

# Gender Representation of Ulema in Jakarta Province Post New Order

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**Abstract--**The research aimed at not only acquiring comprehensive data on the profiles of female ulema in Jakarta province but also obtaining data on response of female ulema towards the issue of gender representation as one of the contemporary issues in Indonesia. This was done because there were few studies that focused on such theme in the reform era. As a case study, the research made use of journal articles and other documents as the primary data supported with the data obtained from the interview three renowned figures of women's ulema namely Faizah Ali Syibromalisi, Rahmawati, and Asih Zaini. They were chosen as the representation of women's ulema in Jakarta province because they played significant role in struggling against woman discrimination. The revealed that women ulema hold an important, strategic and significant role in the process of society development which was not gender biased. The equality between women and men assured the changes towards a just social society which was not contrary to the teachings of Islam as the foundation of the da'wa, especially in the capacity of bolstering their position as ulema by strengthening the Islam propagation, and avoiding pragmatic political practices.

**Keywords--** Gender, Women Ulema, Social changes, Contemporary

## I. INTRODUCTION

Gender representation in almost all parts of the world is still an interesting topic. Efforts are continuously conducted to minimize the inequality that occurs. This is done in order to implement CEDAW( *Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women*) as the foundation for anti gender discrimination. The policy is done among others through the policy of Gender Mainstreaming which is believed as an effort to achieve gender equality and justice in the development of the nation [1], [2], [3]. However, up to the present significant result in veracious aspects including the gender representation in DKI Jakarta are still to be seen

The existence of ulema as the elite or religious figures is very important and strategic especially for the continuity and regularity of the social structure of a society [4]. Besides being acknowledged as having the authority in various religious matters, they are also trusted to handle various social problems and even political problems faced by the society. Furthermore, they are the ones who contribute greatly towards the formation of social-cultural system of the society. Thus, when referring to the principals of gender equality and justice, women ulema

as figures should be considered to have a significant strategic role.

This research is focused on three women ulema in Jakarta province and this research is specifically directed to obtain data encompassing some main aspects: 1) obtain comprehensive data on the profiles of women ulema in Jakarta province; and 2) data on responses of women ulema towards gender representation as one of the contemporary issues in Indonesia. By referring to the above-mentioned focus of research, this research is specifically designed to answer questions among others: 1) who are meant as women ulema in DKI Jakarta? and 2) what are the different thoughts in responding to contemporary Islamic issues around them, especially how are their responses toward gender representation in the post New Order society of Jakarta province?

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The term "ulema" or ulema etymologically mean people who possess knowledge. The Quran refers to them as people who with their knowledge capacity make Allah SWT as the orientation of their lives (*innama yakhshyallahu min 'ibadihil ulama*). Thus, ulema can mean those who give concrete contributions to the society with their knowledge. Although the social and historical constructions are more filled by men, nevertheless the definition itself conveys the term can be attached to women.

This study attempts to record the continuity and change aspect experienced by women ulema group in Jakarta province, especially with regard to the responses towards gender representation of clerics. This aspect is one of the classical problems in social sciences and becomes one main aspect for historians in looking at specific historical context.

Benda in his analysis on Islam in Indonesia, clearly shows the aspects of *continuity* and *change* which occurs in Islam. One of the things that Benda sees is the Islamisation process in Indonesia which to him shows the presence of changes of the form of Islam from its original place in the Middle East. In Java according to Benda, Islam lost its sense of orthodox which eradicate any beliefs that are against monotheistic religions. Islam in Java in fact experience encounters with profound influence of Indian culture in the lives of Javanese society [5]. In short, Benda is able to explain how continuity and changes occurred in Islam in Indonesia. He was able to explain clearly

the various changes that occurred and the causes of the changes. He, for example mentioned that Muslim intellectuals, graduates of Dutch schools became the driving force for the emergence of nationalism of the development of Islam in Indonesian in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to this approach, it is important to explain the working framework of this research which is referred to the theory developed by Azyumardi Azra on cleric network [6]. According to him, throughout the history of Islam, a kind of intellectual network formed among ulema or other Muslim scholars always emerge in the process of transmission and diffusion of Islamic teachings and ideas in the context of ulema in general. History noted that around the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century there were many ulemas who studied in the Middle East, especially in Mecca and Medina. It was from these places that they create relation networks with the ulema of the Middle East who happened to be their teachers. Then, as soon as they returned from their studies in the Middle East, the cleric groups then became the knit of intellectual networks as well as the main disseminator of Islam in Mecca and Medina to Indonesia. This is where the role of women ulema which is the main focus of this research can be clearly seen.

### III. METHOD

As a case study, the research made use of journal articles and other documents as the primary data. Besides, to support the written documents, I also conducted an interview with three renowned figures of women's ulema namely Faizah Ali Syibromalisi, Rahmawati, and Asih Zaini. They were women ulema who studied religious sciences of Islam—whether directly from particular ulema or traditional education institutions such as the *halaqah*, *madrrasah*, *majelis taklim*, and even *pondok pesantren* (islamic boarding school)—who then with the mastery of Islamic sciences (*kalam*, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *tasawuf*, *hadith*) devoted themselves to the Muslim society thus were later acknowledged as ulama or a cleric [7]. All information was then analyzed qualifiedly using the relevant theory and concepts to find out more comprehensive insights to answer the identified problems.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. *Religious Attitude and Orientation of Women Ulema in Jakarta*

The existence of women ulema as religious figures in the society is very important and strategic. In other words, women can participate more actively in social issues and fully contribute in the process of development and transmission of religious knowledge, thoughts and ideas.

The three women clerics, who are the focus of this research, are a small portrait of religious figures who have given their contributions to the society. Then, what are the religious attitudes and ideas of women ulema in Jakarta in responding and addressing the phenomenon and issue that occur in the society that accompany their lives (gender representation)?

#### B. *The Importance of Woman's Roles in Society*

Religion and gender justice has recently become one of the important issues which have continuously debated in many

circles including among religious circles themselves. The essence of the issues is the relation among men and women. The underlying question which has been raised in relation with this issue is whether religion affirms the relation between men and women as equal and parallel regarding the social rights

Reading the thought of fiqh experts, we found at least two main streams on gender relation. The first is subordinate; inferior women and superior men. The two streams are often referred as Patriarchy culture[8]. This position is considered as the nature, the nature of fate, divine norms which cannot be changed and so forth [9]. The second stream argues that women have the same status and position or equal to men. Women according to this stream have human potentials as possessed by men, in terms of mind-spiritual, physical or mental-spiritual aspects. This stream differentiates the two sexes only on physical and biological aspects. What differentiates one person to another is only his or her piety.

To them, the roles of women are indeed important. But they must not forget their nature as women such as taking care of the husband and family. Syibromalisi, a woman ulama from South Jakarta, did not agree with gender issues introduced by the west that woman and man are equal in everything. However, a Muslim woman should not forget her physical and psychological aspects. She said, "If we listen to what people say on gender, that women can do all the things men do, and vice versa. They forget that men and women are psychologically different. I don't want to hold this gender mainstream. I still want my husband to give a living. What happened in Sweden? More than 40% of women were widows and single parent. Years ago, when some members of Indonesia's House of representative planned to hold a gender issue dialogue there, they said that we had to think more in order that what happened in their country did not occur there. Sweden husband became less responsible for their family ..." [10].

On the other hand, she was of the opinion that the independence of a woman is truly necessary as "we, women don't know when husbands gets sick, experience an accident or even die. So, we have to be ready for such occurrences. There was a friend of mine whose husband died, but she was not ready to work. I told her you still have a supportive family and there are still many things to be thankful for rather than crying about. Men are indeed the breadwinner of the family, but if one day the income disappears, then what? I agree that women must be independent but should not neglect the livelihoods from their husbands. The independence of women should not exceed that of men's target because if it does then the husbands will not be responsible. In Islam, women are taught to be independent. Their wealth cannot be disturbed by the husband. Her salary should not be controlled by men [10].

In line with her opinion, Rahmawati, a woman ulama from West Jakarta, believes that women's independence is very important. According to her, the role of women is not only to impart knowledge and preaching. Besides being independent on knowledge, women must also be independent financially, although should not have the intention to compete with the husband but more to help husband in fulfilling his responsibilities to provide for the family. "A woman can earn

money while still taking care of her household, studying... so that she will not economically fully depend on her husband..." [11].

Islam does not distinguish men and women in development, economic activities, management of state and people matters, from household matters, society, village and town and so on. Both share the same responsibilities as human resources because in principal all members of society, a Muslim must know the view of the religion on women and their roles in all lines of life including education, professions, social, political and economic activities or life in and outside the household.

Regarding the role of women in public sphere, Faizah believes that women should truly have an active role but it is not an obligation. According to her, women should participate in the public sphere, but should not be interpreted literally. Women who think they can do it should go ahead but for those who are not able to do so should not be forced as the role of women in the household when the children are still young is irreplaceable. Mothers who supposed to breastfeed their child, look for money instead albeit the fact that breastfeeding influences the level of intelligence of children. When children are still in the golden ages, children at the age of one to five, mothers should not look for work first because children at these ages require the accompaniment of their mother. [10].

In reality of life in our community and the nation up to the present, the *mainstream* on gender relations still show some discriminative views on women. Although modernity has created changes in many things but the social norms that are still present, taking place and practiced still places women as domestic and subordinate creature. The position of men-women or husband and wife is still believed by many religious communities as the standard provisions, norms that are fixed and cannot be changed forever. Changing it means changing god's will [12].

The reality of these discriminative gender relations occurs not only in Indonesia but also in many nations of the world, including Muslim nations. Various laws and public policies regarding men and women relations there still put women as subordinate entity to men. Although there are some progress and social changes, but women have not been considered equal and thus have not acquire their humanity rights as fairly as men have. The unequal gender-based relations bring about problems such as injustice and serious human rights violations. Violence in women continues all the time, in every sphere: domestic and public in terms of physical, psychological, sexual or economy (abandonment) [13].

Women oftentimes become the persecuted one in the society all throughout history. This is due to human's foolishness. The nature of foolish people tend to the practice of the oppression of the strong towards the weak while they are not controlled by suppressive forces, whether internally such as the strength of faith in human's psyche—and this rarely occurs—or externally such as the implementation of the laws and Constitution. The practice of oppression that occurs very naively throughout history in general occurs due to ignorance to the dignity and position of women. Women themselves have to find their true

position should not ever feel being wronged only due to the status of women. Many wrongdoings towards women are admitted as wrongdoings. Unfortunately, many other wrongdoings towards women are actually not admitted as wrongdoings for example the practice of pushing women towards consumerism, cosmetology, hedonism and trend of lacing women as consumption goods although this is the big tranny which can even be the most fatal and tragic ones towards women. This is because of this tyranny; women are turned away from their perfect path so that they are trapped to the trivial and absurd tendency.

Besides that, Indonesia nowadays is experiencing numerous crises, the most striking of which are moral, mental and spiritual crisis. Unfortunately, the object and at the same time the cause of the crises are women, starting from pornography, sex commercialisation, show of the body (advertisement), erotic dances and many more things. The main target and bait of which are women. Just as women can become an effective resource to improve a society, they can also become an effective means to damage and destroy a society. Throughout history, women have fought to gain their rights, but unfortunately, they are often fall into subjection namely modern subjection. Women consider themselves independent when showing off their attractive bodies to be enjoyed by men.

As a result, the challenges women face in fighting for their dignities and rights can be both external and internal. External means that the challenges come or are caused by other people outside the women's will, for instance domestic violence. As for internal, it means that the challenges are caused by women themselves. These challenges are caused by the low understanding of women towards their own dignities. Moral crisis, pornography, promiscuity, abortion, *sirri* and contract marriage and polygamy can be included in this category.

Nowadays, the problems that become the challenges in upholding the dignity of women are increasingly widespread in our society. As an example of this are domestic violence, abortion due to promiscuity *sirri* marriage and polygamy. With regard with domestic violence, almost all women or the majority of women ulema are against it and feel sad about it. Dealing with domestic violence, Faizah said, "it's difficult. Marriage is carried out to be *saqinah, mawaddah, wa rohmah*. Women are to be protected. But many domestic violence occurred due to infidelities which are caused by the freedom of women. Now, women are not ashamed to wear very short shorts. Domestic violence is not triggered by the Quran An-Nisa verse 43. The cause of domestic violence is the more openness, misused means of communication, and lack of strong religious values. What are the consequences? Responsibilities become lesser. But there hasn't been any news that the regulation on domestic is passed by the House of Representative s and that it has been implemented." [10].

While Asih Zaini, explains, "a wife is not a maid but a husband's companion. For example, if in a household with no maid, the wife does the washing up and the husband does the ironing. It's not when a husband arrives home from work and arbitrarily tells the wife to do everything the husband orders. It's more about serving the husband with sincerity." [14].

### C. Transformation in the Strategy of Da'wa of Women Ulema

In their works women ulema have become an inseparable part of the history of Islam in Indonesia. They have contributed not only in the agenda of disseminating Islamic teachings, but also on the process of raising public awareness especially in DKI Jakarta to always hold dearly to the religious teachings. Looking at the recent development, in facing in order to deal with the turmoil of the changing of time women ulema must ease the transformation of dakwa strategy among others can be done through the following ways:

*First*, strengthening the syiar of Islam through the Book or religious works. The tradition of relying the activities of syiar of Islam in the pattern of sermons in the mosques in many ways needs to be reconsidered. This is due to the fact that the more advanced and developed time is, the dissemination process of Islamic teachings in the end is insufficient if only done through the forum of sermons in the mosques. Ways such as making the Islamic teachings into books as religious works should also be carried out. It is here that women ulema are required to not only be in the position of teachers of the Book but also as writer of books.

*Secondly*, minimizing political activities. Nowadays, there is a tendency that religious figures including women ulema besides active as preacher of mosques is to take part into the field of practical politics. It is not wrong for religious figures as an individual to take part in the field of politics because it is the right of every individual in this case including women ulema to determine their own political orientation. But in many cases when religious figures have entered the realm of politics they no longer become the shelter of the ummat, they can no longer give the coolness when ummat is experiencing problems or even no longer be independent and objective. This is because politics is in the *grey area* which is full of interests. That is why when women ulema have involved themselves in the political vortex they automatically get carried away by the system which sometimes only thinks about the interests of their groups.

This becomes many people's concern. In many ways, the closeness of religious figures in Jakarta province with the world of politics make their positions no longer get a place in the hearts of the people that much. There are many cases when people no longer give respects to religious figures who religious figures who take part in politics. This fact requires that they have to think twice when they want to involve themselves in the vortex of political life. It is with what they possess that women ulema actually have to do the duties of always protecting and sheltering the people not be carried away by a system which is formed by the world of politics.

Thirdly, return to the Book. The tendency that can be observed is that women ulema conduct the syiar of Islam through the pattern of sermons from one mosque to another compared to recitation of the Kitab. The problem is that there are some women ulema who deliver their sermons not based on the materials in the Islamic books. Whereas the books in general provide the abundant treasure in terms of materials and thus it is very important to be conveyed to the general public. It is the sermon method which is not based on the books in many cases does not give the society the full teaching of Islam. This is the reason why women ulema need to return to the books whenever they conduct the syiar of Islam.

Thus, that in line with the development of time, women ulema are required to start to transform themselves to adapt with the turmoil of time. Thus, what have been conveyed in the previous chapters of this research at least explain how women scholars/ulema besides always need to try to strive to maintain order according to existing traditions, also strive to adapt themselves in every change that occur around them.

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