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Theology of Women's Liberation in the Perspective of Riffat Hasan; Ideas Toward the Reform of Indonesian Islamic Law

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Abstract: *Women's liberation theology, developed by Riffat Hassan, offers a critical hermeneutical approach to interpreting Islamic sacred texts in a way that is more inclusive and just towards women. Riffat Hassan's thinking highlights that many patriarchal interpretations that harm women come from the dominant social and cultural context, not from the text itself. This research uses a qualitative method with a content analysis approach. Through critical hermeneutic analysis, this research emphasizes the principles of justice, equality, and human dignity in Islam as a foundation for reforming religious understandings and practices that discriminate against women. In the context of Islamic law in Indonesia, this thinking is highly relevant to review and reform various aspects of family and civil law. Reforming inheritance, marriage and divorce laws based on the principles of gender justice can enhance the protection and rights of women. Riffat Hassan's opposition to all forms of violence against women provides a theological basis for strengthening stricter legal provisions. Increasing women's participation in leadership and*

politics is also supported through an egalitarian re-reading of religious texts. By adopting a more inclusive approach, Islamic law in Indonesia can be more responsive to social change and create a more just and equal system for women.

Keywords: *Women's Liberation Theology, Riffat Hassan, Islamic Law, Gender Justice.*

A. Introduction

Before the advent of Islam, the status of women was very low and unappreciated. Their roles in the social, economic, and political spheres were very limited, with men dominating in these areas. It is not surprising that in the Arabian Peninsula at that time, husbands who knew that their wives were pregnant and would soon give birth, had prepared a hole to bury their children alive if it turned out that the child born was female.¹

In pre-Islamic times, women had no autonomy over themselves because they were deprived of their rights. They were treated like slaves who could be bought and sold, they inherited but did not have inheritance rights, and were even treated like inanimate objects. When they died, they were considered worthless because they were seen as different from men from the start.²

History records that before the arrival of Islam, many great civilizations such as Greece, Rome, and India had developed in the world. Even before Islam, which was brought by the Prophet Muhammad, many great religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and Zoroaster existed. However, none of these civilizations and religions defended and gave women a better position.³

¹ Ilkka Lindstedt, "The Qur'an and the Putative Pre-Islamic Practice of Female Infanticide," *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association* 8, no. 1 (August 1, 2023): 5–29, <https://doi.org/10.1515/jiqsa-2023-0005>.

² Muhammad Mumtaz Ali Khan, Mazher Hussain, and Zil e Huma Rafique, "Status of Women in Pre-Islamic Civilizations: Analytical Study of the Dark Ages -From the Ancient Greek to the Jahiliyah," *Statistics, Computing and Interdisciplinary Research* 3, no. 2 (December 31, 2021): 263–76, <https://doi.org/10.52700/scir.v3i2.119>.

³ Read more in: Muhammad Anas Qasim Ja'far, *Mengembalikan Hak-Hak Politik Perempuan; Sebuah Perspektif Islam*, trans. Mujtaba Hamdi (Jakarta: Azam, 2001).

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When Islam came with the Qur'an as a guide to life, one of its teachings was to equalize the position of men and women regardless of their origin or nation. In the eyes of Allah, all humans are equal, and the only difference is their level of obedience to Him, as stated in QS: Al-Hujurat: 13. In another verse (QS: Al-Nahl: 97), Allah honors His servants, both men and women, and Islam places them on an equal footing.

The Holy Qur'an has many possibilities in its interpretation, and everyone who interprets it uses different approaches and methodologies to understand the content and message of God's verses. This happens because the Qur'an does have various meanings, depending on the point of view used. Various styles and methodologies of interpretation also emerge along with the times and places where the mufassirs are located.⁴

The Qur'an and tafsir are two different things. The Qur'an is a revelation text from God that will never change, while tafsir is the result of human interpretation that can change at any time. The process of interpretation will continue to develop along with the consumption of the Qur'anic text by mankind.

The portrayal of women as "half" human beings by the patriarchal theological interpretations of the adherents of the heavenly religions has caused gender injustice and deprivation of women's rights as God's creatures created with equal dignity before Him.⁵ To overcome this problem, feminists are active in interpreting and reconstructing the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an using a different methodology from other mufassirs who tend to be dominated by and biased towards male interests. The interpretations carried out by these feminists will produce a more gendered understanding.

⁴ Ghulam Mustafa Nukhba, "A Comprehensive Review of Comparative Interpretation of Holy Quran: Approaches, Methodologies, and Criteria for Establishing Plausible Interpretations," *International Journal of Humanities Education and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (October 25, 2023): 719–730, <https://doi.org/10.55227/ijhess.v3i2.625>.

⁵ Maftukhatusolikah, "Akar Teologis Ketimpangan Gender: Pemikiran Feminisme Riffat Hassan," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 2, no. 1 (2002): 117, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol2.iss1.art8>.

When feminists, who were reacting to the inequality and injustice experienced by women, entered the Islamic world, Muslim feminist figures emerged. Based on their Islamic beliefs, these figures tried to fight against interpretations that were considered less favorable to women.⁶ They not only challenge traditional patriarchal interpretations, but also offer alternative interpretations that are more inclusive and gender-equitable. Figures such as Riffat Hassan, Asma Barlas, and Amina Wadud, for example, utilize a critical hermeneutic approach to reread sacred texts in Islam.⁷ Through this approach, they highlight how social, cultural and political contexts often influence religious interpretation, which tends to ignore basic Islamic principles of justice and equality. These Muslim feminists also seek to re-explore Islamic teachings that place women as subjects who have the right to dignity, honor and full participation in public life. In doing so, they encourage reforms that are not only relevant to the needs of modern Muslim women, but also in line with the universal values of Islam.

One of the Muslim feminist figures who does not believe in the interpretations of traditional interpreters is Riffat Hasan from Lahore, Pakistan. According to her, the classical interpreter has always discredited women in various ways. In her works, Hasan tries to reconstruct verses that have been interpreted with a patriarchal bias, especially those related to women. According to her, this is due to the patriarchal system of Islamic society and the majority of male interpreters.⁸

What is interesting about Riffat Hasan is that her interpretation is different from other feminists. While other feminists still trust the interpretations of classical scholars, Riffat Hasan does not. She does

⁶ Maftukhatusolikhah, 111–27.

⁷ Read more in: Zayn Kassam, “Legal, Hermeneutical, and Activist Considerations in Mapping the Future for Muslim Women,” in *Women in World Religions: Exploring the Future*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2024), 45–70, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-5975-0_3; Irma Riyani, “Muslim Feminist Hermeneutical Method to the Qur’an (Analytical Study to the Method of Amina Wadud),” *Ulumuna* 21, no. 2 (December 29, 2017): 298–314, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v21i2.320>.

⁸ Riffat Hasan, *Isu Kesetaraan Laki-Laki dan Perempuan dalam Tradisi Islam (Setara di Hadapan Allah)*, Penj. Tim LSPPA (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Prakarsa, n.d.), 46.

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not believe in the interpretations of classical scholars because, according to her, they do not defend women, especially in interpreting verses related to women. Therefore, his ideas are very interesting to be studied more deeply, especially in an effort to explore the potential for Islamic law reform that is more responsive to gender issues.

This study is an advanced study of several similar studies, including the results of Tohir's research which explains that Riffat Hasan uses empirical and idea-normative approaches in interpreting verses related to feminism. One example is seen in her interpretation of the word *qawwamun* in Surah al-Nisa' verse 34, where she emphasizes that the responsibility of earning a living is not only the duty of men, but women also have the opportunity to play a role in this aspect.⁹ Another study, conducted by Anwar and Maghfiroh, also revealed that Riffat Hasan criticized gender bias in the interpretation of classical scholars who were considered unfair to women due to the influence of patriarchy. She emphasized the importance of promoting gender equality so that women are no longer underestimated or under the dominance of men. According to her, the Qur'an states the equal position of men and women, with the difference lying in the form of devotion of each.¹⁰

Unlike previous research, this study has a very important urgency, both in a scientific and applicative context. Academically, this study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of Islamic feminism, especially in interpreting sacred texts with a more inclusive and fair approach to women. Riffat Hasan's thinking, which challenges patriarchal interpretations in classical tafsir, is an important foundation in promoting gender equality in Islamic law. In the Indonesian context, this research is relevant to encourage the reform of Islamic law, especially in the aspects of family law, marriage, inheritance, and violence against women, by prioritizing the principles of gender justice. By adopting this perspective, Islamic law

⁹ M. Tohir, "Feminisme al-Qur'a; Study Kritik terhadap Pemikiran Riffat Hasan Tentang Konsep Equality Gender," *Al-Thiqah: Jurnal Ilmu Keislaman* 1, no. 02 (October 7, 2018): 89.

¹⁰ Mohammad Shohibul Anwar and Rodiatul Maghfiroh, "Pemikiran Riffat Hassan tentang Paradigma Feminis," *Al-Wajih: The Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 30, 2024): 29.

in Indonesia can be more responsive to social change and create a legal system that is more just, equal and protects women's rights.

The research approach employed in this study is qualitative with a literature study design.¹¹ This research focuses on exploring and analyzing the ideas of women's liberation theology from Riffat Hasan's perspective and how her thoughts can significantly contribute to the reform of Islamic law in Indonesia. Data collection is conducted through a comprehensive literature review, including Riffat Hasan's major works, journal articles, books, and secondary sources relevant to the research topic. Additionally, a critical analysis is performed on the historical, social, and cultural contexts that influence Hasan's thought development and its relevance to the dynamics of Islamic law in Indonesia. In data analysis, content analysis is used to identify the main themes in Riffat Hasan's thinking regarding women's liberation theology. A hermeneutic approach is also applied to understand Hasan's interpretation of religious texts and their implications for gender issues in Islamic law.¹² This analysis aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Hasan's contributions in redefining the roles and rights of women in the Islamic perspective and the potential application of her ideas in the context of Islamic law in Indonesia. The validity and reliability of the research are ensured through data triangulation, comparing findings from various sources and integrating the perspectives of other experts in the field.

B. Biography of Riffat Hassan

As mentioned above, several Muslim thinkers are concerned with the issue of feminism in Islam. One of them is Riffat Hassan. It is Riffat Hassan's thoughts on women's liberation that we will try to study and use in this research. However, it is better before further discussing her thoughts, we will first present a little information about this figure.

¹¹ Read more in: Vicki L. Plano Clark and Nataliya V. Ivankova, *Mixed Methods Research: A Guide to the Field* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2015), 130.

¹² Read more in: Lauren Swayne Barthold, *A Hermeneutic Approach to Gender and Other Social Identities* (New York: Springer, 2016), 1–2.

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Riffat Hasan is a Muslim feminist who was born in Lahore, Pakistan. Although there is no exact information about her date of birth, it is known that she comes from an upper-class Sayyid family. Riffat is one of nine siblings, consisting of five boys and three girls. Her father, affectionately called "Begum Shahiba," was a highly respected patriarchal figure who held traditional views. Meanwhile, her mother was the daughter of a prominent poet and scientist, Hakim Ahmad Shuja.¹³

Riffat grew up in a very traditional and patriarchal family environment, which believed that a girl should marry at the age of 16 with the choice of her parents. However, her mother dissented and opposed her father's traditional views. Her parents' differing views caused Riffat to feel restless and isolated from her family, so she often retreated to her room to read and write poetry.¹⁴

Riffat challenged her father, a patriarchal traditionalist. All her efforts to challenge her father were fueled by her mother's support to challenge her father's patriarchal system. For Riffat Hasan, her mother had a major influence on her success in her studies, as she encouraged her to be herself. Despite this, Riffat never felt her mother's love as she should have, as her mother only favored her success and did not pay attention to her as an individual.¹⁵

From her childhood experiences, she was encouraged to study gender injustice issues academically. The education she received greatly supported her interest in this research. As an academic, she had the opportunity to see first-hand the conditions of gender injustice in Islamic societies around the world. This concern has followed Riffat from childhood to adulthood, especially when she went to study in the UK. There, she felt academic and theological angst as she witnessed Muslim women losing their human and Islamic rights. This happened in line with the dominance of

¹³ Moh Muhtador, "Gagasan Riffat Hasan tentang Kritik Gender atas Hadis Misoginis," *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 2, no. 2 (December 15, 2017): 259–274.

¹⁴ Muhtador, 263.

¹⁵ Read moder in: Abdul Mustaqim, *Paradigma Tafsir Feminis, Membaca al-Quran Dengan Optik Perempuan: Studi Pemikiran Riffat Hassan Tentang Isu Gender Dalam Islam* (Yogyakarta: Logung Pustaka, 2008).

patriarchal culture in Islamic societies. It was experiences like these that shaped Riffat's thinking when she decided to marry a man who was also a victim of patriarchal culture. However, her marriage to Dawar had to end after they were blessed with a daughter named Mona. Riffat's disappointment grew when she remarried Mahmoud, an Arab Muslim man who also adhered to the patriarchal system and always mentioned God's name in everything he did. This second marriage did not last long.¹⁶

The debut of her interest in feminism came in 1983-1984 when she was involved in a research project in Pakistan. It was during the Zia government and Islamization was beginning. The question that arose in her mind at that time was, why is it that when a country or government begins to Islamize, the first action taken is to force women back into the house, cover their entire bodies, impose regulations and laws that regulate the behavior of individuals, especially women? She then studied the text of the Qur'an seriously and deeply and eventually saw the need for reinterpretation.¹⁷

From Riffat's life journey like that. She was driven to help Muslim women who were under patriarchal rule. Riffat feels happy because her desire to get women out of the confinement of men by trying to interpret the Qur'an in a systematic and non-patriarchal perspective can be encouraged by members of the Pakistani Commission on the Status of Women by peeling one by one to prove to the people of Pakistan that women are not always secondary, subordinate and inferior to men.

Riffat believes that men are created equal by God. In the future, they cannot become unequal, and vice versa, the Quran does not see the position of women as lower than men, both have the same position. Discrimination and all the injustices that befall women in the Muslim environment according to her stem from a misunderstanding of the main source of Islamic teachings, namely the Qur'an. Since 1974, she has carefully studied the Quran, particularly

¹⁶ Dadang S. Anshori, *Membincangkan Feminisme: Refleksi Muslimah Atas Peran Sosial Kaum Wanita* (Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 1997), 22.

¹⁷ Riffat Hasan, "Feminisme dan Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Ulumul Qur'an* II, no. 9 (1991): 86; See also Muhammad In'am Esha, "Konstruksi Metodologi Teologi Feminisme," *Egalita* 1, no. 1 (2006): 5, <https://doi.org/10.18860/egalita.v0i0.1917>.

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in interpreting verses relating to women. Her contribution to the women's movement in Pakistan has been significant.¹⁸

Riffat pursued higher education in the UK at St. Mary's College, University of Durham. She completed her studies in English literature and philosophy in three years and graduated cum laude. Riffat earned her doctorate with her dissertation on the philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal, a modern Pakistani thinker whom she respects greatly, at the relatively young age of 24.¹⁹ Riffat's intellectual career began to take off after she settled in the United States in 1976. There, she served as Chair of the Religious Studies Program at the University of Louisville, Kentucky. In addition, she was also a visiting lecturer at Harvard Divinity School. During this time, while a guest lecturer, she completed her acclaimed work, "Equal Before Allah", which was based on her one-year research (1986-1987). Riffat also served as an advisor to the senior professor of the Muslim Student Association at the University of Oklahoma, Stillwater.²⁰

Riffat Hasan is a very prolific intellectual, most of whose work deals with gender issues. Because of this work, Riffat Hasan is recognized by many as a feminist thinker who has contributed greatly to the feminist movement in Pakistan. Some of her works are: *The Role and Responsibilities of Women in the Legal Ritual Tradition of Islam/ Shari'ah* (1980); *Equal Before Allah? Woman- Men in The Islamic Tradition* (1987); *Muslim Women and Post-Patriarchal Islam*; *The Issue of Woman-Men Equality in Islamic Tradition* (1991); *Muslim Woman and Post Patriarchal Islam* (1991); *Jihad fi Sabilillah: A Muslim Woman's Faith Journey from Struggle to Struggle*; *Women's and Men's Liberation*.

The scientific works she wrote and the journey of her intellectual career, it Show that Riffat Hassan is a creative, progressive, and

¹⁸ Yunahar Ilyas, *Feminisme dalam Kajian Tafsir Al-Quran Klasik dan Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1997), 47.

¹⁹ Hasan, *Isu Kesetaraan Laki-laki dan Perempuan dalam Tradisi Islam (Setara di Hadapan Allah)*, 46.

²⁰ Mia Nurmala, Umi Sumbulah, and Yayan Nurbayan, "Ideal-Normative and Socio-Historical Approaches to Gender Equality Verses: A Study of Riffat Hassan's Thought," *Millah: Journal of Religious Studies* 22, no. 1 (February 28, 2023): 235–258, <https://doi.org/10.20885/millah.vol22.iss1.art9>.

productive female thinker. It is not an exaggeration if then Riffat Hassan is also referred to as a reformer of Islamic thought in the field of gender issues.

C. Women's Liberation Theology in the Perspective of Riffat Hasan

Islam is a religion that carries a great mission, namely *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy for the entire universe). To spread this mercy, Islam has the main mission of realizing benefit, justice, and freedom. All Islamic rules, especially those contained in the Qur'an, are evidence of this mission. If then many interpretations deviate from these missions, this is due to the interpretation of the Qur'an that is influenced by the socio-cultural context that surrounds the interpreters, or because of a literal understanding of the texts of the Prophet Muhammad's hadith.

For centuries, interpretations that demeaned women dominated the opinions and beliefs of Muslims in this hemisphere. The rise of feminism in the West inspired a small minority of Muslims (interpreters) to reinterpret and reformulate women's *fiqh* (legal understanding). Based on the verses of the Qur'an that carry the mission of justice, equality, and equality, they try to find the root of the problem of why there is an unfair interpretation of giving status to men and women (gender). They trace the hadiths that are the cause of the injustice and interpret them by looking at the context of the hadith. These are known as Muslim feminists.

This paper will reveal the thoughts of a Muslim feminist figure who made a significant contribution to the development of Islamic thought, especially those related to gender perspectives. She is Riffat Hassan.

1. The Problem of Women in Islam

The issue of women's issues in Islam is a gap between theory and praxis because the ideal and the empirical reality are the dominant phenomena in women's lives. Forms of confinement of women are still part of the tradition of Islamic society. For example, Pakistan treats women arbitrarily. The Islamization program launched by the

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government began with efforts to domesticate women, by forcing women back into the house, covering their entire bodies, and restraining them with burdensome regulations.²¹

Such treatment, according to Riffat Hassan, shows hatred towards women. It is even as if the government cannot start Islamization. Because it takes a long time to formulate solid concepts of Islamic politics, state, or economy; so the headscarfing of women is the easiest way to distinguish themselves from non-Islamic countries. According to Riffat, the command to veil is for women to maintain modesty.

This cannot be used as a valid reason to domesticate women and exclude them from the public sector.²² In this context, a thorough and systematic deconstruction is needed to further understand the roots of unfair behavior and oppression against women. Given the dominance of the patriarchal system in human history, the dismantling of the concept and its application can be done through various dimensions, including sociological-cultural, psychological, anthropological, and theological.²³ In this context, Riffat Hasan, who admits that her thinking is heavily influenced by the neo-modernist Fazlur Rahman, tries to understand this issue through a theological dimension.

Riffat Hasan's view on the headscarf as a symbol of modesty without having to be a tool of domestication of women is interesting to be analyzed more deeply. Her criticism of the use of the headscarf as a differentiator between Islamic and non-Islamic identities reveals the dilemma between religious symbolism and the implementation of universal Islamic values.²⁴ On the one hand, the use of the hijab is often politicized to show the collective identity of a society, but on the other hand, this can actually dwarf the role of women in the public sphere. This commentary opens a space for discussion on how

²¹ Anshori, *Membincangkan Feminisme*, 23–24.

²² Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi Untuk Aksi* (Bandung: PT Mizan Publika, 2008), 381.

²³ Read more in: Adi Wicaksono, *Teologi Perempuan; Dekonstruksi dan Wacana Patriarkhal, dalam Postmodernisme dan Masa Depan Peradaban* (Jakarta: Aditya Media, 1994).

²⁴ Diah Ariani Arimbi, *Memahami Penulis Perempuan Muslim Kontemporer Indonesia* (Surabaya: Airlangga University Press, 2018), 28.

religious values should be translated into modern life without sacrificing individual rights.

Hasan's deconstruction of patriarchal domination, while relevant, raises profound questions about the extent to which it can be implemented in different socio-cultural contexts. Given that patriarchy has been entrenched in the fabric of society for centuries, efforts to transcend such constructs require a more pragmatic approach than theological. For example, sociological analysis can provide insights into how public and educational policies contribute to shaping a new, more egalitarian paradigm. However, critiques of patriarchy often face resistance because they are perceived as destabilizing social traditions.

The utilization of critical hermeneutics in the interpretation of feminist verses is a progressive step that shows Hasan's courage in challenging classical interpretations. However, this approach also faces challenges in the form of scientific legitimacy, considering that he is often considered not to have the capacity as a trained mufasir. This is a fundamental criticism of his approach, as the resulting interpretations, while critical, are often considered less authoritative by most scholars. In this context, it is important to integrate Hasan's views with a more comprehensive Islamic scientific discourse so that his approach can be more widely accepted.

Fazlur Rahman's influence on Hasan's thinking should be appreciated because his contextual approach can bridge the gap between religious principles and social reality. However, this also requires balance so that the proposed reforms are not trapped in secularizing religious values. This is the big challenge for Hasan: how to combine the re-reading of religious texts without ignoring the authenticity of the teachings of Islam itself. This balance is important so that the proposed reforms are not only socially relevant, but also accepted by the Muslim community at large.

Overall, Riffat Hasan's thought opens up an important discussion on the relationship between religion and gender justice. However, a critical analysis of her ideas shows the need for a more integrative approach, which not only deconstructs patriarchy, but also offers realistic solutions that can be applied in different contexts. Thus,

Hasan's ideas can be a driver of Islamic law reform that is not only based on gender justice, but also in tune with evolving socio-cultural dynamics.

2. Women's Liberation is an Important Step Towards Progress

Riffat Hasan is one of the Muslim feminists who is persistent and passionate in examining religious teachings related to women's issues, and she interprets these teachings in a more egalitarian way. She can even be called a vocal Muslim feminist theologian. If we consider Riffat's educational background, her family's social position, and the condition of women who are discriminated against in a strong patriarchal system in the surrounding society, it is natural that Riffat becomes a feminist who often voices ideas to overthrow the established reality that positions women as "the other" in their society.

Furthermore, Riffat realized that this painful mental experience was one of the reasons she became a feminist with a strong determination to develop theology within the framework of Islamic tradition. The aim was to prevent men from exploiting Muslim women in the name of God. He believes that inclusive theology based on gender justice can be an important tool to combat patriarchal-biased religious interpretations. Through a critical hermeneutical approach, Riffat seeks to dismantle theological myths that have long placed women in subordinate positions, while also highlighting that Islam fundamentally teaches principles of equality and respect for human dignity. This step aims not only to reform religious interpretation but also to change the social structure that has long neglected women's rights in various aspects of life.

According to Riffat Hassan, there are several ways to achieve women's liberation:

The first is the deconstruction of Islamic tradition. Islamic tradition needs to be reorganized or even overhauled based on the assumption that the construction of misogynistic theology is caused by the influence of misogynistic pre-Islamic Arab culture and anti-

women bias adopted by Islam from Christian and Jewish religious traditions. Several aspects related to feminist theology in the Islamic tradition need to be presented with a systematic discussion.

Second, Reinterpretation of Qur'anic Verses. According to Riffat, reinterpretation can only be done by mastering the language of the Qur'ān and not treating the text as singular evidence, but rather placing it in its proper context. Therefore, interpretation should focus on the root of the word, "because Arabic, like other Semitic languages, depends heavily on the root of the word".²⁵

To understand an Arabic word, we must first know its root meaning. This study that refers to vocabularies, with its controversial impression of meaning that has almost been believed to be valid, when examined and understood philosophically, is able to touch the building of meaning that should be.

The methodology used by Riffat is deconstruction methodology, a method introduced by Jacques Derrida, whose first step separates the monolinear relationship between the text and its meaning (interpretation). The belief that there is a final relationship between a text and a particular interpretation must be dismantled. This is because such a belief will lead to various negative impacts. First, fanaticism towards certain interpretations, and reject the possibility of the validity of other interpretations. Second, it will close the possibility of opening the text to various interpretations. Third, a text that has been claimed through the inauguration of only one interpretation will cause the text to be meaningless in the face of rapid social change in modern times. Riffat gave an example of one of the verses that is popular as an argument for male superiority, namely Surah Al-Nisa; verse 34 which means: *Men are qawwamun (leaders) for women because Allah has given some of them (men) more than others, and because they (men) have spent some of their wealth. Therefore, virtuous women are those who obey God and take care of themselves in the absence of their husbands, because God has taken*

²⁵ Wardah Hafidz, *Aliran-Aliran Feminisme* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995); See also Layla Hasibuan and Tasya Hasibuan, "Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Bahasa Arab," *Jurnal Sathar* 1, no. 2 (November 26, 2023): 2, <https://doi.org/10.59548/js.v1i2.68>.

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*care of them. Those women whom you fear may be unfaithful, admonish them, separate them from their beds, and beat them. Then if they obey you, do not seek to distress them. Verily, Allah is the Most.*²⁶

The verse above has invited various interpretations from the mufasssirs. Riffat Hasan interprets *qawwamun*, as proposed by Fazlur Rahman, not as a leader or regulator of women, but as an economic term, not a biological one. According to Riffat, the term *qawwamun* is more accurately interpreted as a breadwinner, not a leader.²⁷

Therefore, the relationship between men and women in Islam is not hierarchical but functional. Furthermore, Fazlur Rahman explains that the Qur'anic expression: men are *qawwamun* over women because Allah has preferred some of them (men) over others and because they (men) provide for some of their wealth, is not a true difference but functional. If a wife is economically independent, either through inheritance or self-employment, and contributes to the household, then her husband's superiority will be reduced because as a human being, he has no advantage over his wife.

Another example is the interpretation of the verse about hitting a wife. Based on the belief that Allah, the All-Wise and All-Merciful, cannot discriminate against His creation, Riffat sees that the word "*dharaba*" does not only mean hitting, but Riffat has found the meaning of the word "*dharaba*" in more than 11 pages. But the interpretation that exists until now is as if *dharaba* only means hitting. "An extraordinary conspiracy according to Riffat, because this misogynistic interpretation can survive for 12 centuries."²⁸

²⁶ Yayasan Penyelenggaraan Penterjemahan Al-Qur'an, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya* (Jakarta: Departemen Agama, 2008).

²⁷ Ana Miftahul Hidayah and Abdul Kadir Riyadi, "Konsep Keserasian Gender sebagai Resposn Wacana Kesetaraan Gender (Studi Analisis Tafsir Al-Mishbah Q.S. An-Nisa':34)," *Studia Quranika* 8, no. 1 (September 4, 2023): 26, <https://doi.org/10.21111/studiquran.v8i1.9250>; See also Achmad Ghufron, "Kepemimpinan Keluarga Perspektif Feminisme Islam (Penafsiran Fatimah Mernissi dan Riffat Hassan terhadap Qs. An-Nisa: 34)," *Al-Thiqah: Jurnal Ilmu Keislaman* 3, no. 02 (October 11, 2020): 126.

²⁸ Read more in: Riffat Hasan, *Mengungkap Misogini dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Mitra Media, 1994).

Riffat's reinterpretation is an attempt to correct what Fazlur Rahman describes as interpretations that are influenced by old beliefs and ideas that are incompatible with the substance of the Qur'ān. These include a strong patriarchal bias, as well as a tendency for fragmentary interpretations that are not based on the belief that the Qur'ān is an interwoven whole.²⁹

This is where it is important to separate the Qur'ānic "moral ideal" from the historical context in which the Qur'ān was revealed. Thus, the possibility of imposing meaning on the text (eisegesis) can be avoided, and interpretation of the text must always be based on the aim of extracting meaning from the text (exegesis).

Riffat Hasan states "The problems that arise in this regard stem largely from the process of socialization, including the socialization of religious values. What influences the way people interpret these verses and texts is patriarchy".³⁰ Patriarchal religious understandings have taken root in the minds of Islamic societies. Although the constitutions of several Islamic countries, including Indonesia, indicate that there is no difference between men and women, in practice there are still many things that do not match between *das sollen* and *das sein*.³¹ Discrimination continues, especially in the domestic sphere. The teaching that men are the leaders of women and their position is superior to that of women is socialized through existing hadith texts. From these misogynistic traditions, it appears that "the entire existence and even the salvation of women is theologically dependent and centered on the pleasure of the man (her husband).

If one looks at the hadith literature that is often used to legitimize male superiority, the dominant one is not the commonly used creation myth, but the legitimacy is often derived from the view of sin and its eschatological consequences, i.e. the view relating to heaven and hell.

²⁹ Read more in: Mustaqim, *Paradigma Tafsir Feminis, Membaca al-Quran dengan Optik Perempuan: Studi Pemikiran Riffat Hassan tentang Isu Gender dalam Islam*.

³⁰ Budhy Munawar Rachman, "Feminisme Agenda Baru Pemikiran Islam," *Ulumul Qur'an* 6, no. 3 (1995): 53.

³¹ Read more in: Kamla Said Bhasiri Khan, *Persoalan Pokok Mengenai Feminisme dan Relevansinya* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1995).

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Riffat Hasan explains that the discriminatory relationship between men and women in this aspect is explained by the hadith that states that a wife who refuses her husband's invitation to sleep together will be cursed by angels until dawn. She is considered sinful for doing so, and that is what causes more and more women to go to hell. On the other hand, this male-biased eschatological view portrays heaven as a place that pampers men.³²

Misogynistic hadiths categorized as weak by Muslim feminists including Riffat Hasan are not by the spirit of equality in the Qur'an but are still used as a reference by the majority of Muslim communities. Therefore, there is a need to dismantle the theological aspects, and discussions about reinterpretation of religious texts must be carried out.

A review of women's *fiqh* is an urgent need for a new agenda of Islamic thought. What Riffat has done is indeed one of the right solutions for Muslim feminists around the world to follow. Because most Muslim societies still believe in the sacredness of religion, which must be their guide and will influence their lives.

Therefore, creative efforts are needed from Muslim feminists. The challenge posed by Riffat on the issue of the creation of women and the story of the fall of man, which is considered to be caused by women, seems to be selectively followed and developed. This is important because the creation and fall of man myths underlie misogynistic traditions that are still referenced by Islamic societies. Structural change towards a society free from all forms of oppression and injustice is a social process that occurs throughout human history.

Social injustice is not God's decree or will, but the result of historical processes. Violations of human rights, both male and female, which include the right to life, the right to respect, the right to justice, the right to freedom, and the right to a decent life, are acts that reflect defiance of God's decree.³³ Therefore, the responsibility to

³² Fatima Mernissi and Riffat Hasan, *Setara di Hadapan Allah* (Yogyakarta: LSPPA Yayasan Prakarsa, 1996), 15; See also Sri Haningsih, "Pemikiran Riffat Hasan Tentang Feminisme Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Transformasi Sosial Islam," *Al-Mawarid: Jurnal Hukum Islam* 13 (2005): 125.

³³ Read more in: Hasan, *Mengungkap Misogini dalam Islam*.

address social injustice and human rights violations lies in the collective awareness of humanity to rectify the imbalanced social structure and create a more just order.

The doctrine of social justice in feminist theology is closely related to the doctrine of Tawhid. Recognition of God as the only God has consequences for recognition and obedience to all His decrees. Vertical relationships only occur between humans and God, while relationships between humans are horizontal relationships that do not allow for a hierarchy between them. In other words, in a monotheistic society, there will be no dominating or dominated community. Riffat asserts, "...since God is just and merciful, humans should treat each other fairly and lovingly regardless of gender".³⁴

Furthermore, he states that human beings who adhere to Tawhid are committed to creating a new world where people do not mistreat or victimize each other in the name of God. This includes the actions of men who discredit women by using the legitimacy of God's misinterpreted words.

D. Riffat Hasan's Thought and Islamic Law Reform in Indonesia

Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has a distinctive legal system that integrates customary law, national law, and Islamic law. Islamic law, or sharia, has a significant role, especially in family and civil law. However, the interpretation and application of sharia law are often influenced by entrenched patriarchal views. In this context, Riffat Hassan's thoughts on Women's Liberation Theology can provide a theological basis for revisiting and reforming various aspects of Islamic law relating to women's rights in Indonesia.

Riffat Hassan, a Muslim theologian and feminist, emphasizes the importance of interpreting Islamic sacred texts, such as the Quran and Hadith, with a hermeneutical approach that is more inclusive and fair to women. She argues that many interpretations that disadvantage women stem from the dominant patriarchal social and cultural

³⁴ Mernissi and Hasan, *Setara di Hadapan Allah*, 15–16.

context, rather than from the text itself. In this critical analysis, we will explore how Hassan's thinking can be applied to Islamic law reform in Indonesia to create a more just and equal legal system for women.³⁵

Indonesia adopts a pluralistic legal system that combines customary law, national law, and Islamic law. Islamic law in Indonesia is applied in various aspects of life, especially in family and civil law, such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. However, the interpretation and application of this law are often influenced by varying local views. This poses challenges in ensuring that the applied Islamic law truly reflects the principles of gender justice and equality.³⁶

Riffat Hassan is an academic and activist who has played a major role in developing Women's Liberation Theology in Islam. Hassan emphasized the importance of interpreting Islamic sacred texts in a more inclusive and just manner towards women. One of Hassan's main contributions is her critique of traditional theological concepts that support gender injustice. For example, she challenged interpretations that regard women as inferior to men and called for a more egalitarian understanding of justice, equality, and human dignity in Islam.

1. Inclusive Textual Interpretation

One important aspect of Riffat Hassan's thought is her push for inclusive interpretations of texts. In the context of Islamic law in Indonesia, this means revisiting how Quranic verses and Hadith relating to women's rights are interpreted and applied. For example, regarding inheritance, the Quran states that a woman's share of inheritance is half that of a man. Hassan argues that this interpretation should be understood in the social and economic context of the time

³⁵ Doni Azhari and Asmuni, "Progressive Steps in Reforming Indonesian Islamic Family Law Through Gender Studies," *Syakhshiyah Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 3, no. 2 (December 30, 2023): 210, <https://doi.org/10.32332/syakhshiyah.v3i2.8020>.

³⁶ Ahmad Fauzi and Anis Mashdurohatun Gunarto, "Legal Reconstruction of Reasons for Divorce in Islamic Marriage Law in Indonesia Based on Justice Values," *Sch Int J Law Crime Justice* 7, no. 5 (2024): 173–178, <https://doi.org/10.36348/sijlcrj.2024.v07i05.002>.

of the Quran's revelation, and not applied literally in a modern context that has changed.³⁷

In this context, Riffat Hassan's thoughts can be used to encourage the reform of inheritance law in Indonesia that is fairer and by the principles of gender justice. This is important because injustice in the distribution of inheritance is often the cause of economic inequality for women.

2. Gender Justice in Family Law

Islamic family law in Indonesia, which covers issues such as marriage and divorce, is often an arena for gender injustice. For example, in cases of divorce, women often find it difficult to obtain their rights, such as maintenance and child custody. Riffat Hassan's thought, which emphasizes justice and equality, can be used to reform family law in Indonesia to make it fairer for women.³⁸

Riffat Hassan argues that marriage in Islam should be based on the principles of justice and equality between husband and wife. Therefore, the family law implemented in Indonesia should reflect these principles and guarantee that women have equal rights in marriage and divorce.

3. Violence against Women

Violence against women is a serious problem that requires special attention in the context of Islamic law in Indonesia. Riffat Hassan's thinking can provide a theological basis for opposing all forms of violence against women. Hassan argues that violence against women has no place in Islam and should be opposed through education, legal awareness, and strict legal reform. In this context, it is important to ensure that Islamic law in Indonesia has clear and firm provisions against domestic violence as well as other forms of

³⁷ Syaifullah Aji Trianto, "Pemikiran Teologi Feminis Riffat Hassan dan Relevansinya terhadap Peran Laki-laki dalam Isu Gender," *El-Fikr: Jurnal Aqidah dan Filsafat Islam* 5, no. 1 (June 20, 2024): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.19109/el-fikr.v5i1.21143>.

³⁸ Miftakhul Huda et al., "Development of Progressive Islamic Law in Indonesia Regarding 'Apostasy' as Grounds for Divorce: Insights from Maqasid Sharia," *Ulul Albab: Jurnal Studi dan Penelitian Hukum Islam* 6, no. 1 (May 29, 2024): 73–85, <https://doi.org/10.30659/jua.v6i1.36754>.

violence against women. This includes ensuring that perpetrators of violence receive appropriate punishment and victims receive the protection and support they need.

4. Women's Role in Leadership and Politics

In patriarchal societies, women often face barriers in accessing leadership and political positions. Hassan encourages a re-reading of religious texts that support women's full participation in all aspects of public and political life. In Indonesia, this can be realized through affirmative policies that support women's participation in politics and government, as well as in religious institutions. Hassan's thinking can be used to support the argument that women have equal rights to participate in leadership and politics and that structural barriers that hinder women's participation should be removed. This includes ensuring that women have equal access to education and economic opportunities, which are essential prerequisites for full participation in public life.³⁹

Riffat Hassan's thoughts on Women's Liberation Theology provide a very relevant perspective to examine and criticize various issues related to women's rights in the context of Islamic law in Indonesia. By adopting a more inclusive and egalitarian approach to the interpretation of religious texts, Islamic law in Indonesia can become more responsive to the principles of justice and gender equality.

Women's Liberation Theology, as described by Hassan, emphasizes the importance of a contextual and progressive understanding of religious teachings. This is not just a matter of interpreting texts differently, but also changing social and legal structures that have long discriminated against women. In the Indonesian context, this thinking can be an important foundation for legal reforms that are more just and inclusive, and for strengthening the protection of women's rights in various aspects of life.

³⁹ Yusriah Dzinnun et al., "From Global Trends to Local Realities: Understanding Women's Political Involvement for Indonesia's Democratic Progress," *Otoritas: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan* 14, no. 1 (May 1, 2024): 180–193, <https://doi.org/10.26618/ojip.v14i1.14181>.

Therefore, a critical analysis of Riffat Hassan's thought in the context of Islamic law in Indonesia is not only relevant but also very urgent. This is an important step towards creating a more just and equal society, where women's rights are fully respected and protected by the principles of justice and humanity in Islam.

5. Critical Hermeneutic Approach

As a first step in contextualizing Riffat Hassan's thoughts on Islamic law in Indonesia, it is important to adopt a critical hermeneutic approach. This approach emphasizes the need to understand religious texts in the social, historical, and cultural context in which they are revealed and interpreted. Critical hermeneutics rejects a literal and static understanding of the text and encourages interpretation that is dynamic and relevant to contemporary conditions.

In the context of Islamic law in Indonesia, critical hermeneutics can be used to evaluate and revise established interpretations that are unfair to women. For example, in the case of polygamy, which is permitted in Islamic law under certain conditions, critical hermeneutics can be used to assess whether this practice is still relevant and fair in the modern social context of Indonesia, where gender equality is increasingly recognized as an important principle.

6. Marriage Law Reform

Indonesia's marriage law, which combines Islamic and national laws, is often criticized for not fully protecting women's rights. Riffat Hassan's thinking can be used to support a more inclusive and just reform of marriage law. Hassan emphasizes that marriage in Islam should be based on the principles of justice, equality, and mutual respect between husband and wife.

In this context, marriage law reform in Indonesia should include clearer provisions on women's rights in marriage, including the right to maintenance, child custody, and the right to file for divorce in the event of violence or injustice. In addition, regulations regarding dowry and women's post-divorce rights also need to be addressed.

E. Conclusion

Riffat Hassan's Women's Liberation Theology emphasizes the need for deconstructing patriarchal Islamic traditions and reinterpreting Qur'anic verses to promote justice, equality, and human dignity for women. She argues that many discriminatory interpretations arise from social and cultural contexts rather than the sacred texts themselves. Her approach provides a critical hermeneutical framework for reforming Islamic law in Indonesia, particularly in family and civil law. This includes advocating for more equitable inheritance laws, strengthening women's rights in marriage and divorce, and ensuring protection against violence. Additionally, Hassan's ideas support greater female participation in leadership and politics by challenging structural barriers and promoting equal access to education and economic opportunities. Her work underscores the importance of an inclusive interpretation of religious texts to establish a legal system that respects and protects women's rights, contributing to a more just and equal society aligned with Islamic principles of justice and humanity.

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