



Analysis of the Problems of Gender Equality Before God

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Abstract

Gender inequality is not solely a social issue; it extends to economic, cultural, political, and scientific dimensions, often compounded by misinterpretations of religious texts. This research arises from the author's concern regarding the marginalization of women, often perceived as second-class citizens in patriarchal societies. This concern is explored through the lens of gender equality issues depicted in the novel "Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir". The study aims to analyze the novel and present descriptive findings on various forms of gender injustice, employing a religious perspective grounded in gender equality theory and the concept of mubadalah. The research adopts a content analysis method to interpret the findings within the novel. These findings are categorized into five forms of gender injustice: marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, violence, and the imposition of double workloads. The results reveal that gender inequality stems from three main factors: (1) power dynamics and social stratification that restrict women in multiple domains, (2) cultural and traditional practices that perpetuate patriarchal values, and (3) societal structures that hinder the realization of gender equality.

Problemyangmenimbulkan terjadinyaketimpangangendertidak terbelenggu hanya pada aspek sosial saja, namun akan berkaitan pula dengan aspek ekonomi, budaya, politik, ilmu pengetahuan, bahkan karena adanya kesalahan dalam memahami teks-teks agama. Penelitian ini berangkat dari keresahan penulis terhadap keberadaan perempuan yang seringkali dianggap sebagai *the second class* oleh kaum-kaum patrialistik yang kemudian dikolaborasikan dengan berbagai problem kesetaraan gender yang ada dalam novel *Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir*. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis karya dan

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menjelaskan temuan secara deskriptif mengenai bentuk ketidakadilan gender yang ditemukan dalam novel, menggunakan kacamata agama melalui teori kesetaraan gender dan mubadalah. Data yang ditemukan akan dianalisis menggunakan metode analisis isi untuk menafsirkan lebih lanjut mengenai temuan dalam obyek penelitian. Peneliti akan menganalisis karya dan menjelaskan temuan secara deskriptif mengenai bentuk ketidakadilan gender yang ditemukan dalam kumpulan cerpen *Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir*. Temuan dalam penelitian ini akan dikelompokkan ke dalam lima bentuk ketidakadilan gender yakni marginalisasi, subordinasi, stereotipe, kekerasan dan beban kerja ganda. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwasanya problem kesetaraan gender dilatarbelakangi oleh tiga faktor, yaitu (1) faktor kekuasaan, dan strata sosial telah membelenggu perempuan dari berbagai sisi, (2) faktor budaya dan tradisi yang melazimkan faham patriarki, sehingga digunakan untuk mengatur, menindas, dan merendahkan perempuan baik dalam ranah publik maupun privat.

INTRODUCTION

Every religion advocate peace, equality, and ethical behavior, emphasizing the absence of discrimination among all beings. For instance, Islam not only eradicates gender-based discrimination but also aligns men and women as equals in all aspects of life (Rachman, 2004). Both men and women, whether as individuals, servants of Allah, family members, or members of society, are entitled to equal rights and opportunities. Their responsibilities are also regarded as equitable (Achmad, 2020). Despite this, women’s capabilities in social, public, and political spheres are frequently questioned. Society tends to trust men with leadership roles, relegating women to domestic responsibilities (Farihah, 2019; Ratih, 2015). This discrepancy underscores the urgency of amplifying public discourse on gender equality and feminism as a means to address persistent gender inequality (Bayumi et al., 2022). Patriarchal social structures, rooted in discriminatory values, manifest in forms of gender injustice such as discrimination, marginalization, stereotyping, violence, and double workloads, both within families and broader society (Fujiati, 2014).

M. Hilary Lips (1988, p. 3) notes that, “There is in many cultures, including our own, a long history of a hierarchal relationship between the groups: men held more social power than women; men have been dominant and women subordinate”. Gender equality remains a contentious topic, particularly in Arab countries, where it is intertwined with local traditions and interpretations of Islam (Wafaa H. Sorour,

2019). However, Ahmed (1992, pp. 64–66) argues that Islam, as a religion advocating ethical egalitarianism, cannot be held responsible for the oppression of women. She cites Quranic verses emphasizing equality for all individuals, such as, “Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, obedient men and obedient women... for them, Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward” (Surah Al Ahzab: 35).

The issue of gender injustice portrayed in the collection of prose *Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir* by W. Sanavero is highly diverse and remains prevalent in contemporary society. This has prompted the researcher to delve deeper into the gender injustices experienced by female characters in this collection, aiming to uncover the forms of gender inequality women face in today’s society. Additionally, a recurring question when discussing gender issues is: what are the root causes of the gender discourse frequently debated among Muslim feminists from an Islamic perspective? Often unnoticed, familial and environmental backgrounds inherently shape an individual’s worldview and life direction. Those who grow up in discriminatory environments, where there is a visible imbalance in the freedoms of men and women, are often compelled to think critically and logically. They begin to question the injustices they witness and seek to challenge the prevailing societal norms (Zubaidah, 2020).

Many literary works in Indonesia highlight the struggles of women still constrained by patriarchal ideology, often depicted explicitly and vividly. For instance, the novel *Wanita Berkalung Sorban* illustrates the suffering of a woman who experiences gender inequality from childhood to adulthood, even within her own family. This research offers an overview of the protagonist’s suffering, rooted in social constructs that frame such experiences as stemming from divine commandments to be obeyed as a manifestation of a woman’s religious behavior. Using a descriptive method, the study identifies forms of gender injustice experienced by the protagonist, including the perception that women lack valid arguments, are often blamed in times of difficulty, and have their activities restricted. In contrast, the protagonist’s resistance is reflected in her development of self-concept, independence, and fight for bodily autonomy (Botifar & Friantary, 2021). Such phenomena are not without cause but stem from patriarchal ideologies that continue to constrain Indonesian society. This context is increasingly evident in various literary works, authored by both men and women (Botifar & Friantary, 2021). Based on an interest in the issues of gender equality in novels related to feminism and patriarchal ideology, this

research examines similar themes in the novel *Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir*. The novel contains several compelling discussions, including the absence of space for Javanese women constrained by patriarchal myths and the unequal relationships between the upper and lower social classes within Javanese court culture. Women from lower strata are expected to submit to and revere members of the *ndalem keraton* (royal court). They are referred to as *abdhi ndalem*, a term used for those who dedicate their lives to serving the *ndalem* or royal family members, who are venerated and believed to provide blessings to the community.

The focus of this discussion is the relationship between female members of the royal court and female *abdhi ndalem*. What is particularly intriguing is the desire of a royal court member to foster gender harmony within the royal environment, transcending social strata, gender, and other distinctions. The character argues that, fundamentally, all humans are equal. This perspective also seeks to address societal problems that continue to differentiate the roles of men and women.

Based on the data sources, this research employs a library research methodology. The primary data source is the novel *Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir*. A qualitative approach was adopted, focusing on the analysis of observed, heard, and read phenomena, using systematic and scientific logic to identify patterns, models, meanings, and theories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The data analysis technique employed follows the framework by Miles and Huberman (Miles et al., 2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analytical process in this research uses the *mubadalah* theory, which emphasizes mutual relationships and reciprocity between two parties, such as husband and wife. In marital relationships, this theory highlights values of reciprocity, mutual cooperation, and the implementation of principles aimed at achieving a harmonious and beneficial family (Basid & Jazila, 2023). This reciprocal perspective asserts that no gender should dominate or hegemony the other.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive-analytical approach aimed at explaining, describing, and summarizing a condition, situation, phenomenon, or other variables. The analysis involves examining documents to uncover the content and meaning through interpretation within the text (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This approach is applied by describing the facts and issues related to gender equality as experienced by female characters in selected excerpts from the prose collection

Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir by W. Sanavero. The facts presented are not merely outlined but are also accompanied by sufficient explanation to describe the patriarchal cultural elements depicted in the novel through arguments on gender equality from a religious perspective.

This research is particularly noteworthy because the prose collection has not yet been analyzed using gender equality perspectives based on *mubadalah* theory. Furthermore, it offers new insights demonstrating that, even in the modern era, significant gender equality issues persist, particularly for women in Indonesia. In addition to highlighting these issues, the study proposes potential solutions by examining them through the principles of gender equality outlined in *Argumen Kesetaraan Gender Perspektif Al-Qur'an* (Gender Equality Argument from the Perspective of the Qur'an) by Dr. Nasaruddin Umar, MA.

THE ISSUE OF GENDER EQUALITY: *TANPA RUANG* (WITHOUT SPACE)

Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir by W. Sanavero is a literary work in the form of a prose album, aimed at revealing the often-overlooked dimensions of women's lives. Each character in the collection presents a unique perspective on themes such as love, memories, family, culture, marriage, and the human relationship with God. This study focuses on excerpts from the prose album, particularly two themes titled *Tanpa Ruang* (Without Space) and *Runduk* (Submission).

Tanpa Ruang narrates the suffering of a female character in a marital household. Her struggles stem from the dual burden she shoulders as a wife and the societal expectations within Javanese culture that women must rise before sunrise to serve their husbands, even if they are employed outside the home. Failure to do so risks gossip and the label of being a family disgrace.

Meanwhile, *Runduk* offers a vivid depiction of the social disparities within the lives of blue-blooded families in Java, highlighting the divide between the upper and lower social classes. For instance, *abdhi* (servants) are expected to submit and be obedient to members of the *ndalem keraton* (royal court), as they are believed to bring blessings to the community. However, the spotlight in this prose falls on the unease experienced by one of the women from the royal court. She expresses discomfort with the entrenched inequalities within the royal family, particularly those affecting women.

a. Gender-Based Role Division

A wife is expected to fulfill all her husband's needs perfectly and without fail.

"Myths are merely created to fill cultural gaps, to impose so-called moral values," I muttered as I lifted hot water off the stove.

"You just don't know how to make coffee," he replied.

"I knew you would say that."

"Am I wrong?"

"No. You're never wrong, my husband. What's not right is that you always belittle me, even when I'm at my lowest point."

For just one day, I woke up past six in the morning. When I went to the bathroom, everyone in the house was already dressed in batik clothes. Even my husband had made his own coffee. My chest tightened; I chastised myself. What kind of wife am I? (Sanavero, 2018: 75 and 76).

This dialogue between the character *I (Aku)* and her husband reflect the societal doctrine that a wife must obey her husband's every command without question. The husband's words are deemed absolute, leaving no room for dissent or inquiry.

b. Women Always Deemed at Fault

In instances of imbalance within the household, the wife is often held responsible for any errors that arise.

"I made a vow during our wedding ceremony. I promised to serve you with my body and soul. I've done it diligently for six years. But this morning, I failed to wake up early, and you even made your own coffee. Shouldn't you be asking yourself why? Why did it happen? What's wrong with me? Shouldn't you be concerned, if you are truly a husband?" I asked with tearful eyes (Sanavero, 2018: 76 and 78).

The character's response conveys her disappointment with her husband's attitude, as he considers her late awakening to be a grave mistake. This perceived error stems from her failure to prepare his coffee, leaving other household chores unattended.

c. Demand for Perfection from Women

Women are expected to perform their roles as wives flawlessly, particularly in household matters.

"I'm just asking you to learn from my mother. Learn how to cook rice with the right amount of water. Learn how to do weekly grocery shopping. And even now, you've never made a good cup of coffee. I'm baffled," (Sanavero, 2018)

This statement demonstrates the husband's demand for his wife's perfection in fulfilling her domestic roles, using his own mother as the standard of excellence.

THE ISSUE OF GENDER EQUALITY: *RUNDUK* (SUBMISSION)

a. Power Relations in Social Strata

Power dynamics exist across various regions of the world, including Indonesia. In Java, for instance, patriarchal norms prevail, influenced by a history of monarchies. These traditions persist today through the descendants of the royal families, known as *ndalem keraton* or royal palace.

"Mbak, just walk on your feet. Human knees are already dark; don't make them darker by walking on them before me," I softly remarked (Sanavero, 2018: 80).

This dialogue reveals the character's discomfort with the behaviors of *abdhi ndalem* (royal servants). The character *I (Aku)* believes that all humans deserve to walk upright, with their heads held high.

"Mbak. why does my hair bun look like two swan wings? It's different from your simple, neat buns," I asked as they styled my hair. I insisted they redo it.

"We use traditional hair bun measurements, Diajeng. For you, the bun must be two centimeters higher and shaped like a butterfly. This is the ancestral rule for blue-blooded princesses," explained Mbak Sri Ambar Cely while arranging my traditional attire (Sanavero, 2018: 83).

Once again, the character *I (Aku)* finds herself questioning the practices of the *abdhi ndalem*. She wonders why they must treat her differently. A servant explains that their actions follow ancestral rules to honor royal descendants, who are believed to possess blessings.

b. Exclusive Respect for the Elite

While respect is essential for all rational beings, it becomes problematic when it is only directed toward the elite while disregarding the lower classes.

"No! Style my hair like yours. It's just a hair bun, Miss. Its purpose is to keep women's hair tidy and elegant, not to symbolize social hierarchy. We're all women."

"But, Diajeng... this is how society shows its respect to you," (Sanavero, 2018: 83)

As in the previous dialogue, this excerpt underscores the expectation that royal family members must be honored and served, granting blessings to the servants in return.

c. Women Must Always Be Pure

"I was sent by Father to prepare steamed bananas for you, Diajeng. He also asked that you visit him after taking a mandi resik," (Sanavero, 2018: 81)

In this context, *mandi resik* refers to a ritual cleansing bath. In the royal culture, *mandi resik* is not only a means of physical purification but also symbolizes spiritual cleansing and repentance. This requirement represents a gender bias, as it is imposed solely on women, whereas men are not subjected to the same standards. Such practices raise questions: Why are only women subjected to this expectation? Why not men? Does it imply that women are inherently more susceptible to impurity, while men are considered perpetually pure?

ANALYSIS OF GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES IN THE NOVEL PEREMPUAN YANG MEMESAN TAKDIR BY W. SANAVERO

When examining the novel by W. Sanavero, the phrase *memesan takdir* or *ordering destiny* in its title reflects the struggles of female characters to improve their circumstances by challenging patriarchal traditions. These characters also appeal to divine intervention, seeking changes in their fate to escape the confines of a discriminatory patriarchal culture. The concept of destiny teaches that everything occurring on Earth, whether minor or major, past or future, is governed by the will of the Almighty (Nuraini, 2024). However, Islamic teachings clarify that destiny does not equate to passive acceptance of one's circumstances (Haderi, 2014). Allah grants humans the freedom to strive for the best outcomes in life, as they will be held accountable for their actions, whether good or bad.

The purpose of this divine endowment is to fulfill life's needs through active effort. The relationship between humans and destiny is not passive; rather, it involves a dynamic interplay where individuals endeavor to improve their lives and surroundings. Nonetheless, all actions and choices will ultimately be subject to Allah's judgment (Nuraini, 2024). The freedom bestowed by Allah aligns with humanitarian norms, including justice, equality, and respect for human dignity. Thus, human freedom is inherently limited by these principles, preventing individuals from acting arbitrarily toward others (Nuraini, 2024).

By nature, humans prioritize virtue over vice and benefits over harm. When this innate potential is properly exercised, individuals tend to remain on the path

of righteousness. Conversely, when individuals gravitate toward evil, it reflects an inability to control their potential, allowing their desires to dominate (Samsuri, 2020). The concept of *fitrah* (natural disposition) teaches that humans inherently have the freedom to choose between faith and righteous conduct or deviation (Cahyaningrum & Desiningrum, 2018). Despite significant social influences, humans retain the ability to choose their environment and actions. While Islam acknowledges the roles of heredity and environment in shaping personality, these factors are not absolute determinants. With divine guidance, humans can overcome external influences. Although predestined guidance exists, human freedom to choose is honored, encouraging individuals to follow the righteous path with reason, revelation, and divine guidance to achieve spiritual balance (Haderi, 2014).

Regarding gender equality, feminism emerges as a central theme. Feminism advocates for justice and freedom for women, both within and outside the domestic sphere (Fithrah, 2021; Setiawan, 2019). One prominent Muslim feminist, Fatimah Mernissi, sought to liberate women from patriarchal constraints by reconstructing allegedly misogynistic *hadiths*. Her critical ontology focused on scrutinizing *hadiths* to reconstruct them as a foundation for advocating gender equality (Zubaidah, 2020).

When viewed through the lens of the *mubadalah* concept, gender relations are primarily framed within the dynamics between husband and wife in the household (Abdul Kodir, 2019). While there are biological differences between men and women, these distinctions do not imply differences in moral and ethical capacities as human beings. Both men and women share equal potential as moral agents and bear the same human responsibilities (Wulan, 2022).

Based on the description of the data, the author identifies two major themes from the excerpts of the novel *Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir* related to the issues of gender equality. The first theme focuses on the problem of gender equality in the prose *Tanpa Ruang* (Without Space), while the second explores it in the prose *Runduk* (Submission). From these two pieces, it can be concluded that there are two factors contributing to the gender issues experienced by the female characters in the novel:

a. Women's Position in the Family

Women in families are often perceived as secondary or domestic actors, primarily responsible for household duties (Harun, 2015). This perception stems from inadequate premarital understanding of the roles and responsibilities of

husbands and wives, leading to unjust power dynamics, particularly in cases of limited religious knowledge (Heriyanto & Farida, 2017). In general, this perception is caused by a lack or insufficient understanding before marriage regarding the proper roles, duties, positions, and statuses of husband and wife. This often leads to legitimized actions that result in arbitrary power over women, especially in cases where there is limited religious understanding (Widyastini, 2016). Other consequences include gender inequality, imbalance in household roles, and even misunderstandings that can lead to divorce (Khi et al., 2008).

"You simply don't know how to make coffee," he replied.

"I knew you would say that."

"Am I wrong?"

"No. You're never wrong, my husband. What's wrong is that you always belittle me, even when I'm already at my lowest point." (Sanavero, 2018: 75).

The excerpt from the dialogue between the character *I (Aku)* and her husband, it demonstrates that there are still men (husbands) who fail to appreciate their wives' roles in the household. In the prose, it is explained that the character *I (Aku)* is not merely a housewife but also works to support her family's economy. However, even so, when she occasionally fails to wake up early and prepare her husband's coffee, she is harshly scolded by her husband, without him trying to understand the reasons for her late rising.

"I made a vow during our wedding ceremony. I promised to serve you with my body and soul. I've done it diligently for six years. But this morning, I failed to wake up early, and you even made your own coffee. Shouldn't you be asking yourself why? Why did it happen? What's wrong with me? Shouldn't you be concerned, if you are truly a husband?" I asked with tearful eyes (Sanavero, 2018: 76-77).

The excerpt of the dialogue illustrates that the character *I (Aku)* as a wife, can no longer hold back her tears, although she had never cried in front of her husband before. However, her husband's consistent disregard for her presence caused her long-suppressed emotions to overflow:

"I'm just telling you to learn from my mother. Learn to cook rice with the right amount of water. Learn how to shop for weekly groceries. Even until today, you've never made a cup of coffee that tastes good. I'm amazed." (Sanavero, 2018: 77).

This dialogue from the husband further emphasizes that some men still possess the mindset of expecting perfection in a wife's household roles without

considering her feelings or circumstances. When there is an imbalance in the household, the wife is often blamed, despite her daily efforts to meet her husband's needs.

"You're missing one thing, my husband. You forgot that I've done all of that. If you want the results to be exactly as your mother's, then exchange my back with hers. Even when you desire a new womb, exchange my body with hers," I replied (Sanavero, 2018: 77).

The character *I (Aku)* conveys a poignant message in her dialogue, questioning the extent of obedience and honor expected of a wife when her husband never appreciates her. Women's spaces are frequently intruded upon, burdened with demands, insults, and criticisms. This situation reflects the saying: "One drop of ink ruins the whole milk pot." It aptly describes the wife's role—despite contributing significantly, even a minor mistake diminishes her efforts in the husband's eyes. Although not universal, such patriarchal views persist among some men. These issues underscore the necessity of gender equality principles as a reference and solution to such challenges.

According to the Muslim feminist thinker Fatima Mernissi, male superiority is not determined by gender but by their functional role within the family. For instance, a man who earns a livelihood and spends his wealth to support women and his family demonstrates leadership. Mernissi argues that family leadership is not exclusively a male domain. A man can only be considered a leader if he can fulfill the financial and material needs of his wife and children. If he fails to meet these needs, he can be regarded as unsuccessful in leading his family. Mernissi posits that one of the key aspects of male (husband) superiority over women (wives) lies in their ability to provide for the family (Achmad, 2020).

Fatima Mernissi also argues that men and women are equal, granting both the same opportunities in various aspects, including leadership within the family (Widyastini, 2016). Her view is supported by a Quranic verse from Surah Al-Ahzab: 35, which states:

إِنَّ الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَالْمُسْلِمَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْقَنَاتِ وَالْقَنَاتِ وَالصَّادِقِينَ وَالصَّادِقَاتِ وَالصَّابِرِينَ وَالصَّابِرَاتِ وَالْخَاشِعِينَ وَالْخَاشِعَاتِ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقِينَ وَالْمُتَصَدِّقَاتِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَالصَّالِحَاتِ وَالْحَافِظِينَ فُرُوجَهُمْ وَالْحَافِظَاتِ وَالذَّاكِرِينَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَالذَّاكِرَاتِ أَعَدَّ اللَّهُ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرًا عَظِيمًا

“Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their chastity and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so—Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward” (QS. Al-Ahzab: 35)

This indicates that, ideally, family leadership lies in the hands of men (husbands) if they fulfill their responsibilities effectively, particularly by earning a livelihood and providing for their wives and children. However, male leadership in the family is not absolute. Leadership can shift to women (wives) if the man (husband) fails to fulfill his primary role of providing financial support to his family. As Fatima Mernissi states, male leadership is functional; thus, if a man cannot meet his family’s needs, he cannot be considered a leader in his household. Conversely, if the wife takes on the responsibility of providing for the family, leadership within the family may transfer to her (Achmad, 2020; Farihah, 2015).

b. Women’s Position in Society

Women’s abilities are often underestimated by society. Women are frequently regarded as weak and incapable of matching men’s abilities (Harun, 2015). Another factor contributing to the perception of women as the *second class* is the social disparity within Javanese society between the upper and lower classes. This disparity gives rise to various issues, including gender equality problems, particularly among the *ndalem keraton* community. This is evident in the prose titled “*Runduk*”.

“Mbak, just walk on your two feet. Human knees are already created dark; don’t make them darker by walking in front of me,” I said softly.

They smiled but continued walking on their knees.

“Sendika dawuh,” one of them replied (Sanavero, 2018: 80).

Sendika dawuh is a phrase in Javanese that means “Yes, Sir/Madam.” It is commonly used as an expression of obedience by a servant toward the commands or words of a member of the *ndalem keraton*. However, the phrase is not limited to this context; it can also be used by children toward their parents or students toward their teachers (Afra, 2023).

"Mbak. why does my hair bun look like two swan wings? It's different from your simple, neat buns," I asked as they styled my hair. I insisted they redo it.

"We use traditional hair bun measurements, Diajeng. For you, the bun must be two centimeters higher and shaped like a butterfly. This is the ancestral rule for blue-blooded princesses," explained Mbak Sri Ambar Cely while arranging my traditional attire

"No! Make me look like your hairstyle. It's just a hairdo, Mbak. Its purpose is to make a woman's hair neat and graceful, not to distinguish social status. We are both women."

"But, Diajeng... this is the form of respect from society towards you," she replied (Sanavero, 2018: 83)

From the dialogue excerpt, it can be concluded that an *abdhi* must carry out the customs and traditions passed down through generations, where members of the *ndalem keraton* must be obeyed and respected. However, in the dialogue, the main character, *I (Aku)* asks her *abdhi* to walk just like any other person, but the *abdhi* refuses because it goes against the established rules of the royal court life (Sanavero, 2018: 80).

This proves that social inequality in Javanese society has existed since ancient times, with one of the factors being the class disparity between the upper and lower strata. Those from the lower classes are often deemed suitable to occupy roles such as *abdhi*, slaves, helpers, workers, and the like. Often, these roles are assigned without considering the individuals' capacity or abilities, simply because they do not belong to the upper class. In the modern era, traditions like those reflected in the dialogue continue to persist and evolve. This issue highlights the need for discussions on feminism and gender equality.

As Fatimma Mernessi argues, this aligns with the meaning and objectives of the feminist movement. The goal of feminism is to reveal social facts and the powers at play, which are used as justification for violence. Feminism is not only about socio-cultural issues but also addresses the misuse of religion as a tool to justify deviations that harm women. The Gender Equality movement, which brings forth its principles, is a concrete response to actions that marginalize and degrade women's positions worldwide.

When women's rights become an issue in society, especially for modern men, it is not necessarily the fault of tradition, but rather due to rights that contradict the interests of the male elite (Zubaidah, 2020). The passivity of women and their marginalization are not only the result of tradition and culture but also due to a lack of deep understanding of religious values. Therefore, religion should be studied and

understood progressively. This progressive understanding and learning of religion is an alternative pathway to improve the situation, transforming it from a bad state to a better one, while uplifting the thinking, traditions, culture, and mindsets of society that remain primitive or illogical (Setiawan, 2019) as experienced by the female characters in the collection of prose *Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir*.

Islamic Criticism of the Destiny of Women's Position

From the perspective of Islam, there are several aspects that can be used as benchmarks to analyze the principles of gender equality in the Quran, including the following:

1. Men and Women Are Both Servants of God

The purpose of human creation is to serve and worship God, and in this regard, there is no difference between men and women. Both have equal opportunities to make themselves devout servants. To reach the level of devotion (*taqwa*), Islam does not distinguish based on race, tribe, ethnicity, culture, or even gender (Umar, 1999). Allah emphasizes in Surah al-Hujurat/49:13,

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

“O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.” (Surah Al Hujurat:13).

This verse explains that the most noble person is the one who is most devout in the sight of Allah. Therefore, there is no distinction based on nationality, tribe, race, or skin color; everyone has the opportunity to become a devout servant.

2. Men and Women as Khalifah on Earth

In addition to being created as servants, humans were also created as *khalifah* (stewards) on Earth. In this case, “humans” refers to both men and women. Therefore, apart from being obedient servants of Allah, they are also *khalifahs* on Earth, who will be held accountable for all their actions in this world. Thus, both men and women will be accountable for their deeds on the Day of Judgment (Umar, 1999).

Allah created humans as *khalifahs* on Earth to care for, protect, and preserve the natural world. This responsibility lies on the shoulders of all humans, whether male or female. Both are required to cooperate and help each other in goodness. This interdependence emphasizes that one gender should not dominate or hegemonize the other, nor should one be relegated to a servant or *abdhi* for the other. This clearly contradicts the responsibility of *khalifah* that Allah has given to each human and would hinder the realization of justice and prosperity on Earth, as both cannot be achieved without cooperation and mutual assistance (Abdul Kodir, 2019).

3. Men and Women Have Equal Opportunities to Achieve Success

Both men and women have the same opportunities to achieve success. This is affirmed in Surah Ali Imran/3:195:

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنكُم مَّن ذَكَرِ أَوْأُنْثَىٰ بَعْضُكُم مِّن بَعْضٍ
فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِن دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُودُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقُتِلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَا أَكْفِرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ
وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ

جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ

“So their Lord responded to them, ‘Never will I allow to be lost the work of any worker among you, whether male or female. You are of one another.’ So those who emigrated, were expelled from their homes, suffered in My cause, and fought and were killed – I will surely remove from them their misdeeds, and I will surely admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow as a reward from Allah. And Allah has with Him the best reward.” (Surah Ali Imran:195).

This verse implicitly indicates that individual achievements, whether spiritual or career-related, should not be monopolized by one gender. Both men and women have equal rights and opportunities to optimize their achievements. However, to achieve this optimization, it requires a process of correcting societal thoughts that are still constrained by patriarchal socio-cultural values, which are difficult to overcome (Umar, 1999).

Achieving justice in society is one of the calls of the Quran. Therefore, the Quran never provides space for any form of oppression, whether caused by differences in race, skin color, ethnicity, beliefs, or gender. If there is an interpretation of religion

that is discriminatory and even contrary to human values, such an interpretation is open to discussion and debate (Umar, 1999).

In addition to the above, the concept of *mubadalah* theory can also serve as an explanation and correction of gender issues as experienced by the characters in *Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir*. This theory focuses on reciprocal relationships and mutual connections between both parties, such as in the relationship between husband and wife. In a husband-wife relationship, it contains the values of mutual respect, togetherness, positive reciprocity, cooperation, and the implementation of principles aimed at realizing a harmonious and prosperous family (Basid & Jazila, 2023). Discussions on gender equality and feminism remain ongoing and have not reached a final point, as they stem from individuals' patriarchal perspectives, and the inequalities and problems also arise from cultural traumas that are deeply rooted in society (Aulia, Rahma & Sholihati, 2021). However, *mubadalah* theory offers a solution for both social spheres and households to address gender inequality, subordination, violence against women, double burdens, and other issues that marginalize women. By applying the principles in this theory, it can lead to greater gender equality. Therefore, future research should explore in more detail the resolution or implementation of gender equality issues through the *mubadalah* theory to strengthen the reality of gender equality practices.

CLOSING

The novel *Perempuan yang Memesan Takdir* by W. Sanavero is a prose album aimed at uncovering the other side of women, where they are each living their respective destinies. The characters within have their own perspectives on love, memories, family, culture, marriage, and their relationship with God. In this study, the author found that the issue stems from two triggering factors: the factor of power and social stratification that shackles women from various sides, and the factor of culture and patriarchal traditions used as a reason to control, oppress, and belittle women in both public and private spheres.

When hearing the word feminism, some people think that it is just a movement focused solely on women's interests, attempting to displace men. On the contrary, feminism exists to equalize positions and collaborate roles without diminishing the obligations of both women and men. This creates an ideal and harmonious relationship without overlooking or oppressing either side.

Gender equality and feminism are promoted to harmonize the positions of men and women. These two concepts would be highly compatible when combined with *mubadalah* theory. This theory focuses on the view of mutual relationships and reciprocity between both parties. For instance, in a husband-wife relationship, it encompasses the values of mutual respect, cooperation, positive reciprocity, and the implementation of principles that aim to create a harmonious and prosperous family. The mutual respect meant here aims to help women who are marginalized, so they are no longer seen as mere complements to men's lives, or even as secondary partners. *Mubadalah* theory also seeks to create a harmonious balance of roles. Islam has placed men and women in positions of justice, without oppression or discrimination. Therefore, the rights given to women are equal to those given to men, with each carrying their own duties according to religious guidelines.

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