

The Position of Women in Islamic History

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Abstract

Before the arrival of Islam, they are known as the jahiliyyah. It shows a historical fact that the position of women is always placed in the position of objects and occupies the second position after men. The position of women is considered less favorable, so women are often used as objects of exploitation that exceed human limits. Then Islam came with teachings that respect the position of women in various aspects of life. The existence of a long journey about the position of women is interesting to analyze and important to study in depth. This research is an Islamic social history research using historical research methods: *Heuristics, Verification, Interpretation, and Historiography*. At this stage, the author presents the results of the synthesis obtained. This study aims to enrich the historical treasures of Islamic civilization related to the development of the position of women. However, the dynamics of the development of women's position also have many scientific sources that need to be studied more comprehensively. That is, we need to look at events far back to be able to analyze the dynamics of women's positions. The conclusion of this paper explains that in pre-Islamic perspectives starting from Greek, Roman, Jewish, Hindu, and Chinese civilizations, as well as pre-Islamic Arabs, it shows that women occupy a position as inferior until then Islam comes to change their social status with the concept of equality.

Keywords: *Islamic History; Position of Women; Women in Islam.*

Introduction

Talks about women's issues have been a long issue. Over the past few centuries, the position of women in various regions has always been at a disadvantage compared to men. Before the arrival of Islam, the position of women in the view of some people was

considered low and despised. Women were not considered human beings who had a place or were only considered useless items. Even women are considered the base of evil and the source of disaster. The existence of acts of dehumanization against women has accumulated on the stage of world history. The reality of oppression is often found and perpetuated in the pages of history. Even in the view of certain religions, sometimes there is a meaning that tends to discriminate against women, who are always considered inferior, especially in the view of religions before the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad, who looked down on the position of women.

Islam then came with various advantages of respecting women by upholding the human side and eligibility for obligations and responsibilities. Likewise, Islam views women as respectable human beings who have what they have in the form of human rights because both women and men are basically two branches of one tree and two brothers from one father and one mother, namely Adam and Eve.

Previous studies on women's development have been partially discussed. However, there are several studies that are still related to the theme of the study, including: first, research on the dynamics of women's education in Islamic history by Rusli Takunas. The focus of the study conducted by Rusli Takunas is limited to the scope of education which is described by several sub-discussions, namely women's education in the early period of Islam, women's education in the decline period, in the renewal period, and the description of women's education in Indonesia (Takunas, 2018).

Second, research on women's leadership in Islam by Munawir Haris. The focus of study in Munawir's research only specifically discusses the role of women in leadership. This study explains that the public role and leadership of women can be seen in several socio-historical categories in the trajectory of Islamic history. This can be seen in Aisyah's role as the armed forces leader in the Jamal war (Haris, 2015).

The next research is about the domestication of women in the Transnational Islamic Movement in Indonesia, written by Rifai Shodiq Fathoni. The study written by Rifai focuses on the Transnational Islamic Movement using a historical perspective. This

study explains that the Transnational Islamic Movement that developed after the reformation placed women in a strong position in the household. This movement is termed hijrah, namely returning women to their nature following Islamic law; women are in charge of caring for the household, and men work to earn a living (Fathoni, 2020).

Departing from this description, the issue of the position of women in Islam is very interesting to study in the social history of Islam. As for seeing the position of women in Islam, it is necessary to also look at the position of women before the arrival of Islam to be used as a comparison between the position of women in the pre-Islamic period and the post-Islamic period. Therefore, in this paper, there are two main points of discussion. First, what was the position of women before the arrival of Islam. Second, what is the position of women after the arrival of Islam?

Discussion

The Position of Women Before the Coming of Islam

Before the arrival of Islam, in this part of the world, there were already two major civilizations, namely the Greek and Roman civilizations. At the same time, there are also two fairly large religions, namely Judaism and Christianity (Suwandi, 2019, p. 19). In various cultures of the world, women have a fairly tragic history. It is said that based on Ancient Greek mythology, the evil, disease, chaos, and suffering that plagued the world were caused by Pandora and a foolish woman who disobeyed her husband. Pandora violated her husband's message not to open a box filled with anything negative. Based on this mythology, for ten centuries in European-Christian civilization, the position of women was seen as a source of temptation and misery in the world (Marwing, 2021, p. 13).

The Greek society, which is famous for its philosophical thought, doesn't talk much about the rights and obligations of women. Among the political elite (kings, aristocrats, and community leaders), women were kept in the palace to satisfy the moral depravity of their rulers. Meanwhile, among the lower social status, the fate of women is more

pathetic. Women are traded in the market, and women who are married completely belong to their husbands who absolutely must submit and obey the authority of their husbands. They have no civil rights or inheritance (Suwandi, 2019, p. 20). It was even customary for Greek women to be confined in their homes, and they were under constant supervision throughout their lives during childhood under the tutelage of the father, after marriage under the husband, and while widowed under the guardianship of sons or another man (Amiruddin, 1938, p. 153).

At the height of Greek civilization, women gained the freedom to fulfill their needs and satisfy the lusts and luxuries of men. The existence of free sex is not considered a violation of decency. The brothels became centers of political and artistic activity. The statues of naked women scattered in Western countries are evidence of the remnants of their view and civilization toward women (Suwandi, 2019, p. 20). During the peak of Greek civilization, sacred women were seen as something of great value. Greek women wore a kind of veil. They were placed in a female (Al-Hatimy, 1994, p. 5).

In the time of Roman civilization, daughters were completely under the control of their fathers. After marriage, the father's power passes to the husband, which includes the authority to sell, expel, torture, and kill her. All the results of women's efforts become the full rights of the men's families. This situation continued until the 6th century AD (Suwandi, 2019, p. 20).

Likewise, in Hindu and Chinese civilizations, A woman's right to live with a husband must end at the death of her husband. The wife must be burned alive when her husband's body is cremated. In Hindu society, women are often made offerings to their gods. Such customs or traditions only ended in 7th century AD (Suwandi, 2019, p. 20).

According to Jewish teachings, the position of women is seen as a creature that is lower than other men, even considering women inferior to men's khadam (helpers). Women do not get any inheritance from their parents if they still have brothers (Magdalena, 2017, p. 18). A father also has the right to sell his daughter before reaching the age of puberty. Women were seen as a source of a curse because it was women who

caused Adam to be expelled from heaven. Meanwhile, according to Christian teachings at that time, women were seen as weapons of the devil to mislead and plunge humans into sin (Suwandi, 2019, p. 21).

In the 5th century AD, a council was convened to discuss whether women had spirits (Suwandi, 2019, p. 21). In this council, it can be interpreted that the woman has no soul, and her residence is in hell. There is only one exception, namely against Maryam, the mother of Jesus the Messiah (Al-Hatimy, 1994, p. 15). Even in the 6th century AD, councils were held again to discuss whether women were human. The discussion led to the conclusion that women are human beings created solely to serve the needs of men (Suwandi, 2019, p. 21).

Conditions in Arabia before the birth of Islam were very concerning, especially the treatment of women. They are looked down upon as the most degenerate part of society, the hatred of the Arabs towards women in such a way (Amiruddin, 1938, p. 154). The ignorant Arabs accepted the presence of women in two different ways. Most of them bury their daughters alive because they think all the disgrace that has befallen them is buried. So it is unsurprising that many parents do not want to have daughters because having a daughter is a big disgrace to the family – especially those categorized as nobles, wealthy, or other community leaders. As soon as he heard his wife give birth to a daughter, the news would be kept tightly so no one else could hear it. They would not even hesitate to kill the newborn girl out of shame. The other tradition is to keep the child, but it is done unfairly and far from human values (humanity) (Suwandi, 2019, p. 22).

Another example related to the behavior of men towards women in terms of marriage that occurred in Arabia at that time was the assumption that marrying many women was a natural thing. Sadly, their wives would be passed on to their sons if the father died. It is conceivable that the boy must receive the inheritance from his father's wife, who is the mother who conceived and gave birth to him (Suwandi, 2019, p. 23). It can be said that wives' fate in the Arab era of ignorance is like property, which can also be inherited (Al-Hatimy, 1994, p. 16).

In pre-Islamic Arab society, the basis of family unity was *patriarchal-agnatic*, where a group of people descended directly through the male line from an ancestor and was under the authority of an older male or male head of the family. The existence of such a system then gives birth to a family that extends over several generations and to several groups of a number of marriage partners and their branches with a number of descendants or clients whom all claim to be part of the household. The status of women is an inferior group, so they are not full (Lapidus, 2000, p. 42). They lack individuality, status, and privilege and are constantly persecuted (Amiruddin, 1938, p. 154).

The condition of Arabia and civilization in other parts of the world at that time was only one small example of the poor position of women in the dilapidated civilization of the world at that time. Women at the time of ignorance were at a level of humiliation and humiliated. They became a symbol of backwardness and humiliation. They live as scum and filth of society. To the extent that a father has the heart to kill his biological child and has the heart to bequeath his wives to his son, which incidentally is his son born from the wombs of his wives. How depraved and vile their civilization was, and how low the dignity of women at that time was (Suwandi, 2019, p. 23). One story is recorded of Abu'l-'Arshi, acting as his mother's guardian or sponsor, marrying her into his stepdaughter, his father's brother, Abu 'Amr (Levy, 1986, p. 115).

Position of Women After the Coming of Islam

After the arrival of Islam, through the figure of the Prophet Muhammad, there were several changes, especially in the position of women and their position in the cultural structure of Arab society. Many aspects of the life of the Prophet Muhammad in his interactions with the women around him, especially in the social, political, and religious order, which traced is a revolutionary attitude to restore women's rights to the proper (Masruri, 2012, p. 25). The presence of the Prophet Muhammad changed the position of women from low social status to high social status with the concept of equality with men in various ways. The initial step in this direction is to remove the stigma that all responsibility and sin are attached to women. This effort is refuted by

the Islamic theory of an incident between Adam and Eve that the blame is not only on Eve but also on Adam (Amiruddin, 1938, p. 154).

Historically, women have played a very strategic position in the early growth and development of Islam in domestic and public affairs. In the public sphere, Islam also opens up fair access for women. The activities of seeking knowledge, earning a living, conducting transactions, and political activities are also open to women. Just like men, all must be done with honor and dignity (Mulia, 2014, p. 40). Some of these positions are described as follows:

1. The Position of Women in Politic and the Struggle to Defend Islam

Women also have an important position in the struggle to defend Islam, especially on the battlefield. Apart from that, women with political awareness participated in the migration to Medina despite facing various difficulties (Ismail, 2016). For example, Khadijah, the wife of the Prophet who was very loyal, donated many of her belongings to the struggle of Islam, Arwa ibn Abd al-Muttalib asked her son to help the Prophet and give him whatever he asked for (Marwing, 2021, p. 20), Afra 'bint Ubaid bin Tsa'labah a *shahabiyat* who had seven sons who were all deployed in the battle of Badr together with the Prophet Muhammad, two of whom were martyred, namely Mu'adz and Mu'awwidz (Ziyadah, 2001, p. 134).

Several names of female friends were also recorded as fighters, both at the back line, such as treating the wounded soldiers and providing logistics, and at the front line holding weapons against opponents. The Uhud War was one of the military wars in which women took an active role (Roded, 2008, p. 33). Nusaibah bint Ka'ab was recorded as a woman who carried weapons using a bow and sword to protect the Prophet during the battle of Uhud (Mulia, 2014, p. 41). Apart from Nusaibah bint Ka'ab, the names of female commanders such as Al-Rabi' bint al-Muawwidz, Umm Sinan, Umm Sulaim (a dagger maker during the Hunain War to stab enemies who approached) (Al-Qardhawi, 2007, p. 54), Umm Athiyah, and a group of other women also several times came down to the battlefield (Mulia, 2014, p. 41). Also recorded is Humnah bint Jahsy, a woman who took part in the battle of

the Uhud War. He gave drink to the thirsty, brought the wounded, and healed them (Ziyadah, 2001, p. 136).

Based on Ibn Sa'ad's records, related to the history of the wars of the Muslims after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, there are also names of other extraordinary female soldiers, such as Umm Hakim bint Al-Harist who fought with one hand tenaciously and bravely without arrows, spears, nor sword. He fought with a piece of the tent pole used during his wedding. Thanks to his tenacity and courage, he defeated 7 Roman soldiers in the battle at Marj al-Shaffar, whom Khalid ibn Sa'id then married near a bridge in al-Shaffar, so this bridge is known as the "Umm Hakim Bridge". However, her husband, Khalid ibn Sa'id later died in the battle (Masruri, 2012, p. 33).

During the time of Abu Bakr's companions, the names of women involved in the *Riddah*, namely Umm Ammarah and Nusaibah bint Ka'b who went to Yamamah with the Muslims to kill Musailamah (Ziyadah, 2001, p. 199). In the *Qadisiyah* there were women who had quite prominent roles, namely Salma bint Hafshah At-Tamimiyah, the wife of Al-Mutsanna bin Harithah, a horse rider who was famous in various conquests in Iraq. Then Salma married Sa'ad bin Abi Waqash after Al-Mutsanna died and joined her husband in the *Qadisiyah* (Ziyadah, 2001, p. 228). The enthusiasm of women in war at the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions were not only in the outskirts of Arabia, but they also dared to cross the seas to help conquer the farthest areas to convey Islam (Al-Qardhawi, 2007, p. 55).

In the contemporary era, the figure of Sabiha Gökçen (1913-2001) is also known as a woman who introduced the female style of warfare. She has been appointed as head trainer at the Turkish Aviation Institute (Ikhlas, 2019, p. 112).

From the explanation above, it can be noted that women have played political roles in fighting for Islam, such as participating in emigration and carrying out Islamic da'wah. Thus, women also have a broad position in political activities.

2. The Position of Women in the Economy

In the early days of Islam, Khadijah bint Khuwailid was noted as a successful woman in managing a business. Ash-Syifa' is also recorded as a woman appointed by caliph Umar as a market manager in Medina, a large market in the capital city. Zainab, the wife of the Prophet, was known as the most generous woman and earned money from tanning her skin, and the proceeds were given to charity. Zainab, the wife of Ibn Mas'ud and Asma' bint Abu Bakr, was known as a strong woman because she was the main supporter of the family (Mulia, 2014, p. 41). Likewise, Qilat Ummi Bani Anmar was recorded as a woman who had come to the Prophet Muhammad to ask for instructions about buying and selling. Zainab bint Jahsy also actively participates in tanning animal skins. Raithah, Abdullah Ibnu Mas'ud's wife, was also very active at work. This participation was because her husband and child at that time could not provide for the family's needs (Hanapi, 2015).

As previously noted, women's involvement in the economic sector should be considered. Women also have an important involvement. In several Muslim-majority countries with well-established economies, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the demand to be able to work and choose a job is a major problem. In Saudi Arabia, only 5% of women are employed and are limited to domestic zone jobs (such as religious, educational, and nursing). Malaysia is considered a symbol of a Muslim country that has successfully combined tradition and modernity and is a portrait of the successful role of women in development, even though there is still inequality in income (Masykuroh, 2020, p. 69)

Women in Bangladesh also have an important position in the economic sector. With the Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI) under the leadership of Ms. Selima Ahmad, a woman in Bangladesh is very serious about launching a program to promote women's entrepreneurship development. BWCCI is undertaking efforts to graduate 5,000 micro-entrepreneurs to SME level by 2020

into a diversified mainstream business sector to turn Bangladesh into a mid-income country (Roy, 2016, p. 18).

3. The Position of Women in the Transformation of Knowledge

Islamic history in the early days was filled with Muslim women who showed great skills and could compete with men and try to be superior to them at every opportunity (Takunas, 2018, p. 31). At the time of the Prophet Muhammad, 1232 women received and narrated the hadith (Takunas, 2018, p. 41). One of the most famous women in Islamic history is Aisha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad. The quality of his intelligence and memory is known to be extraordinary. Aisha is considered one of the most reliable sources of hadith. She reported more than a thousand hadiths and is considered one of the greatest (Lemu, 1978, p. 16). Even in other literature, it is stated that Aisha is one of seven people dubbed the "treasury of hadith" because of the many hadiths narrated from her, which is about 2,210 hadiths (Mulia, 2014, p. 41). Even no less than 298 hadith narrators took the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad from it and passed it on to the next generation. Among them, 67 are female narrators (Machasin, 2019, p. 14).

Women at the time of the Prophet Muhammad also attended taklim assemblies with men. At that place, they asked the Prophet Muhammad about religious issues, including issues that make women feel ashamed when asked today, so Aisyah once praised Ansar women who dared to ask questions related to junub, baligh dreams, big baths, menstruation, and *istihadhah*. At the time of the Prophet Muhammad, many male companions jostled to dominate women so that women asked him to provide a special day for them, namely a day not dominated by men (Al-Qardhawi, 2007, p. 52).

This condition continued during the caliphate of Khulafa 'al-Rashidun. 'Aisha and Hafsa, daughters of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, and Umar ibn Khattab, had great prestige and influence. Abu Bakr and Umar ibn Khattab gave their sons and daughters various important responsibilities before his death. Abu Bakr for

example, before his death, gave 'Aisyah the responsibility of managing public funds and wealth and distributing her wealth to her sons and daughters who were growing up. When Umar ibn Khattab died, a copy of the Qur'anic manuscript, which had previously been in the hands of Abu Bakr and then held by Umar ibn Khattab, was entrusted to Hafshah for safekeeping (Masruri, 2012, p. 33).

In the era of the Tabi'in, there were *sayyidat al-Tabi'in*, namely the leaders of the *Tabi'in*: Hafsa bint Sirin, known as Umm al-Hudzail, 'Amrah bint 'Abd al-Rahman and Umm al-Darda' al- Sughra. Hafsa narrated the hadith from her famous brothers Yahya bin Sirin and Anas bin Malik (Machasin, 2019, p. 17).

In general, in the early medieval period, there was no prohibition for women to seek knowledge in the Muslim world. At that time, religion encouraged women to study. In the absence of a prohibition against women seeking knowledge, many women later became famous as scholars, writers, poets, doctors, and teachers in their own right, such as Nafisa, a woman who still has descendants with Ali who has such great authority on hadith, that Imam Shafi'i sat in his circle at al-Fustat when he was at the height of his fame (Lemu, 1978, p. 16).

Even Nafisa is a well-known judge and theologian (Jawab, 1989, pp. 21-22). Apart from Nafisa, there was also Shaikha Shuhda, who gave a public lecture at one of the main mosques in Baghdad to a wide audience on literature, rhetoric, and poetry. In Islamic history, she occupies a place of equality with the most eminent (Lemu, 1978, p. 16). There is also Zainab Ummul Muwayyid, a well-known legal expert licensed to teach the law (Amiruddin, 1938, p. 160). There are many other examples of educated Muslim women who have become teachers, writers, and poets highly respected by the Muslim community. Therefore, every Muslim woman is encouraged to continue her studies in any field for her intellectual gain and utilize her academic or professional training for the good of society subject to certain (Lemu, 1978, p. 16).

In addition to playing a role in transforming Islamic teachings through the transmission of hadith, the position of women also underwent further changes

made by the Prophet Muhammad, namely in Islamic law, namely when determining a certain grace period for women to remarry after her husband died or divorced, regardless of the circumstances—his physique. Islam stipulates for a divorced woman to wait for "*three kuru*" (three menstrual periods) before being allowed to remarry and for a widow (husband dies) to wait four months and ten days so that there is a grace period to confirm that she is pregnant (Levy, 1986, p. 117). The waiting period of *'Iddah* that accompanies divorce is also intended to protect a woman to earn a living during the waiting period and support the child to be born if she is pregnant. Finally, to balance the status, at least some possibilities are open to divorce the women (Lapidus, 2000, p. 44).

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the position of women before the coming of Islam in some parts of the world was described as very blurry and apprehensive. From the Roman civilization to the Arab Jahiliyah, women were seen as inferior creatures, worthless, their existence often caused problems, they did not have self-independence, their rights were suppressed and confiscated, their bodies could be traded or inherited and they occupied marginal positions and other deplorable views.

After Islam came, Islam gradually restored the position of women as free human beings. With an elevated status where women are brought up at all levels of society, women have a respectable positions and get important positions in various interests, such as in the interests of political struggles and wars, struggles in transforming education, and struggles in obtaining family economic needs.

It does not just stop there. In other positions, women can also serve as witnesses and are entitled to several inheritances, even though both are only worth half of the testimony or amount of inheritance that men are entitled to receive and may be considered unfair in the current context. Islamic teachings directly oppose the tradition of ignorance relating to women. The arrival of Islam brought light to mankind, especially to women. Thus, women, in the Islamic view, have an honorable position.

Human nature between men and women is said to be the same. God has bestowed glory on men as bestowed glory on women. God endowed both of them with sufficient potential and ability to assume responsibility and enable them to actualize themselves and make a meaningful contribution to humanity. Some of these descriptions show that after Islam came, justice for women was not just a word, but accompanied by serious efforts to open equal access for women in various fields of life.

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