



Gender, Sufism, and Qur’anic Exegesis: Perceptions of Women’s Leadership within Sufi Orders in South Sulawesi

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Abstract: This study focuses on two key areas: the interpretation of Qur’anic verses regarding women’s leadership and its implementation within Sufi orders (*tariqa*) in South Sulawesi. The central question explored is how Sufi orders interpret these verses through a gender lens. To answer this question, a qualitative methodology employing interpretive and gender studies approaches was used. Data were collected through interview and literature review. The results of the research show that the perceptions of tarekat followers in South Sulawesi regarding the interpretation of verses regarding women's leadership in the public sphere. Some interpretations, based on Surah At-Tawbah/ 9: 71, allow for women’s leadership by defining “*awliya*” as leaders, allies, and advisors, suggesting that both men and women can assume leadership roles if they possess the necessary competencies. Conversely, others, citing Surah An-Nisa’/4: 34, restrict women’s leadership. However, a closer examination indicates that Surah At-Tawbah/9: 71 is a more general verse, while Surah An-Nisa’/4: 34 is context-specific, referring primarily to domestic matters. The implementation of leadership within Sufi orders is generally not at odds with these interpretations. In the public sphere, women have equal rights to men, including the right to vote and be elected. Moreover, there is no gender distinction in the concept of becoming a *waliyullah*, as exemplified by Rabi’ah al-Adawiyah. However, women have not yet assumed the role of *murshid* (spiritual guide) within Sufi orders due to several factors, including the historical precedent of male prophets and the physical and spiritual demands of the role. However, from a gender perspective, women often hold the position of *khalifah* (spiritual deputy) assisting the *murshid* in teaching and even coordinating regional activities.

Keywords: Gender, women’s leadership, exegesis, sufi orders, tasawuf

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Abstrak: Fokus pembahasan dalam tulisan ini ada dua hal yakni tafsir ayat kepemimpinan perempuan dan implementasi di tarikat Sulawesi Selatan. Masalah utama yang dibahas adalah bagaimana tafsir ayat kepemimpinan menurut kelompok tarekat yang dianalisis dengan sudut pandang gender. Untuk menjawab masalah tersebut, digunakan metode kualitatif dengan menggunakan pendekatan tafsir dan gender, sementara dalam mengumpulkan data digunakan metode wawancara dan studi literatur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa persepsi pengikut tarekat di Sulawesi Selatan terkait tafsir ayat kepemimpinan perempuan di ranah publik, ada yang membolehkan dengan berdasar pada QS. At-Taubah/9: 71, dengan menafsirkan kata Auliya sebagai pemimpin, penolong, penasehat, sehingga antara laki-laki dan perempuan dapat menjadi pemimpin selama memiliki kompetensi. Sementara golongan yang tidak mengizinkan perempuan jadi pemimpin berdasarkan pada QS. an-Nisa'/4:34. Sesungguhnya bila dipahami QS at-Taubah/9:71 adalah bersifat umum sementara QS. an-Nisa/4: 34, bersifat khusus yakni didalam rumah tangga. Implementasi kepemimpinan dalam tarikat pada dasarnya tidak bertentangan dengan tafsir ayat kepemimpinan, karena di ranah publik perempuan memiliki hak yang sama dengan laki-laki yakni berhak untuk dipilih dan memilih, bahkan menjadi waliyullah tidak ada perbedaan dengan laki-laki seperti Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah. Hanya saja menjadi mursyid dalam tarikat belum ada perempuan, karena beberapa pertimbangan antara lain Nabi dan Rasul bukan perempuan; mursyid mengayomi umat baik secara fisik maupun spiritual, sehingga perempuan memiliki keterbatasan dalam hal tersebut. Akan tetapi dalam perspektif gender, perempuan tetap mendapat posisi khalifah sebagai pembantu mursyid dalam mengajar bahkan sebagai kordinator suatu wilayah.

Kata Kunci: Gender, kepemimpinan perempuan, tafsir, tarekat, tasawuf

Introduction

Islam is a religion that emphatically asserts the equality and balance between women and men, despite their distinct roles. Consequently, the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, the *ulama* (Muslim scholars), and the Muslim community have treated women equitably in all aspects of life. Prior to the emergence of the Western concept of gender, Islamic civilization had already established a robust historical record of both theoretical and practical applications of justice towards women.¹

Historical records indicate a deeply concerning status of women in pre-Islamic Arabia. Women were often objectified as sexual commodities for men and perceived as a societal burden. This perception stemmed from the belief that

¹Khaleed M. Abou El Fadl, "Tensions in Tradition: Hadith, Gender, and Reasonable Interpretation," *UCLA Journal of Islamic and Near Eastern Law* 19, (2021). Andi Miswar, et al., "Qur'anic Narratives of Women's Competencies and The Consequences of Islamic Law on Their Involvement in Society," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 7, No. 2 (2023).

women were unable to contribute to the family's economic standing, often being viewed as a financial liability. The limited opportunities for women to develop and enhance their skills within the context of Arab society at that time exacerbated these inequalities. Consequently, widespread discrimination against women led to their marginalization and subjugation, resulting in their social exclusion.²

In Roman law, women were treated akin to children or the insane, devoid of any authority over themselves. The paterfamilias, or in later periods, the husband, held absolute power over them, determining their fate, both positive and negative. Similarly, under Greek law, women were subject to the authority of their guardians, the husband if married and the father if unmarried. They were entirely without agency, having no opportunity to direct their own lives. Women were treated as commodities, subject to being bought and sold.³

Prior to the advent of Islam in Mecca, a grim fate awaited newborn girls. Infanticide, particularly of female infants, was a common practice. Fathers would mercilessly slay their daughters, either through violent means such as beheading or by the more insidious method of burying them alive. This barbaric act was rooted in the belief that the birth of a girl was a disgrace.⁴ Such practices are vividly depicted in the Qur'an Surah An-Nahl [16:58-59].

The advent of Islam marked a significant turning point in the status of women. Islamic teachings introduced a radical paradigm shift, acknowledging women's rights as integral members of society, empowering them with the opportunity and freedom to shape their own destinies. This recognition extended to women as both individuals and social beings deserving of respect and consideration. Consequently, women gained structural opportunities to assume strategic positions across various spheres of life.

However, the subsequent development of Islam witnessed misogynistic interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith by certain *ulama*. These interpretations, which marginalized and disadvantaged women, were deeply influenced by entrenched patriarchal traditions within societal and cultural contexts. Patriarchy significantly impacted the interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith, the

² Irma Riyani, "Muslim Feminist Hermeneutical Method to the Qur'an (Analytical Study to the Method of Amina Wadud)," *Ulumuna: Journal of Islamic Studies* 21, No. 2 (2017). Lisnawati Shaleh, "Perempuan Dalam Lintasan Sejarah: Menepis Isu Ketidaksetaraan Gender dalam Islam," *EL-Mashlahah* 9, No. 1 (2019).

³ Tarmizi M. Jakfar, et al., "The Main Prayer Place for Women According to Hadith: Method Analysis al-Jam'u wa al-Tawfiq with Islamic Family Law Approach," *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* 8, No. 1 (2024). Syeikh Mohammad Matawalli as-Sya'rawi, *al-Ma'ah fi al-Qur'an*, translation by H. Usman Hatim "Wanita dalam Perspektif al-Qur'an (Jakarta: Yayasan Alumni Timur Tengah, 2010), p. 16-17.

⁴ Farha Ciciek, *Ikhtiar mengatasi Kekerasan Dalam Rumah tangga, Belajar dari Kehidupan Rasulullah SAW* (Jakarta: Lembaga Kajian Agama dan Jender, 1999), p. 3

authoritative sources of Islamic law.⁵ Consequently, these misogynistic interpretations have faced criticism from scholars such as Khaled Abou El Fadl, Muhammad Shahrur, and Muhammad Husayn, who argue that these interpretations are subject to ongoing debate and are not the sole or definitive understanding of the texts.⁶

Qur'anic verses often depict women as objects (*maf'ul bih*) or third persons (*ga'ibah*), while men are generally portrayed as subjects (*fail*) or second persons (*mukhaatab*). However, this does not imply that the Qur'an condones a gender-based social structure. This can be understood from Allah's statement in the Qur'an Surah an-Nahl [16:97], which affirms that both believing men and women hold equal status in righteous deeds.

The international community has opened up extensive opportunities for women through the 1993 UN Conference on Human Rights. This conference produced a declaration and program of action that are crucial for women's empowerment, namely: women should be given the maximum opportunity to participate actively in political, civil, economic, social, and cultural spheres at the national, regional, and international levels, and gender-based discrimination should be eliminated.⁷ This demonstrates the international community's desire for women to be involved in all aspects of life, not merely as objects but as subjects.

Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim nation, has opened up opportunities for women since 2004 with the enactment of a bill (*Rancangan Undang-Undang/RUU*) into law (*Undang-Undang/UU*) related to the implementation of general elections. The year 2004 marked a turning point for women's political participation. The final plenary session of the House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat/DPR*) resulted in a decision to include a specific provision in the law mandating women's representation in political office. The minimum 30% quota for women's representation is based on the Election Law Number 7 of 2017. This has opened up opportunities for women to serve as elected representatives at both the national, provincial, and district/city levels.

Despite these legal provisions, the 2019 legislative elections revealed a significant gap between the mandated quota and actual female representation. Women secured only 20.5% of the 575 seats in the House of Representatives, although they constituted 40% (3,200) of all candidates.⁸ Similar disparities were

⁵Khaleed M. Abou El-Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001. Kusmana Kusmana, "The Qur'an, Woman and Nationalism in Indonesia: Ulama Perempuan's Moral Movement," *al-Jamiah* 57, 1 (2019).

⁶Miftahul Huda and Tri Wahyu Hidayati, "The Concept of Muhammad Shahrūr on Gender Parity in Inheritance Legislation," *El-Usrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 6, No. 2 (2023).

⁷Anas Qasim Ja'far, *al-Huquq al-Siyasiyyah al-Mar'ah fi al-Islam wa al-Fikr wa al-Tasyri'*, Translation by Mujtaba Hamdi, Mengembalikan Hak-Hak Politik Perempuan (Jakarta: Azan, 2001), p. 102.

⁸<https://fsy.uinjambi.ac.id/2023/07/13/mengapa-kuota-keterwakilan-30-perempuan-dalam-pemilu-penting/>

observed at the provincial level, as illustrated by the case of South Sulawesi, reaching only 27.06%.⁹ Several factors contribute to this underrepresentation, including: 1) limited interest among women in active politics, 2) inadequate political knowledge and skills, 3) low self-confidence due to historical marginalization, and 4) economic constraints.¹⁰

Despite women's participation in parliamentary bodies, policies favoring women's interests remain elusive due to a lack of women in strategic leadership positions.¹¹ Women's movement in the public sphere has not been as smooth as men. In addition to patriarchal cultures prevalent in most societies, there are also several Qur'anic verses subject to multiple interpretations, which have had a significant impact on women. For example, in the Qur'an Surah an-Nisa [4:34] which states that, "Men are in charge of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their wealth."

If the verse is interpreted with a masculine bias (sexually male), it implies that only men can assume leadership roles.¹² Women are relegated to secondary positions, contradicting Islam's guarantee of equal and humane rights for women.¹³ This suggests that women have the opportunity to develop their potential and achieve their goals, including top leadership positions. However, a masculine interpretation would deny women the authority to lead, a deeply concerning implication for women's status.

The Indonesian society, characterized by its diverse ethnicities and cultures, encompasses a plurality of religious understandings that have given rise to various sects and denominations. Among these are Sufi orders (*tariqa*), which espouse a mystical interpretation of religion and are practiced under the guidance of a spiritual master or *murshid*. South Sulawesi is a region where a multitude of Sufi orders are prevalent, including the Qadiriyyah, Naqsyabandiyah, Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah, Khalwatiyyah Syekh Yusuf, Samaniyyah, Dzaziliyyah al-Haqiqatul Muhammadiyah as-Sanusiyah al-Idrisiyah, and Sattariyyah.¹⁴ Indeed, some of these established (*mu'tabarrah*) Sufi communities have experienced significant growth in South Sulawesi, with a presence in nearly all regions of the province.

⁹ <https://sulsel.bps.go.id/indicator/40/1749/1/keterlibatan-perempuan-di-parlemen.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.kpu.go.id/berita/baca/9989/bukanlah-demokrasi-tanpa-keterwakilan-perempuan>.

¹¹ Juniar Laraswanda Umagapi, "Women's Representation in the 2019 Parliament Election Challenges and Opportunities," *Jurnal Kajian* 25, No. 1 (2020), p. 20.

¹² Ahmad Atabik, "Wajah Maskulin Tafsir al-Qur'an: Studi Intertekstual Ayat-Ayat Kesetaraan Jender," *Jurnal Palastren* 6 No. 2 (2013), p. 316.

¹³ Dwi Ratnasari, "Gender Dalam Perspektif al-Qur'an", *Jurnal Humanika* 17 No. 1 (2018), p. 6.

¹⁴ Sri Mulyati, et.al., *Mengenal dan Memahami Tarekat-Tarekat Muktabarah di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Kencana, 2006. Ridhwan Ridhwan, "Development of Tasawuf in South Sulawesi," *QIJS: Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 5, No. 2 (2017).

A particularly intriguing aspect of Sufi communities is the profound obedience of disciples to their *murshid*. As the supreme leader within a specific spiritual jurisdiction, the *murshid* consistently instructs followers to cultivate a deep connection with Allah through devotional practices and moral excellence, manifested in unwavering adherence to the *murshid*'s directives. In fulfilling their role of nurturing the community, the *murshid* is assisted by individuals, both male and female, whom the *murshid* personally select. However, the position of *murshid* is exclusively held by men, even though a significant proportion of Sufi adherents are women. It is precisely this unwavering devotion of disciples to their spiritual guides that attracts aspiring local leaders, presidential candidates, and legislative hopefuls to Sufi communities during electoral events.

A historical examination of Sufi lives, from the time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to the present, reveals the presence of numerous female Sufi figures, such as Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, who have made significant contributions to the development and dissemination of Sufi thought and practice.¹⁵ Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, as reflected in her poetic works, expressed, "I love Him with two kinds of love: love for myself and love for You. However, my love for You is a state in which You lift the veil, so that I may see You, whether for this world or the next."¹⁶ Given her evident characteristics of a *wali*, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah presents a compelling figure for studying female leadership within Sufi orders in South Sulawesi.

This qualitative research employed a gendered perspective alongside exegesis and phenomenological approaches.¹⁷ Exegesis (*tafsir*) involves elucidating the meaning of Qur'anic verses to uncover the underlying legal principles and wisdom.¹⁸ A phenomenological approach was adopted to apply scientific methods in examining subjective religious experiences as manifested in external actions (speech and deeds).¹⁹ Data collection involved in-depth interviews and a comprehensive literature review.²⁰

¹⁵ Konul Bunyadzade, "The Sufi Phenomenology of Love Based on the Thoughts of Rabia Al-Adawiyah and Edith Stein," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 18, (2020).

¹⁶ Ibrahim Basyuniy, *Nasy 'at al-Tasawuf al-Islam* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Misriyah, 1319 H), p. 191.

¹⁷ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif dan R & D*, (6th Ed.) (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2009), p. 310.

¹⁸ Abd. Muin Salim, *Metodologi Ilmu Tafsir* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2010). Badruddin Muhammad Bin Abdillah al-Zarkasyi, *al-Burhan fi 'Ulumum al-Qur'an*, Juz 1 (Cairo: Maktabah Dar al-Turas, 1984), p. 13.

¹⁹ Iman Suprayogo dan Tabroni, *Metodologi Penelitian Sosial*, (2nd Ed.) (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya, 2003), p. 103-104.

²⁰ Mohammad Tholchah Hasan, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*, (Malang: Lembaga Penelitian Universitas Negeri Malang, 2002), p. 151.

The Rights of Women

Human rights are fundamental entitlements inherent in every individual from birth, bestowed as a divine gift.²¹ While encompassing a broad spectrum of rights, human rights are primarily focused on the twin principles of equality and liberty. The right to equality, specifically, pertains to: a) equal standing and inherent human dignity, b) equal protection under the law regarding matters of state, and c) equal opportunities in economic and commercial activities.²² When considering women's leadership rights, these fundamental entitlements present opportunities for women to assume strategic public positions. For all individuals, regardless of gender, possess equal rights; however, competence and capabilities serve as differentiating factors.

The 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights produced a Declaration and Programme of Action that were pivotal for women's rights. Notably, it advocated for women's full and equal participation in political, civil, economic, social, and cultural life at the national, regional, and international levels, as well as the elimination of gender-based discrimination as primary global goals.²³ While there has been a recognition of women's human rights to participate outside the domestic sphere, the progress, particularly in Indonesia, has been less than substantial, especially considering the country's predominantly female population.

Further, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia enshrines the principle of just and civilized humanity, thereby guaranteeing all citizens equal standing before the law. This equality extends to the enjoyment of equal rights and obligations. The Constitution also safeguards individual rights and freedoms, encompassing religious, social, political, and civil liberties. These rights include the freedom of expression and the right to a decent standard of living, consistent with fundamental human rights.²⁴

Specifically, the right of women to leadership, as a right possessed in political activities, both to vote and to be voted for, including their membership in a political party, has been established and recognized, as reflected in the Human Rights Charter issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Information. Since 1952, Article 21, paragraphs 1 and 2, have stated that everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country, directly or through freely chosen

²¹Team Dosen Pancasila, *Pendidikan Pancasila Perguruan Tinggi* (Makassar: UNHAS, 2001), p. 91.

²²Ali Abdul Wahid Wafi, *Huquq al-Insan fi Islam*, Transl. Abu Ahmad al-Wakidy, "Prinsip Hak Asasi Dalam Islam" (Solo: Pustaka Mantiq, 1991), p. 11-13.

²³Anas Qasim Ja'far, *al-Huquq al-Siyasiyyah al-Mar'ah fi al-Islam wa al-Fikr wa al-Tasyri'*, Translation by Mujtaba Hamdi, Mengembalikan Hak-Hak Politik Perempuan (Jakarta: Azan, 2001), p. 102.

²⁴Pimpinan MPR, *Materi Sosialisasi Empat Pilar MPR RI*, (Jakarta: Sekretariat Jenderal MPR, 2017), p. 54-55.

representatives. Everyone is entitled to equal access to public service in his/her country.²⁵

In tandem with the onset of the Reformation era in Indonesia, perspectives and understandings regarding women's public roles have evolved significantly. The emergence of the Indonesian Women's Ulama Congress (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia/KUPI*), a women's religious movement, has been particularly noteworthy. KUPI's collective strength, networks, and authoritative claims have enabled the production of inclusive interpretations and religious norms. Consequently, this has provided a platform for women's voices and contributions within the framework of social and religious norms. The authority of women as *ulama* and a hermeneutical approach, coupled with an inclusive gender paradigm, have empowered the KUPI network to initiate reforms in both the social and religious spheres.²⁶

Gender and the Interpretation of Verses on Female Leadership

The primary objective of Islamic law is to realize the ideal of human welfare based on the values of social justice grounded in the principle of equality (egalitarianism). The ideal of Islamic social justice is manifested in the juridical-normative provisions found in both the Qur'an and the Hadith, which are grounded in the values of equality, justice, and freedom.²⁷ The unjust treatment of women by pre-Islamic Arab society served as a catalyst for reform in Islamic law, as this was inconsistent with the principle inherent in Islam, namely, to be a mercy to all creation. Therefore, as a religion that brings mercy to all humankind, Islam introduced reforms to address the many harms inflicted upon women. However, these reforms are not final and can be further updated for the universal benefit of humanity. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of Islamic law, particularly as it relates to gender relations, is necessary to achieve a balanced and equitable relationship between men and women.²⁸

Therefore, Islam views all human activities as obligatory tasks linked to human capabilities. These tasks become mandatory for those who are able to fulfill them, as Allah does not burden a soul beyond its capacity. Social issues are also considered as duties and obligations, and thus can be categorized as individual obligations such as *jihad* (struggle), government positions, and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil). Men and women are

²⁵Ali Abdul Wahid Wafi, *Huquq al-Insan fi Islam*, p. 96.

²⁶Inayah Rohmaniyah, et al., "Female Ulama's Authority: Deconstructing Masculine Domination in Islamic Norms and Practices," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 21, (2022).

²⁷Ridwan, "Gender Equality in Islamic Inheritance Law: Rereading Muhammad Shahrur's Thought," *Al-Manahij* 16, No. 2 (2022).

²⁸Busran Qadri and Ihsan Mulia Siregar, "Islamic Renewal in the Field of Family Law: A Historical Analysis of Gender Equality," *El-USrah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga* 6, No. 2 (2023). Pitrotussaadah Pitrotussaadah, et al., "Islamic Law and Gender: A Misconception of Roles and Responsibilities in Parenting," *De Jure* 15, No. 2 (2023).

seen as equal partners, sharing responsibilities and tasks in managing public affairs within society, as they are “allies (*awliya*) of one another” (Qur'an Surah at-Tawbah: 9: 71).

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ
الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

Meaning: “The believers, both men and women, are allies of one another. They encourage good and forbid evil, establish prayer and pay alms-tax, and obey Allah and His Messenger. It is they who will be shown Allah’s mercy. Surely Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.”

An analysis of the aforementioned verse reveals a mandate for both men and women to collaborate in various aspects of life, as exemplified by the phrase “*ya’murūna bi al-ma’rūf wa yanhauna ‘an al-munkar*”. This phrase underscores the manifestation of faith in both genders, in addition to the performance of devout prayer and the full fulfillment of *zakat* (obligatory charity).

The term “*awliya*” is often translated as “true leaders.” Etymologically, “*awliya*” is the plural form of “*waliy*.” The root word “*waliya*,” comprising the letters *wau*, *lam*, and *ya*, signifies closeness or proximity.²⁹ Shihab further explained that this word also means sincerity in helping. This characteristic that will encourage and gather believers is a steady faith which then gives birth to a helping nature.³⁰

In the Qur’an, “*waliy*” encompasses various meanings, including “to go to,” “guardian,” or “ally.” These meanings are not mutually exclusive, as guardians are inherently those who are close to us. For instance, parents are the “*waliy*” of their children, and those who are close to Allah consider Him their guardian. Similarly, leaders are guardians of those they lead. This is the most widely understood connotation of the term: a leader should be intimately connected with their followers, so close that they are the first to hear their calls, complaints, and even whispers. Due to this proximity, leaders are also the first to provide assistance to their followers.

The term “*awliya*” is also intended to encompass cooperation, assistance, and authority. The phrase “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” encompasses all aspects of goodness and improvement in life, including offering advice or criticism to those in authority. Consequently, all Muslim men and women should follow societal developments to be able to observe and provide

²⁹ Abu al-Husain Ahmad ibn Faris ibn Zakariyā, *Mu’jam Maqāyis al-Lughah*, jilid VI, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1971), p. 141.

³⁰M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Quran*, Vol. 5, Jakarta: Lentera, 2012, p. 163-166.

suggestions in various aspects of life, for the common good.³¹ The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs interprets “*awliya*” as a defender, meaning both men and women should defend one another.³² In essence, these meanings are not functionally distinct, as the right to defend is possessed by those who have certain attributes: power, ability, and authority. Given that these attributes are primarily associated with leadership, leaders are most qualified to defend. Therefore, granting women the authority to defend automatically grants them the right to lead, including in public spheres.

In the al-Munir commentary, the term “*awliya*” is also interpreted as an ally.³³ This means assisting others in doing good, particularly when they are facing difficulties, regardless of whether they are male or female. This is because, fundamentally, believers are considered brothers and sisters, as stated in the Qur'an Surah al-Hujurat: 49: 10:

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

Meaning: “The believers are but one brotherhood, so make peace between your brothers. And be mindful of Allah so you may be shown mercy.”

In line with al-Maragi's assertion, the characteristic of a believer is mutual assistance among one another, rooted in the fraternal bond and mutual love among the faithful, as substantiated by the Prophet's hadiths.³⁴ According to Shihab, the verse very clearly emphasizes unity and harmony as well as harmonious relationships between communities, thus giving birth to harmony. On the contrary, disputes will give birth to bloodshed and conflict and disasters that can end in civil war.³⁵

Abd. Karim Khatib defines “*awliya*” as a guardian or leader,³⁶ and Rasyid Ridha, in his Tafsir al-Manar, provides a more general definition of “*awliya*” as someone who acts as a leader in a general sense, such as a commander leading troops in battle. Asy-Syahmasyari elucidates this concept by contrasting it with the previous verse, which describes hypocrites supporting each other in wrongdoing, while believers support each other in righteousness.³⁷

³¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an Tafsir Maudu'i atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Jakarta: Mizan, 1996), p. 315.

³² Departemen Agama RI., *al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* (Edisi disempurnakan) (Jakarta: Widya Cahaya, 2011), p. 152

³³ Wahbah al-Zuhaily, *Al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-Aqidah wa al-Syari'ah wa al-Manhaj*. Juz V (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1991.). p. 658.

³⁴ Ahmad Mustafa al-Maragi. *Tafsir al-Maragi*. Jilid IV, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), p. 88

³⁵ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Misbah*, Vol. 12, p. 601.

³⁶ Abd. Karim Khatib, *al-Tafsir al-Qur'an li al-Qur'an*, Juz X (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, n.d.), p. 742.

³⁷ Muhammad Rasyid Ridha, *Tafsir al-Manar* Juz X (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), p. 481.

The views of various *mufassir* (exegetes) converge on the notion that leadership entails the duty to counsel, aid, and safeguard all individuals, irrespective of gender, in their endeavors to promote virtue and prevent vice. Mahmud Shaltut argues that the innate qualities of men and women are essentially equivalent. Allah has granted women the same faculties and capacities as men, allowing them to undertake a wide range of tasks. As a result, Islamic law establishes a unified framework for both genders.³⁸

Even during the time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, women were depicted as active, polite, and morally upright individuals. The Qur'an presents an ideal female figure as one who possesses political autonomy (Qur'an 60:12), as exemplified by Queen Bilqis who ruled over a powerful kingdom (Qur'an 27: 23), and economic independence (Qur'an 16: 97). Similarly, the Qur'an narrates the story of a woman managing a livestock farm in the tale of Moses in Midian (Qur'an 28: 23). The Qur'an also affirms a woman's right to make independent decisions based on her beliefs, even if they contradict her husband's (Qur'an 66:11) or the prevailing societal norms (Qur'an 66:12). It further allows for women's involvement in opposition movements against societal deviations and their right to advocate for truth (Qur'an 9:71).

Consequently, the Qur'an depicts Islam as granting women an exceptionally elevated status. It is therefore unsurprising that during the Prophet's era, numerous women exhibited remarkable abilities and achievements on par with their male counterparts. This was facilitated by the Qur'anic guarantee that women were afforded the liberty to participate in various societal sectors, including politics, economics, and other public domains.

In Islamic history, numerous women have emerged as leaders, exercising their political rights. For instance, 'Aisha, the Prophet's wife, was recognized as a *mufti* (Islamic jurist) and even commanded the army in the Battle of the Camel. Al-Shifa', a skilled scribe, was appointed by the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab as the treasurer of Medina.

The aforementioned depiction contrasts starkly with contemporary realities across various nations, where numerous women are still unable to participate in the public sphere, particularly in the realm of politics. This phenomenon is attributable to two primary factors. Firstly, the prophetic era was relatively brief, spanning approximately 22 years. Although the Prophet exerted maximal efforts to realize gender equality, the prevailing societal culture was not conducive to its actualization. Secondly, the Islamic world underwent a process of enculturation, adopting androcentric cultures. Post-prophetic, the Islamic realm expanded into former Persian and Roman territories, stretching from Spain in the West to the Indian subcontinent in the East. The cultures prevalent throughout these regions remained profoundly influenced by patriarchal norms that relegated

³⁸Mahmud Syaltut, *Min Taujihat al-Islam* (Cairo: al-Idarat al-Amal li al-Azhar, 1959), p. 193.

women to the status of 'the second sex'. The *ulama* hailing from these regions found it challenging to disentangle themselves from their local cultural contexts when interpreting Islamic teachings, including those pertaining to gender relations.³⁹ Consequently, divergent perspectives on women's involvement in politics, especially in positions of national leadership, have inevitably arisen.

Classical thought, deeply rooted in patriarchal norms, has significantly shaped the discourse on female leadership, often resulting in biases towards men.⁴⁰ The debate over women's suitability for political leadership, including the presidency, within Islamic frameworks has been a longstanding one. Questions about the applicability of religious edicts in contemporary political contexts have further fueled this controversy. Indonesia's post-reform era provides a historical precedent for such debates, as evidenced by the discussions at the Indonesian Islamic Congress during the Habibie presidency.

A controversy has arisen due to the discovery of Qur'anic verses and hadiths that, when interpreted textually, seem to indicate a male prerogative in leadership within the Islamic community. A prominent example of such verses is Qur'an Surah an-Nisa' [4:34]:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَنِينَاتٌ حَفِظْنَ لِلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ وَالَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُورَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَأَضْرِبُوهُنَّ فَإِنْ أَطَعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا

Meaning: "Men are the caretakers of women, as men have been provisioned by Allah over women and tasked with supporting them financially. And righteous women are devoutly obedient and, when alone, protective of what Allah has entrusted them with. And if you sense ill-conduct from your women, advise them 'first', 'if they persist', do not share their beds, 'but if they still persist', then discipline them 'gently'. But if they change their ways, do not be unjust to them. Surely Allah is Most High, All-Great."

The term "*al-rijāl*" in the aforementioned verse does not refer to men in general but rather specifically to husbands. This interpretation is supported by the subsequent clause in the verse which mandates husbands to provide financial support to their wives. If the term "men" were intended to encompass all males, then the subsequent clause would not have been so specific. Furthermore, the following verses explicitly discuss wives and domestic life.⁴¹ Thus, the verse in

³⁹ Musdah Mulia, *Potret Perempuan dalam Lektur Agama* (Inaugural Scientific Speech as a Principal Researcher in the Field of Religious Literature in May 1999), p. 43-44.

⁴⁰ Kamil and Suardi, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan dalam Perspektif al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Tajdid* 28, No. 1 (2021), p. 56.

⁴¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur'an Tafsir Maudu'i atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*, p. 314

question is contextually specific, pertaining to the marital relationship where the husband assumes the role of the head of the household.

From an Arabic linguistic perspective, the term “*al-rijāl*” does not denote all men but rather specific men, as the definite article *al* indicates a particular reference. Consequently, the verse in question should be understood to imply that only men possessing specific qualifications can assume leadership over particular women. Moreover, the context of the verse’s revelation is tied to the marital relationship within a household.⁴² Therefore, the verse primarily refers to a man’s leadership over his wife within the domestic sphere, and it is not intended to address general leadership roles outside the household.

The hadith serving as a foundational text for this understanding is:

عن ابي بكره قال: لما بلغ رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم ان اهل فارس ملكوا عليهم بنت كسري قال: لن يفلح قوم ولو امرهم امرأة⁴³.

Meaning: “Narrated Abu Bakrah, when the Prophet heard the news that the people of the Persia had made the daughter of Khosrau their Queen (ruler), he said, “Never will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler.” (Narrated by al-Bukhari).

The majority of *ulama* interpret the hadith literally, prohibiting the appointment of women to the positions of head of state, judges, and equivalent roles. This is because, according to Islamic legal guidelines, women are primarily responsible for managing their husbands’ property.⁴⁴ A number of *mufasssir*, such as al-Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, Muhammad Abduh, and Muhammad Tahir bin Asyur, share this view. They agree that the superiority of men is a divine gift, something natural and innate. Based on this, they argue that women are unfit to hold positions of political and public power, especially the power of the state.⁴⁵

Fiqh scholars have identified several universally agreed-upon qualifications for a judge: a) being Muslim, b) having sound intellect, c) being an adult and free person, d) being physically fit, and e) being just and knowledgeable in Islamic law. However, the gender requirement for judges has been a subject of debate. There are three primary scholarly viewpoints. First, Malik bin Anas, al-Shafi’i, and Ahmad bin Hanbal assert that judgeship should be exclusively a male role, citing the need for judges to preside over public hearings attended by men and to possess exceptional intellectual capacity. Second, Ibn Hazm and the Hanafi school argue that being male is not an absolute prerequisite for judgeship. Women can

⁴²Musdah Mulia, *Potret Perempuan*, p. 40.

⁴³Imam al-Bukharī, *Sahih al-Bukharī*, juz V (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1994), p. 160.

⁴⁴Syihabuddin Abi Fadl Ahmad bin Ali bin Hajar al-Asqalani, *Fath al-Barī*, juz VII (Beirut: Dar al-Ma’rifah, n.d.), p. 123.

⁴⁵Hussein Muhammad, *Membongkar Konsep Fiqih Tentang Perempuan*, in Syafiq Hasyim, *Kepemimpinan Perempuan dalam Islam*, p. 39-40.

hold this position, but their jurisdiction should be limited to non-criminal cases. Third, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari and Hasan al-Basri maintain that women are qualified to serve as judges in all types of cases.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the *ulama* who permit women to hold political power argue for a contextualized interpretation of the hadith in question. The circumstances surrounding the time when the Prophet Muhammad PBUH delivered the hadith need to be examined. During that era, women were relegated to a subordinate position relative to men. They were entirely excluded from participating in public affairs, particularly in matters of governance. Only men were deemed capable of managing societal and state affairs. Such circumstances were not unique to Persia but were prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula and other regions as well. Islam emerged to transform the status of women, granting them rights, honor, and responsibilities commensurate with their dignity as beings accountable to Allah, encompassing their personal, familial, societal, and civic roles.⁴⁷

The Prophet's judgment on the suitability of women for leadership roles was deeply rooted in the cultural milieu of the Persian Empire. His assertion that a nation cannot flourish under female rule hinges on the premise that effective leadership demands a degree of gravitas and authority that, at the time, was exclusively associated with men.

In relation to the aforementioned hadith, Fatima Mernissi has presented a critical analysis. Her critique focuses on both the *isnad* (chain of transmission) and the *matn* (text) of the hadith. She questions the credibility of Abu Bakrah as the narrator of this hadith. Mernissi inquires as to why Abu Bakrah introduced this particular hadith during the politically tumultuous period of the Battle of the Camel between 'Aisha and Ali ibn Abi Talib, 23 years after the Prophet's demise, and why he sided with Ali. Moreover, she argues that the context of the hadith is specific to the succession crisis of the Persian King Khosrau, who bequeathed the throne to his incompetent daughter.⁴⁸ Thus, Mernissi contends that this hadith was intended for a specific Persian context and should not be generalized to all situations and societies, as such a generalization would contradict Qur'anic verse 71 of Surah at-Tawbah.

The Role of Women as Leaders in Sufi Orders of South Sulawesi

Adherents of a *tariqa* (Sufi order) constitute a community that practices the teachings of Sufism. This is grounded in the understanding of *tariqa* as articulated by Shaykh Muhammad Amin al-Kurdiy, who offers three definitions: 1) *Tariqa* is the practice of *sharia*, the diligent fulfillment of religious obligations, and the avoidance of laxity in worship, which is intrinsically impermissible; 2)

⁴⁶Hussein Muhammad, *Membongkar Konsep Fiqih Tentang Perempuan*, in Syafiq Hasyim, *Kepemimpinan Perempuan dalam Islam* (Jakarta: The Asia Foundation, 1999), p. 43.

⁴⁷Qasim Amin, *Tahrir al-Mar'ah* (Cairo: Matba'ah al-Taraqqi, 1938), p. 25.

⁴⁸Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil* (Indiana: Indiana University, 1987), pp. 49-61

Tariqa is abstaining from prohibitions and fulfilling divine commands to the best of one's ability, whether those prohibitions are explicit or implicit (internal); 3) *Tariqa* is abandoning what is *haram* (prohibited) and *makruh* (disliked), paying attention to *mubah* (permissible) actions that possess spiritual merit, and fulfilling *wajib* (obligatory) and *sunnah* (recommended) acts according to one's capacity, under the guidance of a knowledgeable *shaykh* or Sufi who seeks a specific spiritual goal.⁴⁹ Therefore, the understanding and implementation of Qur'anic verses or Islamic teachings are based on continuous study under a *murshid* with an unbroken chain of transmission to the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. This includes comprehending the position of women in Islam.

The distinction between men and women does not lie in their biological sex but rather in their varying levels of competence, knowledge, and piety. The differences between men and women serve as a testament to the power of Allah, who created His beings with diverse physical attributes. However, before Allah, all are equal except those who possess faith and piety.⁵⁰ This perspective aligns with the Qur'an Surah Al-Hujurat [49:13]:

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

Meaning: "O humanity! Indeed, we created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may "get to" know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware."

The implementation of female leadership within Sufi orders is theoretically feasible, as women can assume leadership or public office provided, they possess the necessary leadership competencies. However, women face unique challenges in becoming a *murshid* due to the requirement to lead *zikr* (devotional remembrance) while menstruating, a state considered ritually impure. Additionally, the argument that the Prophet Muhammad was male and therefore *murshid* should also be male is often invoked. Within the *tariqa* Khalwatiyya, there are two primary paths to becoming a *murshid*. The first is through hereditary succession (*adat*), wherein an individual becomes a *murshid* based on familial lineage. This traditional approach seeks to maintain the continuity of the Sufi lineage within a family. The second path is through spiritual attainment (*adab*), requiring rigorous spiritual cultivation to achieve closeness to Allah.⁵¹ In Sufi orders, the *murshid* serves not only as an organizational leader but also as a

⁴⁹ Muhammad Amin al-Kurdi, *Tanwir al-Qulub fi Mu'amalah 'Ulum al-Guyub* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1994), p. 364

⁵⁰ Interview with Arsul Syam, Khalifah of the Tariqa Khalwatiyah, July 7, 2024.

⁵¹ Interview with Asrul Dg Laja, Khalifah of the Tariqa Sammaniyah, July 6, 2024.

spiritual guide for the community, leading spiritual rituals that necessitate a state of ritual purity. Women's menstrual cycles, which introduce a state of ritual impurity and can be irregular, pose challenges to fulfilling this requirement.

The primary reason for the prohibition of women becoming *murshid* within the *tariqa* Khalwatiyya founded by Sheikh Yusuf is not their menstrual cycles, but rather the interpretation of the order's teachings based on the practices exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. This interpretation posits that, from a *sharia* perspective, there have been no female prophets or messengers (among the 25 recognized individuals), unlike the numerous prophets (estimated to be around 124,000). Prophets and messengers were tasked with conveying divine messages not only to themselves but also to their communities. Similarly, a *murshid* receives authorization from their teachers to transmit this knowledge to their followers. In contrast, the prophetic mission was primarily focused on individual revelation. Consequently, the argument is made that women cannot assume the role of *murshid* due to the historical absence of female prophets or messengers.⁵²

In Arabic, a woman is referred to as "*mar'ah*," which can also be pronounced as "*mir'ah*," meaning "mirror" in English. Thus, a woman is considered a reflection of a man. In a husband-wife relationship, a man should view his wife as a reflection of himself; therefore, he must treat her in the same way he would treat himself. From a Sufi perspective, all beings are creations of Allah. Regarding the issue of a *murshid*, women are not permitted to hold this position, as there have been no female prophets or messengers. However, in governance, women are allowed to lead.⁵³ If connected to the previous meaning of "*awliya*," this aligns with the interpretation given by the *mufasssir*, which sees women as allies, advisors, or companions in managing or leading a *tariqa*.

Women can assume the role of a *wali*, as exemplified by Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah and other prominent female Sufi figures. Within Sufi orders, women often occupy the position of *khalifah* (spiritual deputy), assisting the *murshid* in teaching, particularly female members. The appointment of a *khalifah* is typically made directly by the incumbent *khalifah*, drawing precedent from the Prophet Muhammad's direct appointment of Mu'az bin Jabal to Syria without consultation with his companions. This practice is commonly observed in Sufi orders.⁵⁴ An examination of the leadership structure of the *tariqa* Khalwatiyya under Sheikh Yusuf in South Sulawesi reveals a profound appreciation for women's roles. Beyond serving as spiritual guides for female members, women are entrusted with

⁵²Interview with Syekh Abd. Rahim Assegaf Puang Makka, Murshid of the Tariqa Khalwatiyyah Syekh Yusuf, August 15, 2024.

⁵³ Interview with Imran Abdillah, follower of the Tariqa Khalwatiyyah Syekh Yusuf, August 15, 2024.

⁵⁴ Interview with Syekh Abd. Rahim Assegaf Puang Makka, Murshid of the Tariqa Khalwatiyyah Syekh Yusuf, August 15, 2024.

significant responsibilities, such as coordinating counseling and parenting programs, as exemplified by Nurhaeda Asnawi. Moreover, Dr. Hj. Fauziah Zainuddin, M.Ag.⁵⁵ holds the position of regional coordinator for Luwu Raya. These appointments underscore the recognition of women's capabilities and align with both Qur'anic teachings and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Women serve as advisors, companions, and even leaders within specific regions.

In the context of Sufism, there exists no inherent gender-based distinction in the practice of *bai'ah* (pledge of allegiance). Both men and women can engage in this practice collectively or individually, and even attain the status of a *wali*. Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, a renowned female Sufi, is a prime example of a woman who achieved the status of a *wali* and had her own disciples, despite living in an era before the formalization of Sufi orders. While it is true that historically, women have not held the position of *murshid* within Sufi orders, their standing within these orders is considered equal to that of men.⁵⁶ The role of *murshid*, traditionally assumed by men, demands a specific set of qualifications in both Islamic jurisprudence and spirituality, as these individuals are expected to emulate the qualities of the Prophet, such as possessing truthfulness (*sidiq*), the conveyance of the message (*tablig*), intelligence (*fathanah*), and trustworthiness (*amanah*).⁵⁷ Ultimately, the goal of the Sufi path is not to attain the position of *murshid*, but rather to foster a profound connection with Allah through a process of spiritual purification (*takhalli*),⁵⁸ adornment (*tahalli*),⁵⁹ and divine manifestation (*tajalli*).⁶⁰ It is this ultimate objective that should be the primary focus of all Sufi practitioners, regardless of gender.

In essence, there is no fundamental distinction between all beings, including human beings, regardless of gender. While both men and women possess unique qualities, limitations, natural inclinations, roles, and dispositions, the potential for spiritual attainment is equally accessible to both Muslim men and women. They can all aspire to the spiritual stations of a Sufi, *waliullah* (an ally of God), or *al-muqarrabin* (a beloved of God). A prime example is the renowned Sufi, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, whose devotion was solely directed towards the Divine. Despite her profound spiritual influence and numerous followers, including a male relative, she did not assume the role of a spiritual guide or have designated disciples. Even without having been directly initiated by her,

⁵⁵ Machmud Suyuti and Hannani, *Tarekat Khalwatiyah Dari Syekh Yusuf al-Makassariy ke Puang Makka* (Pare-Pare: IAIN Pare-Pare Nusantara Press, 2024), p. 333-341.

⁵⁶ Interview with Syekh Dr. H. Baharuddin HS, M.Ag., Murshid of the Tariqa al-Hakikatul Muhammadiyah Assanusiyah al-Idrisiyah South Selatan, August 16, 2024.

⁵⁷ Interview with Zufadli, SQ, follower of the Tariqa al-Hakikatul Muhammadiyah Assanusiyah al-Idrisiyah, August 16, 2024.

⁵⁸ Djam'an Nur, *Tasawuf dan Tarikat Naqsyabandiyayyah Pimpinan Prof. DR. H. Saidi Syekh Kadirun Yahya* (Malang: Widya Karya Malang, 2004), p. 232.

⁵⁹ Djam'an Nur, *Tasawuf dan Tarikat Naqsyabandiyayyah*, p. 236.

⁶⁰ Muhammad Amin Kurdi, *Tanwir al-Qulub*, p. 365-366.

individuals today can still draw inspiration from her life and emulate her unwavering devotion to God. In essence, Rabi'ah al-Adawiyya surrendered her entire life unconditionally to Allah SWT.⁶¹

In the Sufi orders, both men and women hold equal positions. Differences arise from varying levels of knowledge and piety, while differences in gender and physical attributes signify the greatness and power of Allah SWT in creating His beings. However, this does not imply any hierarchy, as each gender possesses unique strengths and weaknesses. For example, Rabia al-Adawiyah, a woman who attained the status of a *waliyullah*, exhibited exceptional abilities and piety, comparable to the male Sufis of her time.⁶²

Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah, based on her scholarly achievements and piety, successfully formulated a renowned Sufi teaching centered on the concept of *mahabbah* (divine love), grounded in her personal experiences. Her devotion, remembrance, and supplications to Allah suggest that she had attained the spiritual station of *Insan Kamil* (perfect human),⁶³ having successfully eradicated all worldly attachments from her being. However, during her time, groups dedicated to exclusive devotion to Allah were not yet termed Sufi or associated with specific *tariqa*; consequently, the title of *murshid* had not yet been formalized.

Historically, around the 15th century, a significant transmission of teachings and regulations occurred to the followers of Sufi masters, laying the foundation for the emergence of *tariqa* as formal organizations dedicated to preserving the teachings of specific *shaykh* or masters.⁶⁴ These *shaykh*, known as *murshid*, were themselves prominent Sufis such as Abdul Qadir Jilani, the founder and *murshid* of the *tariqa* Qadiriyya, Abu Hasan az-Dzazili, the first *murshid* of the *tariqa* Dzaziliyya, Assanusī, the *murshid* of the *tariqa* al-Hakikatul Muhammadiyah Assanusiyah al Idrisiyah, and Shaykh Yusuf, the *murshid* of the *tariqa* Khalwatiyya Shaykh Yusuf, among others.

Thus, in verse 71 of Surah at-Tawbah, there is gender equality, and so spiritually women can have the same spiritual level. However, women have limitations in various things such as purity. Physically, women and men are indeed different, but the level of obedience and good deeds is the same as stated in the Qur'an: Whoever does good deeds, whether male or female, will be given the same reward. Meanwhile, in verse 34 of Surah an-Nisa, there is a difference between men and women, because this verse is specific to the household, and Surah at-Tawbah is general in the public realm.⁶⁵ Women are not only creatures

⁶¹ Interview with Dr. Irham, Tariqa Dzaziliyah, South Sulawesi, July 18, 2024

⁶² Interview with Anwar Syam, Khalifah of the Tariqa Khalwatiyah, July 17, 2024

⁶³ Yusuf Musa, *Falsafah Akhlak Fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Muassah al-Khaniji, 1963) p. 267.

⁶⁴ Harun Nasution, *Islam Rasional* (Bandung: Mizan, 1996), p. 366

⁶⁵ Interview with Muhammad Tajuddin, follower of the Tariqa Qadiriyyah and Naqsyabandiyah, August 17, 2024.

of a different sex from men, but are also viewed as creatures who have souls. In sharia, women are creatures created by Allah to accompany a man's life, so in *tariqa*, women are seen as more than that. She is not only a companion in the household, but also a companion in a man's struggle, as a partner to reach Allah SWT together. The dignity, honor, and status of women must be respected, by showing affection in life together.⁶⁶ To belittle women is to belittle oneself, because in essence what men have is the same as what women have, namely the divine soul.

In general, women and men hold equal status. The differentiating factor lies in the degree of piety or closeness to Allah SWT, enabling both genders to attain the level of a *wali* as exemplified by Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah. However, within the context of Sufi orders, while women are highly esteemed and revered as divine creatures bearing the Nur Muhammad (The Light of Muhammad), the position of a *murshid* is traditionally reserved for men. Women, on the other hand, can assume the role of *khalifah* or even coordinate regional activities within a Sufi order. Nevertheless, in the public sphere, women enjoy equal rights and responsibilities as men, including the right to vote and be elected, provided they meet the qualifications outlined in the Qur'an Surah al-Maidah [5: 55]:

إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ

Meaning: "Your only guardians are Allah, His Messenger, and fellow believers who establish prayer and pay alms-tax with humility."

Wahbah Zuhaili interprets the Arabic term "*ruku*" as encompassing both "*khusyu*" (devoutness) and "*khudhu*" (humility). The context of the revelation of this verse (*asbabunnuzul*) is tied to the betrayal of the Prophet Muhammad by members of the Bani Midlaj, Bani Hanifah, and Bani Asad tribes. Jabir narrated that this verse was revealed in response to Abdullah ibn Salam and his companions who complained to the Prophet about the arrival of the Bani Quraidzah and Bani Nadhir tribes. They vowed not to associate with these tribes, and Ibn Salam declared, "We are content with Allah, His Messenger, and the believers as our *wali* (guardians)."⁶⁷

Therefore, the essential qualifications for a leader are faith, demonstrated by the fulfilment of religious obligations such as sincere prayer performed solely for the sake of Allah, and complete obedience to the laws and regulations ordained by Allah and His Messenger. Therefore, the position of women among religious congregations in South Sulawesi provides equal or at least equal opportunities. This shows that religious organizations such as tarekat in the world of Sufism provide a wide space for those of the *caliph* (*khalifah*) or assistant *musyid*.

⁶⁶ Interview with Syamsu Hidayat, Khalifah of the Tariqa Naqsyabandiyah, July 7, 2024

⁶⁷ Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *Tafsir al-Munir*, jilid III, p. 583

Conclusion

Women, while distinct from men in terms of physical attributes, are not inherently of different dignity or worth. Any human being standing before Allah is determined by their faith and piety, and there is no distinction in the performance of righteous deeds or the rewards promised by Allah. The dignity and rights of women are also recognized and protected by international organizations such as the United Nations and human rights bodies, serving as a foundation for women to develop their potential and contribute according to their aspirations and abilities without discrimination. The Qur'an affirms women's right to lead, provided they possess the necessary qualities and skills. However, within the specific context of Sufi orders in South Sulawesi, there are no female *murshid*, primarily due to the historical precedent of male prophets and the practical challenges of providing both physical and spiritual guidance to a community. Despite this, Sufi orders in South Sulawesi acknowledge the existence of female *wali* such as Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah and affirm women's equal opportunity to pursue spiritual growth. Women in these orders often serve as *khalifah* or deputies to male *murshid*, teaching new female members and even coordinating regional activities.

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Interviews

- Interview with Anwar Syam, Khalifah of the Tariqa Khalwatiyah, July 17, 2024
- Interview with Arsul Syam, Khalifah of the Tariqa Khalwatiyah, July 7, 2024.
- Interview with Asrul Dg Laja, Khalifah of the Tariqa Sammaniyah, July 6, 2024.
- Interview with Dr. Irham, Tariqa Dzaziliyah, South Sulawesi, July 18, 2024
- Interview with Imran Abdillah, follower of the Tariqa Khalwatiyah Syekh Yusuf, August 15, 2024.
- Interview with Muhammad Tajuddin, follower of the Tariqa Qadiriyyah and Naqsyabandiyah, August 17, 2024.
- Interview with Syamsu Hidayat, Khalifah of the Tariqa Naqsyabandiyah, July 7, 2024.
- Interview with Syekh Abd. Rahim Assegaf Puang Makka, Murshid of the Tariqa Khalwatiyah Syekh Yusuf, August 15, 2024.

Interview with Syekh Dr. H. Baharuddin HS, M.Ag., Murshid of the Tariqa al-Hakikatul Muhammadiyah Assanusiyah al-Idrisiyah South Sulawesi, August 16, 2024.

Interview with Zulfadli, SQ, follower of the Tariqa al-Hakikatul Muhammadiyah Assanusiyah al-Idrisiyah, August 16, 2024.