

The Role of Religious Organization for Muslim Women Empowerment

Siti Badi'ah^{1*} Suhandi¹

¹*Faculty of Ushuluddin and Religious Study, Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, Bandar Lampung, Indonesia*

**Corresponding author. Email: badiah@radenintan.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

Fatayat NU is a women's organization under the auspice of *Nahdatul 'Ulama* (NU), the largest traditionalist Muslim organization in Indonesia and in the world. This organization is engaged with issues concerning of, and for women members of the organization, promoting equal chance of education and position of women in society. Fatayat NU has its branches across local regions of the country, especially where NU is the majority. This paper aims at studying the role of Fatayat NU for women's development in the field of social religious sectors, especially in local regions. It especially take the local Fatayat NU in Tanggamus, Lampung, as the case study. This research uses a qualitative method, using observation, interview and documentation as its main tools for obtaining the research data. The data are then analyzed qualitatively in three cycles: data reduction, data display and data verification, all of which are done continuously throughout the research process. The findings of this study indicate the activities executed by the Fatayat NU Tanggamus are able to encourage Muslim women members of the organization to make significant changes; these range from their understanding of religious knowledge to the improvement of the quality of their social mobility.

Keywords: *Fatayat NU, women empowerment, religious movement, social solidarity*

1. INTRODUCTION

An injustice practice against women can occur anywhere, both in the public and domestic sectors, in social and private spaces. Some people, even some Muslim scholars, mention that women are the second creature after men in the public and domestic spheres. Different treatment prevails to women compared to men. It is an irony and a concrete form of gender injustice, and there is a gap between the sharia's ideal objectives with the common understanding among many Muslims about women statutes. In historical records, women have never been contemplated as equal to men and even their rights and obligations are determined by men.[1] For centuries, it is considered as well-established condition and some even regard it to be God's destiny.[2]

The spread of gender differences is basically a social and cultural construction formed through a long process. However, because such socio-cultural construction has become a "habit" in quite a long time, then the gender differences become beliefs and ideologies that are rooted or embedded in the consciousness of each individual and society. Most people assume that women use more emotion than rationality, so that they are not given enough space for their expression in public. This opinion has been embedded in the community. A married woman, for example, only deserves to be given a limited place, which can be known as *konco wingkeng* namely wells, kitchens and beds.[3] Gender difference is considered as absolute and natural God's provisions.

The millennium era is an entrance for civilians to seize opportunities for reconstruction in various fields, including opening opportunities for women to develop their roles in the family and community. Moreover, women existence is recognized as part of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a grace for all universe). Islam believes that all humans are equal, despite their difference of sex, nation, tribe, and descendant; and that what makes them different is only their piety and devotion to the God Allah. This doctrine affirms that Islam through the Qur'an rejects any views in society that discriminate women. This reality encourages the formation of norms and ethics in society that provide many opportunities to enhance any practices of women empowerment. In developing human resources, it is necessary to consider prominent factors, within the organization both internal and external.[4]

This circumstance raises a critical awareness about the need for women movements or women organizations specifically one that are advocate for women's rights and signify women's resources. This is evidenced by many women organizations that incidentally restore women image and increase women empowerment. Fatayat NU is one of the many women organizations that attempt to display a women figure who has the spirit to go forward, energetic, broad-minded and independent. This phenomenon must be seen as a progress for women in responding current developments. The entire society components must be able to contribute to the larger community interests and can be utilized for a better life.

This study focus on the Fatayat NU movement in Tanggamus, Lampung. One of the factors that has formed the background of the establishment of the Fatayat NU Tanggamus is the deep concern among its members for the conditions, attitudes and behaviors of the people in the area, who thought that women were weak, dependent on men and powerless, and as a complement of the man. Most women in the Tanggamus did not have any activities. They only did activities inside the house, even though going outside the house only interacted with neighbors and talked about trivial things (gossip). This is the main reason for the birth of the Fatayat NU movement, that is, to make the community understand that women also have pivotal role in society, and are capable of making efforts for empowering their roles especially in the social and religious fields. Also, it is established to provide advantageous activities to women, one that is giving positive influences to the, especially with regard to religious values. The Fatayat NU activities are conducted on regular basis, such as every Friday, Tuesday and Sunday, both evening and night, ranging from recitation of the Qur'an to studying Islam. All of these activities are oriented towards intensifying women's origins therefore, they can be fully exploited and developed specifically for their religious potentials.[5]

Observing the above phenomena, the researcher intends to describe and examine the roles of Fatayat NU in fostering women in the social religious fields, where women are required to have the power of imagination, creativity, and dedication to its surroundings, as well as being able to develop human resources, especially women's resources, and able to participate in increasing religious thoughts in society.

From the general description above, there are two main problems in this study, namely: 1. What roles does the Fatayat NU play in fostering women in the social and religious fields in Tanggamus, Lampung? And 2) What are the driving factors for these women to follow the Fatayat NU in Tanggamus, Lampung?

2. METHOD

This research is conducted at the religious organization of Fatayat NU in its role of encouraging the community, especially women, to have a better quality human resources. Hence, this research belongs to the field research; namely examining the facts in the field, because the primary data that must be collected is data obtained from observations, interviews and questionnaires. All the literature relating to this research come from books, papers, journals, research results and others is only a complement data (secondary data).[6] This research will be conducted on NU's fatayat activities and Lampung people's lives.

This research uses a sociological approach, which is an approach used in observing the community, which has strong relation with social groups, researching and understanding the group attitude scientifically.[7] The sociological approach examines religious phenomena that

accumulate in human behavior, in relation to social and cultural structures that are owned, shared and supported together.[7] The use of sociological approach is because it emphasizes the related patterns of relationships, interactions, and communication, between people who are the Fatayat NU organization members, which have the same vision, namely women development in the socio-religious field. In extracting information three methods are used; namely: Observation, interview, and documentation methods.

After all the required data has been collected, and data validation has been carried out, then the next stage is data analysis, which is the process of compiling data so that it can be interpreted. Arranging data means classifying it into patterns, themes or categories and interpretation; namely delivering meaning to the analysis, explaining patterns or categories, observing relationships between various concepts.[8] In a qualitative research, researchers become instruments of the analysis from the very beginning of data collection. In the qualitative research there is the so-called *Key Instrument* which means the researcher acts as an instrument as well as a data collector, in addition to other instruments that can be used. Therefore, researcher presence in the field is absolutely necessary.[9]

According to Miles & Huberman, each process of data analysis entangles three sub-processes, namely data reduction, data display, and data verification.[10] In the qualitative research, the analyzing process is essentially already started before data collection is carried out, when the researcher conducts the planning and design, and transpire at the time of data collection and after the final process of collecting data. After that data analysis in qualitative research is done at any time during the research process. The three sub-processes of analysis are not carried out sequentially or alternately stages, but the process will proceed cyclically or circularly and interactively carried out during the data collection process which has already begun from the initial survey until the end of the process of accumulating all the data needed.

Conclusions will be drawn using the inductive method; that is, from specific analyzes of all particular information that can be collected, both phenomena that arise from the field and information obtained from informants through interviews; nor the data obtained from the documents concluded in general conclusions.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Women activities in the socio-religious field, organized by Fatayat NU administrators in the Tanggamus, is open for all members of the organization.[5] Fatayat NU also encourage women development program for Muslim woman teenagers, aged above fifteen years old. The socio-religious activities organized by the of Fatayat NU Tanggamus administrators include:

3.1. *Tadabbur Al-Qur'an*

Tadabbur Al-Qur'an is an activity carried out by Fatayat NU members on Sundays at 14.00. This activity studies the reading and meaning of the Qur'an, guided by a cleric who is proficient (expert) in the Qur'anic thoughts. This activity aims to sharpen their mastery of the Qur'an, including *tahsin* (correct recitation of the Qur'an), *tajwid* (science of reciting the Qur'an) and *tahfidz* (memorization of the Qur'an), as well as their understanding of the meaning of the Qur'an. The organization of this program is because there are indications that there are still many women in the area who are not able to read the Qur'an properly; both in reciting *hijaiyah* letters and in using the recitation knowledge. Reading the Qur'an is the basic capital of all worship practices recommended by the sharia law. As time goes by, this activity went well that was followed by many women enthusiastically. Within a few years this program has been running many members are good at reading the Qur'an.

3.2. *Study of Nadzhomal-Barzanji*

Al-Barzanji activity is reading verses that contain prayers, praise, and narration of the Prophet Muhammad biography, of the book al-Barzanji, which was written by Shaykh Ja'far al-Barzanji bin Hasan bin Abdul Karim. Al-Barzanji reading is pronounced with a rhythm or tone. This activity is favored by Fatayat NU members because it is not boring and not monotonous: performed once a week on Tuesday at 07.00 PM. This activity is regulated in a special arrangement, namely: opening ceremony by master of ceremonies, a reading of a little part of the Qur'an, introductory remarks, reading of the Al-Barzanji, break, prayer and closing. This activity is highly effective to train mentally and foster devotion for each member of Fatayat NU, because this activity is an in depth study about Islamic history, and deeply understands the contents contained to be used as study material and applied in daily basis. This study emphasized to intensify our sense of love for the Prophet, peace be upon him, and seek to emulate, and carry out the sunnah that he taught.

3.3. *The Yasinan (Reading the Qur'anic Verse of Yasin)*

Yasinan is a routine activity which consists of recitation of the Yasin chapter of the Qur'an, which is carried out jointly or in congregation every Friday at 07.00 PM. This is certainly carried out by mothers and young women at one of the members house. This activity was carried out alternately, as well as the start of reading which was led by a person from the group who was deemed capable and fluent in reading Quran. The pattern of this activity was carried out alternately, namely the officers took turns to train mentally to become accustomed to being a leader.

Hence, whenever there are outside activities or in the midst of the wider community is always prepared to be used as a leader.

3.4. *NU Anniversary*

NU Anniversary is carried out in January every year. However, even before the event arrived, Fatayat NU cadres are already busy preparing all activities to commemorate and enliven the NU's birthday. Usually the NU anniversary event is filled with various programs such as Islamic contests, for children and adolescents, namely Adhan contest, LCT, short preaching contest, competition of the Qur'anic recitation, and others. Everything is done in the framework of motivating Muslim women to be active and creative in reviving the values contained in the Islamic teachings through useful activities. This activity aims to inculcate Islamic values that are *rahmatanlil 'alamin*, Islam which teaches adherents to become useful human beings for many people.

3.5. *Islamic and Indonesian holidays*

The Islamic holidays are Maulid (Prophet Muhammad's birthday), Isra Mi'raj, the Islamic New Year and Indonesia Independence Day on August 17. The *Nahdiyin* (NU' adherents) can be said never left behind in celebrating every Islamic holiday, as well as Fatayat Nu, because Fatayat NU stands in the pillars of *I'tiqad Nahdiyin*, or the *Ahlussunah Wal Jamaah* (The Sunni principles). The NU Fatayat Members became part of the committee structure and the event attendants were like being Qori'ah officers, the Prophet's blessing officers and others. The prophet's birthday is one of the activities of Islamic holidays, but this holiday is a special one, because it is an annual event, which is enlivened by all Muslims and in this activity Fatayat NU always strives to be a pioneer in the front line in commemorate and celebrate this holidays, this activity is already an annual activity of Fatayat NU Tanggamus.

3.6. *Budget Allocation*

Funds allocation is an activity carried out by Fatayat NU in the Lampung region in realizing solidarity in the of humanitarian framework such as helping people affected by disasters (death, illness or natural disasters) and donating funds to the poor quarterly. Fatayat NU encourages its members to always work and establish a harmonious and prosperous Islamic society. The process of fostering the organization was carried out in the mosques and take turns at Fatayat members houses, these activities included: reading the Qur'an, *maulid*, *mauidotul hasanah*, NU Anniversary, and activities conducted at members houses including: Al-Barzanji and Yasinan. The Fatayat NU organization roles is prominent for women,

especially in improving spiritual and morality who are useful in society.

4. DISCUSSION

Fatayat NU tries to guide women to explore their potentials, even directed to generate new potentials, which in turn can benefit the community in Tanggamus, Lampung. In this particular case women who have entered adolescence are trained to be sensitive to current issues and are expected to be able to meet future needs, in the economic, educational, social and religious fields.

Skills and mentality are the main capital in the training carried out by the Fatayat NU, for every teenager who has the ability in creativity is consistently referred to pursue the field he is engaged in, in addition broad insight given to new members with the aim able to comprehend the position that is being faced at this time, because the present time is strongly different from the past condition, nowadays every person is required to be able to reveal their potential in front of public in order to survive in globalization era.

Mental is a possibility that must not be forgotten in providing guidance to the Fatayat NU members, there fore in the arrangement of structural organization chosen figures are considered to have a strong mentality, and extensive experience, and have pivotal role in society. At least he can blend-well with community. The steps that need to be taken in fostering the congregants of Fatayat NU include presenting motivation, mental training, religious development, direction and fostering Muslims autonomy about Islamic thought, teaching how to pray five times a day the correct one, undertaking the sunnah that has been exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad, teaches morals, manners, good behavior, teaches to comprehend the peripheral and does not ignore to exemplify discipline and be aware of the responsibility in everything that is done, and learn to read the Qur'an and its implications in society.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the NU Fatayat in Tanggamus has carried out its role in empowering women Muslims member of the organization, especially in the social and religious fields. As such is triggered from the strong motivation among these women to empower themselves and their other fellow women to be more active and meaningful in society. The prominent factors that encourage their movement are, firstly, the desire among members of the Fatayat NU to participate in the activities organized by the organization, and secondly, there is a spirit of togetherness that is established to strengthen the solidarity of fellow Muslims.

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