

Riffat Hassan's Thoughts on the Feminist Paradigm

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Abstract

The continuity of life in society will be harmonious if the relationship between men and women goes hand in hand and respects one another. Therefore, awareness of the need to renew the relationship between men and women in a direction that is more just and equal continues and remains a topic of study that needs to be discussed. This is because the dominance of men continues to stick due to matriarchal culture in the wider community so that women experience unfair and marginalized treatment, even women are belittled and have a lower position than men.

In this way, studies and discussions on gender equality emerged, and even gave birth to a movement known as Islamic feminism. The Islamic feminist movement must be based on a reinterpretation of Islamic teachings, so as to strengthen women's rights and give them an equal place in society and participate in various fields of life, including in the political and economic fields. As for this article, the author uses a text study approach and historical context study. Text study attempts to analyze the basic patterns of thought contained in the text, while context study seeks to examine how the existing reality influences the context. The method in this study used library research (library research) which utilizes library sources to obtain research data and the type of research includes qualitative-descriptive techniques documenting relevant data sources. This research produces Riffat Hassan's perspective regarding sacred texts which are reinterpreted as part of his ijtihad in fighting for women to be able to appear in public and not be marginalized and not merely complementary beings

Keywords: *Gender Equality, Riffat Hassan, Feminism*

Introduction

The issue of the position and existence of women in society is an interesting theme to study, because Muslim perspectives on the position of women vary greatly and it happens because everyone's understanding is different. so that women become special beings. Unfortunately, women are often labeled as weak creatures and only act as complements and are not given the opportunity to take part in public spaces. Not only do men think so, but women themselves lack confidence and do not believe that God created men and women to be equal. However, there are reasons that have led to the rise of women, namely the awareness of marginalized positions and statuses and even inspired by feminism groups that echo *equality* with men or religious knowledge and their historical awareness is getting better (Anam, 2019).

In the relationship between men and women, awareness of the importance of renewing the pattern of relations between men and women towards a more just and different equality

continues and remains an important and interesting research topic (Husniyah, 2018). Historically, community activities have always been dominated by men, and women are treated unfairly in various levels of society until now, except in matriarchal societies there are only a few, where socially and culturally women are only underestimated (Husniyah, 2018).

Women are influenced by the classical mindset that their role is limited to household matters (wells, kitchens and beds) so that other matters become neglected and irrelevant. The number of women who are competent in the public sphere and combine family affairs and careers is scarce. Women are afraid to fulfill the demands of their household work without pay and without stopping, or they focus too much on matters outside the home and neglect for the sake of family harmony. The balance between family affairs and the realization of greater self-development is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve.

Interest in the debate on women's emancipation and empowerment has recently raised the topic of gender equality, in fact this topic is an important study in every religion: Islam. In an atmosphere of female domestication dominated by patriarchy, feminists try to exclude women from the male movement, which in Budhy Munawar Rahman's term is *ex-centralism* (Husniyah, 2018). Women must free themselves from their cultural role as *wingking concho* (Kamla, 1996). Several factors why women feel gender inequality (bias), so they have not felt equality. First, the life of a society dominated by patriarchal culture. Second, political factors, which always exclude the role of women. Third, the global capitalist system that is sweeping the world, causes women to be exploited. Fourth, there is an interpretation of religious scriptures that are gender-biased. Until now, the interpretation of religious scriptures; the Qur'an has been dominated by patriarchal ideology, because indeed most interpreters are men so they do not pay attention to the interests of women. Therefore, the need for deconstruction, and paradigmatic reconstruction of the interpreting model that tends to override women's interests (Andriani, 2017; Connell, 2020).

In this study, researchers wanted to see how Riffat Hassan's construct of thought as a Muslim feminist in her perspective on gender equality. In addition, the researcher also wants to explore his methodology in interpreting the sources of Islamic law with the theme of women (Feminist). There is a previous study on gender equality written by Sarifah Suhra entitled "Gender Equality in the Perspective of the Qur'an and its implications for Islamic law" concluded that the word "gender" is used to identify differences between men and women, with more emphasis on social, cultural, psychological and other non-biological aspects, while "sex" sees differences in biological aspects (Suhra, 2013). Its implications for the law also equalize between men and women. Furthermore (Mazaya, 2014) with the title "Gender Equality Islamic Historical Perspective" revealed the absence of gender equality in the Jahilliyah period So that the study discussed in this study is different, namely related to gender equality Riffat Hassan's perspective that occurs in modern times.

Method

This research is library research, the data source used is works written by Riffat Hassan himself, such as *Equal Before Allah: Women Man Equality in Islamic Tradition* and other

researchers' works related to Riffat Hassan's thoughts, especially in gender equality studies. The method is descriptive-qualitative with data collection through documentation of articles in accordance with the focus of the problem: gender equality. Documents that have been collected are used as data sources. These documents are then read and understood to obtain the necessary data in accordance with the problems that exist in this research. After the data is collected and considered sufficient, then systematization is carried out for analysis. Then, an interpretation of what is implied behind it is carried out. If necessary, it is also held with the results of research or the work of other thinkers. this was done in order to understand and formulate the concept of gender equality from Riffat Hassan's perspective.

Results and Discussion

Riffat Hasan's Biography

Riffat was born in Lahore, a historical city in Pakistan. She is a Muslim feminist who comes from a Sayyid family. Since childhood, Riffat lived in an environment full of problems. He never felt the true meaning of happiness in his life, he was found in a conflict until he was seventeen years old. One of the conflicts he faced was the quarrel between his own father and mother. His father, Begum Shagrant, was a conservative in his region, his way of thinking was clearly patriarchal and one of the ideas his wife always rejected was the assertion that the best age of marriage for women was sixteen. His wife, Dlara, has a great concern for the fate of women (Bidayah, 2013; Hassan, 2019) He argued that educating girls was more important than men, because female babies in pre-Islamic history explained that female babies born had to be buried alive on the grounds that female babies were not only a burden but a threat to men. Apparently Riffat followed in the footsteps of her mother who was committed to marginalized women (Zulaiha, 2016).

In addition, Riffat pursued formal and informal education. With his English skills he continues to develop his writing skills so that he can publish his writings in the form of poems, articles and short stories. Riffat continued his formal education at Durham University College, he was able to complete 3.5 years of education laude and received awards in English and Philosophy. Thanks to his intelligence and persistence, he was able to obtain a doctorate in philosophy at the age of twenty-four. In 1974 Riffat began to study and review the sacred text or verse of the Qur'an in detail and tried to reinterpret these verses, especially about verses related to women's issues (Zulaiha, 2016).

This is done by riffat to minimize patriarchal bias. Riffat moved to the United States and became a Professor in 1976. Riffat developed his career as a guest lecturer at Harvard University in 1987 and successfully wrote, and published his book entitled *Equal Before Allah* (Zulaiha, 2016).

Riffat Hassan's Method of Interpretation

Riffat tried to create feminist ideas that were closely related to women. There are two approaches used, namely the normative-idealist approach (normative *ideal approach*). at this stage Riffat Hasan examines first from the side of normative ideals, namely texts related to

women's issues from the Quran. Then Riffat saw the presence or absence of a correspondence between literary facts and empirical facts. Because Riffat assumes that whatever the basic principles contained in the sacred text must be examined in a socio-historical context, in this case Riffat wants to convey with a holistic understanding of the Qur'an that one will be able to obtain the points of Islamic teachings related to issues of equality between women and men and the relationship between the two based on mutual respect and respect for human rights. Therefore, the Qur'an is believed to be the source of the highest value and is therefore used as a guideline. Both approaches are historical-empirical. This approach is used after looking carefully and critically at the normative ideal view of the Qur'an, Riffat then looks at the empirical-historical reality of the condition of women in Islamic society. Unfortunately, according to Riffat, empirical data prove that in the case of women, there is still a gap between the ideal-normative and the historical-empirical-realistic, and this situation is experienced by almost all women everywhere (Zulaiha, 2016).

If so, there is something wrong with women's history. But fundamental values such as freedom, justice, equality and the spirit of respect for human rights contained in the Qur'an can be transformed and embodied in the history of mankind in reality. It is the thing that causes Riffat anxiety to reinterpret and even deconstruct verses of the Qur'an that contain Patriarchal bias. Both approaches used by Riffat are dialectical-integrative and functional. This means that the two are not separated, while Riffat sees the ideal-normative side, he then also sees the empirical-realistic side. At the normative level he refers to the Qur'an as the source of Islam's highest values, and historically, he looks at how the treatment of women occurs in society. Riffat strongly believes in the authority of the Qur'an as the source of Islamic values and teachings, and positions other sources such as Hadith as 'relative' and debatable. Hadith is not simply accepted as taken for granted, even without criticism, because Hadith does not have a guarantee of its originality, unlike the Qur'an whose preservation is guaranteed directly by Allah Almighty. This is as stated in QS.Al-Hijr:9. "Verily We have sent down the Qur'an and indeed we have kept it."

According to Riffat, the reason for the humiliation or inferiority of women in various areas of life lies in the theology that has only been interpreted by men. From there she then built a feminist theology that emphasizes gender equality in the Islamic context so that not only women but also men are freed from unjust structures and laws (Zulaiha, 2016). Riffat does not clearly define the term theology, but he states that it is now very important to develop feminist theology in the Islamic context, just as feminist theology develops in the context of Christians and Jews in the West (Supardi, 2022). Therefore, Riffat understood and adopted Western feminist theology. The theology of feminism that developed in the West is part of liberation theology derived from Christianity. Liberation theology of the oppressed is the poor and other oppressed, while in feminist theology that developed in the West, the oppressed are women (Suhra, 2013).

For Riffat, feminist theology must be further developed in the context of Islam, even if it comes from the West. According to him, in both the Western and Islamic worlds, women are

oppressed and classed as secondary beings whose status is lower than men. Therefore, feminist theology must be developed to liberate not only Muslim women but also Muslim men from unjust structures and laws that do not allow relationships between men and women (Andriasari, 2019). The existence of discrimination and all forms of gender injustice faced by women in the Muslim community stems from misunderstandings and biases against the source of the law, the Qur'an. Therefore, in her writings and thoughts, she expresses deconstructive theological ideas about women, especially regarding the concept of the creation of the first woman, namely "Eve" (Anam, 2019). In his book *Equal Before Allah*, Riffat states that women are oppressed by various parties in the name of "Islamization". They believe that the patriarchal system is institutionalized in the Qur'an (Hassan, 2019). According to Riffat, this view is wrong: if God's Word is read correctly, then in essence it promotes the emancipation of women in the Islamic world (Hassan, 2019). That is, there will be no legitimacy over gender inequality.

Riffat then applied his methodology in understanding the Qur'an about women. He made three interpretive principles in understanding Qur'anic verses: (1) *linguistic accuracy*, which is to look at terms with reference to all classical lexicons to obtain what is meant by the word in the culture in which it is used, (2) *criterion of philosophical consistency*, which is to see the use of words in the Qur'an as philosophically consistent and not contradictory, and (3) *ethical criterion*, namely that ethical practices must actually be reflected in the Qur'an (Hassan, 2019).

Riffat Hassan's Gender Equality Concept

1. Creation of Women

Riffat Hassan's view of equality between men and women is a concept of creation. He considered that classical Mufasir interpreted the creation of "woman" from man. The formation of this kind of interpretation of meaning, considered as a bias of the patriarchal system is so strong, then feminists consider that the concept of patriarchal interpretation is not in accordance with the holy text of the Qur'an which states that men and women are equal in the creator-N. Because, if classical interpreters consider women to be created from men, then women are only complementary and certainly not the same. Departing from this concept, it must continue to be studied by feminist mufasir how the Qur'anic interpretation of women actually is. According to Riffat, if God creates men and women equal, it is impossible to be unequal in the future (Hassan, 2019).

Riffat says that the Qur'an uses the term "Adam" only for people who are confident, experienced, and morally independent. When describing the physical process of human creation, the terms *al-insan*, *al-bashar*, and *al-nas* are used, which are the same as those quoted by Riffat in Iqbal's thought. From this point of view, Riffat states that it is not true that Adam was a man (Hassan, 2019).

Based on that, it is true that the word "Adam" is a masculine noun, only etymologically it does not mean "gender". The naming of Eve (called Adam's wife) is also not explained in the Qur'an. The word "Eve" uses the word *Zauj* to indicate Adam's partner. If Adam wasn't necessarily a man, then *Zauj* probably wasn't a woman. For example, in QS. *al-Nisa* (4):1 Riffat confirms the meaning of the verse by stating that the word Adam is a Hebrew term and the

word Adamah means land that serves as a generic term for man. Riffat also tells that in the Qur'an there is no reference that Adam was the first man and it is not stated that Adam was male (Hassan, 2019).

In addition, according to Riffat, regarding the creation of women from male ribs came from Judeo-Christian through Hadith literature and it turns out that the hadith that explains the creation of women from ribs is weak because there is one of the statuses who is considered not Tsiqah. such as Maysaroh and Abu Zinnad, but the narrators who were considered weak by Riffat were never considered weak by Al-Dhahabi (Hassan, 2019; Fauziyah, 2020).

2. The Concept of Equality of Men and Women

Regarding the position between men and women, Riffat criticized the source of the Qur'an. For him the creation of man and woman is equal before God. Both receive the same reward for doing good. Please note that Islam does not only prioritize the relationship between servants and their God, but more than that Islam also guides relationships between fellow creatures. So based on this statement, patriarchal culture is still considered detrimental to women by feminists. (V.A.R.Barao et al., 2022). Although the Qur'an reflects much of God's justice and love for women, none of this comes true when women are treated unfairly due to patriarchal bias.

Looking at Islamic history that has bestowed a female Muslim figure who is Sayyidah, Aisha, Khadija and Rabiah 'Adawiyyah (a female Sufi figure). However, until now, traditional Islamic traditions have tended to be rigid and patriarchal, which hindered the growth of women's scholarship. This is why Riffat holds that women are marginalized, and although the Qur'an emphasizes equality between men and women, Muslim society in general never considers that men and women are different, especially in the context of marriage. Riffat rejects this and refers to Fatima Mernisi's observations about the position of women in family relationships in Morocco. He said: A feature of sexuality in Islamic societies is the presence of territorial boundaries that reflect different divisions of labour and different concepts of society and power. Territorial boundaries between the sexes create a level of duty and a model of authority. Because space is limited, women are materially satisfied in sexual and reproductive services in return for complete obedience. Men always have a higher degree than Muslim women. Men force women to move closely, both physically and mentally (Anam, 2019), (Tohir, 2018). According to Riffat, the rejection of equality between men and women in Islamic public relations stems from the paradigm that states women are inferior because of the source of creation (Hassan, 2019; Muhtador, 2018).

3. Polygamy Concept

The issue of polygamy is often the subject of discussion in feminist studies. But unfortunately most classical interpreters misinterpret this verse so that in the end it seems as if the verse becomes a justification for someone to practice polygamy just like that, without regard to the context in which the verse expresses it being done, and the spirit of polygamy. According to Riffat's view, the verse of polygamy is more focused on the problem of caring for orphans, namely by making the mother of the orphan as a wife. So that the existence of these orphans is

safer with the supervision of their parents, and they get justice. so the point of Riffat's thinking is that polygamy is permissible but in emergency conditions and the person who will practice polygamy must be able to be fair. as was the case with polygamy practiced by the Prophet Muhammad not only to have sex, as alleged by orientalist, but also to raise and care for orphans and widows (considering that at that time there were many wars and many men died and left their children).

Conclusion

Riffat Hassan is a feminist who assumes that there is gender bias in the interpretation carried out by classical interpreters that reflects an unfair attitude towards women, this is due to patriarchal bias. Riffat Hassan believes that gender equality that occurs in the current decade must continue to be echoed so that women are no longer underestimated and remain in the shadow of male power. The desire of the feminist mufasir is to explain that the position of men and women is the same as stated in the Qur'an. Riffat emphasized that the difference between the two is their devotion.

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