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Characterizing Human Nature: A Study of QS. Ali 'Imran [3]: 14–17 in Tafsir Al-Tarbiyah Al-Islamiyah

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Abstract

This study explores the characteristics of human nature and *fitrah* as created by Allah, and how they are understood in the context of Islamic education through *Tafsir Al-Tarbiyah Al-Islamiyah*. By nature, human beings are inclined to love worldly pleasures. The main concern lies in how to regulate these tendencies so that they do not exceed boundaries or violate divine law. This study employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach. The primary data source is the book *Tafsir Al-Tarbiyah Al-Islamiyah*, while secondary sources include relevant books and academic articles. The analysis method used is content analysis. The findings show that the inclination toward worldly pleasures is not inherently forbidden in Islam. To prevent excessiveness in worldly attachment, QS. Ali 'Imran [3]:14–17 encourages humans to develop patience, honesty, obedience to Allah, charity (*infaq*), and repentance. These attributes serve as a means of balance, enabling humans to align with their *fitrah* and avoid transgressing divine limits.

Keywords: human nature; religious education; *tafsir Al-Tarbiyah Al-Islamiyah*

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān serves as an eternal guide for humanity. It provides fundamental principles concerning the nature of human beings (*fitrah insāniyyah*), the means to attain ultimate truth, and moral conduct aligned with divine intent. Its role as a source of guidance transcends historical and temporal boundaries, remaining perpetually relevant (al-Marāghī, as cited in Jamil & Yahya, 2016). As both a moral compass and spiritual reference, the Qur'ān inspires ethical behavior and regulates individual conduct throughout life.

Human nature is inherently dynamic, possessing the potential to elevate an individual to a position of honor or, conversely, to degradation, depending on how it is

cultivated. As Jamil and Yahya (2016) explain, human behavior is heavily influenced by desire (*nafs*), which can lead to imbalance when left unchecked. In the modern context, the dominance of desire often manifests as *hubb al-dunyā*—excessive attachment to worldly pleasures—which can obscure spiritual clarity and moral discipline.

This reality highlights the importance of addressing human nature through education. Widyadara (as cited in Kesuma, 2013) emphasizes that human beings are fundamentally educable, which supports the notion that education should engage directly with the moral and psychological dimensions of human nature. Syafi'i and Syaoki (2018) similarly argue that a proper understanding of human character is essential in the development of educational models aimed at moral reform. Cultivating virtuous traits, such as sincerity, patience, and humility, enables individuals to fulfill their divine potential.

Those who embody the praiseworthy attributes described in the Qur'ān are better equipped to distinguish between right and wrong, and to carry out their responsibilities toward Allah in accordance with their *fitrah*. However, as al-Ghazālī (as cited in Mahmud, 2005) notes, this process is neither easy nor straightforward. It requires illumination through divine knowledge, which removes the veil of ignorance and opens access to spiritual insight.

Al-Mawdūdī (as cited in Kesuma, 2013) adds that every human being is born with the potential for obedience to Allah, though they are granted freedom of choice. Fulfilling one's *fitrah* through the embodiment of Qur'anic virtues signifies alignment with the original covenant between humans and their Creator. Islamic scholars often classify the essential aspects of human nature into five categories: religion (*dīn*), life (*nafs*), intellect ('*aql*), dignity ('*ird*), and affection (*hubb*) (Kesuma, 2013).

This paper investigates the nature of human characteristics and *fitrah* through an analysis of QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:14–17, as interpreted in *Tafsir al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah* by 'Alī 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd. It aims to reveal how these verses offer an Islamic educational framework for understanding and managing human tendencies. The researchers seek to highlight the pedagogical implications of the verses so they may be actualized in individual and societal life. Ultimately, the application of these values is expected to guide humans toward truth and the fulfillment of their covenant with Allah SWT.

METHOD

This study employs a **qualitative descriptive research approach**, which is commonly used to explore and interpret textual data. The objective of this method is to understand the meanings and implications behind specific phenomena through an in-depth analysis of written sources (Creswell, 2014). In this context, the phenomenon under investigation is the concept of human nature and *fitrah* as reflected in QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:14–17, interpreted through an Islamic educational lens.

The **data collection method** used in this study is **library research**, which involves the systematic examination of texts such as books, journals, and scholarly articles. The primary source of data is the exegetical work *Tafsir al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah* by 'Alī 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd, a prominent scholar whose interpretations emphasize the integration of religious and educational values. Secondary sources include works discussing Islamic educational philosophy and the nature of human beings from an Islamic perspective, such as *Konsep Manusia dalam Sistem Pendidikan*

Islam (Amir, 2012) and *Konsep Fitrah Manusia Perspektif Pendidikan Islam* (Kesuma, 2013).

The **data analysis technique** employed is **content analysis**, which allows the researcher to extract educational meanings and values from the text systematically. Content analysis involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and key concepts in the source materials, particularly those that relate to human behavior, morality, and spiritual development in the Qur'ānic context (Krippendorff, 2013). This method is especially suitable for interpreting religious texts where contextual and theological dimensions must be carefully considered.

Through this approach, the study seeks to uncover how *fitrah* and the natural tendencies of human beings, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, can be addressed and shaped through educational efforts rooted in Islamic teachings.

DISCUSSION

Biography of 'Alī 'Abd al-Halīm Maḥmūd

'Alī 'Abd al-Halīm Maḥmūd (hereafter AAHM) was a distinguished contemporary Egyptian scholar, widely recognized for his contributions to Islamic education, *da'wah*, and exegetical thought. He was a central figure within the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn) and served as a lecturer at al-Azhar University, Cairo. Born in 1928 in Tahtā, Suhāj Province, Egypt, AAHM became involved with the Muslim Brotherhood at an early age and was a direct disciple of Ḥasan al-Bannā, the movement's founder, who was assassinated in 1949 (Meilani & Arif, 2022).

AAHM's intellectual influence extended significantly beyond Egypt. His writings—more than a dozen of which have been translated into multiple languages—are cited widely in academic and religious institutions, including 23 major global libraries. In Indonesia, his works are often referenced in campus-based *tarbiyah* and Islamic activism circles. His educational model has shaped both institutional curricula and personal spiritual development initiatives within Islamic communities.

Among his most important works is *Tafsir al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah*, which demonstrates his educational hermeneutics—an approach that integrates Qur'ānic exegesis with pedagogical concerns. His corpus also includes *al-Ghazw al-Fikrī wa Atharuhu fī al-Mujtama' al-Islāmī*, *Fiqh al-Da'wah ilā Allāh*, *al-Nafs fī al-Islām*, and *Rukn al-Jihād alladhi lā tahiya al-Da'wah illā bih*. These works show his systematic effort to construct a framework of religious education grounded in both textual tradition and contemporary realities.

AAHM passed away in 1978, but his legacy continues through his interpretive methodology. He employed two primary exegetical strategies: (1) selecting Qur'ānic verses based on their educational significance, and (2) identifying key pedagogical themes within them. Unlike other contemporary exegetes such as Muḥammad Shahrūr or Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh, AAHM emphasized that Islam encompasses all divinely revealed messages that call for total submission to Allah, not only those brought by Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ (Arif, 2017).

His exegetical framework reflects what scholars describe as a **hermeneutic of inquiry**, aiming to unveil the multi-layered meanings of the Qur'ān, extract ethical teachings, and apply them to the field of education. AAHM's model assumes that the sacred text is inherently clear, comprehensive, and offers corrective guidance to existing educational practices.

General Interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:14–17

QS. Āli 'Imrān verses 14–17 offer a comprehensive theological reflection on the nature of human desire and its relationship with divine expectations. These verses reveal the human inclination towards worldly pleasures and contrast them with the superior rewards promised in the Hereafter. According to AAHM in *Tafsir al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah*, the verses encompass three primary themes: the characterization of human nature, the permissibility of such inclinations within legal and ethical frameworks, and the superiority of the Hereafter as the ultimate reward (Mahmud, 2005).

Verse 14 begins by describing the adornments that captivate human desires—women, children, wealth in the form of gold and silver, fine horses, livestock, and agricultural land. These are categorized as transient pleasures of this worldly life. The verse concludes by emphasizing that the best and most lasting outcome lies with Allah: “*That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but Allah has with Him the best return*” (Qur’ān 3:14).

In verse 15, the Prophet ﷺ is instructed to declare a rhetorical question: “*Shall I inform you of what is better than that?*” This *istifhām* (interrogative device) introduces a shift from worldly temptation to spiritual fulfillment. The answer is that for those who are God-conscious (*al-muttaqūn*), there are gardens beneath which rivers flow, eternal companionship with purified spouses, and—most significantly—the pleasure (*riḍwān*) of Allah (Qur’ān 3:15).

Verses 16 and 17 elaborate on the ethical and spiritual characteristics that define the *muttaqūn*. They are those who supplicate to their Lord for forgiveness and protection from Hell, and who embody five core virtues:

1. **Patience** (*ṣabr*): Endurance in fulfilling obligations, resisting prohibitions, and withstanding trials.
2. **Truthfulness** (*ṣidq*): In speech, action, and intention.
3. **Obedience** (*qint*): Steadfastness in worship and submission to divine commands.
4. **Charity** (*infaq*): Spending wealth in ways that are pleasing to Allah.
5. **Seeking forgiveness before dawn** (*al-mustaghfirīn bil-ashār*): A deep spiritual practice linked to nightly worship and inner purification.

AAHM interprets these characteristics not merely as ethical ideals, but as integral components of Islamic education and character formation. He argues that these virtues serve as the antidote to excessive indulgence in worldly desires, allowing believers to realign their *fitrah* with divine purpose (Mahmud, 2005).

Moreover, AAHM’s interpretation affirms that the natural inclination toward desire (*shahwah*) is not inherently sinful. Instead, it must be disciplined through adherence to *Shari‘ah*, balanced behavior, and spiritual development. Human desire, when guided, becomes a means for fulfilling one’s role as *khalifah* (vicegerent) on earth.

Explanation of Allah’s Teaching on Human Nature and Fitrah

In *Tafsir al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah*, AAHM explains that the natural inclinations embedded in human beings—such as love for women, children, wealth (gold and silver), and possessions—are divine in origin. These desires were created by Allah not as mere indulgences but as instruments to sustain life on earth and ensure the continuation of human civilization (Mahmud, 2005). From this perspective, the function of such desires

aligns with the human role as khalifah (vicegerent), responsible for maintaining balance (*tawāzun*) in personal conduct and societal development.

AAHM emphasizes that the prophetic mission plays a crucial role in educating and reforming human desires. According to his interpretation, there are three pedagogical methods through which the prophets (*rusul*) addressed and redirected human inclinations:

1. **Emphasizing accountability in the Hereafter:** All actions and desires are subject to divine judgment, which encourages self-restraint and responsibility.
2. **Promoting emulation of the prophetic model:** Prophets embody ideal ethical behavior, serving as practical guides for managing worldly desires.
3. **Issuing warnings for deviation:** When people ignore prophetic guidance, they are reminded of the consequences through divine admonitions.

These methods form the foundation of moral education in Islam, highlighting that desire is neither inherently evil nor rejected, but rather needs to be regulated within the framework of divine law and ethical boundaries.

In the Qur'ān, this balanced perspective is also evident in the use of the term *zinah* (adornment), which is often used to describe things that attract human attention. AAHM categorizes adornments into three types:

1. **Psychological adornment** (*zinah nafsiyyah*): Includes knowledge and upright beliefs.
2. **Physical adornment** (*zinah badaniyyah*): Such as strength and good stature.
3. **External adornment** (*zinah khārijīyyah*): Comprising wealth and social status.

This classification is supported by various Qur'ānic verses. For instance, psychological adornment is mentioned in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]:7:

“Allah has endeared to you faith and has made it pleasing in your hearts...”

Bodily adornment is reflected in QS. Yūnus [10]:24 and external adornment in QS. al-Qaṣāṣ [28]:79. These examples illustrate how adornments, while appealing, must not be idolized or misused. AAHM also points out that the Qur'ān occasionally attributes adornments to Allah (e.g., QS. al-An'ām [6]:108), while in other contexts, it attributes them to *shayṭān* (e.g., QS. al-Anfāl [8]:48). This dual attribution signifies that adornments can be a test—either leading to gratitude and moderation or to vanity and excess.

Ultimately, the educational implication of AAHM's interpretation is clear: human desire must be acknowledged, understood, and shaped—not suppressed. In this way, Islamic education functions as a process of harmonizing human *fitrah* with divine guidance.

Adornment and Desire (Zīnah and Shāhwah)

In his interpretation of QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:14, AAHM presents a nuanced view of human desire (*shāhwah*) and adornment (*zīnah*), both of which are natural inclinations embedded within human beings by Allah. These inclinations are not condemned in themselves; rather, Islam calls for their regulation and alignment with ethical and legal frameworks.

Adornment (Zīnah)

AAHM explains that adornment refers to everything that beautifies human life without necessarily corrupting it. Drawing from classical Arabic sources and Qur'ānic evidence, he categorizes *zīnah* into three distinct forms (Mahmud, 2005):

1. **Psychological adornment (zīnah nafsiyyah):** Inner qualities such as knowledge and noble beliefs.
2. **Physical adornment (zīnah badaniyyah):** Bodily attributes like strength and stature.
3. **External adornment (zīnah khārijīyyah):** Material possessions such as wealth, authority, and social status.

These categories reflect a comprehensive view of human values and aspirations. Each type of *zīnah* has its place and purpose, and when used correctly, it contributes to human dignity and societal welfare. AAHM draws intertextual connections to Qur'ānic verses to support this framework, such as:

1. QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]:7 for psychological adornment:
“*Allah has endeared to you faith and made it pleasing in your hearts...*”
2. QS. Yūnus [10]:24 for physical adornment:
“*...when the earth has taken on its adornment and is beautified...*”
3. QS. al-Qaṣāṣ [28]:79 for external adornment:
“*So he came out before his people in his adornment...*”

Interestingly, the Qur'ān sometimes attributes adornment to Allah (e.g., QS. al-An'ām [6]:108), and in other instances, to *shayṭān* (e.g., QS. al-Anfāl [8]:48). This dual attribution emphasizes that adornment can be both a sign of divine favor and a test that may lead to delusion if misused.

Desire (Shahwah)

AAHM defines *shahwah* as the inclination to pursue what the soul finds pleasing. He classifies it into two categories:

1. **True desire (shahwah ḥaqīqiyyah):** Natural and necessary needs such as eating when hungry, or seeking companionship. These are essential for human survival and prosperity.
2. **False or excessive desire (shahwah ghayr ḍarūriyyah):** Inclinations toward things that are not necessary for life, such as obsessive pursuit of wealth, sensuality, or social dominance.

According to AAHM, the six desires listed in QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:14—love for women, children, gold and silver, fine horses, livestock, and cultivated land—are all manifestations of natural human tendencies. However, they become problematic when pursued without ethical restraint. For example:

1. Love for **women** relates to sexual attraction, which is both a blessing and a trial.
2. Love for **children** reflects both affection and the burden of responsibility.
3. Love for **wealth** (gold and silver) is linked to financial security but may incite greed.
4. Love for **horses** in classical context signifies pride and status.
5. Love for **livestock and farmland** indicates attachment to sustenance and production.

These desires are permissible within limits but may lead to spiritual harm when allowed to dominate human purpose. Hence, the function of education—especially Islamic education—is to provide individuals with the capacity to channel these desires in accordance with *Shari'ah* and ethical balance (*i'tidāl*).

Taqrir 2: Regulation of Desire in the Framework of Sharia

In the second *taqrir* (affirmation) of his interpretation, 'Alī 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd asserts that the human tendency to desire is part of the divinely ordained *fitrah* and is, in itself, **permissible**. However, such desire (*shahwah*) must be regulated by the **framework of Sharia**, including its legal boundaries (*hudūd*), ethical guidelines (*ādāb*), and spiritual dimensions (*ma'ānī rūḥīyyah*) (Mahmud, 2005).

AAHM highlights that unchecked desire may become a tool for *shayṭān*, who continually seeks to lead humans into transgression. The role of *shayṭān* is to incite excess—urging people to seek beyond what is lawful or to indulge in that which has been clearly prohibited. Yet, if humans manage to **discipline** their desires within the parameters set by Allah, they are promised reward and spiritual elevation.

He further explains that the Qur'ān frames these inclinations as both **tests and opportunities**. If utilized properly—guided by knowledge, reason, and prophetic ethics—these desires become tools for achieving balance in personal life and societal harmony.

Asbāb al-Nuzūl (Context of Revelation)

AAHM refers to several narrations concerning the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) for QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:14, although he acknowledges the weakness of some chains. These narratives nonetheless provide interpretive insights into the verse's significance:

1. **The Delegation of Najrān:** A Christian delegation arrived in Madinah wearing luxurious garments—striped robes of silk and gold rings. Their worldly appearance attracted the attention of some Muslims, prompting a divine response to redirect the focus toward eternal values.
2. **Abū Ḥārithah ibn 'Alqamah:** A Christian cleric who secretly affirmed the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ but publicly denied it out of fear of losing his wealth and status under the Roman emperor.
3. **After the Battle of Badr:** The Muslims, having achieved a significant victory, displayed strength and material gains. The verse served as a **reminder** that true victory lies not in worldly possessions but in spiritual devotion.

While these accounts offer contextual background, scholars—including AAHM—agree that the verse's legal and ethical implications are **general in nature**, in line with the exegetical principle:

“al-‘ibrah bi-‘umūm al-lafz lā bi-khuṣūṣ al-sabab”

“The consideration is based on the generality of the wording, not the specificity of the cause.”

This principle ensures that the verse applies universally to all humans and all eras, not merely the circumstances of the original audience. It reinforces the idea that all human beings are subject to the same challenge: to navigate their desires responsibly.

Thus, from an educational standpoint, the verse teaches **self-discipline**, the importance of **spiritual awareness**, and the necessity of **moral limits** in dealing with worldly attraction.

Taqrir 3: The Promise of the Hereafter and Traits of the Righteous

The third *taqrir* in *Tafsir al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah* by AAHM explores the Qur'ān's redirection of attention from fleeting worldly pleasures to the eternal rewards in the Hereafter. This interpretive transition is introduced by the rhetorical question in QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:15:

“Say: Shall I inform you of something better than that?”

AAHM interprets this as a **powerful pedagogical device**, wherein Allah guides believers to compare the transient beauty of worldly adornments with the ultimate reward—Paradise, eternal companionship with purified spouses, and divine pleasure (*riḍwān Allāh*) (Mahmud, 2005).

The verse employs the Qur'ānic rhetorical method of *istifhām*, not to pose a real question, but to **provoke reflection** and emphasize the greatness of what lies ahead. The phrase *al-anbā'* (to inform) is preferred over *ikhbār*, indicating that what follows is a **profound and noble truth**, according to classical Arabic linguistics (al-Rāghib al-Asfahānī, as cited in Ar-Rāzī, 1981).

Material Rewards (al-juz' al-mādī)

AAHM explains that the Qur'ānic imagery of Paradise—gardens beneath which rivers flow, eternal life, and pure spouses—is a symbolic expression of **ultimate sensory fulfillment**. These rewards mirror the desires mentioned in verse 14 but elevate them to a realm of perfection, free from impurity, temporality, or moral compromise. For instance:

1. Eternal gardens symbolize *continuity and peace*.
2. Pure spouses signify not only marital intimacy but also emotional and spiritual harmony, free from illness, impurity, or deficiency.

Spiritual Rewards (al-juz' al-ma'navī)

The most sublime reward is *riḍwān Allāh*—the pleasure of Allah—which AAHM considers the **highest form of success and fulfillment**. This reward surpasses all material pleasures and marks the culmination of a righteous life lived in accordance with divine guidance.

The criteria for attaining these rewards are outlined in verses 16–17, which describe five essential virtues of the **pious (al-muttaqūn)**:

1. **Patience (ṣabr):** The ability to endure obligations, resist prohibitions, and remain steadfast in adversity. It is considered the **foundation** of the remaining virtues.
2. **Truthfulness (ṣidq):** Divided into honesty in speech, actions, and intentions. It reflects full sincerity and integrity in religious and worldly affairs.
3. **Obedience (qint):** Total submission to Allah, manifested through consistent worship and internal devotion.

4. **Charity (infaq):** Generous financial support for the needy, family, and causes in the path of Allah.
5. **Seeking forgiveness at dawn (istighfār bi al-ashār):** A spiritually significant practice of praying and repenting in the early hours, indicating deep awareness and humility before Allah.

According to a narration from Ibn Mardawayh reported by Anas ibn Mālik, the Prophet ﷺ encouraged his companions to seek forgiveness seventy times at dawn following night prayers—a practice that AAHM highlights as a **model of disciplined spirituality** (Mahmud, 2005).

Imam Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī further explains that the presence of the **conjunctive particle (wāw)** between the traits in QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:17 implies that **each trait, on its own, is sufficient** to merit divine reward, though their combination reflects ideal character (Ar-Rāzī, 1981).

This holistic view of reward integrates both the tangible and intangible, material and spiritual, thereby forming the foundation of Islamic pedagogy aimed at character development and moral excellence.

Educational Values in QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:14–17

QS. Āli ‘Imrān [3]:14–17 contains profound educational values rooted in Islamic ethics and spiritual development. Based on the interpretation of *Tafsir al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah*, these verses present a comprehensive framework for cultivating moral character and balancing human desires with divine principles. AAHM identifies at least five key educational insights derived from these verses (Mahmud, 2005):

1. Recognition of Natural Desires as Part of Human Fitrah

The verse begins by affirming that the love for wealth, family, property, and other worldly delights is embedded within human nature. These desires are not condemned; rather, they are acknowledged as part of the divine design. However, Islam sets **clear boundaries** to ensure that such inclinations do not lead to corruption or transgression.

2. Warning Against Excess and Moral Deviation

The Qur’ān warns that indulgence in worldly pleasures without restraint constitutes injustice to the self—both spiritually and socially. When these desires dominate a person’s life, they risk violating their original *fitrah* and falling into heedlessness. This moral imbalance affects not only personal well-being but also the ethical fabric of society.

3. Affirmation of the Lawful Enjoyment of Blessings

Contrary to ascetic interpretations, AAHM emphasizes that Islam does not discourage the enjoyment of worldly provisions. As stated in QS. al-A’rāf [7]:32:

“Say, who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things of provision?”

This indicates that the Islamic manhaj embraces human instincts, permitting their fulfillment within the bounds of Shari‘ah.

4. Functional Role of Desires in Human Flourishing

The Qur’ān presents a positive pedagogical perspective: worldly desires, when moderated, serve essential purposes. For example:

- a. **Sexual attraction** promotes reproduction and family life.

b. **Affection for children** encourages education and nurturing.

c. **Love for wealth** motivates generosity and supports charitable causes.

These desires, therefore, can be transformed into **vehicles of virtue** when aligned with spiritual goals.

5. Elevation of the Pious Through Inner Discipline

The verses conclude with the promise of eternal rewards for those who are patient, truthful, obedient, charitable, and spiritually conscious. These traits represent the **ideal educational outcomes** in Islamic pedagogy. They not only prepare the individual for the afterlife but also shape a peaceful, ethical, and secure society.

AAHM asserts that when these qualities become widespread, they foster collective moral stability (*amn*), leading to social harmony and trust. This aligns with the Qur'anic vision of the *ummah* as a community grounded in righteousness and guided by divine knowledge.

In summary, the verses offer an integrated model of Islamic education that connects **spiritual formation**, **moral discipline**, and **social responsibility**, enabling individuals to actualize their *fitrah* and attain both worldly balance and eternal success.

ANALYSIS

Human Nature in the Perspective of Islamic Religious Education Based on Tafsir al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah of QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:14–17

In the context of Islamic education, the Qur'an is considered a foundational source not only of divine law but also of educational philosophy. Ahmad Munir, as cited in Mahmud (2005), outlines five primary roles of the Qur'an in education: (1) as the basis of belief, (2) as a means of validating knowledge, (3) as a supplement to empirical understanding, (4) as a source of moral reinforcement, and (5) as a connector between divine revelation and human guidance.

Tafsir Tarbawi, or educational exegesis, operates within this framework. It seeks to derive pedagogical meaning from Qur'anic verses by highlighting their educational functions. As Abudin Nata (as cited in Arif, 2017) notes, the Qur'an cannot be implemented effectively without structured interpretation, particularly in the educational domain. Thus, the effort to interpret QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:14–17 in *Tafsir al-Tarbiyah al-Islamiyah* becomes a crucial project in aligning religious knowledge with human development.

These verses describe human beings as inherently inclined toward worldly things—wealth, status, family, and material possessions. This *fitrah* is not seen as a deviation but as a **constructive potential** that, when regulated, supports the divine role of humans as *khalifah* (vicegerents) on earth (Qur'an, Āli 'Imrān [3]:14). The educational implication is that desires are **not to be suppressed**, but to be managed through *taqwā* (God-consciousness), ethical action, and knowledge.

AAHM stresses that human beings, in their original disposition, also carry productive traits such as the desire to cultivate land and raise livestock. These traits are not accidental but integral to human survival, progress, and civilization. As society evolved, these practical instincts became associated with **economic activity**, indicating that *Islamic education should integrate both spiritual and material dimensions of life*.

Nonetheless, the Qur'ān warns of *shayṭānic temptation*, which seeks to distort these natural desires, turning them into **greed, pride, and heedlessness**. Therefore, in verse 15, Allah shifts focus to the eternal pleasures of the Hereafter, offering a **corrective vision** that redirects desire toward spiritual fulfillment. The promised rewards—Paradise, purified companionship, and divine pleasure—serve both as motivation and as **educational goals** for character building (Qur'ān, Āli 'Imrān [3]:15).

Verse 17 outlines the virtues that define a morally upright individual: patience, truthfulness, obedience, charity, and repentance. According to AAHM, these traits form the **core objectives of Islamic education**. Patience is presented as the gateway to the other four traits, while the consistent practice of repentance (especially at dawn) instills humility and self-awareness.

The vision of the *ideal human being* in the Qur'ān is further elaborated by Sakany (as cited in Mujiono, 2013), who outlines four dimensions of human excellence: **faith, knowledge, righteous action, and social contribution**. These qualities align directly with the characteristics emphasized in QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:16–17 and indicate the formation of *insān kāmil*—the complete human.

Islamic education, therefore, must aim not only at cognitive or ritualistic training but also at forming **ethically responsible and socially engaged individuals**. It is in this balance between inner *taqwā* and external contribution that a human being becomes both spiritually elevated and socially relevant.

CONCLUSION

In essence, the Qur'ān affirms that human beings were created with innate desires for worldly pleasures. These desires—such as love for wealth, offspring, status, and possessions—are part of the *fitrah* (natural disposition) endowed by Allah. Rather than rejecting these tendencies, Islam seeks to regulate them through the application of *Shari'ah* and ethical discipline. This regulation is necessary to prevent humans from becoming slaves to their desires and thus violating divine boundaries.

The verses of QS. Āli 'Imrān [3]:14–17 serve as both a **diagnosis of human nature** and a **prescription for spiritual growth**. They acknowledge that desire is natural, but they emphasize that true fulfillment lies in controlling such inclinations in accordance with divine guidance. The Qur'ān encourages believers to cultivate five key virtues—patience, truthfulness, obedience, charity (*infaq*), and repentance—especially during moments of deep reflection, such as before dawn. These qualities not only purify the soul but also restore human beings to their original moral orientation.

By mastering these attributes, individuals can align their actions with the divine purpose, actualize their role as *khalīfah* on earth, and prepare themselves for the everlasting rewards of the Hereafter. The Qur'ān promises that those who succeed in managing their desires within the framework of divine law will be granted **eternal pleasure**, both materially in Paradise and spiritually through Allah's approval (*riḍwān Allāh*).

From an educational standpoint, these verses lay the foundation for a holistic model of Islamic education—one that integrates cognitive understanding, emotional regulation, and spiritual development. The values contained in these verses are timeless and universal, making them relevant to contemporary challenges in character formation and moral pedagogy.

In conclusion, Islamic education should not suppress human desire, but should **channel it, discipline it, and elevate it**, so that it becomes a means of worship, self-improvement, and social transformation.

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