




The Gender in Religious Discourse

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ABSTRACT

The problem of gender equality in religious discourse is not only related to differences in roles between men and women, but also injustices that arise due to social constructions that limit access and opportunities for one gender. In Islam, the debate over gender has created two main groups: conservatives and progressives. Conservative groups believe that Islam is fair in regulating gender roles, while progressive groups believe that gender inequality occurs due to biased interpretations influenced by patriarchal culture. Different interpretations of religious texts are a major factor in determining views on gender roles, with a literal approach supporting gender hierarchies and a reformist approach encouraging equality based on Islamic principles of justice. This research uses the library research method with a case study approach that focuses on gender in religious discourse. Apart from that, quantitative analysis is also used to identify patterns and trends in people's perceptions of gender roles through surveys and statistical analysis. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive methods, regression and correlation tests to understand the relationship between religiosity, education and understanding of religious teachings with gender views. It is hoped that the results of this research will provide insight into the impact of religious discourse on gender equality and encourage interpretations of religious teachings that are more inclusive and relevant to current social challenges. With increasing awareness of the importance of gender equality, this research can be a basis for formulating fairer policies for women in social, economic and political life.

Keywords: *Gender, Religious Discourse, Interpretation of Religious Texts, Equality, Statistical Analysis*

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INTRODUCTION

The problem of gender equality is not only related to differences in roles between men and women, but more to the injustice that arises as a result of social construction that limits access and opportunities for one gender. In many cases, women often face obstacles in various aspects of life, such as education, work and involvement in decision making. Gender stereotypes inherent in society often assume that women only play a role in the domestic sphere, while men are more dominant in the public sphere. This view creates inequality that prevents women from developing optimally and contributing to social, economic and political life. (No et al., 2022)

In Islam, gender issues are still controversial. Among Muslims there are groups who believe that there are no gender problems in Islam. Gender issues give rise to two main views: First, the Conservative group believes that Islam is perfect and fair in regulating gender roles according to nature, inequality is considered to be the result of individual deviation, not from religious teachings. The gender equality movement is often seen as a threat to religious and cultural values. Second, progressive groups, this group believes that gender inequality comes from biased interpretations of religious texts due to the influence of patriarchy. They encourage a contextual reinterpretation of Islamic teachings to support equality, viewing this struggle as an effort to realize the values of justice promoted by Islam. (Jihan Abdullah, n.d.)

Debates regarding gender roles and positions in religious discourse reflect the complex relationship between sacred texts, traditions, and social context. Interpretation of sacred texts is often the basis for forming gender views, but this understanding is not uniform. Traditional perspectives tend to be literal in favor of a gender hierarchy with men as leaders, while women are more limited to domestic roles. In contrast, reformist interpretations emphasize the importance of reading texts in historical and cultural context, promoting gender equality by highlighting the principles of justice and inclusivity contained in religious teachings. Local traditions also play a big role, where patriarchal cultures often reinforce gender stereotypes in the name of religion, although not always in harmony with sacred texts.

This discourse is also enriched by feminist thought in religion, which seeks to deconstruct gender bias in religious narratives and provide space for women's experiences as subjects. These differences in interpretation have wide-ranging impacts, including on family life, social participation, and public policy, which can open up opportunities or limit women's rights. In the future, increasing awareness of the importance of gender equality will encourage religious communities to reflect on their teachings in a more inclusive and relevant manner, bridging the gender gap through dialogue and adaptation to the challenges of the times. (An & Nasaruddin, 2023)

METHOD

This type of library research is Library Research. Therefore, the author tries to look at a number of books and also several other journals related to the contents of the discussion in this title which are used as primary sources and other information as related secondary sources. The information that has been obtained from several sources is then processed descriptively and analytically. A flow model that includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions is used to carry out the analysis. This research uses a case study type of research with a focus on gender in religious discourse. (Sari, 2020)

The research method applied is a qualitative method Statistical analysis in gender research in religious discourse plays an important role in identifying patterns and trends in people's perceptions of gender roles in religious contexts. By using methods such as descriptive analysis, regression, or correlation tests, this research can

reveal the relationship between variables such as level of religiosity, education, and understanding of religious teachings with gender views. Data obtained through surveys or questionnaires allows researchers to measure the extent to which religious discourse influences gender perceptions in various groups of society. The results of this analysis can be a basis for formulating policies or recommendations that are more inclusive in religious life. (DR. H. Zuchri Abdussamad, S.I.K., n.d.)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. *Interpretation of Sacred Texts*

Interpretation of sacred texts can be done through a variety of approaches, each offering a different way of understanding their meaning. Literal interpretation tends to read the text directly according to the written words, without considering the historical or cultural context. This approach often results in masculine interpretations, placing men as authorities and women in subordinate positions, in accordance with the patriarchal social structure at the time the text was written.

In contrast, contextual interpretation emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical, social, and cultural background behind the text. In this way, interpretation can be more inclusive and egalitarian, because the context that influenced the writing of the text is recognized as part of the meaning. This approach allows readers to explore universal values in the text, such as justice and equality, that remain relevant in modern life.

Feminist hermeneutics goes further by offering a critical perspective on sacred texts. This approach seeks to identify and challenge patriarchal biases that may be inherent in the text, while also looking for hidden meanings that can empower women. By reading it from the perspective of women's experiences, feminist hermeneutics not only criticizes, but also opens up new space for dialogue that is more just and equal, both in religious traditions and social life. (Muflihah, n.d.)

The differences in styles and approaches in interpreting the Koran show that understanding of this holy book is dynamic and continues to develop according to the context of the times. Tafsir bi al-ra'yi which emphasizes rationality and tafsir bi al-ma'tsur which is based on hadith provide variations in understanding the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an. Apart from that, textual and interdisciplinary approaches further enrich insight in understanding the messages contained therein. Therefore, differences in interpretation are not a contradiction, but rather a manifestation of Islamic intellectual property that allows the Al-Qur'an to remain relevant in every era. (Adab et al., 2020)

A literal approach in interpreting sacred texts is often considered the most authentic, but its limitations in considering historical and social context can lead to injustice, especially in gender relations. Hierarchies that place men as holders of authority are often not only the result of religious teachings themselves, but are also influenced by patriarchal culture that has developed over time. Therefore, a contextual approach is important to understand that religious

teachings are not static, but have values of justice and welfare that can be applied more inclusively. By considering the social and cultural context, religious interpretation can be more relevant to the principle of equality and able to accommodate changing times without losing its spiritual essence. (Mayola Andika, n.d.)

Contextual interpretation provides a broader and more relevant understanding of sacred texts by adapting the interpretation to the dynamics of the times. By considering historical, social and cultural backgrounds, this approach helps avoid misunderstandings resulting from readings that are too literal or detached from the original context. In addition, this approach encourages readers to highlight universal values that remain relevant in various times, such as justice, compassion, and respect for human dignity. In the context of an increasingly plural and diverse world, contextual interpretation also opens up space for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, so that it can bridge differences in understanding and strengthen mutual respect in social life. (Textual et al., 2016)

Feminist hermeneutics acts as a critical tool in interpreting sacred texts by highlighting the patriarchal bias that may be contained in them and offering a more inclusive and just perspective towards women. By exploring alternative meanings that have been neglected, this approach not only criticizes the structure of domination in the text, but also displays the potential for empowerment that can be found in the women's stories in it. In addition, feminist hermeneutics encourages awareness of how religious interpretations can influence social and political norms related to gender, thus opening up space for reflection and transformation in religious traditions and social life. Thus, this approach becomes an important tool in fighting for gender equality and respect for the rights and dignity of every individual. (Budi & Amalia, 2025)

2. *Patriarchal Tradition*

Patriarchal culture in Indonesia, which is often reinforced by religious interpretations and social norms, creates gender inequality that harms women in various aspects of life. Practices such as large dowries or dress codes that limit women's freedom show how patriarchal norms can shape unequal power relations. Additionally, inequality in religious leadership and division of inheritance reflects how the interpretation of sacred texts is often influenced by a culture that favors men. Even though the challenges to changing this tradition are quite large, awareness of the importance of gender equality continues to grow through efforts to reinterpret religious texts and public education. With a more inclusive approach, religious teachings can return to their fundamental values, such as justice and respect for the dignity of every individual, without being trapped in deep-rooted patriarchal cultural biases. (Rahmania et al., 2023)

The patriarchal culture that is still strong in Indonesia is a barrier for women to gain equal access and opportunities in various areas of life, including economics, education, politics and law. This gender inequality strengthens exploitation and discrimination which makes it difficult for women to develop

in the public sphere. One of the real impacts of patriarchy is women's poverty, where access to resources and employment opportunities is often more limited than men's. In fact, many women act as the backbone of the family, even the head of the family. Therefore, efforts to empower women and eliminate gender-based discrimination are very important to create a more just and prosperous society. Gender equality is not only about women's rights, but also about social development that is more inclusive and sustainable for all. (Halizah et al., 2023)

3. *The Role of Women in Islam*

The view that men's education is prioritized over women's is often based on patriarchal values that are deeply rooted in society. Parents who focus on boys' education assume that they have greater responsibility as future breadwinners and household leaders. On the other hand, girls' education is often considered less important because their role is identified with domestic duties, such as taking care of the household and serving the family. These kinds of stereotypes not only harm women, but also limit their potential to develop intellectually, socially, and economically.

Concerns about girls' safety, such as the risk of abuse, human trafficking, or religious rules that limit their mobility, are also frequently cited reasons for limiting their access to education. For example, the view that women should not travel far without their mahram is often used as a basis to prevent them from continuing their education in distant places. While concerns about safety are natural, solutions should focus on creating a safe and supportive environment for all children, not limiting their right to a decent education. (Nursaptini, 2019)

A literal understanding of religious verses also strengthens this inequality. Some communities use biased interpretations of religious texts to prevent women from carrying out activities outside the home, including getting an education. In fact, many more contextual interpretations emphasize that Islam encourages the search for knowledge without distinguishing between gender. Therefore, it is important to promote inclusive education that supports gender equality and empowers women, so that they can contribute actively in the family, society and the world of work. (Fatmawati, 2024)

Women in traditional roles are often limited to the domestic sphere as wives, mothers and educators of children in the family. In religious contexts, their role is usually directed towards supporting activities such as charity, girls' education, and domestic religious rituals. This division of roles is based on social norms and religious interpretations which prioritize men as leaders of the household and community. As a result, women's involvement in the public sphere, including in the more formal religious sphere, is very limited.

With social and cultural changes, women are increasingly taking active roles in various aspects of life, including the religious field. They are now known as intellectuals, religious leaders, activists and drivers of social change. Women have become not only passive participants, but also significant contributors to theological discussions, social justice advocacy, and religious reform. This modern role shows that women have the same capacity as men to

contribute intellectually and spiritually, beyond traditional boundaries that have existed.

Despite progress, women's participation in religious life is still faced with various challenges. Gender discrimination, inequality in leadership, and limited access for women to formal religious education are the main obstacles. However, social changes and increasing awareness of the importance of gender equality provide opportunities for women to be more recognized. Community support, reinterpretation of sacred texts, and inclusive education are key to overcoming these obstacles, paving the way for women to play a more active and equal role in religious life. (Nurhaliza et al., 2021)

4. *Islamic Views About Gender*

Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, and attributes that are considered appropriate for a particular gender in a society. This is different from sex, which refers to the biological differences between men and women. Society's views on gender often create certain stereotypes that require men and women to act and think in ways that conform to their social expectations. For example, women are often associated with domestic roles such as cooking, caring for themselves, and being gentle, while men are considered leaders, protectors, and decision makers in the family and society.

These gender stereotypes stem from social norms that have existed for a long time, and although many of them have changed as society has developed, they are still often widely accepted. Beliefs such as that women are always emotional and sensitive, or that men must be rational and assertive, are often used to limit an individual's opportunities and choices based on their gender. This can give rise to injustice and discrimination, because individuals who do not meet established gender expectations are often considered to be inconsistent with social norms or even treated unfairly.

However, it is important to remember that these gender constructs do not always reflect biological reality or individual abilities. Gender is something that is shaped by culture, and norms can change over time. With increasing awareness of gender equality, many societies are beginning to break down traditional gender stereotypes and recognize that both men and women have the right to choose and pursue any role without being bound by restrictive social expectations. Therefore, it is important to continue to educate society about gender flexibility and appreciate the diversity of roles that individuals can fulfill, regardless of their gender.

The Qur'an teaches basic principles that support an egalitarian view of the relationship between men and women. In several verses, the Qur'an explicitly states that both sexes have equal standing before Allah. For example, in Surah Al-Hujurat (13), Allah emphasizes that the differences between nationalities and ethnic groups that exist between humans are for getting to know each other, not for differentiating their degrees. This shows that gender differences, like racial or ethnic differences, should not be the basis for discrimination or inequality. Likewise, in Surah An-Nisa' (124), Allah explains

that men and women will receive the same reward in the afterlife for all the good deeds they do, as long as they believe.

This confirms that before Allah, there is no difference between the two in terms of retribution for good deeds. If God as Creator treats men and women with equal rights, then humanity should follow that example in their social interactions. Inequalities that occur between men and women in various aspects of life, including in terms of rights and opportunities, should not be allowed to occur, because this is contrary to the teachings of the Koran which emphasizes the principle of equality. Therefore, it is important for Muslims to understand these egalitarian messages deeply and apply them in everyday life, creating a more just and civilized society.¹²

In the context of understanding gender according to the Qur'an, there are several main principles that show equality between men and women, which can be used as a basis for analyzing gender issues. First, both men and women are seen as servants of Allah who have the same position in serving Him, without any differences in terms of their rights to worship and seek Allah's approval. Second, the Qur'an states that both of them are caliphs (leaders or representatives of Allah) on earth, who have the responsibility to protect and manage the universe in accordance with Allah's instructions. Third, in the context of the primordial covenant, men and women both accept a covenant with God to carry out their roles in the world, as part of His will.

Apart from that, the Qur'an also describes that Adam and Eve were actively involved in the cosmic drama of human life, where both of them had equally important roles in the creation process and life's journey. This confirms that the two of them are not separate individuals in terms of life goals, but complement each other. Fourth, both men and women have the potential to achieve achievements, both in terms of worship, science, and in social and economic life. This potential shows that equality in achievement is highly valued, regardless of gender.

Overall, the obsession of the Qur'an is the realization of justice in human life, both in individual relationships with God and between fellow humans. The Qur'an teaches that justice covers all aspects of life, without discrimination based on ethnicity, skin color, race, religion or gender. Therefore, the Qur'an opposes all forms of oppression that occur in society, including gender-based injustice. Any differences in interpretation that arise regarding these verses are often more subjective, depending on the perspective and understanding of the individual or group interpreting them. However, in essence, the principle of gender equality in the Koran still prioritizes justice and respect for human dignity. (Rahim, n.d.)

CONCLUSION

Interpretation of sacred texts, whether through a literal, contextual or feminist hermeneutic approach, opens up space for a broader and deeper understanding of the role of gender in religious teachings. A literal approach often maintains patriarchal norms that limit women's roles, while contextual

interpretation and feminist hermeneutics offer a way to explore more inclusive and equal meanings, which can lead to a renewed understanding of religion that supports gender equality. Thus, each of these approaches provides an opportunity to correct misinterpretations and create space for justice and respect for the dignity of all individuals, regardless of gender.

In the context of Islamic views, the teachings of the Qur'an firmly support the principle of equality between men and women, emphasizing that both have an equal position before Allah. Islam teaches that gender differences should not be the basis for discrimination or inequality, and both have the same rights in worship, achieving achievements, and carrying out their role as caliphs on earth. Gender equality in Islam aims to create a just society, where every individual is respected and given equal opportunities, without any restrictions based on gender. Thus, Islamic teachings should encourage change towards a more inclusive and just society.

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