral action or submission. The Queen's initiative to visit Solomon, the exchange of gifts, and the probing of riddles collectively signify a relational dynamic predicated on reciprocity and recognition: "She came with a very great train...and stood before Solomon and communed with him of all that was in her heart" (1 Kings 10:2). This interaction reflects a partnership model in which female agency is not only acknowledged but operates on a plane of equality, facilitating a form of shared decision-making that encompasses political, intellectual, and strategic dimensions.

Feminist and literary scholars have argued that such depictions offer a counter-narrative to hierarchical constructions by valorizing female sovereignty and dialogic engagement (Exum, 1996; Silva, 2016). The Queen of Sheba's agency exemplifies a relational model of authority based upon

dialogue and mutual acknowledgment, consistent with Butler's (1990) thesis on the performativity of gender and the possibility of subverting dominant scripts through enacted roles. Rather than dissolving into passive acceptance or transgression, female agency here manifests through active participation within a shared polity, a facet of decision-making that upends the simplistic identification of male dominance with legitimate authority. The Queen's intellectual and diplomatic prowess is met with respect and accommodation, thereby configuring a normative space within the narrative for female co-authorship of political decisions rather than exclusion.

Theologically, this presents a model wherein divine sanction and human agency intersect through mutual recognition and reciprocal discourse, situating female agency within the bounds of legitimate influence rather than subversive challenge. This juxtaposition raises salient questions concerning the textual and ideological conditioning of gendered authority and offers fertile ground for reimagining gender roles in both historical and contemporary contexts. The Queen of Sheba's narrative thus encodes a relational and shared mode of decision-making that emphasizes the interdependence of genders and complicates monolithic hierarchical readings.

When these biblical models are juxtaposed with Qur'anic narratives, the contrast and convergence concerning decision-making frameworks become even more pronounced. The Qur'an's portrayal of couples, such as Adam and Eve, tends towards an ethos of mutual consultation and joint responsibility rather than unilateral authority, as suggested by Esack (2005) and Saeed (2006). Shared agency is foregrounded within Islamic theological discourse, which emphasizes complementarity and spiritual equality, even within differentiated social roles. Similarly, the Queen of Sheba's counterpart in Sura An-Naml articulates a negotiation culminating in submission to divine truth, which reflects a shared assent to transcendent authority rather than exclusively human hierarchies (Fadlallah, 1996). Though the forms of power are differently articulated, the Qur'anic texts subtly reposition female agency within frameworks of negotiated recognition and participation, complicating simplistic hierarchical models.

The implications of these varying conceptions of decision-making extend beyond scriptural exegesis to contemporary gender ethics and relational theology. Shared decision-making within couples challenges patriarchal frameworks that enforce rigid hierarchies, inviting new paradigms of mutual empowerment, dialogic engagement, and equitable distribution of authority. Conversely, hierarchical models, while historically dominant, often entail the marginalization of female perspectives and the constriction of female agency within preordained roles. The biblical and Qur'anic narratives, therefore, provide discursive resources that both enable and constrain contemporary reflections on gender justice within religious traditions.

In summary, exploring shared versus hierarchical decision-making within these canonical narratives reveals the multifaceted nature of gendered agency and relational authority. The Adam and Eve account exemplifies a hierarchical model that circumscribes female autonomy within divinely sanctioned male dominion, often interpreted through the lens of transgression and subordination. In contrast, the Solomon and Queen of Sheba narrative embodies a shared, dialogic mode of agency that foregrounds female intellectual equality and sovereign participation. These

paradigms not only reflect theological and cultural ideologies but also actively shape the hermeneutical and ethical landscapes from which contemporary gender discourse emerges, offering both challenges and opportunities for reimagining gendered relationality in sacred and social contexts.

12.2.2 Analysis of couple agency: Adam s Eve versus Solomon s Queen of Sheba in both traditions

Exploring the dynamics of couple agency through the figures of Adam and Eve alongside Solomon and the Queen of Sheba unveils a layered dialogue on gendered interaction within both Biblical and Quranic traditions. Unlike the individual female figures whose agency has been disentangled from broader relational contexts, couple narratives situate female agency within the intimate and symbolic framework of dyadic relations, making visible the ways in which gender roles and moral responsibilities are co-constituted and negotiated.

The Biblical story of Adam and Eve, foundational to Judeo-Christian anthropology, has long shaped theological and cultural conceptualizations of womanhood and manhood as complementary yet hierarchical. Eve's pivotal actionpartaking of the forbidden fruithas historically been read as both a moment of transgression and an expression of volition, which paradoxically affirms and constrains female agency. Traditional exegeses often underscore Eve's agency as disruptive, casting her as the catalyst for humanity's exile from Eden, thus reinforcing a patriarchal paradigm wherein female initiative is viewed with suspicion and allegorized as a source of sin and disorder (Trible, 1978). However, feminist hermeneutics challenge this portrayal by recognizing in Eve's choice a form of existential agency that asserts self-determination even at great cost, hence complicating the reductive association of female agency with moral failure.

The Quranic counterpart to this narrative articulates a notably different ethos. While acknowledging Eve (Hawwa), Islamic exegesis tends to emphasize the shared accountability of Adam and Eve in the act of disobedience, thereby diffusing gender-specific blame and fostering a more symmetrical understanding of couple agency (Abdel Haleem, 2004). This framing aligns with the Quran's broader theological framework that foregrounds human fallibility and divine mercy rather than gendered culpability. Here, agency within the couple is relational but less hierarchically inflected than in the Biblical text; both Adam and Eve are actors within a divinely ordained test whose outcome underscores collective human responsibility. The implications for female agency are substantial, as this narrative allows for a conception of womanhood that does not inherently imply moral deficit but rather participates fully in the human condition of trial and redemption. Consequently, this portrayal can be seen as fostering a more balanced discourse on gendered agency, which recognizes interdependence rather than unilateral dominance.

Turning to the partnership of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the Biblical and Quranic portrayals again converge and diverge in illuminating ways. The Biblical narrative situates their encounter as a meeting of sovereign minds and dignitaries, with the Queen journeying to Solomon's court to test his famed wisdom (Jewish Publication Society, 1985). This episode carves out a space where female agency transcends domestic confines and enters the realm of political and intellectual authority. The Queen's agency is enacted through her self-initiated diplomatic mission and critical

engagement with Solomon, highlighting a form of agency founded on negotiation, curiosity, and recognition of wisdom as an egalitarian virtue. Despite the implicit gender asymmetry embodied by Solomon's kingship, the narrative dignifies the Queen of Sheba as an autonomous actor who exercises discernment and influence. The Quranic rendition reinforces these aspects but nuances them by emphasizing the Queen's spiritual agency, particularly her eventual acceptance of monotheism following Solomon's demonstration of divine favor and power (Abdel Haleem, 2004). This theological inflection imbues her agency with a dimension of faith-driven voluntary submission that complements, rather than diminishes, her authority. Thus, within the Islamic tradition, the Queen of Sheba exemplifies a model of female sovereignty that is deeply intertwined with intellectual acumen and spiritual responsiveness, reflecting a form of agency that integrates worldly leadership and piety. These couple narratives illuminate a spectrum of gendered agency that is relationally contingent and contextually mediated. Adam and Eve's story foregrounds the existential tension between individual initiative and shared consequence, revealing how agency in couples is negotiated through responsibility, obedience, and interdependence. By comparison, the partnership of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba illustrates how agency can be expressed through diplomatic relation and intellectual intercourse, with theological dimensions shaping the contours of power and submission. Both traditions engage with couple agency as a site where gender roles are simultaneously reproduced and reconfigured, exposing the dialectic between authority and cooperation.

The contrasting narrative structures and emphases reflect divergent theological priorities: the Hebrew Bible frequently underscores the moral and covenantal implications of human action within a history of communal destiny, rendering female agency within couples as fraught with existential consequence; the Quran privileges a holistic vision of divine justice and mercy that frames couple agency within shared human frailty and divine guidance. Theologically, these narratives shape contemporary understandings of gender roles by revealing how agency is embedded not only in individual capacities but in relational frameworks that balance autonomy with mutual obligation.

Interpreting these texts through modern gender theory invites recognition of the complex interplays between agency, accountability, and power within intimate dyads, thus disrupting simplistic binaries of dominance versus submission.

In sum, a comparative analysis of Adam and Eve and Solomon and the Queen of Sheba underscores the rich semiosis of couple agency in both the Bible and the Quran: from the origins of human relationality to the exercise of governance and faith through intercultural and intergender dialogue. Such narratives compel contemporary readers to grapple with the multifaceted nature of agency as simultaneously personal, relational, and shaped by transcendent ethical structures within sacred traditions.

12.2.3 Analysis for couple narratives in Biblical and Quranic text collection/ Corpora:

The process of critical analysis serves as a methodological tool for unraveling how couple narratives within biblical and Qur'anic corpora construct, reinforce, or contest female agency, embedding those constructions within broader theological, cultural, and hermeneutical frameworks.

By closely examining explicit and implicit citationsboth intertextual references within the sacred texts themselves and the manner in which these narratives are later invoked in exegetical traditions and scholarly discourseone can trace the trajectories through which the agency of female figures in marital and diplomatic contexts is articulated and reinterpreted. This approach not only illuminates the narrative strategies and thematic emphases that foreground or marginalize female participation but also reveals the dialogical interplay between texts and communities that perpetuate or challenge dominant gender norms.

Within the biblical tradition, couple narratives such as that of Adam and Eve, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, and figures like Deborah and Esther occupy distinct positions in the intertextual landscape, wherein citation patterns can either consolidate patriarchal orders or open spaces for female agency. For example, the Genesis account of Adam and Eve functions as a foundational citation locus; its thematic motifsdisobedience, transgression, and knowledgeare systematically echoed in later scriptural passages and theological commentaries to justify constrained views of female agency (Johnson, 2007). The frequent allusions to Eve's act in the Garden underscore a hermeneutic that associates female initiative with original sin, implicitly curtailing female authority within marital or familial settings. Yet, a nuanced citation reading also identifies moments wherein Eve's role is recuperated as integral to human relationality and the necessity of intersubjective accountability, suggesting a complex negotiation of agency that refracts through subsequent texts (Ruether, 1983).

In juxtaposition, the Queen of Sheba's narrative, as cited in texts such as 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles, reveals a distinct citation pattern that emphasizes diplomatic engagement, intellectual prowess, and sovereign agency. This narrative's citations within later biblical wisdom literature and rabbinic interpretations often highlight her role as a paradigmatic figure of female political acumen, reinforcing a mode of agency predicated on public dialogue and mutual recognition (Silva, 2016). The repeated citations of her encounter with Solomon serve a dual functionboth to celebrate diplomatic female agency and to affirm a patriarchal order by framing her submission as acknowledgment of divine wisdom mediated through Solomon. This ambivalence is discernible through the lens of citation analysis, which exposes the textual strategies that simultaneously elevate and contain female initiative.

The Qur'anic corpus presents a distinctive set of citation dynamics with respect to couple narratives that bear on female agency. The story of Adam and Eve, recounted in verses such as Sura Al- Baqarah (2:35-39), eschews unilateral attribution of fault, emphasizing mutual responsibility and the ethical dimension of repentance and divine mercy. These citations are often employed in exegetical traditions to articulate complementary gender roles underpinned by consultation (shūrā) and mutual respect (Fadlallah, 1996). The narrative's invocation in later Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) and normative texts signals a deliberate reframing of marital agencyone that foregrounds relational accountability while acknowledging individual moral capacity. Citation analysis here illuminates the theological impetus to counterbalance hierarchy with dialogue, constructing a paradigm of agency that is simultaneously gendered and relational.

Moreover, the Queen of Sheba's Qur'anic portrayal (Sura An-Naml 27:20-44) contributes a richly intertextual field where citation patterns accentuate female sovereignty and discernment within a framework of submission to monotheistic truth. The verses' narrative arcdetailing the queen's inquiry, deliberation, and eventual assenthas been repeatedly cited within Islamic jurisprudence and feminist readings to demonstrate a sophisticated model of agency that incorporates both autonomy and divine guidance (Esack, 2005). These citations, often contrasted with biblical traditions, underscore an interpretive stance that allows for a significant female role in public and political spheres, whilst framing that role within a theological paradigm that resists secular delineations of sovereignty.

Beyond the textual corpus itself, citation analysis extends to the reception history of these narratives in exegetical commentaries, liturgical usages, and theological reflections. In Christian traditions, the Eve narrative has historically been mobilized in patristic and medieval writings to justify social hierarchies that limit female agency, with citations from Genesis serving as authoritative proof-texts (Ruether, 1983). Conversely, modern feminist theologians have revisited these citations to recuperate agency through re-interpretation and re-contextualization, demonstrating how citation serves as both an instrument of domination and resistance. Similarly, in Islamic scholarship, the citation of the Queen of Sheba narrative has informed varied hermeneutical perspectivesfrom affirmations of female leadership to conservative readings emphasizing submissionthereby revealing the mutable nature of agency as constructed through citation networks (Fadlallah, 1996). Importantly, the comparative dimension of citation analysis between biblical and Qur'anic corpora highlights the differential modalities through which agency is embedded in textual traditions. Whereas biblical citations around couple narratives often function to underscore hierarchical gender relations embedded in marital roles, Qur'anic citations exhibit a more dialogic pattern that integrates agency within relational and divine frameworks without entirely dissolving asymmetries. This comparative perspective allows for a deeper appreciation of how sacred citations act as intertextual nodes that mediate gendered agency, shaping communal understandings and religious ethics. The layered complexity found in citation patterns across both traditions invites further interrogations into how authority, voice, and agency are historically configured and ecclesially or collectively negotiated.

Consequently, citation analysis reveals that the construction of female agency within couple narratives is not a static hermeneutical given but an evolving discourse shaped by intertextual dialogues, theological priorities, and socio-historical contexts. The interplay of marital and diplomatic spheres is refracted through the selective citations that reiterate or contest gender norms, influencing contemporary engagements with these texts in debates surrounding gender justice and religious authority. By unpacking these citation networks, scholars can better understand the multifaceted ways in which female agency is named, authorized, or suppressed, providing a critical foundation for reimagining the possibilities of gendered agency within sacred traditions as they resonate in modern contexts.

12.3 Implications for Contemporary Gender Roles

Translating historical agency models into modern gender discourse Bridging from the intricate citation patterns that frame female agency within couple narratives, the challenge of translating these historical models into the vocabulary and frameworks of modern gender discourse requires a critical re-contextualization that acknowledges both continuity and transformation. Historical theological accounts frequently embody sex-gender constructs that emerged under particular socio-political configurations, often aligning female agency with relational or subordinate roles legitimated through divine ordinance. Contemporary gender discourse, shaped by feminist theory, postcolonial critique, and intersectional analyses, demands an interrogation of these inherited models to uncover latent potentialities for agency alongside the structural limitations they perpetuate.

The biblical portrayals of figures such as Esther and Deborah illustrate this tension vividly. While Esther's narrative is historically positioned within survival and mediationher agency unfolding within the constraints of courtly invisibility and riskit has been reclaimed in feminist scholarship as a paradigm of strategic negotiation and subversive power wielded through astute diplomacy (Trible, 1984). This reclamation invites modern gender discourse to recognize agency not exclusively in overt resistance or authority but in the nuanced deployment of influence within circumscribed contexts. Similarly, Deborah's leadership as a prophetess and judge challenges patriarchal norms of political and spiritual authority in ancient Israelite society, signaling a break from standard gendered expectations. When translated into contemporary terms, Deborah's model contributes to discourses on female leadership, intersectionality of spiritual and political roles, and the complexity of agency exercised within male-dominated institutions (Campbell, 2009).

Equally significant is the re-interpretation of the Genesis couple narrative within modern gender frameworks. The traditional hermeneutic frames Eve's action as transgressive, underpinning patriarchal constructs of female culpability and passivity. However, feminist exegetes and queer theologians contest this narrative's gendered prescriptions by re-reading the text through lenses that foreground mutuality, relational agency, and the dynamics of desire and knowledge as emancipatory rather than confining (Bird, 1997). This reframing harmonizes with contemporary discourses that problematize rigid binaries of agency/passivity and male/female dichotomies, offering a model that can underwrite dialogical partnership and ethical agency within gender relations.

Turning to Islamic narratives, the translation of historical agency models into modern gender discourse also reflects a tension between traditional authoritative exegesis and contemporary hermeneutical approaches. Mariam's figure, embedded within Qur'anic narrative as both a paragon of piety and autonomous divine favor, offers fertile ground for reconceptualizing female agency beyond domestic or kinship spheres. Her role exemplifies a form of spiritual agency intimately linked to prophecy and revelation, which can be leveraged in contemporary Muslim feminist thought to articulate narratives of empowerment that respect theological continuity while challenging patriarchal closures (Mahmood, 2005). Likewise, the Queen of Sheba's representation in Islamic texts has been interpreted through modern feminist scholarship as emblematic of sovereign agency that combines intellectual inquiry, political acumen, and spiritual submission. This complex

interrelation dismantles simplistic oppositions between authority and submission, suggesting a model of agency deeply rooted in relationality and cosmological order rather than exclusively Western paradigms of individual autonomy (Mernissi, 1991).

In these processes of translation, the deterministic frameworks of historical-theological models are critically engaged through the prism of contemporary gender theory, which insists on contextual specificity, power relations, and the performativity of gendered agency. Theorisations of agency by scholars such as Judith Butler emphasize that agency is not a fixed essence but an emergent, negotiated practice shaped by discursive formations and social structures (Butler, 1990). Applying this to biblical and Qur'anic female figures requires unpacking the ways in which agency is enacted within, constrained by, and sometimes resistant to religious doctrinal paradigms. Such a lens reveals that these narrativesfar from being static prescriptionsare dynamic sites where gendered identities and performances are continually contested and reconstituted.

Moreover, the integration of intersectional analysis further complicates the straightforward adoption of historical agency models into modern discourse. Female figures in sacred texts inhabit multiple axes of identity, including ethnicity, class, and religious status, and each influencing the modalities of agency available. Contemporary scholars stress that translating agency across time and traditions must attend to these nuanced positionalities, ensuring that modern gender discourse does not universalize or homogenize experiences but remains attentive to socio-historical particularities (Crenshaw, 1991). This perspective is crucial when engaging with sacred texts that have been mobilized variably in different cultural contexts, resulting in diverse interpretations and applications of female agency.

The challenge extends to contemporary religious communities as they negotiate scriptural precedents in light of modern egalitarian impulses. The hermeneutical strategies deployedwhether by reformist theologians, feminist activists within faith traditions, or broader secular discoursesrequire a dialogical approach that neither dismisses these narratives as archaic nor uncritically reproduces their patriarchal dimensions. Translating historical agency models therefore involves a multilayered endeavor of critical appropriation, where the acknowledgement of theological authority coexists with a commitment to gender justice and inclusivity. This praxis confronts the tension between tradition and innovation, opening pathways for female agency that are both rooted in religious identity and responsive to contemporary ethical demands.

Ultimately, the translation of biblical and Qur'anic models of female agency into modern gender discourse demands a methodological pluralismencompassing textual criticism, feminist hermeneutics, and socio-political analysiswhich allows for the emergence of complex, contextually grounded understandings of agency. Such translation does not seek to replicate historical agency models unaltered but to engage their legacies critically, discerning elements that affirm female autonomy, creativity, and leadership while interrogating those that reinforce exclusion or subordination. This endeavor enriches contemporary gender discourse by reconnecting it with foundational narrativesboth as sources of inspiration and as objects of transformationthereby illuminating the ongoing interplay between sacred tradition and the evolving landscape of gendered subjectivity.

13 Implications for feminist theology and interfaith dialogue

The implications of these recontextualized portrayals for feminist theology and interfaith dialogue are manifold and demand nuanced engagement that transcends mere comparative description. Feminist theology, operating at the intersection of faith and gender justice, is thus called to navigate the complex legacies of biblical and Qur'anic narratives, harnessing their productive tensions to craft emancipatory yet rooted understandings of female agency. The appropriation of figures such as Esther, Deborah, and Mariam within feminist theological frameworks challenges monolithic constructions of religious authority by foregrounding the pluralities and dissonances within sacred traditions. By excavating forms of agency embedded in contextually specific cultural and theological milieus, feminist theologians destabilize patriarchal readings and open theological space for new articulations of empowerment that honor continuity without forfeiting critical scrutiny.

This process reframes theological authority itself, shifting it from a static, hierarchical locus to a dynamic arena wherein sacred texts are dialogically engaged rather than dogmatically imposed. Feminist readings of Deborah's political and spiritual agency, for example, not only recover a model of female leadership often elided in ecclesiastical settings but also articulate modes of prophetic resistance that resonate with contemporary feminist calls for social justice and transformative praxis (Campbell, 2009). Similarly, Mariam's portrayal within Qur'anic exegesis offers a theological counterpoint to predominant patriarchal narratives by situating female sanctity in realms of divine election and revelatory encounter. Such portrayals contribute to a theological reconsideration of spirituality and agency that transcends prescribed gender roles and underscores the indeterminacy and multiplicity of religious subjectivities within Islam (Mahmood, 2005).

Engaging these complex narratives fosters an intersectional feminist theology that is sensitive to the variegated experiences of women across religious and socio-historical contexts. Feminist theologians draw upon the critical insights of intersectionality to interrogate how gendered agency interacts with race, class, ethno-religious identity, and colonial histories embedded within scriptural interpretations (Crenshaw, 1991). This enriched hermeneutic approach enables a productive dialogue between Christian and Muslim feminist thought, wherein shared struggles over patriarchy and religious authority are addressed alongside distinctive theological vocabularies and cultural histories. For instance, the Queen of Sheba's narrative, as understood within both biblical and Islamic traditions, becomes a potent site for exploring sovereignty, intellectual inquiry, and relational agency, inviting feminist theologians to problematize Western notions of autonomy through conversations about hierarchical obedience and divine order (Mernissi, 1991). Such intertextual and inter-religious engagement not only expands feminist theology's boundaries but also cultivates solidarity rooted in mutual respect and critical reflection.

In the arena of interfaith dialogue, these reconsiderations of female agency catalyze more substantive and equitable conversations that move beyond superficial acknowledgment of gender issues to embrace deeper theological and hermeneutical challenges. Recognizing that both Biblical and Qur'anic texts contain narratives that simultaneously constrain and empower female figures

underlines the shared complexity inherent in religious traditions. This commonality facilitates dialogues that prioritize experiential and interpretive diversity over essentialist binaries between Christianity and Islam, fostering an environment wherein gender justice can be collaboratively pursued through interreligious solidarity. Moreover, the employment of feminist hermeneutics as a hermeneutical tool in interfaith settings encourages interlocutors to question prevailing patriarchal exegeses and to consider transformative readings that support inclusive community formation and leadership (Trible, 1984; Butler, 1990).

The translation of sacred female agency models into contemporary gender discourse within interfaith contexts also necessitates awareness of power dynamics and hermeneutical humility. Religious narratives are often mobilized in sociopolitical arenas to justify both repression and emancipation; hence, the dialogical negotiation of such texts must critically attend to who wields interpretive authority and whose voices remain marginalized. Feminist theologians argue that empowering women within faith traditions depends on democratizing scriptural engagement and encouraging diverse interpretive communities, thereby resisting monolithic religious monopolies and fostering pluralism (Bird, 1997). Such democratization is not without tension, yet it holds potential to reconfigure gendered authority in ways that are both faithful to tradition and responsive to contemporary ethical imperatives.

Finally, the interdisciplinarity inherent in translating these ancient narratives into modern contexts invokes a continuous reimagining of gender roles that is neither ahistorical nor uncritical. Feminist theology's commitment to both justice and tradition encourages dialogical openness, where the complexity of female agencywhether situated in Esther's courage, Deborah's leadership, Mariam's sanctity, or the sovereign acumen of the Queen of Shebaserves as a resource for challenging systemic inequalities in religious and secular societies alike. Interfaith dialogue that incorporates these nuanced models fosters solidarity steeped in recognition of difference and common striving, ultimately enriching contemporary understandings of gender roles through the prism of sacred narratives. Hence, feminist theological reflection combined with interfaith engagement holds transformative potential for reshaping modern gender discourses, highlighting the enduring relevance and contestability of religious texts in navigating gendered agency today.

14 Discussion and findings

The analysis undertaken throughout this study leads to a multifaceted response to the research question regarding the portrayal of female and couple agency in biblical and Qur'anic narratives, notably through the figures of Esther, Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, and Solomon with the Queen of Sheba. The answer insists on perceiving agency not as a monolithic or uniformly empowering concept but as a variegated, context-dependent phenomenon deeply enmeshed in theological, cultural and socio-political frameworks. This nuanced understanding moves beyond reductive binaries of domination versus liberation, illuminating how agency is exercised within and against dominant structures and expectations.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that female agency in these sacred narratives is articulated through different modalities that reflect each tradition's theological emphases and socio-historical

contexts. Esther's narrative illustrates agency as strategic and circumspect, highlighting how women's empowerment often navigates constraints rather than seeking outright dismantlement of patriarchal power. Her use of calibrated silence and speech acts exemplify J. Butler's notion of subversive performativity, where agency emerges within restrictive norms through subtle yet consequential interventions (Butler, 1990). Deborah's public prophetic and judicial authority disrupts conventional gender expectations by occupying a divinely sanctioned leadership role, expanding the conceptual space where female agency manifests in ancient Israelite contexts (Campbell, 2009). In parallel, Mariam's portrayal in the Qur'anic discourse foregrounds spiritual agency through piety and divine favor, emphasizing a form of empowerment intimately linked with religious virtue rather than political or social dominance (Mahmood, 2005). This alignment with a model of spiritual subjectivity challenges Western feminist critiques that might dismiss such agency as passive or subjugated, urging a more intersectional reading attuned to Islamic devotional paradigms (Crenshaw, 1991).

When examining couples' agency, the narratives complicate simplistic patriarchal interpretations by enfolding relational and dialogic dimensions that allow for interdependent negotiations of power. Adam and Eve's joint narrative embodies tensions between shared responsibility and hierarchical privileging of male precedence, yet a critical hermeneutic stance reveals openings for reconceptualizing this dyad as a site of mutual recognition and complex agency, consonant with contemporary relational feminist insights (Bird, 1997). The interaction between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba further exemplifies this dynamic by portraying a female protagonist who asserts intellectual and political autonomy within a sovereign discourse, with Solomon responding not from a position of unilateral authority but through engagement and reciprocation. This dialogical model disrupts patriarchal monologues by suggesting that couple agency can emerge through negotiation, respect, and intellectual exchange, thereby enriching feminist hermeneutics with exemplars of partnership beyond conjugal intimacy (Mernissi, 1991).

The comparative dimension between biblical and Qur'anic portrayals reveals fundamental differences and areas of convergence that bear theoretical significance. Biblical texts often frame agency within the dialectic of divine command and human initiative, where women's leadership is contingent upon divine sanction but simultaneously challenges socio-political boundaries (Trible, 1984). Conversely, the Qur'anic texts privilege piety, submission, and divine election as the core of female agency, situating empowerment less in socio-political realms and more in spiritual participation, thus reframing power through ethical and religious lenses (Mahmood, 2005). Such differentiation foregrounds how theological doctrines shape embodied agency, inviting a pluralistic framework that recognizes diverse paradigms of empowerment rather than imposing homogenizing Western feminist criteria.

Drawing on these observations, the study contributes theoretically by underscoring the need for interpretive frameworks that respect the intricate interplay between empowerment, constraint, and situatedness within sacred narratives. These findings critique simplistic applications of agency as synonymous with autonomy or overt resistance, advocating instead for a relational, contextualized,

and layered understanding that honors the cultural and religious particularities embedded in these texts. In doing so, the study aligns with intersectional feminist theory, which posits that agency is mediated by intersecting identities and power structures, thus resisting universalist claims while foregrounding specificity (Crenshaw, 1991). Furthermore, it elucidates how scriptural narratives provide resources for contemporary gender discourse by modeling complex forms of agency that incorporate negotiation, spiritual vocation, and strategic self-fashioning.

The implications extend to contemporary engagements with gender roles within religious communities and scholarship alike. Recognizing the relational and ambivalent nature of agency promotes dialogues that navigate between tradition and transformation without defaulting to binary oppositions of oppression versus liberation. This balanced approach enables more nuanced gender policies that honor religious sensibilities while seeking social justice, thereby affirming what Mahmood (2005) terms "agency as embodied ethical striving" within religious frameworks. Additionally, highlighting couple agency as a site of mutual engagement informs models of gender equality premised on partnership and dialogue, rather than competition or unilateral empowerment. The interpretive humility and pluralism advocated here encourage ongoing critical hermeneutics that resist static or patriarchal appropriations of sacred texts, fostering spaces where gendered agency can be reclaimed and reimagined in multiple registers.

In summary, the research substantiates that biblical and Qur'anic narratives present female and couple agency as deeply contextual, ambivalent, and relational phenomena shaped by interlocking theological, cultural, and historical determinants. These portrayals defy simplistic categorization and instead invite interpretive strategies attentive to contradiction, negotiation, and situated subjectivities. Through such engagement, sacred texts emerge not as rigid repositories of gender norms but as dynamic discursive environments that continue to influence, challenge, and inspire contemporary understandings of gender roles and agency.

14.1 Limitations of current study and suggestions for future research

Despite the rich insights offered by this comparative study of female and couple agency in Biblical and Quranic narratives, several methodological and interpretive limitations circumscribe the scope and generalizability of its findings. One primary constraint lies in the selective focus on a limited set of canonical figuresEsther, Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, Solomon, and the Queen of Shebawhose textual portrayals, while emblematic, do not exhaust the variegated landscape of female and couple agency across the full corpus of Biblical and Quranic literature. This selection biases the analysis toward particularly prominent but exceptional figures, which risks reinforcing paradigms of exceptionalism rather than capturing the experiences and representations of more ordinary, yet socially instructive, women and couples within these traditions. Future research might expand the corpus to include less canonically celebrated women and familial units, thereby elucidating more diffuse and normalized forms of agency embedded in everyday religious texts and oral traditions. Another limitation stems from the interpretive framework's reliance on predominantly textual and theological exegesis, occasionally at the expense of ethnographic or sociological data that might contextualize how these narratives are appropriated, contested, or

transformed in diverse contemporary Christian and Muslim communities. While theological narratives offer powerful symbolic resources, their lived impact varies significantly across cultural, denominational, and regional contexts. For instance, feminist activists in Muslim-majority countries may draw strategically on Mariam's narrative to advocate for educational and political inclusion, whereas Christian communities might differentially engage with Deborah's story depending on denominational traditions and local gender norms (Wadud, 1999; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983).

Incorporating empirical research methodologies such as interviews, participant observation, or discourse analysis would enable a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic interplay between scriptural agency models and socio-political realities, highlighting localized appropriations or resistances that textual analysis alone cannot fully capture.

The study also contends with inherent challenges in cross-religious and intercultural comparative analysis. The complex hermeneutical, historical, and linguistic differences between Biblical and Quranic texts necessitate careful navigation to avoid reductive equivalences or cultural misinterpretations. Each tradition's unique exegetical history and theological emphasis shape the contours of female and couple agency in ways that are not always congruent or directly comparable. For example, the theological valorization of submission in Mariam's portrayal aligns differently with Islamic doctrinal frameworks than Esther's strategic diplomacy aligns with Judeo-Christian paradigms of divine providence. More refined comparative methodologies employing interdisciplinary approachesdrawing from theology, feminist theory, cultural anthropology, and historical-critical methodscould better account for these divergences and mitigate oversimplifications, enhancing the fidelity and depth of interreligious gender analyses.

Furthermore, the historicity and textual fluidity of these narratives complicate fixed readings of agency. The biblical texts and Quranic revelations underwent multiple stages of composition, redaction, and transmission, influenced by varying social and political milieus. Consequently, the gender constructions embedded in these narratives, and their subsequent interpretations, may reflect specific historical contingencies rather than universal or static models of agency. A diachronic approach that traces the evolving reception and reinterpretation of these figures across centuries would, deepen insight into how gendered agency is historically contingent and subject to reconfiguration in response to shifting socio-religious contexts. This historical sensitivity is crucial for understanding the contemporary mobilization of these narratives and their potential for transformative reinterpretation.

Lastly, the study's focus on textual portrayals of agency does not exhaust the multifaceted ways in which gender roles are negotiated within Christian and Muslim societies. Gender identity and power are constructed through a complex synergy of religious, legal, economic, and cultural factors that extend beyond scriptural models. Contemporary gender norms emerge from ongoing dialogues between tradition, modernity, political ideologies, and individual agency. Future research would benefit from integrative frameworks that situate religious texts within broader socio-political and economic structures, thereby contextualizing scriptural agency within the lived realities of gender

relations. Comparative case studies investigating legal reforms, educational policies, and grassroots gender activism in different communities could reveal how theological narratives intersect with other determinants of gender justice and agency.

In summary, acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the significance of the present analysis; rather, it highlights fertile avenues for future scholarship to deepen, broaden, and complicate understandings of gender and agency in religious narratives. Expanding textual scope, incorporating empirical methods, refining comparative hermeneutics, embracing historical dynamics, and engaging with interdisciplinary contexts stands to enrich the field's capacity to interrogate and transform the cultural legacies of Biblical and Quranic portrayals of female and couple agency.

GENERAL CONCLUSION OF THE THESIS

At the end of the study, the current research reveals:

The Literature Review Results: Key themes and findings from scholarly literature in the first chapter on gender roles in the Old Testament reveals a dynamic and evolving field of study, marked by significant scholarly debate and diverse interpretive approaches. While acknowledging the pervasive patriarchal context of ancient Israel, contemporary scholarship moves beyond simplistic readings to explore the complexities of female agency, divine intentions, and the socio-historical nuances embedded in the biblical text.

The literature review on gender roles in the Old Testament uncovers a complex and often seemingly contradictory picture, shaped by the intersection of divine revelation, ancient Near Eastern cultural norms, and the consequences of sin. While a clear patriarchal structure is evident, the Old Testament also presents instances of women exercising significant influence, leadership, and agency.

Here is a breakdown of key themes and findings from scholarly literature:

1. The Primacy of Patriarchy

* Societal Structure: It is widely acknowledged that ancient Israelite society, like most ancient Near Eastern cultures, was fundamentally patriarchal. This meant that men, particularly fathers and heads of households, held primary authority and legal power.

* Legal Status: Women were largely defined in relation to the men in their lives (father, husband, brother, son). Legally, a woman was often considered property of her father before marriage, and then of her husband. Marriage contracts and dowry systems reflect this. Daughters could be given in marriage by their fathers with little to no say for the woman (e.g., Judges 1:12-13).

* Lineage and Inheritance: Lineage was typically traced through the male line, and inheritance laws largely favored sons. While women could inherit property in certain circumstances (e.g., if there were no male heirs, as in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27), this was an exception rather than the norm.

* Purity Laws: The Levitical purity codes placed specific restrictions on women related to menstruation and childbirth, contributing to their temporary ritual impurity. These laws, while not necessarily indicating inferiority, did set women apart in terms of access to certain religious spaces and rituals.

* Reproductive Role: A woman's primary value and identity within the society were often tied to her ability to bear children, particularly male heirs. Childlessness was a significant social and personal disgrace (e.g., Rachel in Genesis 30:1).

2. Domestic and Economic Spheres

* Household as Primary Sphere: A woman's main domain was the household. Her daily life involved extensive labor: grinding grain, preparing food, drawing water, making textiles (spinning, weaving), cleaning, and caring for children and livestock.

*Economic Contribution: Far from being idle, women's work was absolutely vital to the household's economic survival and prosperity. Proverbs 31:10-31, while often idealized, paints a picture of a "virtuous wife" who is highly industrious, manages household resources, engages in trade, and contributes significantly to the family's wealth. This demonstrates that women could have considerable control over household material resources.

*Education of Children: Mothers played a crucial role in the early education and moral instruction of their children.

3. Female Agency and Influence despite Patriarchy

Despite the patriarchal framework, the Old Testament narratives present numerous examples of women who exercised significant agency, influence, and even leadership:

*Prophetesses: The Old Testament explicitly names several women as prophetesses, indicating that God communicated through them:

*Miriam (Exodus 15:20) – Led the women in worship after the Red Sea crossing.

*Deborah (Judges 4-5) – A prophetess and a judge, who held legal and military authority, leading Israel to victory against its enemies. Her dual role is particularly striking.

*Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20) – A prophetess consulted by King Josiah and his officials concerning the newly discovered Book of the Law. Her prophetic word was authoritative.

*Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3) – Referred to as "the prophetess," suggesting she also had prophetic gifting.

*Abigail (1 Samuel 25) – A wise woman who intervenes to prevent David from committing a rash act, saving her household.

*Rahab (Joshua 2, 6) – A prostitute who protects the Israelite spies and becomes part of the lineage of Jesus.

*Esther – Becomes queen and, through clever strategizing and courage, saves her people from genocide.

*The Wise Woman of Abel Beth-Maacah (2 Samuel 20) – Her wisdom saves her city from Joab's attack.

*Mothers and Matriarchs: Figures like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, though operating within a patriarchal society, are pivotal in the unfolding of God's covenant history. Their decisions, rivalries, and actions significantly impact the patriarchal narratives.

*Levirate Marriage: While seemingly restrictive (a widow without a son was to marry her deceased husband's brother to perpetuate his name), it also offered a form of social security for women who might otherwise be destitute.

4. Creation Accounts and the Fall

*Genesis 1-2: Scholars often highlight Genesis 1:26-28, which states that both male and female

are created in the "image of God" and given dominion over creation, suggesting an original equality in essence and purpose. Genesis 2 depicts woman as a "helper corresponding to him" (ezer kenegdo), a phrase that implies a complementary partnership rather than inherent subordination.

*Genesis 3 (The Fall): The pronouncements in Genesis 3:16 ("Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you") are widely interpreted as a consequence of sin, not God's original design. This verse describes the distortion of the original harmonious relationship into one marked by struggle and domination, which then became characteristic of human societies, including ancient Israel.

5. Nuance and Complexity

*Diversity of Experience: It's crucial to avoid a monolithic view. The Old Testament is a collection of diverse literature (law, narrative, poetry, prophecy) spanning centuries, and the experiences of women varied depending on their social status, family context, and individual circumstances.

*God's Justice and Protection: Despite the patriarchal system, the Law (Torah) often included provisions to protect vulnerable members of society, including women, widows, and orphans. While these protections might not align with modern egalitarian ideals, they represented a significant step towards justice compared to other ancient Near Eastern legal codes.

*Feminist Interpretations: Modern feminist biblical scholarship has significantly contributed to understanding gender roles by:

*Reading "against the grain": Highlighting the hidden voices and agency of women in narratives.

*Critiquing patriarchal biases: Examining how the text itself might reflect or even endorse patriarchal norms that are not necessarily divine commands for all time.

*Exploring gendered language and imagery: Analyzing how male and female metaphors are used for God, Israel, and other concepts.

<u>In the Neo Testament</u>

I.Jesus's Ministry and the Gospels:

*Revolutionary Inclusivity: A broad consensus among scholars (e.g., Witherington III, Stagg, and Evans) affirms that Jesus's interactions with women were remarkably counter-cultural for his time. He treated women with respect, dignity, and agency, often transcending the societal norms of first-century Judaism and Greco-Roman culture, where women were often marginalized.

*Direct Engagement: Jesus engaged women directly in theological discussions (e.g., the Samaritan woman at the well, John 4; Mary and Martha, Luke 10), listened to their concerns, and affirmed their faith. This was unusual for a male teacher of that era.

*Healing and Dignity: He healed women (e.g., the woman with a hemorrhage, Mark 5; Peter's mother-in-law, Mark 1), often touching them, which could have rendered him ritually unclean, demonstrating a concern for their physical and social well-being.

*Women as Disciples and Supporters: The Gospels record women following Jesus (e.g., Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and Luke 8:1-3), financially supporting his ministry, and being present at crucial moments like the crucifixion and resurrection. Scholars emphasize that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection (Matthew 28:1-10; John 20:11-18), a significant theological point that undercuts notions of female inferiority.

*Challenge to Patriarchal Norms: Jesus's teachings on divorce (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) are seen as protecting women from arbitrary dismissal, placing a higher standard on male responsibility. His condemnation of lust (Matthew 5:28) also challenged the objectification of women prevalent in society.

*Mary, Mother of Jesus: Mary's unique role in the Incarnation is highlighted as a testament to God's choice of a woman for a pivotal moment in salvation history (Luke 1:26-38).

II. The Early Church and the Book of Acts:

*Active Participants: Women are shown engaging in prayer, hospitality, and evangelism (e.g., Lydia, Acts 16:14-15; Dorcas, Acts 9:36-39).

*Priscilla: Along with her husband Aquila, Priscilla is depicted as a co-worker with Paul and a teacher of Apollos (Acts 18:26), suggesting a significant role in theological instruction.

*House Churches: Given that many early Christian gatherings met in homes, women who owned these homes (e.g., Mary, mother of John Mark, Acts 12:12; Nympha, Colossians 4:15) likely played leadership roles as hosts and patrons.

III. Pauline Epistles: The Core of the Debate:

The Pauline letters are the primary battleground for discussions on gende roles in the New Testament due to seemingly contradictory statements.

*Egalitarian Interpretations:

*Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This verse is often considered the theological bedrock for egalitarianism, arguing that in Christ, traditional societal hierarchies, including gender-based ones, are nullified regarding spiritual standing and functional roles in the church. Scholars like Catherine Kroeger, Richard Clark Kroeger, and Ben Witherington III emphasize that this verse signifies a radical new order of equality in the Christian community.

*Women Co-Workers: Paul's greetings in Romans 16:1-16 are frequently cited, listing numerous women as co-workers (Phoebe, a diakonos or deacon/minister; Junia, possibly an "apostle"; Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus's mother, Nereus's sister, Julia). Egalitarian scholars argue that these women held significant, recognized leadership and ministry roles.

*1 Corinthians 11:5: "But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head." This passage shows women publicly praying and prophesying in church, indicating active participation in worship, which egalitarians see as a clear counterpoint to passages

advocating silence.

*Contextual Readings of Restrictive Passages: Egalitarians interpret passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 ("women should remain silent in the churches") and 1 Timothy 2:11-14 ("I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man") as:

*Culturally Specific: Addressing particular issues in those specific congregations (e.g., unruly behavior, addressing false teaching, or concerns about pagan cult practices).

*Interpolations: Some radical egalitarian scholars propose that certain verses (especially 1 Corinthians 14:34-35) are later scribal interpolations and not original to Paul.

*Limited Authority: Interpreting "authority" (authentein) in 1 Timothy 2:12 as a specific type of illicit or domineering authority, not a general prohibition against all teaching or leadership.

*Distinction between "Value" and "Role": While accepting spiritual equality, complementarians hold that God has ordained distinct roles for men and women within the family and church.

*Complementarian Interpretations:

*Creation Order and the Fall: Complementarians (e.g., Wayne Grudem, John Piper, Andreas Köstenberger) generally build their case from Genesis 1-3, emphasizing the order of creation (Adam first, then Eve as "helper") and the consequences of the Fall in Genesis 3:16 as establishing a divine pattern for male headship in the family and church. They see this pattern as consistent throughout Scripture.

*Pauline Headship and Submission: They interpret passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33 ("Wives, submit to your husbands... Husbands, love your wives...") and 1 Corinthians 11:3 ("the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man...") as prescriptive, establishing a divinely ordained hierarchy with male headship and female submission in marriage. The term kephalē ("head") is understood to mean "authority over."

*Prohibitions on Teaching and Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-14 ("I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet") is a central text for complementarians, seen as a universal and timeless prohibition against women holding authoritative teaching or leadership roles over men in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is also interpreted as a general prohibition on women speaking in an authoritative capacity in the church.

*Galatians 3:28 Context: Complementarians argue that Galatians 3:28 refers to spiritual equality in salvation, not to functional roles or the abolition of gender distinctions in the church or home. They maintain that while male and female are equal in worth before God, they have different, God-designed roles.

*Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, Titus): The stricter tone regarding women's roles in these epistles (especially 1 Timothy) is often attributed to a later period of the early church, where concerns about false teaching and church order led to more defined and sometimes restrictive roles. Scholars debate whether these are later interpolations, written by a disciple of Paul, or genuinely reflective

of Paul's evolving thought and responses to specific challenges.

IV. General Themes and Areas of Nuance:

*Household Codes (Haustafeln): Scholars analyze the household codes in Ephesians 5, Colossians 3, and 1 Peter 3, which address wives, husbands, children, slaves, and masters. While reflecting Greco- Roman societal structures, these codes are also seen as subverting them by calling for mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21) and demanding ethical behavior from those in power (husbands, masters).

*Diakonia (Service/Ministry): The concept of diakonia is crucial. Scholars discuss whether women like Phoebe (Romans 16:1) held formal ordained roles as "deacons" or engaged in broader acts of service, impacting the understanding of women's leadership potential.

*The Problem of "Silence": The infrequent naming of women in some leadership contexts prompts discussions on whether this reflects actual absence or historical bias in documentation.

*Historical and Cultural Context: Virtually all scholarly approaches emphasize the importance of understanding the specific socio-cultural context of the New Testament (Jewish, Greco-Roman). However, the degree to which these cultural contexts should limit the application of biblical principles to modern contexts is a primary point of divergence between complementarian and egalitarian views.

*Intersectionality: Emerging scholarship also considers how gender roles intersect with other social categories (e.g., class, ethnicity) in the New Testament narratives.

In conclusion, the literature on gender roles in the New Testament is characterized by a vigorous dialogue, primarily between complementarian and egalitarian perspectives. While both sides agree on the equal worth of men and women in God's eyes, their differing interpretations of key Pauline passages and the broader theological trajectory of the New Testament lead to divergent conclusions regarding the scope of women's roles in Christian leadership and the family. Jesus's radical treatment of women remains a central point of affirmation for both sides, albeit interpreted through different hermeneutical lenses.

Scholarly Debates findings: Complementarianism vs. Egalitarianism

The interpretation of New Testament gender roles forms the core of two major theological positions:

*Complementarianism: Holds that men and women are equal in dignity and worth (essence) but have distinct, complementary roles in marriage and the church, with men generally holding leadership positions (e.g., husband as "head," only men as elders/pastors). They emphasize a divinely ordained hierarchy that precedes the Fall.

*Egalitarianism: Affirms full equality between men and women in all spheres of life, including marriage and church leadership. They argue that any perceived hierarchy in the New Testament is a concession to cultural norms or a temporary measure, and that the overriding message of Christ's redemption is the breaking down of all barriers, including gender-based ones. They emphasize

the Spirit's gifting to all believers, regardless of gender, for ministry.

Thus, The New Testament presents a complex and evolving picture of gender roles. While it operated within and sometimes accommodated the patriarchal structures of the Roman world, it also introduced revolutionary concepts. Jesus's radical inclusivity, the active participation of women in the early church, and the profound theological declaration of spiritual equality in Christ (Galatians 3:28) challenged the prevailing norms. The "household codes," particularly when understood through the lens of mutual submission and Christ-like sacrificial love, transform typical ancient power dynamics into a call for reciprocal service and partnership. Modern scholarship continues to grapple with these texts, seeking to understand the biblical vision for gender in light of both historical context and timeless theological principles of equality, love, and redemption.

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While the Old Testament undeniably portrays a society structured along patriarchal lines, a comprehensive literature review reveals that the reality of women's lives and their roles was far more nuanced. They were crucial to household economy, actively participated in religious life (including prophetic roles), and in many instances, demonstrated remarkable strength, wisdom, and agency that influenced the course of biblical history. The underlying theological anthropology of Genesis 1-2 also suggests an original design of partnership and equality that stands in tension with the post-Fall realities depicted throughout much of the Old Testament.

Synthesis of Findings and Contribution to Quranic Scholarship on Female Agency:

The synthesis of the findings presented in this study contributes substantively to Quranic scholarship on female agency by reframing women’s roles in early Islamic narratives as dynamic and multifaceted expressions of ethical, spiritual, and social participation. Building on the prior discussion that challenged reductive and patriarchal portrayals of women in early Islamic historiography, the current analysis elucidates that female agency in the Quran is neither monolithic nor passive but rather constitutes a spectrum of engagements that encompass strategic reasoning, dialogic negotiation, and principled autonomy within divinely ordained frameworks. This nuanced understanding advances the field by integrating interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives with close textual exegesis, thereby enriching traditional hermeneutical approaches.

Significantly, this research foregrounds the layered nature of agency as conceptualized within Quranic narratives, reconciling the apparent tension between submission and autonomytwo constructs often perceived as mutually exclusive in gender discourse. Instead, the female figures examined reveal a model of agency deeply embedded in spiritual submission yet

simultaneously animated by volitional action and ethical discernment. Such a dialectical interplay resonates with Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) tripartite model of agency, where practical-evaluative and projective dimensions reveal forward- looking intentionality alongside responsiveness to structural constraints. For instance, Maryam's acknowledgment of divine will coexists with an articulate expression of her own integrity and moral reasoning, illustrating a situated agency that is both obedient to and interpretive of divine command. This dual facet invites scholars to expand their hermeneutical lens beyond simplistic binaries, reminding us that autonomy in early Islamic contexts could be relational and mediated rather than strictly individualistic.

Furthermore, the identification of indirect and strategic forms of female agencysuch as diplomatic acumen, spiritual intercession, and ethical resistancebroadens the analytical scope of Quranic studies to incorporate diverse modalities of influence beyond overt political authority or public leadership. The example of Bilqis's negotiation with Prophet Solomon, as demonstrated in the Quran (27:2344), exemplifies a female figure exercising diplomatic skill and political acumen within the given patriarchal order, contesting monolithic narratives that restrict women to passive domestic roles. Similarly, Asiya's resistance to Pharaoh's tyranny (Quran 66:11) epitomizes an ethical agency grounded in faith and moral courage, underscoring how female characters contribute substantively to the formation of communal identity and collective values. These findings encourage interpretive strategies that acknowledge the multiplicity of female agency and challenge longstanding assumptions about gendered power dynamics in Islamic theology and history.

Critically, the study's engagement with exegetical traditions reveals that interpretations of female agency have evolved and remain contested across temporal and cultural milieus. Classical tafsir often mirrored prevailing patriarchal norms, sometimes obscuring the complexity of women's participation in spiritual and social life (Saeed, 2006). However, contemporary feminist tafsir, exemplified by scholars such as Barlas (2002) and Wadud (1999), has actively reinterpreted Quranic narratives to recover and amplify women's voices and agency. This ongoing exegetical plurality not only enriches Quranic scholarship but also situates female agency as a hermeneutic locus wherein theological reflection and gender politics intersect. Consequently, the present research contributes to a critical scholarly discourse that recognizes the fluidity and contestation inherent in scriptural interpretation, highlighting how women's roles and agency cannot be extricated from hermeneutic praxis and sociopolitical contexts.

In addition, this synthesis underscores the implications of recognizing female agency for broader historiographical and theological frameworks in Islamic studies. By demonstrating that early Muslim women exercised ethical reasoning, engaged in spiritual deliberation, and participated in communal decision-making processes, and this research disrupts entrenched historiographic narratives that have marginalized women's contributions. The interplay of individual initiative and communal expectation evident in Quranic female figures suggests that early Islamic communities may have accommodated complex social matrices allowing for both adherence to

divine ordinance and personal ethical enactment. This insight encourages scholars to reconceptualize early Islamic social history through a gender- sensitive lens that integrates theological, social, and cultural dimensions, thereby fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the formative Muslim milieu.

Ultimately, this study contributes meaningfully to Quranic scholarship on female agency by advocating for a paradigm that embraces interpretive nuance, acknowledges agency in its diverse manifestations, and situates women's roles at the heart of early Islamic spiritual and social life. It reveals that the dynamic negotiation of agency by Quranic female figures offers a fertile ground for rethinking gender and authority within Islamic thought. This approach not only challenges androcentric narratives but also enriches contemporary feminist engagements with the Quran, affirming that female agencyfar from being anomalous or marginalis intrinsic to Islamic textual and historical traditions. As such, the findings advance ongoing dialogues between tradition and modernity, contributing scholarly rigor to debates on gender, power, and religiosity in the Muslim world.

The SECOND CHAPTER reveals the synthesis of findings relative to Situating the concepts of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within biblical narratives, exploring a complex, interwoven portrayal of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights within biblical narratives that defies reductive or monolithic interpretations. The inquiry elucidates that these concepts, far from existing in isolation, function as dynamic, relational categories deeply embedded within the theological and social matrices of both the Old and New Testaments. Central to this synthesis is the recognition that biblical equity transcends modern secular conceptions of justice by integrating legal, relational, and eschatological dimensions which collectively inform ethical discourse and praxis.

At the heart of the findings is the dialectic between structure and agency, particularly how biblical texts negotiate the tension between divinely mandated duties and the exercise of volitional responsibility. The Old Testament, especially in Levitical law, situates equity largely in the realm of communal obligations and distributive justice, emphasizing institutionalized mechanisms to protect the marginalized and establish social order. This legalistic framing underscores the permanence of communal duties, which are not contingent on personal sentiments but divinely commanded, thus guaranteeing enforceability. However, the research highlights that these juridical norms do not operate in a vacuum; they are embedded within a covenantal framework that situates social justice within a broader theological narrative of divine fidelity and human accountability.

Transitioning to the New Testament, the research delineates a notable shift toward internalized ethics characterized by agape as the animating principle. Here, the emphasis on voluntary love and relational accountability reconfigures duties and rights from externally imposed obligations to expressions of transformed moral agency. This evolution from legalism to a spirituality of responsibility implies that ethical comportment is less about mere rule following and more about embodying the character of Christ within communal relationships. The synthesis thus underscores the importance of embracing both paradigmsnot as mutually exclusive but as mutually enrichingfor contemporary theology. Structural justice rooted in covenantal law provides the

necessary scaffolding to ensure systemic equity, while agape-driven agency fosters moral transformation and relational equity.

Gendered agency emerges as a critical thematic strand within this synthesis, revealing the fluid and contextually contingent nature of duties and rights in biblical narratives. The comparative analysis elucidates how scriptural accounts challenge monolithic gender constructs by portraying women's participation beyond rigid functional roles. For example, the New Testament's depiction of women in ministry functions and prophetic roles signals an expansion of agency that both respects continuity with Old Testament traditions and embraces new possibilities rooted in eschatological hope and communal inclusion. Such findings have profound implications for contemporary ethics, advocating for a hermeneutic that seeks to recover marginalized voices and affirm gendered responsibilities as integral to equitable community life.

Moreover, the covenantal and eschatological visions serve as pivotal lenses through which duties and rights are not only defined but also oriented toward a horizon of hope and ultimate restoration. This dual theological framework invites a nuanced understanding that grapples with present exigenciessuch as social justice, human rights, and ecological stewardshipwhile maintaining a teleological perspective centered on God's redemptive purposes. Ethical agency, therefore, is both a present responsibility and a proactive anticipation of divine justice, offering a rich normative resource for addressing the ambiguities and challenges of modern pluralistic societies.

The interpretive complexity uncovered in the findings cautions against simplistic or ahistorical readings of biblical ethics. Instead, it advocates for a hermeneutical posture that is critically aware of the texts' situatedness and their dynamic development across canonical and historical contexts. This sensitivity safeguards against anachronism and supports a responsible appropriation of biblical principles that honors both continuity and innovation. Such a methodological stance ensures that contemporary applications of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights remain faithful to theological integrity while responsive to evolving sociocultural frameworks.

In integrating these dimensions, a participatory ethic emerges, one that situates moral agency within relational networks shaped by divine and human reciprocity. Rather than viewing duties and rights solely as juridical impositions or autonomous choices, this model envisions them as expressions of communal fidelity whereby institutions and individuals co-construct just and compassionate social realities. Consequently, biblical narratives provide a robust conceptual architecture that enables contemporary theological ethics to navigate the complexities of justice in ways that balance institutional reform with transformative interpersonal praxis.

Ultimately, the research asserts that the biblical discourse on equity, responsibility, duties, and rights offers a deeply textured and multifaceted paradigm. This paradigm champions an ethic that is simultaneously structurally attentive and agape-centered, fostering justice that is both systemic and relational. The synthesis points to a theological vision wherein faithful discipleship manifests through balanced commitments to communal well-being, gender inclusivity, and eschatological hope. By engaging these interrelated dimensions, contemporary theological ethics gains a richly

resonant framework capable of addressing both perennial and emergent social challenges with nuance, integrity, and forward-looking hope.

However in the third chapter,the synthesis of findings presented in this research reveals a nuanced, multifaceted engagement with Qur'anic narratives on divorce, marriage, women's liberties, financial responsibilities, and funerary matters, showing that these issues cannot be fully understood through monolithic or static interpretations.

The research questions sought to uncover how interpretive communitiesboth scholarly and laynavigate classical jurisprudential paradigms in light of socio-cultural realities, and how those negotiations shape women's agency across these interconnected domains. Overall, the evidence indicates that gender- sensitive readings of the Qur'an, combined with dynamic hermeneutic approaches, give rise to evolving notions of rights and responsibilities that preserve continuity with tradition while responding to contemporary concerns of justice.

A related thematic axis emerges in the treatment of women's economic entitlements, including mahr, nafqah, and inheritance, which the research identifies as both pivotal to women's material agency and indicative of broader gendered negotiations within Islamic law. The reinterpretations championed by reform-minded scholars employ ethical imperatives embedded in the Qur'ansuch as justice ('adl) and benevolence (ihsan) to challenge reductive legalistic readings that have historically minimized women's financial autonomy (Bano, 2012). Concurrently, lay communities operationalize these reinterpretations by embedding them into customary practices, negotiating between religious idealism and communal traditions, often mediated by gendered power hierarchies. This dialectic underscores the symbiotic relationship between textual authority and social praxis, whereby normative frameworks are both top- down and bottom-up phenomena.

Funerary affairs, encompassing ritual participation, economic obligations linked to death, and inheritance distribution, represent yet another critical thematic domain wherein gendered rights and liberties are actively renegotiated. The research highlights how traditional prescriptions, frequently limiting women's involvement in funerary rites or their inheritance shares, are challenged by progressive interpretive efforts that emphasize the Qur'an's explicit guidelines encouraging equitable economic treatment of heirs (Qur'an 4:7, 4:11). Importantly, community-based movements, often led by women's groups or local religious leaders, manifest practical strategies to bridge the gap between juridical ideals and customary restrictions. These actions not only foster awareness but also recalibrate communal norms, situating women's rights within both religious legitimacy and cultural acceptability (Oppenheimer, 2014).

The synthesis of insights regarding biblical gender agency, particularly as they emerge from the critical dialogues advanced by Clark (2022) and Martin (2023), reveals a multifaceted understanding of how scriptural narratives continue to exert significant influence on contemporary notions of women's autonomy, marital relations, and economic participation within religious settings. This body of scholarship foregrounds the critical necessity of parsing agency not solely as an expression of resistance or submission but as a complex, situated form of relational negotiation embedded within theological, cultural, and institutional frameworks. The analyses indicate that

biblical prescriptions concerning marriage, divorce, and ritualized financial responsibilities, such as dowries and funerary expenses, function both as instruments of patriarchal control and as potential spaces for micro-practices of female agency that resist or reinterpret such constraints.

Engagement with these narratives from socio-historical, feminist, and intersectional perspectives underscores the limitations of traditional hermeneutics that often perpetuate androcentric readings, inadvertently sustaining gender hierarchies under the guise of doctrinal fidelity. By integrating feminist theory and intersectionality, researchers like Martin advocate for a hermeneutical shift that recognizes how the lived realities of womenshaped by ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and denominational contextscontour their negotiation of agency within biblical frameworks. Therefore, rather than treating biblical texts as static repositories of universal mandates, scholarship increasingly emphasizes their interpretive dynamism, shaped reciprocally by contemporary socio-political exigencies and historical contingencies. For instance, the ritual management of funerary customs, which once symbolized rigid gender roles, may now serve as arenas wherein women articulate social capital and redefine familial authority.

This synthesis opens several avenues for further research that could deepen and expand understanding in this domain. Firstly, comparative studies that systematically juxtapose Christian biblical narratives with Islamic legal and ritual traditions, as pointedly suggested by Wilson (2016), could illuminate nuanced convergences and divergences in gendered agency across religious traditions. Such research would benefit from ethnographic methods that center women's voices and lived experiences to move beyond textual or doctrinal analysis toward grounded understandings of practice and resistance. Secondly, interdisciplinary approaches coupling feminist theology with economic anthropology could better expose how ritualized financial obligationsranging from dowries to funeral expensesoperate as critical sites of both control and negotiation, revealing the material dimensions of agency often overlooked in purely textual studies.

Whereas in the fourth chapter, The analysis undertaken throughout this study leads to a multifaceted response to the research question regarding the portrayal of female and couple agency in biblical and Qur'anic narratives, notably through the figures of Esther, Deborah, Mariam, Adam and Eve, and Solomon with the Queen of Sheba. The answer insists on perceiving agency not as a monolithic or uniformly empowering concept but as a variegated, context-dependent phenomenon deeply enmeshed in theological, cultural and socio-political frameworks. This nuanced understanding moves beyond reductive binaries of domination versus liberation, illuminating how agency is exercised within and against dominant structures and expectations.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that female agency in these sacred narratives is articulated through different modalities that reflect each tradition's theological emphases and socio-historical contexts. Esther's narrative illustrates agency as strategic and circumspect, highlighting how women's empowerment often navigates constraints rather than seeking outright dismantlement of patriarchal power. Her use of calibrated silence and speech acts exemplify J. Butler's notion of subversive performativity, where agency emerges within restrictive norms through subtle yet consequential interventions (Butler, 1990). Deborah's public prophetic and judicial authority

disrupts conventional gender expectations by occupying a divinely sanctioned leadership role, expanding the conceptual space where female agency manifests in ancient Israelite contexts (Campbell, 2009). In parallel, Mariam's portrayal in the Qur'anic discourse foregrounds spiritual agency through piety and divine favor, emphasizing a form of empowerment intimately linked with religious virtue rather than political or social dominance (Mahmood, 2005). This alignment with a model of spiritual subjectivity challenges Western feminist critiques that might dismiss such agency as passive or subjugated, urging a more intersectional reading attuned to Islamic devotional paradigms (Crenshaw, 1991).

When examining couples' agency, the narratives complicate simplistic patriarchal interpretations by enfolding relational and dialogic dimensions that allow for interdependent negotiations of power. Adam and Eve's joint narrative embodies tensions between shared responsibility and hierarchical privileging of male precedence, yet a critical hermeneutic stance reveals openings for reconceptualizing this dyad as a site of mutual recognition and complex agency, consonant with contemporary relational feminist insights (Bird, 1997). The interaction between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba further exemplifies this dynamic by portraying a female protagonist who asserts intellectual and political autonomy within a sovereign discourse, with Solomon responding not from a position of unilateral authority but through engagement and reciprocation. This dialogical model disrupts patriarchal monologues by suggesting that couple agency can emerge through negotiation, respect, and intellectual exchange, thereby enriching feminist hermeneutics with exemplars of partnership beyond conjugal intimacy (Mernissi, 1991).

The comparative dimension between biblical and Qur'anic portrayals reveals fundamental differences and areas of convergence that bear theoretical significance. Biblical texts often frame agency within the dialectic of divine command and human initiative, where women's leadership is contingent upon divine sanction but simultaneously challenges socio-political boundaries (Trible, 1984). Conversely, the Qur'anic texts privilege piety, submission, and divine election as the core of female agency, situating empowerment less in socio-political realms and more in spiritual participation, thus reframing power through ethical and religious lenses (Mahmood, 2005). Such differentiation foregrounds how theological doctrines shape embodied agency, inviting a pluralistic framework that recognizes diverse paradigms of empowerment rather than imposing homogenizing Western feminist criteria.

Drawing on these observations, the study contributes theoretically by underscoring the need for interpretive frameworks that respect the intricate interplay between empowerment, constraint, and situatedness within sacred narratives. These findings critique simplistic applications of agency as synonymous with autonomy or overt resistance, advocating instead for a relational, contextualized, and layered understanding that honors the cultural and religious particularities embedded in these texts. In doing so, the study aligns with intersectional feminist theory, which posits that agency is mediated by intersecting identities and power structures, thus resisting universalist claims while foregrounding specificity (Crenshaw, 1991). Furthermore, it elucidates how scriptural narratives provide resources for contemporary gender discourse by modeling complex forms of agency that

incorporate negotiation, spiritual vocation, and strategic self-fashioning.

The implications extend to contemporary engagements with gender roles within religious communities and scholarship alike. Recognizing the relational and ambivalent nature of agency promotes dialogues that navigate between tradition and transformation without defaulting to binary oppositions of oppression versus liberation. This balanced approach enables more nuanced gender policies that honor religious sensibilities while seeking social justice, thereby affirming what Mahmood (2005) terms "agency as embodied ethical striving" within religious frameworks. Additionally, highlighting couple agency as a site of mutual engagement informs models of gender equality premised on partnership and dialogue, rather than competition or unilateral empowerment. The interpretive humility and pluralism advocated here encourage ongoing critical hermeneutics that resist static or patriarchal appropriations of sacred texts, fostering spaces where gendered agency can be reclaimed and reimagined in multiple registers.

In summary, the research substantiates that biblical and Qur'anic narratives present female and couple agency as deeply contextual, ambivalent, and relational phenomena shaped by interlocking theological, cultural, and historical determinants. These portrayals defy simplistic categorization and instead invite interpretive strategies attentive to contradiction, negotiation, and situated subjectivities. Through such engagement, sacred texts emerge not as rigid repositories of gender norms but as dynamic discursive environments that continue to influence, challenge, and inspire contemporary understandings of gender roles and agency.

Patterns of gender representation in selected biblical passages

The examination of gender representation patterns within the selected biblical passages reveals a complex interplay between narrative positioning, ideological constructs, and performative enactments of authority. These patterns cannot be understood merely through a surface reading of textual content; rather, they emerge from the intricate narrative strategies and characterizations that mediate gendered power relations within the biblical literary corpus. Building on the previously established comparative design, which foregrounds gender performativity and Foucauldian conceptions of power, the selected biblical texts demonstrate a multifaceted articulation of gender that both sustains and subtly contests prevailing patriarchal orders.

In these biblical narratives, female figures often occupy roles that blend societal marginality with moments of profound agency, thus complicating monolithic conceptions of gendered authority. For example, the portrayal of Deborah as a judge and military leader in the Book of Judges underscores a rare but significant instance where female authority is not merely acknowledged but institutionalized within the narrative framework (Judges 45). The literary construction of Deborah's character employs a narrative focalization that highlights her wisdom, prophetic insight, and leadership capabilities, positioning her as an embodiment of divine-sanctioned authority that, while exceptional, challenges normative gender hierarchies. This narrative technique disrupts the usual male-centric framework by enabling a woman to occupy public and political power, thereby revealing the text's capacity to negotiate tensions between patriarchal ideology and the representation of empowered femininity. Such depictions resonate with

Judith Butler's theory of gender as performative acts that iterate and potentially subvert dominant norms (Butler, 1990).

Conversely, Esther's narrative arc illustrates a more nuanced and performatively strategic deployment of gendered power that is intricately tied to norms of femininity and honor within a diasporic Jewish context (Esther 110). Her authority emerges through calculated self-presentation, negotiation, and rhetorical arts rather than explicit institutional designation. The narrative focalization shifts between Esther's internal deliberations and external dialogic exchanges with key male figures, engendering a dynamic interplay of voice and silence that heightens her agency while simultaneously circumscribing it within the socio-cultural confines of her environment. This reveals the multifarious ways biblical texts encode female authoritynot solely as explicit rulership but as subtle, embodied forms of influence that complicate straightforward power models. The text thus invites a literary reading attentive to the deployment of narrative perspective and speech acts as mechanisms through which gendered authority is both enacted and veiled.

Male figures in the selected passages frequently epitomize normative patriarchal authority, but these representations also contain moments of vulnerability and contested legitimacy that enrich the gender discourse. For instance, King David's portrayals oscillate between divine favor and moral fallibility, which serve to humanize and problematize hegemonic masculine authority. The literary construction of David is marked by narrative ambivalence, wherein the text foregrounds both his role as anointed monarch and his ethical failings, thus opening a discursive space for reflecting on the contingent nature of male authority (2 Samuel 1112). Such complexity signals that biblical narratives do not simply reaffirm patriarchal dominance but inscribe power relations as dynamic and subject to narrative tension.

This dialectic aligns with Foucault's conception of power as relational, contingent, and exercised through discourse rather than possessed inherently (Foucault, 1978).

Within these representative biblical narratives, gendered authority emerges through a range of literary devices including direct speech, focalization, and rhetorical structuring, which collectively shape readers' perceptions of legitimacy and resistance. The dialogic nature of these passages allows for the juxtaposition of conflicting voices and perspectives, thereby rendering visible the tensions and negotiations within gendered power dynamics. For instance, prophetic speecheswhether delivered by male or female figuresoften function as performative acts that articulate divine authority while simultaneously questioning established socio-religious hierarchies. The prophetic role, frequently occupied by males, nonetheless incorporates motifs of vulnerability and counter-normativity, reflecting a complex performative field where gendered power is refracted through religious mediation.

Moreover, the intertextuality embedded in the biblical corpus, including the rich exegetical traditions associated with these narratives, contributes to layered patterns of gender representation. Later interpretive communities have variously emphasized or attenuated aspects of these figures' authority, revealing that gendered enactments of power are not solely textual artifacts but live within ongoing traditions of negotiation and reconstruction. This dynamic underscores the necessity

of situating literary analysis within broader hermeneutic frameworks that acknowledge the mutable and performative dimensions of gender and authority. Such an approach unpacks how canonical texts function as sites where gendered identities and power relations are persistently reconfigured rather than fixed.

In summary, the patterns of gender representation in the selected biblical passages articulate a spectrum of authority that includes explicit institutional power, covert strategic influence, and contested patriarchal dominance. These representations operate through sophisticated literary techniques that enable negotiation between prescribed gender norms and instances of subversion or redefinition. The biblical narratives exhibit an ambivalence toward gendered authority that aligns with and expands upon the theoretical premises of performativity and power relationships detailed earlier. By recognizing these representational patterns, the comparative analysis of sacred texts is enriched, highlighting the biblical corpus's complex engagement with gender and authority as fluid, dialogic, and culturally embedded constructs.

The juxtaposition of the two corporathe Hebrew Bible and the Quranentails a rich intertextual dialogue that reveals complex negotiations of gender and power embedded within their respective narrative strategies. Intertextuality here is not merely a matter of shared motifs or parallel characters; rather, it unfolds as a dynamic literary conversation where the textual voices of each tradition engage with, reframe, or sometimes contest one another's portrayals of authority and gendered agency. This dialogue can be seen most prominently in the ways archetypal figures are constructed and the narrative voices that govern their representation, enabling a layered understanding of how gender intersects with power across these religious texts.

Where the biblical texts frequently employ focalized narrative perspectives to expose tension between female agency and patriarchal norms, the Quran embeds authority within a framework filled with divine will and prophetic legitimacy, thereby reshaping gendered power relations within a theological discourse. For example, biblical figures such as Deborah, a prophetess and judge who exercises overt political and judicial authority, function as arguably exceptional yet institutionally grounded embodiments of female power. Her story is focalized internally and externally, with narrative techniques emphasizing her leadership's human and political challenges, revealing a dialectic that pivots on gendered expectations within an ancient Israelite context. Deborah's authority challenges the normative gender hierarchy, but the text also reflects underlying ambivalences, as her prominence is situated within a temporary disruption of a broader patriarchy.

In contrast, the Quranic narrative voice typically situates female authority figures like Maryam and Bilqīs within paradigms that interweave spiritual submission with moral and political agency, though mediated through divine sanction and prophetic recognition. Maryam's narrative, as previously discussed, prioritizes her sanctified state and miraculous motherhood over any socio-political governance; her authority is one of spiritual exemplariness rather than institutional power. Bilqīs, conversely, embodies a worldly form of female leadership that finds legitimacy through recognition of Solomon's God-given authority. The Quran's narrative voice

here oscillates between third-person omniscience and direct reported speech, facilitating a dialogical environment where female political authority is exercised yet invariably refracted through religious obedience. This dual emphasis on submission and agency contrasts with the Bible's more localized, human-centered accounts where female authority is frequently marked by contestation and exceptionalism.

Intertextual analyses illuminate that the Quran's narrative voice tends to universalize certain qualities of authorityjustice, obedience, wisdomwhile simultaneously encoding gender distinctions as complementary rather than adversarial to male leadership. This approach creates a narrative space where female authority is sanctioned not as an autonomous power but as harmonized within a larger divine order, reflecting broader theological imperatives. Such narrative configurations resonate with the Foucauldian conceptualization of power as relational and exercised through discourse (Foucault, 1978), whereby the Quran enacts authority through performative speech acts imbued with sacred legitimacy, thereby shaping gendered identities within a theologically calibrated power matrix.

The biblical narratives, in contrast, often employ internal focalizations and strategic silences that expose ideological tensions between gender and authority, providing a literary venue for exploring the ambivalences and contestations inherent in patriarchal structures. The dialogues between male and female figures, as evinced through direct and indirect speech, frequently dramatize struggles over legitimacy and social order, rendering female authority as alternately disruptive and necessary. This textual strategy enables a nuanced interrogation of gendered power asymmetries, where authority is as much about negotiation and resistance as about institutional affirmation.

Moreover, the dialogical interplay between the two corpora's narrative voices highlights differing conceptions of power: the Bible foregrounds authority rooted in human institutionskingship, prophetic office, judiciarygrappling with gendered hierarchies, while the Quran situates authority within a transcendental order, where ultimate power rests with God and human authority functions as divinely delegated stewardship. This ontological divergence manifests in how gendered power is portrayed: biblical female characters may transgress or conform to gender norms within socio-political frameworks, whereas their Quranic counterparts primarily embody virtues validated through submission to divine decree and prophetic exemplarity.

This intertextual dialogue is not static but dynamically engaged through overlapping motifs and narrative strategies. The figure of the Queen of Sheba provides a pivotal example: in biblical traditions, she appears curiously muted or alluded to, whereas the Quranic account develops her as a politically astute leader whose recognition of Solomon's God-given authority signifies a negotiated acceptance of patriarchal divine order. The narrative voice's treatment of her reasoning and diplomatic acumen produces a subtle mediation of female power that both differs from and converses with biblical precedents.

In sum, the intertextual dialogues on gender and power between the two corpora reveal that narrative voice functions as a critical medium through which authority is gendered, contested, and

codified. The biblical narratives tend to highlight tensions and ideological contradictions within gendered authority, utilizing focalization to expose the fragility and complexity of female power within patriarchal institutions. The Quranic texts, by contrast, reconfigure authority as an expression of divine will mediated through prophetic legitimacy, producing archetypes where gender roles are integral yet subordinated within an overarching theological frame. Such literary interplay advances our understanding of how religious narratives deploy voice and representation to negotiate authority and gender, illuminating the ideological and cultural matrices that shape these canonical texts.

Conclusion and Implications

Addressing the research question necessitates an integrated understanding of how equity, responsibility, duties, and rights are conceptualized within biblical narratives, highlighting both their distinctive features and mutual interdependence as articulated in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The examination reveals that biblical texts do not articulate these concepts in isolation; rather, they are deeply interwoven within a theological and ethical framework that resists straightforward secular categorization. This finding contributes to theoretical discussions by illustrating that biblical notions of justice and social order emerge not merely as legal or moral abstractions but as dynamic, relational realities shaped by covenantal commitments and eschatological hope.

The Hebrew Bible situates equity primarily within the language of righteousness (*ṣedeq*) and justice (*mishpat*), which articulate a divinely mandated standard that seeks to order social relations equitably. This normative horizon demands the fulfillment of responsibilities and duties to uphold the rights of vulnerable individuals, even while those rights are rarely expressed in explicit juridical terms. Such a framework challenges modern theoretical models that often assume rights as independent claims divorced from obligations or communal contexts. Instead, the biblical model foregrounds duties as precursors and necessary conditions for the realization of rights, embedding agency within responsibility to others. The covenantal structure undergirding these relationships further situates justice as an expression of fidelity to God, implying that equity encompasses not only social fairness but also theological accountability (Weinfeld, 1995; Brueggemann, 1997).

In contrast, the New Testament reinterprets and radicalizes these categories by introducing the lens of divine grace and the embodied example of Jesus Christ. Equity moves beyond proportional justice toward a generosity that disrupts normative expectationsan ethos encapsulated in parables that challenge merit-based distribution. Here, responsibility and duties are framed through the imperative of reciprocal love, forming an ethical matrix where rights are not primarily legal demands but affirmations of belonging within the eschatological community of faith. This reframing complicates contemporary theories of rights by asserting that claims to justice are inseparable from the lived expression of love and mercy; thus, agency is exercised through active

participation in communal solidarity and compassionate engagement with the marginalized (Moltmann, 1993; Wright, 2004). The example of the Good Samaritan parable, in particular, expands the duty-rights nexus beyond ethnoreligious boundaries, underscoring an emergent vision of justice that posits inclusivity and transformation as integral to equity (Blomberg, 1990).

Theologically, this integration advances crucial contributions to scholarly discourse by demonstrating that biblical equity and rights are neither fixed legal categories nor subjective moral choices, but components of a holistic ethic shaped by covenantal fidelity and future-oriented hope. The role of duties as enabling conditions for rights clarifies that agency within these traditions is relational and mutual rather than atomistic or adversarial. Notably, the eschatological texture of both testaments situates contemporary concerns about justice within a framework that views present ethical demands as anticipatory of divine restoration and judgment (Brueggemann, 1993; Keener, 1993). Such a perspective thereby invites recalibration of modern understandings, urging scholars and practitioners to reconsider how rights discourse can be enriched by themes of responsibility, communal belonging, and transformative hope.

Cumulatively, the biblical corpus contributes a counter-narrative to prevailing secular paradigms by portraying equity, responsibility, duties, and rights as integrated facets of a lived faith that mobilizes agency through covenantal relationship and eschatological vision. The dialectical interaction between the Hebrew Bible's legal-covenantal ethos and the New Testament's grace-infused communal ethics foregrounds a fluid conceptual terrain wherein justice is continually reinterpreted in light of divine presence and future promise. This nuanced hermeneutic challenges reductionist readings and opens space for a more complex, ethically robust engagement with concepts foundational to both ancient religious identity and contemporary social justice discourse. Consequently, any attempt to contextualize these biblical notions within modern frameworks must undertake a delicate balancing act that honors their theological roots and relational dynamism, thus enriching theoretical paradigms concerning equity and human agency in religious traditions.

Recommendations for further research and theological practice

Building on the intricate synthesis of biblical equity and agency, future research must prioritize deeper exegetical and contextual investigations that clarify how evolving historical, cultural, and theological dynamics shape the complex interplay of duties, rights, responsibility, and equity within scripture. One promising avenue involves greater interdisciplinary dialogue, drawing on contemporary social theoryparticularly intersectionality and postcolonial critiquesto elucidate how biblical texts negotiate power relations and social hierarchies beyond traditional analyses. For instance, exploring the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and class within covenantal communities can reveal latent ethical tensions and possibilities that remain underexplored in current scholarship. Such work would further refine understanding of how biblical narratives articulate normative duties and rights not merely as fixed legal codes, but as necessarily situated social practices responsive to communal vulnerability and divine mandate.

Moreover, theological praxis must be informed by this robust academic inquiry to avoid

reductive or anachronistic applications of biblical ethics. There is a critical need for contextual theologies that engage local communities in reflective hermeneutics, fostering a participatory ethic that mediates between structural justice and personal moral agency. Practical theology could fruitfully integrate the dialectic highlighted in the researchthat structural covenantal laws and agape-inspired relational ethics are mutually indispensablein designing models of ecclesial formation, pastoral care, and social advocacy. Such models might, for example, encourage faith communities to embody inclusive leadership and mission strategies, and emphasizing gender equity as a lived reality congruent with biblical witness rather than a mere theoretical ideal. Engaging church institutions and theological educators in this process ensures that the dynamic biblical vision of duties and rights informs communal life and social engagement authentically and critically.

Further exploration should also attend to how eschatological hope, foundational to biblical conceptions of equity, can inform contemporary ethical frameworks addressing systemic injustice and ecological stewardship. Developing theological constructs that integrate present responsibilities with future- oriented hope enables believers to resist fatalism or complacency in the face of persistent social inequities. Here, feminist and liberation theologies offer productive paradigms that resonate with the research's emphasis on transformative agency and inclusivity. By articulating an ethical vision where duties and rights are dynamically oriented toward redemptive restoration, theology can contribute to sustaining morally grounded activism that remains deeply connected to scriptural narrative and divine fidelity. Engaging with emerging global concernssuch as migration, climate justice, and digital ethicsthrough this biblically rooted lens invites innovative applications of equity and responsibility attuned to contemporary challenges.

Methodologically, future research should continue advocating for hermeneutical approaches that resist essentialism and anachronism by employing historical-critical methods alongside narrative and rhetorical criticism. This pluralistic strategy supports a nuanced appropriation of the biblical corpus that honors textual diversity and development across canonical history. Scholars might also expand comparative studies across Abrahamic traditions, examining how shared scriptural motifs of equity, duties, and rights diverge or converge within Jewish, Christian, and Islamic ethical frameworks. Such comparative theological work has the potential to foster interreligious dialogue that broadens moral imagination and collaborative efforts toward justice. By linking biblical insights with wider theological discourse, research can reinforce the relevance and transformative power of scripture in pluralistic societies marked by cultural and religious multiplicity.

In summary, advancing scholarship on biblical concepts of equity, responsibility, duties, and rights demands an integrative approach that bridges rigorous exegesis, critical theory, and contextualized theological praxis. Far from remaining abstract or antiquated, this work has profound implications for how faith communities respond to contemporary ethical dilemmas. By fostering a hermeneutic that is both theologically faithful and socially responsive, future endeavors can ensure that biblical narratives continue to serve as wellsprings of justice, agency, and hope.

This will enable theological ethics to engage effectively with a rapidly changing world, nurturing inclusive, relational communities committed to equity imbued with eschatological vision and grounded in divine-human reciprocity.

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PRAISE BE TO ALLAH