

Dra. Suraiya IT, MA., PhD

Religion & Women's Movement 'AISYIYAH ORGANIZATION

Summary of The Book

Religion and Women's Movement: Aisyiyah Organization

Dra. Suraiyat IT, MA., PhD



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'AISYIYAH
ORGANIZATION**

Suraiya IT, Dra. MA., PhD

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'Aisyiyah Organization

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ABSTRACT

RELIGION AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT (THE 'AISYIYAH ORGANIZATION)

The primary significance and aim of this book is to shed light on, analyze, and trace how far the role of religion and culture have affected the women's movement in Indonesia and how far the role of the *ulama* (Islamic scholar) has affected the opportunity given to women to act in public life. These objectives will be achieved by way of my analyzing of the work of the 'Aisyiyah organization.

The Muslim women's movement in Indonesia was influenced by the Islamic reform movement in the twentieth-century. The reformists sought a "return" to the fundamental truth of the Islamic texts and tradition, as articulated in the Qur'an and *Hadith*. The women's divisions of religious reform movements played active roles in advocating and implementing social and educational reforms. 'Aisyiyah is the women's section of the Islamic reformist movement, the Muhammadiyah, and 'Aisyiyah is used as a case study in this study. Initially, their efforts were directed towards increasing the awareness of Muslim women in an effort to improve their lives, obtain their rights, and realize their responsibilities. Education, both secular and religious, was seen as the key, and Aisyiyah has long inspired Indonesian women to dedicate themselves to establish educational opportunities for women.

Particularly in recent years, the 'Aisyiyah organization has been spearheading a reexamination of traditional Islamic sources for answers to the complex relationship between culture, tradition and religious requirements regarding the role of women in Islam. Analyzing Islamic teaching from a gender perspectives was an innovative initiative to change thinking patterns on gender issues,

especially in the Indonesian context. The book examines how ‘Aisyiyah’s influence has made a difference for many Muslim women by its emphasis on the importance of the mother’s role as an educator, as well as on the need for women to be economically independent and to make decisions on their own.

Indonesian Muslim women are taking an active role in current debates on the ratification of women’s social, cultural, legal, and economic roles in their society. Indonesian Muslim women professional groups, such as ‘Aisyiyah organization, have been spearheading a reexamination of traditional Islamic sources for answers to these complex matters. For ‘Aisyiyah, there is a need for change and it urges women to improve their lives, obtain their rights, and realize their duties. Education, both secular and religious, is a key to women’s programs. ‘Aisyiyah inspires Indonesian women to dedicate themselves to establishing educational opportunities for women.

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I am very grateful to my beloved husband, Muhammad Izwandi Rusli, for his constant love, support and encouragement, especially in the difficult times in finishing my book, and my dear parents, my late father Tgk. Ismail Thaib Payabujouk, whose spirit, courage and principles have always inspired me, as well as my mother, Nyak Syaribanun Saigy, who taught me to care passionately about love and justice. To my brothers and my sisters, my deep thanks for their unfailing support of me, and for their patience. And also I am similarly grateful to my father and my mother in law, as well as my brother and sisters in law, for their supportive.

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Respectfully Dedicated to:

My Parent

Tgk Ismail Thaib Payabujouk and Syaribanun Saidy

Whose spirit, courage and principles always inspired me;

My beloved Husband Muhammad Izwandi Rusli for whom my love
and affection can never dim

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RELIGION AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT (THE 'AISYIYAH ORGANIZATION)

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

1. *Background*

In the beginning of the 20th century the first endeavor to bring about the formation of diverse women's movement organizations caused renewed and widespread changes for women in Indonesia. The first women's movement was organized by R.A Kartini in the early twentieth century (1879-1904). She is recognized as the first Indonesian women to declare her conscience and to resist the prevailing customs, which diminished and imprisoned women. Though her life was remarkably short--she lived to be only 25, from 1879-1904--R.A Kartini is remembered as one of the most outstanding women of her day and as an early feminist.²⁷³

In addition to the influence of Kartini, a second major factor contributing to social change for Indonesian women was the emergence of Women organizations and Islamic Reformism in the second half of the 19th century. The reform movement's main goal was to purify the teachings of Islam from the accretions of local Indonesian teachings and customs to a closer observance of the way of life based on the holy Qur'an. Islamic teachings alone would be the guidelines for every aspect of life. One of the Indonesian Islamic reform organizations was the Muhammadiyah, founded in 1912 in Yogyakarta, central Java, by Kyai Haji Akhmad Dahlan. Its main concerns were the education of Indonesian Muslims and the "purification" of Islam from innovations.²⁷⁴ The significance of

273 Saskia Wieringa, *Women's Struggles and Strategies*, (Gower: Brookfield. 1988), p.71

274 Alfian. *Muhammadiyah: Political Behavior of a Muslim Modernist Organizations Under Dutch Colonialism*.

this movement in the development of modern Islamic thought in Indonesia cannot be appreciated without some knowledge of the social and religious life of the Indonesian people. Such knowledge is important, particularly of the period during the first decade of the twentieth century prior to the rise of the Muhammadiyah movement.

Kyai Haji Akhmad Dahlan founded the Muhammadiyah organization for guidance in the Muslim faith, and along with it he envisioned the establishment of a women's branch. For this purpose a group of intellectually active women was trained to run the women's section and to become the first leaders of the 'Aisyiyah. These women were Siti Bariyah, Siti Dawimah, Siti Dalalah, Siti Busjro, Siti Wadingah, and Siti Badilah.²⁷⁵ They eventually formed a new women's organization, under the name 'Aisyiyah, a name derived from that of the Prophet's wife, 'Aisyiyah. Officially, 'Aisyiyah was chartered in 1917 in Yogyakarta as an organization intended to be characterized by its religious and social nature, as well as its feelings of sisterhood. In 1918, Haji Mukhtar, Dahlan's right hand man, gathered the above mentioned six women and some other students and held a meeting which was attended by Dahlan and Ki Bagus Hasikusumo (one of the leaders of Muhammadiyah). Out of this meeting 'Aisyiyah was actually born, with the above-mentioned six women as the core of its leadership. Siti Bariyah and Siti Badilah were to become its Chairperson and Secretary, respectively.²⁷⁶

The primary aim of 'Aisyiyah is to educate Muslim women who are pious, devoted to God, noble of character, knowledgeable, dedicated, skillful, responsible and useful to the religion and the nation. The organization also aims at enhancing loyalty towards the principles, bases and goals of Muhammadiyah in enforcing

(Yogyakarta:Gajahmada University Press, 1989), pp.171-172

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, pp.171-172

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*,

Islamic law, and in realizing a just and prosperous society, which is seen as being blessed by God. As a part of the big Muhammadiyah family, 'Aisyiyah also has quantitatively large numbers of members spreading throughout Indonesia. In implementing its activities, 'Aisyiyah cooperates with various institutions--governmental and non-governmental-- both in the country and abroad.

In light of the foregoing, the primary significance and aim of this study is to shed light on, analyze, and trace how far the role of religion and culture have affected the women's movement in Indonesia and how far the role of the *ulama* (Islamic scholar) has affected the opportunity given to women to act in public life. These objectives will be achieved by way of my analyzing of the work of the 'Aisyiyah organization.

2. Scope of the Study

This study is an attempt to trace the historical background of the women's movement in Indonesia in general and then to move on to the specific discourse regarding the Islamic women's movement on the issue of "social change" from the perspective of the Islamic contribution. In the course of this analysis, I will attempt to shed light on a number of contemporary Muslim women's movements. However, women have organized not only to achieve ends within religious institutions; they have also organized along religious and ideological lines to work for social change in the wider community. Therefore, in the context of this study I am interested in the role of religion as an agent of social change, using 'Aisyiyah as a case study in an Islamic women's movement. This study is mainly concerned with factors that prompted the emergence of the 'Aisyiyah movement and the milieu in which it operated; its founder as well as its main objectives. Furthermore, the main thesis of this study is that the

impact of religion on the women's movement does reflect social change in Indonesia.

The purpose of the present study is to analyze the particular role and position of women from two perspectives. First I will discuss the role and position of women both in Qur'anic teachings related to the position of women in Islam and from a sociological perspective. To illustrate this, I will use the case of 'Aisyiyah in Indonesia. Second, I will analyze and examine the issue of the status of women with arguments based on my research in a contemporary "Islamic feminist" perspective.

3. Significance of the Study

Religion is both a problem, in that its structures of dominance have oppressed women, and a solution, in that its vision of liberation or equality has generated powerful movements for social change. The same religious tradition may be both a problem and a solution. Islam's vision of human equality may be a source of strength even when much of the tradition compromises women's equality of power. It is stated in a verse of the Qur'an that "women have the same rights as those of men over women."²⁷⁷ The Qur'an in addressing the believers, often uses the expression "believing men and women" to emphasize the equality of men and women in regard to their respective duties, rights, virtues and merits.

Thus it is my intention in this thesis to provide a sympathetic but critical analysis of the role of women in Islam. A clear understanding of the problem will be required.

History shows us that the role of women in Islam is as poorly understood in the West as any other aspect of Muslim culture. The responsible feminist is clearly confronted with a delicate dilemma:

²⁷⁷ Qur'an 2:228, see for example A. Yusuf Ali's translation, *The Holy Qur'an* (Washington DC: The Islamic Center, 1978).

the extrication of the justified urge for universal female equality from self-seeking cultural intrusion.²⁷⁸

Tracing back through history, it must be noted, even when a Muslim woman is able to acquire an education and secure a job, she is seldom able to free herself from the burden of traditionalism that confronts her on all sides. In the absence of any supportive literature or any social support structure, it is very difficult even for modernizing Muslim societies to respect women's role and place in society. It is also clear that the conceptions, assumptions, and social customs and institutions relating to women that are derived from Middle Eastern traditions at the time of the Islamic conquests entered into, and helped shape, the very foundations of Islamic concepts and social practices as they developed during the first century of Islam. These facts, according to Leila Ahmed, emphasize the importance of considering Islamic formulations of gender in relation to changing codes and cultures, including the Islamic.²⁷⁹

For the majority of Muslim women who have been kept for centuries in physical, mental, and emotional bondage and deprived of opportunities to see themselves as fully human, the task of defining what womanhood in Islam is, or even of analyzing the question, is overwhelming. All this is only possible through a rigorous understanding of Islam's heritage, its context, and its own defined goals.

In recent years, Islam--for instance in Indonesia--has played an increasingly central role in world affairs. With a population over two hundred million, 50.2 percent of whom are female, and eighty-seven percent of which are Muslims, Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world. Thus Indonesia can avail itself of an excellent

²⁷⁸ Local "interpretations" have, therefore, usually affected women negatively. For instance, women's economic position was strengthened by the Qur'an, but local custom has weakened that position in its insistence that women must work within the private sector of the world: the home, or at least in some sphere related to the home. Thus, to the outside observer, Islamic women's economic activities have been disguised throughout the centuries by the customs of seclusion and social segregation. The local practices of veiling, seclusion, and general social segregation of the sexes have helped to maintain two quite different societies: the world of men and the world of women.

²⁷⁹ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1992), p.5

opportunity to play an influential role not only in the region of Southeast Asia, but in the Islamic world at large. 'Aisyiyah is one of the Islamic women's organizations in Indonesia, and probably the most dynamic women's movement in Southeast Asia. Through its activities, 'Aisyiyah has brought about significant kinds of social change. For example, first, 'Aisyiyah released housewives from bondage to the household alone. 'Aisyiyah made it possible for housewives to spend time at its centers, tending to their own growth and education, and to that of their children. Secondly, in seeking to educate and upgrade the status of women, 'Aisyiyah helped women to develop the ability to observe their environment and in order that they will learn, from being active in a strong organization, how to improve their social condition based on Islamic teachings. Thirdly, 'Aisyiyah increased the consciousness in women of the value of their role as mothers in bringing up the younger generation and implanting peace and order in society. Fourthly, 'Aisyiyah realized that when women begin to feel like subjects, not just objects, they begin to believe they can do things. Finally, 'Aisyiyah hopes to help women join in making decisions about the problems they are facing, because they are conscious of being involved in something larger--that they, too, are part of the society, and need not sit by while husbands, fathers, and other men make decisions.

Any study pertinent to the role of religion--in this case Islam--in women's movements and religious institutions in Indonesia therefore is naturally of great importance. This is because religion is significant not only for an analysis of the position of women, but also for understanding social change as well. This understanding is significant, both for women and for the processes of social change. In order to understand, analyze, and begin to change the situation of women, insight into religious issues is foundational, even for women

who do not think of themselves as religious.

Facing these historical facts, it is necessary that we ask not only what religion can do for women, but more importantly: what can women do with religion? In other words, how can women use religious traditions and values to their advantage? How can we meet traditional values half-way, so that the traditions can help change society?

4. Review of Related Literature

It must be acknowledged that there are not many works which deal with the issue of the Islamic women's movement in Indonesia in relation to 'Aisyiyah's work, let alone books on the 'Aisyiyah organization itself. There is very little literature on the 'Aisyiyah movement. What information exists is just scattered through many articles and pamphlets. There is nothing academic in book-form available, or in the way of a critical analysis of this very important organization. However, many non-academic books concerning the work of 'Aisyiyah had been written for the Muhammadiyah movement in Indonesian. Here are some examples of this literature:

1. The 'Aisyiyah publication, *Tuntunan Nasyyatul 'Aisyiyah* (The Guidelines of 'Aisyiyah) (1962), is mainly concerned with 'Aisyiyah's work in relationship to educational and other social activities.
2. The Central Board of 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan 'Aisyiyah* (History of the 'Aisyiyah Movement), a history of 'Aisyiyah and other Islamic movement organizations from 1917 to 1995. This is an informative historical account of its birth and its goals. It has an extensive bibliography.
3. The 'Aisyiyah publication, *Anggaran Dasar dan Rumah Tangga 'Aisyiyah*, (Basic Principles and Regulations of 'Aisyiyah): this book provides the guidelines for and the goals of this organization.
4. The 'Aisyiyah publication, *Suara 'Ayshiyah* (The Mission of 'Aisyiyah): this is a journal published by 'Aisyiyah that

covers the activities of women and women's organizations in Indonesia, particularly focusing on Muslim women and Islamic organizations.

5. The Central Board of 'Aisyiyah, *Buku tuntunan Administrasi 'Aisyiyah* (The Guidelines of 'Aisyiyah's Administration): this book sets forth guidelines for 'Aisyiyah's management and information about 'Aisyiyah activities, not just for the Central Board of 'Aisyiyah but also for the members that are widespread outside of Java. (Indeed, 'Aisyiyah is rapidly spreading throughout Indonesia).
6. Mukti Ali, *The Muhammadiyah Movement: A Bibliographical Introduction*. This is an informative historical account of the movement, a bibliographical work on the pre-war period of Muhammadiyah, its founder, and its goals.
7. Ibrahim Alfian, *Muhammadiyah: The Political Behavior of a Muslim-Modernist Organization under Dutch Colonialism* (1969). Although this book deals with the issue of the political roles and behavior exhibited by the Muhammadiyah from its birth up to the end of Dutch colonial rule: the author includes the historical background and early activities of 'Aisyiyah.

5. General Outline and Methodology

There are two obvious steps or methods that were deemed necessary in order to fulfill the objectives of this study. First, field research was conducted to get a representative view concerning the issues faced by the women's movement in Indonesia. This was done through particular, and personal, interviews, distributing of questionnaires and classifying of answers (with the leaders and members of the 'Aisyiyah organization and other Muslim women's organizations as important contributors). In order to analyze the subjective dimension of 'Aisyiyah's work, I focused on participating in and observing the activities in various areas with leaders of the 'Aisyiyah organization and its members. The whole process of this field research was analyzed from both a sociological and a cultural perspective.

Second, a survey of the literature relating to the issue of women, examining materials written by both Indonesian and foreign scholars, was also conducted. This was an ongoing process even during the field research period, because an adequate knowledge of the issue is needed, especially for the purpose of conducting successful interviews, comparing what the theoretical studies have elaborated and what the interviewee's understanding of the issue is. Furthermore, in determining the motivating factors that contributed to the emergence of 'Aisyiyah, biographical and historical materials written in both English and Indonesian have been utilized.

Chapter 2

THE MAIN REASONS FOR THE BIRTH OF THE 'AISYIYAH

The Indonesia Muslim women's movement of the early twentieth-century must be seen within the context of the Islamic reform movement in the twentieth century. One conspicuous characteristic of Indonesian Islam was its inclination towards mysticism. Heterodoxy and syncretism--an admixture of superstitious and popular religious practices--along with a certain moral laxity were prevalent in Muslim society. Various social attitudes also infiltrated Islamic culture in response to the Dutch colonialist presence, and were then assimilated as norms and identified with Islam. The situation generated by these conditions served to undermine the position of Indonesian Muslim women who became less and less part of social life in general.

The reformists or modernists pressed for a return to the basic Islamic texts and tradition, as articulated in the Qur'an and Hadith.²⁸⁰ They wanted to purify Islam from the mystical and traditional adulterants and additions. And traditionalist religious schools renewed their curricula by replacing most of the Malay and Javanese writings on which they had long relied with texts of recognized Middle Eastern origin.²⁸¹ They maintained that religious reform would revitalize Islam, and then called for Muslims to unite in a single community (*ummah*). They rejected other authorities, including the venerated Kyai and other Muslim teachers and scholars who taught the ornate philosophies and legal systems of medieval times. They were undoubtedly influenced by both social and ideological streams.

The reformist or modernist Islamic organizations also spearheaded

²⁸⁰ James L. Peacock, *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam* (Menlo Park, California: The Banyamin/Cumming Publishing Company, 1978), p.24

²⁸¹ Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), p.35.

the foundation of Islamic women's organizations. Conditions in Indonesia lent themselves to the rise of new ideas that empowered women and led them to engage in the public domains of politics and religion.

K.H Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah, and his wife, Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, among others, had serious concerns about the backward social status of Muslim women. For that reason, in 1917, Dahlan and his wife initiated the establishment of 'Aisyiyah in order to promote their position.²⁸² They also sought to return Indonesian Muslim women (*Muslimat*) to the teachings of Al-Qur'an and Hadith, and to improve the condition of Muslim women²⁸³ by initiating innovations and changes in thinking about gender issues, especially in analyzing Islamic teaching from a gender perspective.

Many factors come into play in the social construction of gender, including internal and external pressures, local history, socioeconomic contexts, state policies, and social responses. These factors all mediate the interpretation of Islam that comes to prevail in a given country at a given time. They also mediate the many interpretations that confront one another.

In the changing modern social life, Indonesian Muslim women have been continuously struggling to seek proper roles and positions for themselves. On the one hand, they wish to hold on to Islamic teachings and traditional values. On the other hand, they want to have active roles in their nation's social, cultural, economic, and political life. While the role of Muslim women in various fields has been advancing in line with increases in educational opportunities, and other reforms, many women have continued to adhere to the old traditional values, beliefs, and practices. In such circumstances, the desire for change can

²⁸² See, *Boeah Congress Moehammadiyah Seperempat Abad* (The Fruit of the 25th Annual Congress of the Muhammadiyah), Yogyakarta: Hoofdcomite, Congress Muhammadiyah, 1936, pp.24-25. See also Solichin Salam, *K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, Reformer Islam Indonesia* (Ahmad Dahlan, the Islamic Reformer of Indonesia) (Jakarta: Djajamurni, 1963), p.54.

²⁸³ See Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan 'Aisyiyah*, (Jogyakarta: Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 1997), p.24

surface as a great upheaval.

Based on the above, several main reasons for the birth of 'Aisyiyah may be identified. However, I will limit myself to a brief discussion of three aspects of the factors in this chapter. First, I will discuss the Indonesian Muslim situation before Muhammadiyah was established (Indonesian Muslims in the early twentieth century). The birth of 'Aisyiyah cannot be discussed separately from the rise of Muhammadiyah. There were a number of variables that relate to Muhammadiyah, which are linked to one another to form a solid foundation for the establishment of the 'Aisyiyah. Secondly, there is a need to stress the fact that 'Aisyiyah emerged as a response to the condition of Indonesian Muslim women in the early twentieth century. Thirdly, each finding has been substantiated and corroborated by certain facts believed to explain the main driving force behind 'Aisyiyah. By attending more closely to the historical and cultural forces it is possible to move beyond reductive accounts of women and Islam. The birth of this organization was brought about by the interaction of a number of complex factors that we will discuss further below.

1. Indonesian Muslim before the Establishment of Muhammadiyah (Indonesian Muslims in the early 20th Century)

a. The influence of Mysticism

It must be noted, that long before Islam spread in Java, generally the Javanese community had been engaging in mystical practices. Historically speaking, mysticism was to play a significant role in influencing the spread and development of Indonesian Islam.

Indonesian Islam, prior to the birth of the Muhammadiyah, was in a state of crisis due to the “backwardness” of its followers, caused by its static educational system. Although the Indonesian

people generally regarded themselves as Muslims, they were not all devoted Muslims. A large number of them still practiced Islam with some admixture of local customs, some of which, however, derived from Islamic mystical roots. It has been acknowledged that the Sufis had played a very important role in spreading Islam in the Indonesian archipelago.²⁸⁴ According to Alfian, the term *Sufi* constitutes what we understand in our modern terminology as a Mystic, while Sufism (better known as *tasawuf*) expresses what we mean by mysticism.²⁸⁵

Through a mystical spiritual life a traditional Sufi seeks to create a harmony with the divine will through words, acts and thoughts. The ultimate aim of a Sufi, then is to triumph over all attachment to the flesh until his or her soul finds the true God, *al Haqq*, which seemed to have remained observant to orthodox Islam and to have repudiated pantheism. This was even true of the Shattariyah Order, which Abdur Rauf of Singkil²⁸⁶ brought to Indonesia, although the Shattariyah Order, which flourished in Madina under Ahmad Qushahi in the seventeenth century, was strongly subjected to Indian influence.²⁸⁷

However, the *tariqah* orders in Indonesia were not of this type of Sufism. The mystical orders in Indonesia were seen by the heterogeneous Muslim culture as manifestations of popular piety and resisted the “Salafi”²⁸⁸ encroachment. “Agami Islam” and “kejawen” were designations of the typical associations organized in peasant communities between the traditional cults which were reflected in customary norms (*adat*) and the Islamic Shari’ah. Naqshabandiyah considered itself as the

284 The success of the Sufis in spreading Islam in Indonesia in thirteenth century was based on the characteristic readiness to build on the past and enroll elements of local belief and custom in the service of Islam. It was, therefore, the absorption of Islam by non-Muslim communities, which was made possible by specific nature of Sufism, which led to the *tariqah* orders.

285 Alfian, *Muhammadiyah: The Political Behavior of a Muslim Modernist Organization under Dutch Colonialism* (1989).

286 Better known as Teungku Dikuala (because his grave, a sacred shrine, is located at the mouth of the Acheh River), he was considered a saint, as were many other Shaykhs.

287 See Archer Leroy, “Muhammadan Mysticism in Sumatra.” *Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society (JRASMS)* Singapore, XV, Part II, Sept 1937, p.90

288 A Sufy Shayk, Abd Qadir al-Jazairi (d.1883) contributed to the emergence of the *Salafi* reform movement and brought together Egyptian reformers and his followers. Al Jazairi represented a different strain of religious reform from that of the Wahhabis. See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co, 1966), pp.240-249. On the Wahhabi movement, see H.St.John Philby, *Saudi Arabia*, (New York: Praiger, 1953)

protagonist of a unified Indonesian Muslim culture, and was engaged in capturing popular support against other mystical orders.

Since this latter type of mysticism stressed the importance of good intentions rather than actual observation of the rules and obligations of the orthodox teachings of the Faith, it was bound to be influenced by the specific local characteristics and customs as the various mystic-orders were to flourish in the various parts of Indonesia. Thus, in Sumatra, for example, the local *adats* were to be syncretized into Islam, while in Java the more or less animistic sub-tradition of the *abangans*²⁸⁹ and the highly Hindu-influenced Javanese culture of the *priyayis*²⁹⁰ also found their way into the religion. According to Geertz, Islam had little influence either on the Javanese nobility, the *priyayi*, who retained their Hindu-Javanese heritage, nor the *abangan* peasants and small traders. The *abangan* religious tradition comprised complex spirit beliefs, and represented a stress on the ‘animistic aspects’ of Javanese syncretism.²⁹¹ Through this process of syncretism Islam was to spread very rapidly, but at the same time its purity was contaminated by all kinds of local traditions and forms of belief.²⁹² The heritages of ancient Javanese religions overlaid by Hinduism were too established to be uprooted or displaced. Instead, Islamic elements were easily absorbed into Javanese culture.²⁹³

This type of Islamic mysticism could have destroyed Islam itself from within, since by its syncretism it would have completely disregarded many of the rules and obligations of the pure teachings of Islam as they were laid down in the Holy Qur’an and the tradition

289 Abangan is Hindu-Buddhist-animist syncretistic Islam, as Peacock described the Abangan Pattern in Java; “Islam is joined with peasant animism and an elitist Hinduism.” According to him, such a mixed culture is known as *abangan*. See Peacock, James L., *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam*, 1978, p. 20

290 The word *priyayi* derives from two words *para* and *yayi*, meaning “little siblings of the noble king.” The term later expanded its usage to include civil servants. See, Soedjito Sossodiharjo, *Perubahan Struktur Masyarakat di Djawa, The Change of the Social Structure in Java* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Karya, 1968), p.18.

291 See Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University Press, 1960), pp.5-6

292 Deliar, “Masyarakat Minangkabau II” in *Media* IV,4, Nov, 1957, p. 16

293 Ann Kumar, “Dipnagara and the Java War,” *Indonesia* I (1974), pp.69-118

or sunnah of the Prophet.

The perceived corruption of religion through syncretism and moral degeneration was abhorrent to the more orthodox in the Muslim community. Thus Islam in Indonesia was shaped and influenced by the cultures that it encountered there.

There were other problems. In practicing mysticism, there was virtually no critical discussion on theology in general and on Islamic teachings (*syari'ah*) in particular. This is a problem as regards the Muslim community, in that it led to an uncritical acceptance of any religious explanation given by the *Imam* or *Kyai*. In such conditions, there arose many heterodox mystical teachings which led to the creation of spiritual sects or *kebatinan* (the esoteric group).²⁹⁴

The *Sufi* temperament seemed consonant with aspects of pre-Muslim religion, but from the perspective of the orthodox Muslim, the *sufi* weakened, not strengthened Islam, because what was being taught was incomplete and distorted, lacking the spirit of jihad so central to the orthodox. As a result, the varied Muslim mystical ascetic traditions known collectively as “Sufism” facilitated the dissemination of an attenuated version of Islam.²⁹⁵

In this regard, as Peacock has emphasized in his book *Muslim Puritans: Reformist Psychology in Southeast Asian Islam*:

... we should recall the general consensus of ethnographic studies that the Javanese traditionally view the world as composed of spiritual energies contained in forms and images, such as magical potent swords, sacred shrines, deities, teachers, and rulers. The Javanese syncretism world is what Weber termed “a garden of magic”—indeed, an animistic jungle.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ The word *Kebatinan* derives from the Arabic root *batin*, which denotes “inward” in the sense of the “the science of the inner.” Basically, *Kebatinan* seeks to establish a direct relationship between the individual and God, unmediated by any religious law or Prophet outside Java. See, Harun Hadjiwiono, *Man in Present Javanese Mysticism* (Baarn: Bosch and Keuning, 1967), p.2

²⁹⁵ Anthony Johns, “Islamization in Southeast Asia: Reflections and Reconsiderations with Special Reference to the Role of Sufism,” *Southeast Asian Studies* (Tokyo), 31:1, 1993, pp.43-61

²⁹⁶ James L. Peacock, *Muslim Puritans: Reformist Psychology in Southeast Asian Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp.42-43

Syncretistic mysticism fostered preoccupation with the “inner life and the afterlife” at the expense of social problems. Ritual specialists invoked guardian spirits to gain access to supposedly magical powers. And references to non-Islamic deities were made in the prayers of puppeteers, healers, and midwives, all of whose ritual supplications often included offerings to guardian spirits.

Most Indonesian Muslims were illiterate and poor. They had few chances to immerse themselves in the details of Islamic law or literature—activities that required, at the very least, training in classical Arabic. In the course of a day, these ordinary Muslims were able, at best, to perform the required worship and to utter a few petitionary prayers, which might include magical invocations. They did engage in Islamic life-cycle rituals and celebrate the holidays. But at times of crisis and transition, such as at a child’s birth, circumcision, or marriage, or at times of illness, harvest, or death, Muslim villagers would turn to ritual specialists to invoke the guardian spirit.

Those involved in these activities justified them on the grounds that these apparent “divinities” were really just species of *Jin*, a type of being acknowledged by the Qur’an as having been created by God along with Adam and Eve. For more orthodox-minded Muslims, however, such rituals smacked of polytheism, which is a sin strictly forbidden (*haram*) in Islam.²⁹⁷ From the earliest period of Islam’s growth in Indonesia such activities were criticized. Their abolition would become the main aim of Muslim reform movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It still is today.

b. The Influence of Hinduism and Buddhism

After Islam entered the Indonesian archipelago, the dominant religious pattern there was a mixture of pagan animism and Islamic

²⁹⁷ Robert W. Hefner, “Religion: Evolving Pluralism,” in Donald K. Emmerson (ed), *Indonesia beyond Suharto: Policy Economy Society Transition* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), p.216.

Mysticism super-imposed on a culture heavily influenced by both Buddhism and Hinduism.²⁹⁸ During the early centuries of the Common Era, Hindu culture had a great impact on that of Indonesia. Hindu priests had come to the early Indonesian Kingdoms from India, especially in Java, as chancellors, advisors in government affairs and as supervisors of the construction of Hindu temples.²⁹⁹ The process of the diffusion of the Hindu and Buddhist religions and their socio-political culture among the indigenous people evolved through cultural absorption and acculturation.³⁰⁰ Buddhism was the dominant influence on other island kingdoms. The Buddhist empire of the seventh to thirteenth century, Sriwijaya, in southern Sumatra, was one of the greatest.³⁰¹

Buddhism and, most especially, Hinduism were able to extend their roots beyond the royal courts into the surrounding society.

In addition to state-sponsored religious hubs, pre-Muslim Java, for instance, had monasteries, hermitages, spirit shrines, and cult centers that depended less directly on the court.³⁰² In addition, diffuse Hindu-Buddhist influences were felt in the arts, law and politics, and in folk traditions of healing and mediumship. Although eventually the majority of the inhabitants converted to Islam, it was said that the new religion never really displaced the pre-Islamic culture, but merely covered it over or mixed it into a syncretistic whole. Islam was generally acceptable to the Indonesian people only in so far as it was able to accept the old religious patterns and to associate itself with existing practices and beliefs.

Thus, not only mystical practices, but also aspects of

298 See Taufik Abdullah, *Sejarah dan Masyarakat: Lintasan Historis Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1987).

299 See for more discussion about this issue see, James L. Peacock, *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah movement in Indonesian Islam*, 1978, p. 17

300 See Alwi Shihab, *The Muhammadiyah Movement and Its Controversy with Christian Mission in Indonesia*. Unpublished Dissertation, Temple University, 1995.

301 O.W. Wolters, *The Fall of Srwijaya in Malay History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970)

302 See Theodore G.T.Pigeaut, *Java in the 14th Century: A Study in Cultural History, Vol.4* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), pp.251-266

animism and remnants of “Buddhist and Hindu” culture still have much influence in Indonesian society. Many Javanese, for instance, followed an Islam that had heavily incorporated Hindu-Buddhist and other pre-Islamic beliefs, although Muslims in some other regions prided themselves on following an orthodoxy associated with the Middle East.³⁰³ But basically Islamic beliefs and practices were simply grafted on to existing Indonesian culture, particularly in Java. In fact, one of the most striking features of the Hindu-Buddhist influence in Java found its expression in the emergence of Indonesian political powers. The Hindu influence was clearly evident in the early empires of Indonesia.

In his book, *Islam in Java*, Woodward describes how Islamic identity supplanted that of Hindu-Buddhism and provides a detailed analysis of the surviving Indic elements of Javanese culture.³⁰⁴ However, many of these elements, such as the Indian epics used in the shadow theatre, have been transformed through contact with Islam and Woodward concludes that the significance of these Indic elements in Javanese religious philosophy itself has been overstated.³⁰⁵

Many indigenous religious practices continued after the arrival of Islam, but most under the guise of being part of Islam itself. In other words, while the coming of Islam to Indonesia, brought changes to the values and traditions of Indonesian society, the implementation of Islamic teachings in society at large was influenced by pre-Islamic tradition.

Clifford Geertz in his study “The Religion of Java,” discussed the *slamaten* ritual communal feast that is held to celebrate significant life events in Javanese society. He sees this ritual feast as the core

³⁰³ See Robert Cribb, “Nation Making Indonesia,” in Donald K. Emmerson (ed), *Indonesia Beyond Suharto: Policy Economy Society Transition*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), pp.16-17.

³⁰⁴ See Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta*, 1989, pp.215-240

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*

of the Javanese religious system, and the feast, in his view, is essentially pre-Islamic, although it incorporates Muslim prayers.³⁰⁶ Geertz also describes the significant life crisis rituals surrounding marriage, pregnancy, birth, important phases in child's early life, first menstruation and male circumcision. All of these—even the circumcision required by Islam—rely on traditional ceremonial forms including the propitiation of non-Islamic spirits.³⁰⁷ Over many centuries of influence, Hinduism established a deep cultural underpinning, providing myths, affecting attitudes, and establishing mores that are still very much present in Indonesian society today.³⁰⁸ Villages throughout Java celebrate Hindu holidays, markets display batik paintings featuring scenes from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabrata* stories, and traditional Javanese *gamelan* orchestras perform their haunting music in villages as well as at grand hotels.³⁰⁹

For the Muslim educated in Islamic faith and teachings, while the Qur'an acknowledges the reality of human diversity and affirms the importance of respecting other people's way of life, it also stipulates that for Muslims, divinely revealed religion should be given precedence over merely human institution, custom or practice. Indeed, as Islam has spread to and through diverse societies, a primary task of Muslim scholars and rulers has been to ensure that local customs as practiced by Muslims do not violate God's commands. Again, however, what some people regard as practices consistent with these divine requirements, others may consider forbidden.³¹⁰ This would prove to be the nub of the problem for Muslim reformers as they looked critically at many traditional Indonesian practices in

306 Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960)

307 *Ibid*

308 The first signs of both Hindu and Buddhist influence in Indonesia date back to the early fifth century C.E. Borobudur and Prambanan, the Buddhist and Hindu temple complexes in Central Java, were erected in the eighth and ninth centuries respectively. See Eric Oey (ed), *Indonesia* (Singapore: APA Publications, 1989), pp.21-23

309 Gamelan music is made with brass gongs on a twelve-tone music scale, creating music that is delicate and intense by turns.

310 See John R. Bowen, *Muslim Through Discourse: Religion and Ritual in Gayo Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp.245-250

light of the requirements of divine revelation.

Indonesia's Hindu-Buddhist heritage has retained its influence in modern times, it has been argued, in areas as diverse as the classical arts, architecture, social etiquette, and notions of power and rule.

This background allows us to understand some of the tensions that have animated Indonesian religion from its early times until today. Historical evidence indicates that in the first days of Indonesian Islam, many pre-Islamic customs and beliefs were simply carried over into the new religion. As the process of Islamization advanced, however, some in the Muslim community objected to some of these older ways as violations of the true spirit of Islam.

Though the above-mentioned factors were very important, there was another factor, "Colonialism," which was equally important. The impact of colonialism will be discussed in the next section.

c. The influence of Colonialism

Until the end of the nineteenth century, cultural contact between Europeans and Indonesians was very limited. It was largely confined to a few scholars and other interested men on the Dutch side, as well as few high dignitaries on the Indonesian side. The Dutch only offered education to a very small group of future officials. The rest of Indonesian youths were just educated by their parents or in the Muslim environment of the *pasantren* (Islamic boarding school).³¹¹ Among the aristocracy, the traditional education of Indonesian boys was intended mainly to develop character and teach the social abilities honored in the community such as etiquettes, courtesy, modesty, self confidence and the like, which embodied the Indonesian ideal of nobility. In addition, they were expected to be acquainted with

³¹¹ The *pasantren* is where Indonesians acquired education which focused on religious instruction; both men and women learned Arabic to enable them to read Islamic books written in Arabic, or at least, the Qur'an. See A. Mu'ti Ali, *The Muhammadiyah Movement: A Bibliographical Introduction*, MA Thesis, (Montreal: McGill University, 1957), pp.16-17.

ancestral manners, customs, and family traditions, as these were the moral pillars of Indonesian society.

Even when more modern attempts at education were begun in order to create more-skilled laborers and industrial workers, the Dutch provided the mass of Indonesian people with far less education than the elite; most women did not have a chance to get a higher education or to go to university. The Colonialist definition of femaleness reflected a gender division of labor and a sexist bias.³¹² Female education was also constrained by inherited social customs.³¹³ Educational opportunities for women were almost non-existent during the colonial period. The colonial state was not disposed to educate girls, and did little to encourage the advancement of girls' schooling.³¹⁴ The opportunity for higher education was basically limited only to the elite who served the interests of the Dutch government. Education in Indonesia is one of the areas that suffered tremendously from the many decades of successive colonial oppression and subjugation.

Under neither the Dutch nor the Japanese colonial administration was there any effort to educate or develop the skills of women, since they were considered unnecessary to secure political domination and enhance economic exploitation. Education, even literacy, was not considered useful for women as they were expected to perform only domestic work and household management. Hence the status of Indonesian Muslim women began to deteriorate in light of the changes wrought and demanded in modern times.

For security reasons, the Dutch were reluctant to allow the Christian missions to take advantage of the local religious cleavages.

³¹² Barbara N. Ramusack and Sharon Sievers, *Women in Asia; Restoring Women to History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp.88-89

³¹³ See Mu'ti Ali, "The Muhammadiyah Movement," pp.16-17

³¹⁴ It was, however, responsible for planting the seeds of the desire for education, as can be seen in the case of women like Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of the 'Aisyiyah organization.

One such rift appeared in east central Java in the 1830s. Tensions were growing among Muslims--legalistic *Santri* on the one hand, eclectic "Javanists" on the other. A few of the more mystically inclined in the latter group had even begun wondering whether they were really Muslim at all. In this turbulent context, some peasants in the area converted to Christianity under the guidance of a mixed-blood Javanese aristocrat. Colonialism sought to impose not only political dominance and economic control, but also western culture, at least among the elite. And the arrival of modernity as a result of Dutch colonialism, was an ever-increasing challenge to traditional ways of life.

Thus, the challenge of colonial domination and the social changes that came with the encroachment of modernity stimulated the search for new answers in this transformed socio-cultural environment. Local and international influences merged to produce many different movements ranging in character from spiritual, to educational, to actively political. A deep-felt sense of injustice also erupted into periodic rebellions and wars throughout the succeeding centuries.

The emergence of several modernist movements³¹⁵ was championed by Muslim scholars as a response to the Dutch socialist parties urging of "forced Christianization," which called on the government to Christianize the natives by turning education over to Christian mission schools. Traditional religion-based views of authority and leadership, for example, became vulnerable to revision. Reforms introduced an important measure of pluralism into the Muslim community and fostered a new spirit of criticism and public debate.

From 1909 to 1912, during which the Muhammadiyah movement

³¹⁵ Indonesian Muslims were in touch with the wider Islamic world and growing number of pilgrims were journeying to Mecca. Some scholars returned having been influenced by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Ridha. The Dutch, for their part, were very concerned with the mid-century emergence the Pan-Islamic Movement, which coincided with resurgence of the "Turkish" Naksyabandiyah *tariikat*. All the new movements of religious renewal, as well as the defence of the old ways, claimed to speak for orthodoxy of Islam. The Modernists were highly critical of the Sufi brotherhoods, whom they charged with contaminating the pure and rigorous sources of Islam with superstitions and practices of no legitimate standing within Islam. See Reid, A.J.S., "Nineteenth-Century Pan-Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 25, pp.267-83. See also Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-194* (Singapore: Oxford University Press,1973), pp.4,9-10

emerged, the Christian mission schools increased in number by 40 percent. Twenty percent of all pupils were in private schools, a large majority of them in mission schools.³¹⁶ For Indonesian Muslims, the penetration of colonial institutions into native society caused a crisis of confidence in indigenous authorities, including religious ones. One response to this crisis, evident in the actions of Muslim reformers, was to distance religion from the compromised political establishment and to work for a purification of the faith. They became aware that they would not be able to face the challenge of Dutch colonialism, Christian penetration, and Islam's mixture of local beliefs and its struggle for advancement unless they introduced changes and reforms and by deepening its Islamic character.

These reformists ideas can generally be divided into two large division: First, the educational and social movement, where the Muhammadiyah movement assumed most of the responsibility on the religious and educational planes. Second, the political movement, was represented by organizations, such as *Sarikat Islam* (Islamic Association) and the Association of Indonesian Muslims.³¹⁷ However, the various groups shared the same sense of religious duty to protect Islamic values among the people. They all, and particularly Muhammadiyah, also had serious concerned about the backward social status of Indonesian Muslim women that will be discussed in the next section.

2. The Condition of Indonesian Muslim Women in the early 20th century

In part of the Indonesian community, until the early twentieth century when 'Aisyiyah was established, the situation and condition of Muslim women was one of very low status, regardless of her

³¹⁶ See Vandenbosh, *The Dutch East Indies: Its Government, Problem and Politics* (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1941), p.66

³¹⁷ Deliar Noer, *The Modernist*, p.177

position in the family, whether as wife, mother, or daughter. Most women had a staggering lack of education. Women were largely prevented from participating in the educational systems because men feared loss of cultural hegemony. Female education was viewed as a threat to the traditional customs and the way of life of the society. There was, and remains still, a wavering social attitude that is not totally supportive of equal rights for women. Furthermore, the situation and condition of Indonesian society both under the Dutch occupation (before 1942) and under the Japanese occupation (after 1942) was one of very great uncertainty, for both men and women.

The opportunity to get an advanced education was basically limited to *priyayi* and the wealthy, even for men. Women had far less access to prestigious public roles and thus were almost entirely subordinate to men. However, Anthony Reid in his book *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce* finds consistent evidence for the autonomy of pre-Islamic women in Indonesia and observes that women, far from lacking religious consciousness, actively resisted the introduction of the new religions of Hinduism and Islam as they felt these undermined the authority women commanded in *adat*.³¹⁸

However, by the early twentieth century, custom did not approve of women working outside the home or even appearing in public places, especially women in the middle and upper classes. The division between private and public spheres was very strong. The home was associated with the private domain proper to women and everything outside this space was perceived as the public domain, off-limits to women. To some extent, the government itself was not supportive in providing the same educational opportunities for girls as for boys. Education was not considered important for women, whose lives were assumed to be limited to household management

³¹⁸ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680: Volume Two, Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988).

and serving their spouses. Consequently, the majority of Indonesian Muslim women remained in ignorance. Girls received much of their traditional education from their mothers, who focused on training them in the household duties associated with being a wife and mother, such as domestic work, household management and childcare.³¹⁹ Even young girls were kept in the house and the courtyard in order to protect them from the risk of slander and shame through possible contact with young men.³²⁰

It was particularly in the culture of the traditional Javanese aristocracy (*budaya priyayi*) that women most often stayed at home as housewives, educating and raising their children in the traditional way. These mothers always sought to harmoniously plant ethical values and respect in children. (Indeed, one unfortunate by-product of the more open role of the housewife in late years has been the loss of this traditional shaping of the minds and mores of many children, with ensuing negative results.)³²¹

The Indonesian term *ibu* means both wife and mother; however, in fact women are strongly perceived as always being in relation to husbands and children, so that even young unmarried women are generally seen simply as “potential wives.”³²²

This single perception of women’s role kept them in a state of ignorance and backwardness. They had little social experience, and most women were illiterate, which made them even more underdeveloped as people. They had only limited skills, generally just those needed for daily life; the ability to carry and care for children was the principal barometer of a girl’s qualities.³²³ In the village, besides caring for younger brothers or sisters, girls

319 See Pimpinan Pusat ‘Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan ‘Aisyiyah* (Jogyakarta: Pimpinan Pusat ‘Aisyiyah, 1997), p.11

320 *Ibid.*, p. 12

321 Suryatno Kartodirjo, “Gaya hidup dan Istri simpanan” (Lifestyles and Mistresses), *Matra* 72 (July 1992), p.69

322 Tiwon, “Models and Maniacs: Articulating the Female in Indonesia,” in L.J. Sears (ed),

323 Pimpinan Pusat ‘Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan ‘Aisyiyah*, p. 12.

helped their parents in harvesting rice, and in the kitchen. Early marriage for women was common. A girl moved from obeying her parents, especially her father, to obeying her husband and in-laws. Dependency and obedience were praised. From beginning to end, almost all decisions were made for her. Understanding this helps the reader to grasp the basic condition of women in the period before 'Aisyiyah was established. In light of this background I will discuss and set out the situation of Muslim women in the early years of twentieth century as follows:

a. Women and Culture

Various proverbs against women demonstrate that women's role was very limited and less than fully respected. An aphorism such as "*Suwarga nunut neraka katut*" ("Following husband to heaven or hell") suggests that women were not seen as having a right to consult their own will and that they were dependent on men for their entire happiness. This implies that a woman was unable to work or pursue a career without her husband's help.³²⁴ The status of women formed an integral part of a social ideology which demanded that women's bodies symbolize the rejection of an imposed alien culture by maintaining traditional customs, such as veiling, deprecating female opinions, and subordinating them to all male members of the family.

The proverb reflects a form of male society and male control. Men dominated the public sphere, the economic, politic, and social life outside the household and women, dependant and powerless, were relegated solely to the domestic realm of home and family, as useful adjuncts of male comfort and convenience.

Furthermore, cultural values related to women's sexuality, which reflected the inequality of gender, very much influenced the

324 Suratmin, SF, *Nyai Ahmad Dahlan*, (Jakarta: Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Traditional, 1982), p.67

formulation of law in Indonesia. It can be presumed that when the law has already put women in an unequal position, in certain situations it will neglect women's interest altogether. Women were ignorant not only of outside affairs, but also of their legal rights in terms of marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Society was sharply segregated into male and female, with maleness emphasized by social markers such as beards while feminine sexuality was totally obscured. Roles were clearly defined; the man was the family provider and the sole source of authority; the woman was the homemaker and nurturer. Her sole legacy was the inculcation of traditional values in future generations.

It is evident that women have been more closely associated with the family than men in most cultures. In Mary Ann Tetreault's discussion of the situation of women in Africa and Asia, she concluded that women, as primary producers, are essential for the state to be successful, yet women are, and are perceived to be, biologically bound to human reproduction in ways that men are not.³²⁵ The physical facts of pregnancy and lactation are often understood as necessarily as embedding women in the private subsistence economy of the household. Women rarely have been viewed as substantial agents in the public square. Therefore, the personification of women as individuals, or as members of the same kinds of social groups into which men are categorized, is thereby blurred or even negated.³²⁶

In short, the ideal Indonesian woman is self-effacing, meek, passive, and obedient to the male members of the family, sexually shy and modest, self-sacrificing and nurturing, finding her true vocation in marriage and motherhood. Ignorance and upbringing hindered Indonesian Muslim women from working, or even appearing, in public places.

However, the Kauman villages called "Kampung Kauman", situated near the palace of the sultan, were famed as residences of

³²⁵ Mary Ann Tetreault, *Women in Revolution in Africa, Asia, and The New World*,
³²⁶ See Mary Ann Tetreault, *ibid*

the pious,³²⁷ and it was here that Muhammadiyah and ‘Aisyiyah were founded. Here there were some very limited opportunities for women to assume public roles. Unusually the women of Kauman communities were permitted to attend the *pengajian* (religious meeting) in the Agung mosque or in the houses of the *Kyai* (the religious leader). *Pengajian* was performed weekly after *subuh* prayer or on other certain and special occasions, such as an Islamic holiday, a wedding, a *kitanan* (circumcision), and so on.

The traditional Kauman village was the center of a *pengajian* that gathered at some *ulama’s* and *kyai’s* home. These *Kyais* were automatically teachers at the *pengajian*. The students were not only men but also children and women. And the students were not just from the Kauman community but also from outside the village. Because of the *pengajian*, the Kauman village thus was a lively center of faith. And the door there was open, at least a crack, to women.

The above discussion is an invaluable demonstration of the problematic nature of the Indonesian Muslim womanhood. The next sections will discuss the ways in which education influenced the construction of womanhood.

b. Women and Education

Education can be used both as an instrument for equality and as an indicator of women’s development. However, in this era the image of women was only domestic; hence they were never given a really good education. Girls stayed only until the third grade at primary school. Even daughters of the *santri* (religious teacher) did not receive formal education, although they were taught to recite the Qur’an at home. They were not married until around fifteen or sixteen and tended to be held in high esteem by their spouses. However, *priyayi* girl children

327 Peacock, James L., *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam*, P.30

might go up to the level of HIS (Holland Indische School), which was regarded as an improvement. However, from the age of twelve they were kept at home, where they had little to do, as there were many servants. After marrying in their mid-teens, they continued to live a life of confinement.³²⁸ Furthermore, child marriages were possible in all classes. The rationale behind the promotion of such unions was to prevent a girl from choosing according to the dictates of her heart rather than reason.³²⁹ In this regards, Jacqueline Van Voris writes in her book *Carrie Chapman Catt*:

They are in revolt of mind but, poor little prisoners, they do not know what to do. They went to a Dutch school but were taken away at about twelve, for after that it is wrong for a woman to be seen in public. Soon they will be married to some man they have never seen. If breaking windows could liberate our sex, we ought to smash every one in the world.³³⁰

However, attitudes towards female education varied not only from family to family, but from region to region. In general, family life was kept very private; women were quite secluded, even in the Kauman communities. Also in the Kauman communities until about 1900, education at school for children of either gender was not regarded as important. At that time, the culture of Kauman communities regarded someone who attended a government school as a *Kafir* or *Nasrani* because they assumed that government schools would teach their children about something not permissible in Islam.³³¹ It is not difficult to see how easily “religion” could be used as an excuse to justify the exclusion of women from the educational process.

Furthermore, not all children could even enter school, which was

328 See Cora Vreede-De Stuers, *The Indonesian Women*, p. 52

329 *Ibid.*, p. 52

330 Jacqueline Van Voris, *Carrie Chapman Catt: A Public Life* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1987), p. 94

331 Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan 'Aisyiyah*, p.13

limited largely to children of civil servants, *priyayi*, or the rich.³³²

And what might be barely tolerated for boys was completely unacceptable for girls. The Kauman feared the moral consequences if girls spent the whole day with boys.³³³ In the Kauman community, the parents did not even allow their daughters to play with boys, so the thought of them spending a whole day with them away from parental supervision was intolerable. Older girls especially were discouraged from going to school in order to save them from the spectre of losing their virginity, and the humiliation of unwanted pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births. Consequently, most daughters ended up not going to school at all. Even if a girl was permitted to go to school, only a small percentage enjoyed an elementary and secondary education.

A fundamental obstacle, besides the fears of undue contact with boys, was the parental conviction that a girl's only goal was to prepare for and succeed in getting married and that formal education was thus utterly unnecessary for a woman.³³⁴

Most parents did not understand that a formal education would give girls knowledge and education which they simply could not get at home and did not realize that a formal education would help girls to develop their ability to perform better as a wife and mother. It is also undeniable that girls had greater domestic responsibilities than boys in the family, which allowed less time for their school work. Parents preferred sending their sons to school, as the need for educating boys instead of girls was more obvious.

The basic education system that Kauman communities had at that time was traditionally that given by parents at home. The main education was in religion courses: *Shalat* and recitation of the Qur'an

³³² *Ibid*, p.13.

³³³ *Ibid*.

³³⁴ See Suratmin SF, *Nyai Ahmad Dahlan: Pahlawan Nasional, Amal dan Perjuangannya* (Yogyakarta: Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah, 1990)

was the first requirement for a child, whether a boy or a girl.

A girl would be taught to recite the Qur'an, as well as the basic principles of Islamic law, but generally, girls were not taught how to write. It was argued that writing for a girl is *haram* and would lead to immorality. The fear was that a girl could write a letter to a boy, and that this could lead her to do something impermissible. Beside a basic knowledge of religion, a girl was trained to do housework and help her mother at home by cooking, washing, cleaning, and caring for younger sisters or brothers. This was the real training for her future. Beside all this, in some cases girls were also trained for appropriate female professions, such as sewing, *menyulam* (embroidery) and *membatik*. This last, interestingly, proved a particularly significant one for improving the later role and status of women. There, at least, mothers could own and manage businesses and as a result their husband and the children could obtain honorary titles.³³⁵ In Indonesian society, the title is an important social category. The profession of *membatik* was also a highly lucrative one. It appears that Muhammadiyah/⁶Aisyiyah had a very strong following among the batik entrepreneurs/traders.

Boys were given many more educational opportunities than girls. A boy was taught how to read the Qur'an, write Arabic and Javanese, and was given more instruction about religion. However, in certain special cases, depending on the *Kyai* (Religious leader, another small door would open for girls in the Kauman community. Some would allow not just boys to study the Qur'an at the *Kyai's* house) or *Langgar* (small mosque) but also some girls were permitted to study religion as well at certain levels. Among the *Kyais* who would teach girls were K.H. Muhammad Padhil, the father of Nyai Ahmad

³³⁵ Commonly these businesses were managed from home. See Sudarmono, *The Appearance of Batik Merchants in Laweyan at the Beginning of the 20th Century*, unpublished Master's thesis, (Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University, 1987).

Dahlan; K.H. Khatib Tengah; K.H. Khatib Wetan; K.H. Muhammad Nur; K.H. Mat Pekkih, and few others. The main course was given in the *pengajian* was how to read Qur'an. A girl's education was, however, regarded as complete once she knew how to read the Qur'an fluently. However, a boy was allowed to continue his study in a *pondok* (religious boarding school). It was common for a boy, in order to advance his study in religion, to live for some time in the *pondok*. Also the *Kyais* who taught religion at home would have graduated from a *pondok*.

In education, it seems clear that despite their reputation for piety, the Kauman community did not grant sufficient opportunities for women to study. Actually, Islam encourages both men and women to pursue knowledge. Everyone has the right to an education, both females and males. Education for women is regarded as an integral dimension of social development.³³⁶ There is no priority for men over women. Both are equally encouraged to acquire education "from the cradle to the grave."³³⁷

For instance, in the notes of Imam Bukhari, the Prophet's wife, Aisyah binti Abi Bakrra, praises the women who were always studying: "The greatest women are those of the Anshar; the women who are never ashamed to always be studying about religion."³³⁸ And there is also the account of the woman went to the Prophet for advice. She said, "You are always surrounded by men, so appoint a day for us." The Prophet promised to do so and went to them and taught them.³³⁹

It is important for every woman to have knowledge, for the sake both of her household and for the society in which she lives. Education in itself cannot be a source of harm, and it is almost impossible for

336 S.A.A. Maududi, *Purdah and the Status of Women in Islam* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications Ltd, 1976), p.152

337 Fida Husain Malik, *Wives of the Prophet* (Lahore, Pakistan: S.H.Muhammad Ashraf, 1979), p.47

338 Riwayat Bukhary, as quoted by Abdurrahman I.DoI, *Women in Syaria'h (Islamic Law)* (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Noordeen, 1990), p. 138

339 *Ibid*

ignorance not to have harmful consequences. Nonetheless, it is important to stress that, because Islam recognizes that women are in principle wives and mothers, they should place special emphasis on seeking knowledge in those branches which could help them in those particular spheres.³⁴⁰ It is undeniable, however, that women who are educated know their rights much better than uneducated women, and educated women are in a better position than others to avail themselves of their rights, and to demand more justice.

However, in early twentieth century Kauman communities, only a boy was given the freedom to study more broadly and to stay as long as he could at the *pondok*. Girls were not permitted to advance their knowledge about religion at the *pondok*. Thus it can be argued that the source of educational deprivation and the social underestimation of women was basically a reflection of traditional beliefs and customary practices. And without women's full and active participation in education and development programs, their success could not be far-reaching.

Education and training play an important role in combating gender discrimination, providing women with the opportunity to break out of old molds and to become more competitive in the public place. Thus Vreede-De Stues declares that the early women's organizations saw that the way to improve the position of women was through education, and thus they "flung open the doors of the domestic prison in which women of the middle and upper classes were imprisoned like birds."³⁴¹ Equally significant is the fact that the impetus for change came from Indonesian women's organizations. These reforms, however, occurred because of the fact that traditional social cultural norms were seen to discourage women from seeking redress of their legal rights. In term of the Islamic framework, the

340 S.A.A, Maududi, *Purdah and Status of Women in Islam*, p.152

341 Cora Vreede-de Stuer, *The Indonesian Women: Struggle and Achievement*, 1960, pp.64-67

‘Aisyiyah model decreases women’s subordination by treating Islam as a dynamic civilization, able to adapt to changing conditions, by reinforcing specific aspects of Islamist gender discourses and by elaborating on those aspects of women’s roles which leads to a strengthening of women’s power and authority.

Furthermore, beside education and culture, there was also another issue, “religion,” that affected women’s position in the early twentieth century, which we will discuss in the next section.

c. Women and Religion

The view that women did not understand the meaning of the Qur’an was based on the fact that they were only taught how to read the Qur’an and to recite the short *surahs*, but women did not have deeper knowledge of the religion for example, *fiqh* (Islamic Law), *aqaid* (belief), *tarikh* (Islamic history), and *nahwu* (grammar). They also learned about religion and ethics basically through songs and prayers.

Because of the general backwardness of women in that time, some women appeared as pioneers for the women’s movement, including Nyai Ahmad Dahlan (the founder of ‘Aisyiyah). In this she was supported by her husband. Her husband, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, came to be completely convinced that Islam should give an equal position to women and men, based on his reading of some *ayah* (verses) in the Qur’an, and some Hadith. For instance, in the Qur’an, he found the *surah an-Nahl*, *ayah* 97, that mentions the position of women in Islam, and he used this *surah* as the foundational justification for the ‘Aisyiyah organization. This *ayah* explained: “Whoever works righteousness, man or women, and has faith, Verily, to him will We give a new life.”³⁴²

Despite Islamic teachings that give women the same position as

³⁴² Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Qur’an, Text, Translation and commentary*, Surah An-Nahl, *ayah* 97, Elmhurst, New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, Inc, 2001. But this is only an example; in the Qur’an many *ayah* describe the position of women as equal to that of men. See, for instance: Q. 23:40, Q. 4:124, Q. 33:35, Q. 9:71, and Q. 2:187

men, with the same rights and responsibilities, Dahlan, like many others since, recognized that the reality in many Muslim societies was and still is that the position of women is subordinate to that of men, and that limited opportunities and rights are given to women. Like Muslim women in other countries, Indonesian Muslim women have been subject to denigrating interpretations of their status. However, this is not in accord with Islamic teaching. Qurais Shihab defines how Islam teaches women's equality in terms of their humanity:

There is no difference between one person and another, whether they are women or men, so that both sexes are allowed to work in various fields in or outside the household, individually or with other people, in public or private institution, as long as they need the employment or they are needed by it...³⁴³

Likewise the responsibilities given to women did not conform to Islamic teaching. And according to Farzaneh Milani, a scholar of comparative literature: "Women experience their confinement not only metaphorically and mystically but also spatially, physically, and verbally in their social segregation, cultural confinement, and enforced silence."³⁴⁴ In the Qur'an itself there are no injunctions which are detrimental to women. Rather, it is cultural practice which has adversely affected gender relations and which favors men. This is why Muslim women living under Islamic Law in different cultures can live in such very different positions of subordination or dominance.

If we return to Islam as a way of life and the source of solutions, the place of women has become the first battleground to prove one's renewed religiosity: it has become the easiest measure of a society's return to the faith.

³⁴³ Qurais Shihab, *Membumikan Al Qur'an (Bringing the Qur'an Back to Earth)* (Bandung: Mizan Publication, 199), p.280

³⁴⁴ Farzaneh Milani, "Unveiling the Other: Forugh Farrokhzad" in *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*, Syracuse University Press, 1991, p.7.

In the early twentieth century, Kauman village women were not participating in social life, even though it was one of women's rights and responsibilities, for they did not realize this: they had not been taught their duties of study, education and full participation.

Nyai Ahmad Dahlan has described Islamic teaching in this period as very backward and much tainted by pre-Islamic influences:

The view of Islam which guaranteed an equal position between women and men (there are only differences in some matters) was disregarded (in those times), and the teaching of the Qur'an which gives the guidelines as to how women actually have to behave in house and the society were rejected and became a dead word.³⁴⁵

These attitudes shape the minds of both women and men, giving them unquestioned concepts that may further affect their development as mature adults. These religious and cultural values have also considerably affected the role and position of women, women's perceptions of themselves, and women's development. The birth of Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah was the direct and result of the situations that we discussed before. For K.H.Ahmad Dahlan, there was no other alternative but to respond to the challenge. This will be discussed in the next section.

3. The Founding of Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah and the Realization of What Was Needed for Women

K.A.Dahlan, as an Indonesian Muslim reformer, was well aware that he was in need of a strategy to meet the challenge of backwardness and Western domination in Indonesian Muslim society. He founded Muhammadiyah 1912 in Yogyakarta, to respond to the Islamization problem.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ As quoted in Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.66

³⁴⁶ K.H.Ahmad Dahlan introduced changes and reforms and improved the traditional activities intended to uphold Islam.

The Muhammadiyah movement viewed itself as having a God-given moral duty to preserve the existence of Islam in the region by introducing reform ideas, because according to Kyai H. Ahmad Dahlan, the only way to bring about improvements in conditions for Muslims was to return to the true principles of Islamic teaching. He thus sought to purify Islamic rituals of any accretions of non-Islamic practices and ideas.³⁴⁷

Again, it must be noted that at that time the vast majority of Indonesian Muslims still practiced Islam with some admixture of local customs and beliefs, thus resisting change in a distorted interpretation of Islam. This “interpretational error” was identified by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and his followers as being in need of dramatic correction. Dahlan’s emphasis in founding Muhammadiyah was in the creation of a new social structure which would transform the Islamic values embodied in the Qur’an and Sunnah into an Islamic culture which would serve as a model for the development of a modern Indonesian society.³⁴⁸ In Dahlan’s view, “interpretational error” had caused the backwardness of the *Ummah* (Islamic community).

For Dahlan, there was no other alternative but to respond to the challenge of syncretism as well as modernization. Muslims would have to arrange their way of life according both to the spirit of Islam and the requirements of science and civilization. His response to these twin challenges was to establish an organization that would cleanse Javanese Islam of the admixture of local customs and beliefs and strip away superstition. Thus, one of the most important reasons for the birth of the Muhammadiyah was a response to the “impurities” that had long been rooted in the society created by the *priyayi* culture. And the birth of Muhammadiyah was a challenge presented to the

347 See Peacock, James L., *The Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam*.

348 Thus, for Alfian, the Muhammadiyah, has at least a three fold role: “As a religious reform movement, as an agent of social change, and as a political force.” See Alfian, *Muhammadiyah*, p.178

Indonesian people in general and Indonesian Muslims in particular.

In other words, Muhammadiyah sought to free the Muslim community and the Indonesian peoples from the snares of colonialism, conservatism, dogmatism, formalism, traditionalism, and isolationism.³⁴⁹ And alongside this came the birth of 'Aisyiyah, motivated by a desire to improve Muslim women's conditions.

The establishment of educational institutions was the main concern of Dahlan and the central aim of the organization. In order for Dahlan to escalate his educational program and to advance Islamic quality, he established *Muallimin* (male teachers) and *Muallimat* (female teachers) schools in which the instructors for the Muhammadiyah elementary and secondary schools were trained. Dahlan also set up *Mubalighin* (male preachers) and *Mubalighat* (female preachers) schools equivalent to other secondary schools.³⁵⁰ Muhammadiyah's social activities were not, of course, restricted to women and schools. It has also established hundreds of clinics, and some pharmacies and orphanages throughout the archipelago.³⁵¹ Muhammadiyah also publishes books, as well as organizing farming cooperatives, factories, and other instruments of development.

While the organizational achievements of the Muhammadiyah are impressive, one may well follow the account of Solichin Salam in singling out feminism and education as two of its culturally noteworthy developments.³⁵²

It was the situation of women which challenged K.H.Ahmad Dahlan, and inspired him to seek to improve the position of women and to think deeply about how to empower women. Thus 'Aisyiyah was founded, initiated by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan with the support of

349 Salam, Solichin, *Muhammadiyah dan Kebangunan Islam di Indonesia* (Jakarta: N.V. Mega, 1965), p.54

350 Mukti Ali, "The Muhammadiyah Movement," pp.50-55.

351 James L. Peacock, *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam*, P.53

352 *Ibid*, p.51

his wife, Siti Walidah, better known as Nyai Ahmad Dahlan.³⁵³

Like other reformers of the day, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, sought to defend the nation and religion by gathering the *ilmu* (knowledge), property, and strength of the people. The Dahlans believed in education as the door to change. Therefore, K.H.Ahmad Dahlan initiated the establishment of 'Aisyiyah and started the work by recruiting six girls and giving them the necessary training and education to become the first leaders of their forthcoming organization. The six girls were Siti Bariyah, Siti Dawimah, Siti Dalalah, Siti Busro, Siti Wadingah and Siti Badillah.³⁵⁴

On April 22, 1917 'Aisyiyah was formally born, with these six girls as the core of its first leadership; Siti Bariyah and Siti Badillah were to become its first chairperson and secretary, respectively.³⁵⁵

The 'Aisyiyah organization was first introduced into the urban communities of Laweyan and Kauman in Yogyakarta; like Kauman, Laweyan is a community where the position of mothers is very important as a conferrer of titles, and where entrepreneurial women can acquire wealth. The active role of 'Aisyiyah women and the social recognition of their importance protected them from being exploited. This differed from the custom of the *priyayi* in the upper-class community, in which the husband was the only decision-maker, while the wife merely followed. As was generally the case with people living in Kauman Yogyakarta, Siti Walidah during her childhood learned to read Al-Qur'an and religious books in the Javanese language. Like other young girls at that time, she was confined and not allowed to associate with boys or attend school. The mere ability to read the holy Qur'an and the observance of religious duties were considered sufficient for her. But after she

³⁵³ Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, whose maiden name was Siti Walidah, was born in Kauman, Yogyakarta, in 1872. Her father, Kyai Penghulu Haji Muhammad Fadli, was a teacher and Muslim scholar.

³⁵⁴ See Alfian, *Muhammadiyah*, pp.171-172

³⁵⁵ Alfian, *Muhammadiyah*, p. 172

became the wife of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, she followed all of her husband's teachings, particularly those concerning women.

K.H. Ahmad Dahlan organized a *pengajian* in his home, as well as teaching at other *pengajian*. Through these *pengajian* he spread his reformist ideas, teaching his students about pure Islamic teaching and the genuine spirit of Islam. Furthermore, Dahlan insisted that to be devout or faithful is very important in building character and thus transforming the whole society. In his efforts, Dahlan began by training students from the Kauman community. This *pengajian* was the foundation stone for building his organization. From this base, he motivated his close friends and students to work together more organizationally. His broad and rational teachings and engaging personality inspired his students to enliven and develop other *pengajians*. From this early beginning Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah arose and have evolved into prominence in Indonesia.

As mentioned, the Kauman community was economically powerful and Dahlan was very successful in inspiring the Kauman community to increase both in its charitable life and its devotion. The economic factor was very important in attracting the larger society toward becoming more devout, because of the perceived connection with prosperity. The strong religious spirit was also a factor in encouraging people to be charitable, out of a religious obligation. The wealth and hospitality of the community served as a tool in providing the organization the stable base and support that it needed. These factors not only supported Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah in their inception, but also accounted for the influence of both these organizations as they developed in this period.

Nyai Ahmad Dalan followed in her husband's footsteps in promoting Muhammadiyah, thereby increasing her knowledge and experience and affording her an opportunity to be useful. Thus,

almost ironically, as a dutiful wife to her Muslim scholar husband and as a pious woman, Nyai Ahmad Dahlan broke with conservative beliefs and fought to help women move forward, in order not to lag behind the men. Her aspirations and achievements inspired innumerable women. After Dahlan's death, she carried on the work of her husband in developing Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah.

Nyai Ahmad Dahlan and K.H. Ahmad Dahlan faced an initially difficult situation in founding 'Aisyiyah, because socially women were very weak and did not have enough education. However, Nyai Ahmad Dahlan did not give up, laboring continually to educate and empower women. She built a temporary school in front of her home and used very simple equipment in teaching. At first, the students would just sit on mats, or on seats made from used boxes and empty oil cans. However, these deficiencies did not stop her from seeking to empower the women and children she was teaching. Her goal was to expand and improve women's participation in, and responsibilities to, family and community development, and to ensure that more opportunity be given to them to enhance their roles as mothers as well as decision and policy makers. Nyai Ahmad Dahlan argued for the need to train young Muslim women to take on leadership position within groups and organizations that would advocate women's rights. She was convinced that women must challenge not only the political and religious authorities who ruled over them but the deeply-rooted cultural values and mores that were instrumental in defining their self-identities.

Dahlan's serious interest in 'Aisyiyah led him to do much for it, as can be seen from his action in sending three girls to public Kweekschool to obtain knowledge of secular subjects, after having had their religious training. These girls were groomed and recruited by Dahlan to make them the cadres for the establishment of 'Aisyiyah's

own Kweekschool for girls (known as *Mu'allimat*). The goal was successfully achieved in 1924 with the opening of that school. Nyai Ahmad Dahlan was the first to establish a *pondok* (Muslim boarding School) for girls in Indonesia; before this, the *pondok* was intended only for boys. She used her own house as a dormitory for girls, especially for those studying at the *Mu'allimat* Muslim girls' school Mulo, and the teachers' college, including those hailing from other areas such as Bandung and Bukit Tinggi. She believed that a woman needed to be educated in order to have an understanding of her own will.³⁵⁶ Her goal was that 'Aisyiyah would concentrate on religious, educational, and social activities among the Muslim women, just as Muhammadiyah did among the men. 'Aisyiyah was to have its own *muballighat* (women propagators), religious training courses, and a cadre-school. Facilitating access to education, and promoting the rights of women were thus the inherent in the goals of 'Aisyiyah.

'Aisyiyah also sought to extend Islamic practices in concrete ways. For example, it prescribed a head-dress for its members that left the face bare but covered the head and the neck.³⁵⁷ This partial veiling occurred during the twentieth century in a culture where most Muslim women had previously not worn any head-covering. Thus it became clear that, perhaps ironically, religious reform for women might bring some restrictions on their legal rights and dress on one hands, while simultaneously providing more opportunities for education and participation in religious activities, as in women's mosques, on the other.³⁵⁸

Before 'Aisyiyah was founded, although R.A Kartini's ideas about the woman's movement had already spread throughout the

³⁵⁶ See Suratmin S.F, *Nyai Ahmad Dahlan: Pahlawan Nasional, Amal dan Perjuangannya*, 1990

³⁵⁷ This issue of the head-dress or *hijab* has been controversial in Indonesia to the present day. Indonesia is a pluralist society and Muslims come from many different backgrounds. Many scholars there have argued that there is nothing in the Qur'an that requires Muslims women to wear the *hijab*, whereas in many Muslim countries, it is considered the obvious duty of a Muslim woman to do so.

³⁵⁸ See Cora Vreede-de Stuers, *Indonesian Women: Struggle and Achievement*, 1960

country, the situation had changed only a little in education, and not at all in decision making. The proverb “*Swargo nunut, neraka katut*” (“Following to hell or heaven”) was still normative, and if a woman’s husband was a doctor, she was called “*ibu doctor*” (Mrs. Doctor). However, after ‘Aisyiyah was founded, the Muslim woman was encouraged not to use the title of her husband.

The proverb “*Swargo nunut neraka katut,*” was resisted; this view was regarded as out of date and not in accord with Islamic teaching. The Muslim woman, according to Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, was to find a balance between her role in the home and her participation in public society and politics.

‘Aisyiyah has made an impact by its emphasis on the mother’s role as an educator, as well as on the need for women to be economically independent and make decisions on their own. The fact that the Kauman women had been permitted to attend *pengajian* meant that these women had not merely a role only at home and were otherwise isolated from social life. By attending the *pengajian*, women had learned something of how to communicate with one another and to develop their religious and social knowledge. These activities impacted the development processes of the position of Muslim women and also occurred simultaneously with a growing self-mobilization among women in the Kauman village. They were thus, perhaps, the ideal women to whom to introduce the reformist ideas of the Dahlans.

A description of active ‘Aisyiyah women at about the time of the organization’s establishment portrays these women as traders, businesswomen, large-scale merchants and members of the emerging middle-class society in the early twentieth century; not at all the kind of women who follow or who were socially attached only through their husbands’ position and status. However, in formal education

they were the same as other women at that time.

Although both Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah organizations helped to develop the nation through the advancement of knowledge of all kinds, the main goal in establishing Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah was to spread Islamic teaching. Nyai Ahmad Dahlan faced multiple tasks that were necessary in balancing old and new ideologies, and breaking into new areas of knowledge. Finding ways to accomplish this task without open conflict required sensitivity and strategy. With this in mind, 'Aisyiyah strove to advance the education and teaching of women, to enable them to join men in the moral and material development of society, to attain a just and prosperous society blessed by God's grace or *baldatun toyyibatun warobbun ghofur*.³⁵⁹

Nyai Ahmad Dahlan's views about the role of women were realistic: they should be a support and not a burden to their husbands in their struggle. Her opinion reflects the general view of Muslim women in the present time, who aspire for bigger social roles for women. In her last public message in 1946, she stated:

The Dutch who have colonized Indonesia are driven away, but the Japanese occupation forces have posed an even greater danger. However, thanks to the nation's struggle, Indonesia has gained her independence. And it is the duty of all of you to foster and maintain what has been achieved so far through that struggle.³⁶⁰

Wishing for the female character to be developed on the basis of the religion of Islam, in the interest of family life, she set forth her basic dicta:

1. The family is a fundamental institution in the Community;
2. If the family is good, the community will also be good.

³⁵⁹ KOWANI, *Sejarah Setengah abad Kesatuan Pergerakan Wanita Indonesia, (Half a Century of Unity of the Indonesian Women's Organizations)*, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1986, p. 47.

³⁶⁰ As quoted in Mirdiati, Diati Ganis, Kartini Sabekti, and Sabarish, *The Women of Indonesia*, Jakarta: Department of Information Republic of Indonesia, in cooperation with the Office of the Minister of State for the Role of Women, 1985.

Nyai Ahmad understood that women are, more than men, viewed as the harbingers of the future of society. ‘Asiyah women took serious note of Nyai Ahmad Dahlan’s view in appropriating her ideas. As tradition and modernity are conceptualized, women tend to be identified as the keepers of tradition and the guardians of those institutions, domains, values, and practices that are most closely linked to tradition. The idea that women are the guardians of tradition has served to reify some of the most regressive aspects of tradition and to reinforce an essentialized vision of womanhood. This does not confine them conceptually to the past, however, because their duty is to maintain continuity with the imagined moral values of the ancestral past and to transmit them to future generations. Particularly in their role as mothers, they are considered to hold the moral fate of the nation in their hands.

‘Aisyiah women were encouraged by a tradition promoted by reformist Islam that women could serve their communities and God by becoming educated and working outside the home. ‘Aisyiah created a cadre of women leaders who were able to focus solely on securing women’s right and education. ‘Aisyiah also advocated an Islamist reformist orientation, emphasizing the reinterpretation of Qur’anic passages on women.

‘Aisyiah demanded empowerment within the changing the status of Muslim women in Indonesia. We will discuss these efforts in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

THE ISLAMIC WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: 'AISYIYAH'S WORK

1. *The Establishment and Early Days of the 'Aisyiyah Movement.*

The first associations of Indonesian women extending beyond local community boundaries were formed in the 1920s. Few of these organizations were independently established and managed by women. One of the earliest and most successful was 'Aisyiyah (1917); it is also a branch of women's auxiliary of the Muhammadiyah organization,³⁶¹ the oldest and second largest Muslim organization in Indonesia after Nachlatul Ulama. 'Aisyiyah viewed the emergence of Islamic reformism in Indonesia as benefiting Indonesian women.³⁶² 'Aisyiyah's objective is to honor and revere Islam, and to promote education for women, as well as to profess pure Islam as a way to worldly and eternal happiness.³⁶³

Although 'Aisyiyah's branch organization, Muhammadiyah, the major Islamic reform movement, was founded in 1912 as an educationally and culturally oriented organization; by the time 'Aisyiyah was formed four years later Muhammadiyah "was a still, but deep, tributary of the stream of political nationalism and quietly but sustainedly nourished and strengthened that stream."³⁶⁴ If we look back to the early women's movement, Saskia Wieringa, an Indonesian feminist, argues that women's participation in the national revolution had two important consequences. First, it brought upper class women into contact with the common people.

³⁶¹ Muhammadiyah aimed to purify the Islamic faith by seeking to eradicate superstitious practices and traditional admixtures, and also to develop modern Islamic thought in Indonesia. Initially, Muhammadiyah's efforts were directed towards increasing awareness of nationalism while also encouraging women to engage in public acts. The conviction was that the most important pillar in the development and progress of Indonesian civilization would be secured by the development, progress, and advancement of women.

³⁶² Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, p.123

³⁶³ See Suratmin SF, *Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, Pahlawan Nasional, Amal dan Perjuangannya* (1990), p.73

³⁶⁴ See George Mc Turnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), p.88

Second, some women came to realize that sharing the struggle with men could not in itself bring an end to male sexism.³⁶⁵ Her argument is that some women entered the national revolution as actors with their own scripts which overlapped with those of the male leaders but were not always identical.³⁶⁶ Yet they were regarded by many men as mere appendages of the male leaders. However, for some women's organizations, including 'Aisiyiyah, support for the national revolution was one of their primary objectives. The advancement of Indonesian womanhood was deemed crucial for the achievement of the goal of nationalism and modern progress.

For several reasons, the political situation in the early women movement was highly conducive to a growing interest in organizational and political activities. Women's participation in public was ideologically important to the nationalist cause even as it contradicted the established customs of gender separation and subordination of women. Organized women have always identified areas where there is gender inequality. 'Aisiyiyah is steered by Muhammadiyah,³⁶⁷ but in general, they are expected to take care of matters considered appropriate for women. Understanding the discursive impact of the woman question and its challenge in the modern world, 'Aisiyiyah advocated reforms in education for women and in the interpretation of Islamic law in order to meet the demands of a changing world and to bring Indonesian Muslim women into conformity with the standards of the age.

Furthermore, studies on women in Islamic societies are numerous, but despite the fact that Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, it has yet to be included in the

³⁶⁵ See Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, pp.66-67

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p.87

³⁶⁷ All decisions made by 'Aisiyiyah, especially decisions made at 'Aisiyiyah annual conferences, have to be formally approved by Muhammadiyah, and this included election results. The leader of Muhammadiyah had greater authority than 'Aisiyiyah chair. This is according to most of 'Aisiyiyah's members.

comparative discussions on women in Muslim societies, which are largely dominated by scholarly works on Middle Eastern, African, and even South Asian countries. Because the dominant feminist frameworks on Islam and gender are highly influenced by research on the Arab world, there is a need for the articulation of a completely different treatment of gender in Islamic places like Indonesia and some other parts of Asia.

Recognition of this fact and dissatisfaction with it inspired several individuals and groups to advocate greater unity and cooperation as a means to achieve more autonomy and influence for women. The result of this line of thought was the founding of the 'Aisyiyah organization, which must rank as the most significant milestone in the history of the Indonesian women's movement. Although the founding groups and individuals had different immediate purposes and programs, they were all committed to the advancement of the position of Indonesian women. In addition we have to acknowledge the role of the state in Indonesia in controlling women's organizations. Governments during the colonial period and the New Order followed remarkably similar policies that came, under Suharto, to be referred to as the "floating mass notion" that the rural population should be kept out of politics. Hence the only women's organizations that were really free to flourish at the village level were those considered apolitical, such as religious organizations like 'Aisyiyah and, during the New Order, the state controlled Family Welfare Program (PKK),³⁶⁸ which was intended to promote family welfare and more generally helped implement the government's development plans,

³⁶⁸ The PKK was the government's primary tool for the purpose of incorporating poorer women into a framework that supported the government. In 1974, the PKK was institutionalized at the level of village and urban neighborhoods. For more discussion see Norma Sullivan, "Gender and Politics in Indonesia" in Malla Stevens (ed), *Why Gender Matters in Southeast Asian Politics* (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1991). The PKK was described in official literature as a "voluntary movement," consisting of about two million volunteers, mostly women, mobilized community participation in the village development activities. The leaders of PKK were wives of State officials and therefore subject to moral pressure to take on these social duties. The PKK implemented ten major programs including fostering the official State ideology of *Pancasila* and other social and welfare-related projects as directed by the office of the Minister for the Role of Women and other government agencies.

especially family planning. In the 1950s-1960s, it was politically difficult for a women's organization to organize rural working women. The government suppressed radical organizations that tried to do so, whether by the colonial government or the New Order. Only at the end of the 20th century, therefore, was it possible to organize working women in rural areas independently.

Furthermore, a revolution against the condition of women in the traditional Muslim societies is probably inevitable. I have already mentioned that Hasan Turabi said that the Islamists are urged by their own ideals to reform the traditional society and to close the gap between the fallen³⁶⁹ historical reality and desired model of ideal Islam. This is even more urgent with respect to the present state of women.³⁷⁰ Many Indonesians have claimed that Muslim women already enjoy equal rights in Indonesian society. What they really wish to say is that there is no need for women's emancipation. It is true that some women have achieved extraordinary influence in modern Indonesian society, but the vast majority of them have not. It is also true that in some parts of Indonesia women have certain freedom of movement, perhaps more than in many other parts of Southeast Asia. The degree of this freedom depends much on their family social status.

Through 'Aisyiyah and similar organizations women were represented in the early stages of the nationalist movement, but their role clearly was subsidiary. Because of the flexible nature of Islam in Indonesia and more specifically because of the influence of modernist Islamic ideas, religion could play a significant role as a vehicle for an Indonesian Muslim women's movement. Women's participation in 'Aisyiyah extended to embrace their social (private,

369 By the middle of thirteenth century C.E., many Islamic countries had fallen behind, and experienced backwardness as a result of the stagnation of intellectual activities. See Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (1968), pp.81-89. And in many Muslim societies, the social status of women, as more rigidly interpreted over the centuries, formed an integral part of this stagnation. The ideology demanded that women's bodies symbolize the rejection of an alien culture by maintaining traditional customs, such as veiling, deprecating female opinion, and subordinating women to all the male members of the family.

370 Hasan Turabi, *Women In Islam and Muslim Society* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986), p.302

family and organizational), economic and religious lives. ‘Aisyiyah ties women into a larger social sphere right up to the present day. ‘Aisyiyah also develops strategic programs for regulating the well-being of women and children in Muslim communities, such as health programs in every city around the country.

Indonesian women were aware that the significance and future of their work was to rely on education. Education was a means to an end, and in the minds of some Muslim women, such as the women of ‘Aisyiyah, the end was not just bringing up children and caring for husbands, but economic independence for women and ultimately uplifting the welfare of the human race. ‘Aisyiyah emphasized the necessity of extending “enlightenment and education” to women as well as men. Education was viewed as the key to reforming women. At the same time, however, this emphasis on education and enlightenment was applied not only to women, but to society in general. ‘Aisyiyah believed that women would lay the whole foundation for future generations.

2. The Status of ‘Aisyiyah in the Muhammadiyah organization

In the beginning, ‘Aisyiyah was the instrument of the Muhammadiyah for the purpose of developing Muslim women’s understanding of the teachings of Islam. It was important that women understand the basics of the faith, based on the “five pillars” in their most formal sense, that is, not only the recognition of the unity of God and the recognition of Muhammad as the final Prophet, but also they would know how to practice the five daily prayers, fasting during Ramadhan, paying *zakah* (the religious tax), going on a pilgrimage to Mecca, etc.³⁷¹

In addition, it was important that women know the basis of virtue

371 See Suratmin SF, *Nyai Ahmad Dahlan: Pahlawan Nasional, Amal dan Perjuangannya*, pp. 68-70

in the Qur'an and *Hadith*, and understand the prohibitions against adultery, cheating, lying and so on.

When 'Aisyiyah was founded, as part of its parent organization, it was directed by the needs of the time of its establishment. 'Aisyiyah's statutes affirmed that 'Aisyiyah was a special department of Muhammadiyah, with an autonomous position.³⁷² Initially, its organizational objectives and activities were aimed at religious education, as well as the general educational, economic and socio-cultural needs of women in the whole society. However, its activities and programs nowadays have shifted its focus to the needs of its organization's members.

In the first stage, 'Aisyiyah did not even have its own bylaws, officials or administrators; it was managed by Muhammadiyah.³⁷³ After 'Aisyiyah officially became an independent organization, it gradually developed its own administration and management, with its own staff from the national, provincial, and district levels, and began to expand outside of Yogyakarta into other cities, at first as an adjunct of Muhammadiyah, and then on its own.

In the early years Nyai Akhmad Dahlan, the wife of K.H.A Dahlan, would travel with her husband and gather the women in those places where he was organizing the Muhammadiyah.³⁷⁴

And today, 'Aisyiyah has begun to play a role in national development and, as it has expanded, its activities have adjusted to national programs, guided by the GBHN (Broad Outlines of State Policy) which require that women take part in all fields and at all levels of development. Hence women need to perform tasks beyond those of wife and mother, so as to render services in various categories of society and thus participate in the development of the

372 See 'Aisyiyah, *Anggaran Pokok dan Peraturan Rumah Tangga 'Aisyiyah* (Yogyakarta: Muhammadiyah, 1955), pp.16-32

373 *Ibid*

374 *Ibid*, p.58

nation and the community.

However, 'Aisyiyah follows the traditional gender division of labor: men (the main organization of Muhammadiyah) relate to the public sphere which includes politics, organizational policies, issues of religious law, development of macro-economic enterprises, administration of *wakaf* (a religious endowment, rather like a grant, made privately or by the government, but always designated for special uses), and government relations. Women are restricted to the home and the stereotypical women's activities of education and health. Not even the 1984 convention in Surakarta, which supposedly put more emphasis on women's role in development, has produced the hoped for changes, as women are still limited to the fields of education, health and economics.

The Muhammadiyah, as parent organization, does not object to, nor hamper, the involvement of members of the 'Aisyiyah in political organizations or government institutions, as long as this does not involve the organization's name. But if a leader in 'Aisyiyah occupies a position in a political party or in a government institution like the legislative assembly, most give up their position in the organization. Although 'Aisyiyah is the woman's branch of a larger organization, 'Aisyiyah cannot make its own decisions when it comes to the important fields of politics and religious laws. For this they must follow decisions made by the Muhammadiyah, consisting solely of men.

Furthermore, all decisions made by 'Aisyiyah, especially those made at conferences, have to be formally approved by Muhammadiyah, and this includes election results.³⁷⁵ The leader of Muhammadiyah has greater authority than 'Aisyiyah's chair. As Barorah Baried stated regarding the power of the leader of Muhammadiyah in her interview with Saskia Wieringa:

³⁷⁵ See Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, p.123

He is our counselor. If the counselor is good, he will let 'Aisyiyah, he will let 'Aisyiyah find its own way. But if the counselor is bad he can restrict 'Aisyiyah. Muhammadiyah has the right to veto our decisions but that is very rarely applied. They also can fire members of the 'Aisyiyah Board, which they have done in the past. We cannot fire them and we don't have a veto in their organization. You see, it is rather like a husband-wife relationship.³⁷⁶

In some points, 'Aisyiyah is independent in the formulation of its status, rule of association, and working programs. However, in fact 'Aisyiyah's autonomy in relation to Muhammadiyah is rather limited. While 'Aisyiyah's statutes stipulated that the organization had the rights to make and implement its own decisions, in reality it had to follow the decisions of Muhammadiyah. The parent organization (Muhammadiyah) itself no longer has any women's programs since they are all managed by 'Aisyiyah.

The socio-political reform initiated by Muhammadiyah included not only the political system, but also educational reform that attempted to juxtapose modern science and Islamic knowledge. This also opened up the opportunity for Muslim women to elevate their knowledge not just in Islamic education but also in modern science.³⁷⁷ All efforts will continue to be undertaken to sensitize and enhance the awareness of the society on decisive role of women for the social, political, and cultural transformation of the country.

3. Special Characteristics of 'Aisyiyah

The special characteristics of 'Aisyiyah are, first, as a woman organization, 'Aisyiyah is constantly seeks to promote the status and consciousness of Indonesian Muslim women for their participation

³⁷⁶ As cited in Saskia Wieringa, *Sexual Politics in Indonesia*, p. 123
³⁷⁷ *Ibid*

in nation building.³⁷⁸ It is important to recognize that because of ‘Aisyiyah, Indonesian Muslim women grew more aware of their rights in public domain. ‘Aisyiyah designs programs to increase the number and upgrade the quality of women leaders and public servants.

Secondly, ‘Aisyiyah carries out the principles of the teaching of Islam, and educates women about their legal rights and responsibilities, especially regarding the problems of women in promoting the welfare of their families and of society. Women, then, are assigned a clear role in nation-building. They are to be the nation’s cultural signifiers and the mothers/educators of the nation’s children.

Thirdly, ‘Aisyiyah stresses its programs on social and educational activities. Socially, Indonesian women still face numerous problems, such as basic women’s health issues. For instance, there is still a very high level of mortality in childbirth. ‘Aisyiyah expands health care in rural areas and improves mother-child health care system.

‘Aisyiyah’s strategy is also to empower women because women have always lagged behind men in several areas, including the political process. ‘Aisyiyah tries to change the position of women in Indonesia by attempting to address an authentic Islamic identity in the context of Islam and modernity. However, it can only be successful when there has been a complete reexamination of the primary sources of Islamic thought and praxis.³⁷⁹

‘Aisyiyah also encourages the “double role” of wife and mother as long as it does not violate the “women’s *qodradh*”.³⁸⁰ Once having achieved the status of wife, the next step for women is to

³⁷⁸ As an ‘*Orang tua*’ (respected Acehnese Ulama, Tgk. Ismail Thaib Payabujouk, the founder of Modern Islamic School in Langsa, Aceh) has said; “One of the yardsticks of civilization is woman’s place in society and the success she has attained.”

³⁷⁹ “O Mankind! Be conscious of your Sustainer, who has created you out of one living entity, and out of it created its mate, and out of the two spread abroad a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of God, in whose name you demand (your rights) from one another, and of these ties of kinship. Verily, God is ever watchful over you. (Muhammad Assad, *The Message of the Qur’an*, Gibraltar: Dar Al-Andalus, 1984) The Qur’an, 4:1.

³⁸⁰ This is a view of woman’s *qodradh*, which relates the meaning of woman’s life to marriage and childbearing. This view results in a dominant gender ideology that secures a women’s role in the family as a top priority in her life.

prove their womanliness by becoming mothers, because without that legitimization the woman's status as a wife remains in constant jeopardy. To become a mother does not mean to become any kind of mother, but to be a perfect mother (besides being, of course, a perfect wife).³⁸¹ This means on the one hand, that a mother is source of love, self-sacrifice, patience, wisdom, and faithfulness. On the other hand, she must possess some practical knowledge about nutrition, and begin education of her children. There is no necessary contradiction between affirming the sacred role of women in the home and respecting the right of women to participate in social activities outside the home.

For 'Aisyiyah, so long as the education system is governed by the spirit of Islam throughout, there will be a harmony between these two modes of social activity, permitting women to express themselves in accordance with their natural dispositions, and to be given the respect and honor which is very important for Islamic values.

Furthermore, 'Aisyiyah has always stressed the importance of improving the skills of its members in order to increase the income of their families through establishing needlework, cooking and other kinds of courses. 'Aisyiyah also supports political aspirations for its members, as women's advent in the political arena was increasingly viewed as a necessity if women were to play a key role either in elections or in parliament. For Indonesia, with a majority Muslim population, the equal status of women and their opportunity to participate in political activities is based on the legal jurisprudence of the 1945 Constitution.³⁸² But there are still a multitude of discriminatory issues facing women, with only some progress towards the goal of development being achieved

Moreover, in recent years 'Aisyiyah has participated in

³⁸¹ See Suratmin SF, *Nyai Ahmad Dahlan*, p.69

³⁸² *Undang-Undang Dasar 1945* (The Constitution of 1945), Republic of Indonesia

government programs such as national family planning, maternal and infant health, the promotion of the status of women in rural areas, and programs concerning population and environment. The activities and programs which are implemented in the regions are adjusted to the potential and the conditions of the regions. Some regions are advanced in the field of education, or in the field of preaching *tabligh*, others are economically advanced or advanced in promoting the religious community's prosperity (*Pembinaan kesejahteraan Umat*), and still others have a special focus on clinics, and hospitals.

4. The Principles, Goals, and 'Aisyiyah's Organizational Structure

One of the guiding principles of 'Aisyiyah is *Pancasila*.³⁸³ It is based on the principles of Islamic teaching, and 'Aisyiyah encourages the ongoing commitment to *Pancasila* as the Indonesian way of life, which has to be practiced correctly and consistently.

The obvious goal of 'Aisyiyah is to glorify the teaching of Islam in order to realize a prosperous Indonesian community under the guidance of God, encourage women to increase their knowledge of the Qur'an and *Sunnah*, as well as to provide other learning opportunities, to teach women to implement their knowledge, develop leadership qualities and abilities in women, assist in finding Islamic solutions to daily problems, and encourage women to get involved and make a difference. 'Aisyiyah set its goal as that of empowering women and changing their place both in the home and in society through the application of Islamic principles.

³⁸³ "The five basic principles of the Republic of Indonesia: Belief in one God Almighty; Humanity that is just and civilized; Unity of Indonesia; Democracy guided by the wisdom of representative deliberation; and Social Justice for all Indonesians." All state organizations must acknowledge these principles as their sole foundation, a requirement that was expanded in the 1980s to include all social and political organizations. For more information about how the government required organizations to put "The Pancasila" as a base principle of organization, see Robert W. Hefner, "Islamization and Democratization in Indonesia," in Robert W. Hefner and Patricia Horvatic (eds), *Islam in an Era of Nation-States: Politics and Religious Renewal in Muslim South-East Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), pp.75-127

‘Aisyiyah tries to implement, primarily, Sura Ali Imran (3) verse 104. God says: “Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, they are the ones to attain felicity.” A second significant text is Sura An-Nahl (16) verse 97. God says: “Whoever works righteousness, male or female, and has faith, verily to them We give a new good and pure life, We will bestow on them reward in accordance with the best of their deeds.”³⁸⁴

The structure of the ‘Aisyiyah organization is similar to that of the Indonesian government:

- The national level is under the leadership of the *Pimpinan Pusat ‘Aisyiyah*, PPA (the Central Board of ‘Aisyiyah).
- The provincial level is under the leadership of the *Pimpinan Wilayah ‘Aisyiyah*, PWA (the Provincial Board of ‘Aisyiyah).
- The regional and municipal level is under the leadership of the *Pimpinan Daerah ‘Aisyiyah*, PDA (the Regional Board of ‘Aisyiyah).
- The district level is under the guidance of the *Pimpinan cabang ‘Aisyiyah*, PCA (the District Board of ‘Aisyiyah).
- The sub-district level is under the guidance of *Pimpinan Ranting ‘Aisyiyah*, PRA (the sub-district Board of ‘Aisyiyah).

The ‘Aisyiyah organization has members in almost all provinces. In each of these provinces guidance for members reaches down to the village level. At this point, guidance is delegated to the leadership of the organization’s village branch, which constitutes the membership level. The largest membership can be found in the region where ‘Aisyiyah has its headquarter, which is Yogyakarta.

³⁸⁴ ‘A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an*, commentary and translation by ‘A. Yusuf Ali, Brentwood, MD: Amana Corporation, 1991.

5. The Development and Activities of 'Aisyiyah.

In order to achieve its goals, 'Aisyiyah carries out a number of activities in order to realize the teaching of Islam and to work towards advancement of the status and position of the Indonesian Muslim women in the family as well as in society. 'Aisyiyah, as a women's organization, stresses activities concerning the problems of women as a means to improve the status of women as a mother, a wife, and as a member of the society. These activities provide guidance in such fields as education, health, social welfare, economic matters and other activities related to the improvement of women's skills. Its activities and programs nowadays have shifted their focus to the needs of their organization's members. 'Aisyiyah also outline a broad program to free women from domestic confinement and raise their political, cultural and productive levels. Hence the prime focus is education, religious knowledge aiming at enhancing the role of women, and social and political activities conforming to Islamic teaching.

In the social field, 'Aisyiyah carries out such activities as assistance for orphans and disabled children; the care of the aged, the establishment of clinics, and maternity and nursery centers, and training for improving family welfare especially to overcome economic problems. As an equal partner to men, women are responsible both for the welfare of the family and the public welfare.

According to Baried, 'Aisyiyah urged women to be aware that they had the same duties as men, in running the household, building up the community and in the service of God, (so that) women who have felt Aisyiyah's guidance will realize that the important duty of women is in her home. After having managed the household successfully she will realize that she has to do the same to her society. According to her, the most suitable way to achieve this is

through working with organizations.³⁸⁵

Women's role in social development as a support in an overall development effort is also gaining in importance. Thus educated women are being urged to participate. 'Aisyiyah also contributes to Social Welfare, either through separate or joint efforts with other groups in the spirit of religious tolerance and harmony.

'Aisyiyah provides women with legal advice through the programs conducted by the Legal Awareness Cadre (*Kader Sadar Hukum*) focusing on laws relating to marriage, family welfare and labor conditions and on all regulations affecting women. In this, 'Aisyiyah works with KOWANI,³⁸⁶ the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor and the Department of Religious Affairs.

In the educational field, in attempts to modernize education, 'Aisyiyah has established a large number of formal as well as informal schools such as kindergartens and *diniyah* (religious schools) throughout Indonesia.³⁸⁷ These institutions are intended to promote the development of Islamic culture and education. 'Aisyiyah also seeks to establish vocational schools for women, schools of home-economics, nursing schools, teachers' colleges, midwives' schools and other institutions.³⁸⁸ These schools also have helped to furnish the needed teachers in places where 'Aisyiyah operates and to provide midwives and nurses for 'Aisyiyah-run maternity clinics and hospitals. Furthermore, 'Aisyiyah is offering training for midwives to become qualified nurses through a three year diploma program of the Nursing Academy, and providing continuing education to broaden the perspective of teachers while providing them additional skills relevant to their profession up to Bachelor's degree level.

385 See I.H.B Baried, "Aisyiyah and Social Changes in the Indonesian Woman's Life," *mimeo*, pp.16-17

386 The official umbrella organization for womens groups.

387 From the report by P.P 'Aisyiyah 1995, 'Aisyiyah already has 3962 kindergartens and 507 *diniyah* (religious school) around Indonesia in 1995, with thirty students each class.

388 See Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan 'Aisyiyah*, Yogyakarta: Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, 1997.

In the course of the 20th century, the government responded to pressure for the advancement of the education of girls and women by expanding educational opportunities, with the result that by the 1990s equality had almost been attained at primary school levels, although inequality increases with the level of schooling. As the need for educational reform in the post-New Order era gains support, it is likely, however, that more attention will come to be focused on the curricula and pedagogy of schooling rather than just on enrollments. The gender aspects of the education system will come under increased scrutiny from women's organizations, which are now free to raise such matters, because education has long been seen as an essential factor in development. However, the general educational level of Indonesian women is still fairly low, although girls increasingly go on to higher levels of education.

Statistics disseminated by *Bappenas* (Central Bureau of National Statistics, in 1997 concerning education and culture in Indonesia, reveal a striking imbalance between the educations of females compared to that of males. During the period from 1980-1990, the number of females attending school was incredibly low in comparison to that of males.

According to BAPENAS (Central Bureau of National Statistics), 82.1 percent of Indonesian women have not received more than an elementary school education.³⁸⁹ Mothers' level of education is mostly Elementary school (SD) or lower. Furthermore, the results also showed higher the level of education, the lower the number of female students.³⁹⁰

The 1992 National Socio Economic Survey also reveals that 67.85 percent of mothers are able to read and write the Roman alphabet and 3.12 percent are able to read and write another alphabet

³⁸⁹ See report provided by *Jakarta* May 1, 1995.

³⁹⁰ See Central Bureau of National Statistics, *Statistical Profile of Education and Culture in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997)

or writing system. The data thus suggests that almost 30 percent of mothers are illiterate.³⁹¹ The National Socio Economic Survey also reveals that only 30 percent of ever-married women have ever engaged in any social or cultural activities.³⁹²

According to BPS (Central Bureau of Statistics), of women in a workforce of approximately 80 million women, 57.8 million have an educational level of elementary school or less.³⁹³ It is apparent that the number of females attending university or having the opportunity to attend university is very low. Only 1.5 percent of Indonesian women have had a university education.³⁹⁴ If we look at results from primary school through to senior school, males dominate the education system in Indonesia.³⁹⁵

The imbalance concerning access to education, for males and females, rests on the hold of the “male oriented society,” thus, placing the importance of education for the male before the importance of education for the female. Within the “male oriented society,” the male child will become the head of the family and will be given preference, especially in the area of education, over the female. In a low income family, where money is of real concern, education will be offered to the male child and denied to the female child.

Although education is an equal right for all persons,³⁹⁶ the reality is quite different. Often, the less fortunate or lower status groups of society are not given the same opportunity for education as those of a higher status. Thus, because the social position of women in Indonesia is considered lower than that of men, their ability to access

³⁹¹ Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Profile of Mothers and Children in Indonesia*, Jakarta: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1993.

³⁹² *Ibid*

³⁹³ Report from BPS (The Central Bureau of National Statistic), 1994

³⁹⁴ Soekanto, 1999

³⁹⁵ Statistics collected from BPS (the Central Bureau of Statistic) between the years 1980-1990, show that across the board, the average rate of females attending school is much lower than that of males.

³⁹⁶ Every citizen has the same right and opportunity to obtain education as guaranteed in the Constitution (Article 31) and the National Education System Act 1989. Legally, there is no discrimination between boys and girls in entering school; the act requires that all citizens age 7 and above are obliged to undertake 9 years universal basic education from primary school through lower secondary school.

education is more restricted.

The government's dedication to education and access to education impacts greatly on the people of a nation, especially in developing countries. A lack of commitment regarding education means that not only does education become a "product" unobtainable by many, but it also has the affect of dividing the nation into two classes: the "common" class and the "educated" class. It can be said, then, that only those with money have the opportunity to go to school, as alternative methods, such as scholarships, are few.

The laws providing for equal access to education or jobs are not yet effective in dealing with the discrimination women meet in the course of their lives and careers. One of the results of lower education levels is lower understanding of health and nutrition, which are reflected in high infant mortality rates and high population growth rate, which in the end will slow the development process. And the lack of opportunity for females to attend school and have access to an education impacts heavily on their position within the social, political and economic spheres of society.³⁹⁷

From the start of the 20th century, Indonesian women were voicing their dissatisfaction about not having the same access to education as men. What was at stake here was of far-reaching significance. Women want education for a variety reasons. Access to better-paid, modern employment was an obvious attraction of schools, and although such work is by no means guaranteed by schooling, it is certainly restricted to those with the right educational qualifications. It was also hoped that staying at school longer would provide girls with more autonomy in the selection of husbands, since parents customary arranged the marriage of daughters at very young ages. Finally, women hoped that with an education they would be both better mothers and better wives,

³⁹⁷ In Parliament, only 8% of parliamentary members are female. See *Journal Perempuan*, no 23, (2002).

able to hold their own with educated husbands.

This situation challenged ‘Aisyiyah to put more focus on education. ‘Aisyiyah also realized that a strong formal education was needed to prepare youth to face the future, since their ill-educated mother could not be fully relied upon. For ‘Aisyiyah, increasing education for women is not only a matter of justice but would yield exceptional economic returns down the road.³⁹⁸ And education can also play a major role in improving the status of women and would significantly improve household health through better nutrition, lower child morbidity and mortality rates, and slower population growth. ‘Aisyiyah believes that when education succeeds it will effect social change and social justice. In this they are in full agreement with the observation of Haddad in her article “Islam, Women and Revolution in Twentieth Century Arab Though” that changes in the role and status of women seems to occur more within the context of a stable group identity.³⁹⁹

In summary, educational opportunities for women make a significant difference in the lives of women and the well-being of the whole society. An illiterate mother is indirectly affecting her capacity to increase family welfare. A better education leads to a better understanding of health, nutrition and a better way of life. Thus from an educated mother we can expect healthy, smart and good children. Education for women will increase current human capital quality and will prepare better human resources for future development.⁴⁰⁰ Education is the social basis for increasing welfare and prosperity, because through education one can acquire skills which will be used to earn a good living in the modern age. It is difficult for an under-educated society to raise its economic level in an era of

³⁹⁸ Through this change in perception education is expected to bring equality among humans, particularly between the sexes.

³⁹⁹ See Yvonne Haddad, “Islam, Women and Revolution in Twentieth Century Arab though,” in Yvonne Haddad and Ellison B. Findley, *Women, Religions, and Social Change* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985).

⁴⁰⁰ It is to appropriate to say here that the key to the situation of women is in increasing the awareness of women themselves of their rights. Thus organizations like ‘Aisyiyah remain crucial.

science and technology. 'Aisyiyah insists that investment in women will have a positive impact on the family and on the whole society.

However, success in investing in women's education depends on a multitude of critical factors beyond the classroom and the school itself: economic, social-cultural, institutional, political and institutional factors as well as human resources and school curriculum. Likewise, a person's faith and knowledge can only be obtained through their social conditions and surroundings, desires, means of livelihood and ability to work hard.

For 'Aisyiyah, education is the precise field in which in to carry out any sort of defense of women and the struggle for justice. Education is the key instrument to initiate any form of social change. Education paves the way for people to know their abilities and strengths, raises questions about preconceptions, look for truth and to struggle for the truth. Education is a strong social and political base for all women. Therefore, education has become even more important for women in this era if they are to have true, meaningful political participation. To many of the women entering to the political arena, this can only be achieved if they involved in decision making.

'Aisyiyah has constantly striven to elevate the economic standards of Muslim women. Therefore, 'Aisyiyah has organized an economic development program through *BUEKA*,⁴⁰¹ *Badan Usaha Ekonomi and Koperasi 'Aisyiyah* ('Aisyiyah's Executive Branch for Economic and Co-operatives). The program gives priority to enterprises involving co-operatives, industrial skills, "window shops,"⁴⁰² and marketing. Three of these activities are already operational down to the branch level. The enhancement of industrial skills covers handicrafts, sewing and embroidery.⁴⁰³

401 'Aisyiyah has four hundred and thirty five (435) BUEKA co-operatives throughout Indonesia.

402 "Window shops" are small shops in the homes of members where they can sell their products at any time; this is common in Indonesia and these shops are generally managed by women.

403 See Ismah Salmah, *Peran Organisasi 'Aisyiyah Dalam Mewujudkan Keluarga Sakinah Di Kalangan*

The activities of the co-operatives generally include saving and loans, renting out party equipment, and efforts to increase managerial skills. In order to improve employment for women, 'Aisiyah encourages the businesswomen among its members to increase their entrepreneurial efforts through co-operation with the government and private sector.⁴⁰⁴ 'Aisiyah also encourages the establishment of skills-training centers to prepare its members for becoming businesswomen or skilled workers.⁴⁰⁵ Therefore, by utilizing the opportunities provided directly through 'Aisiyah to improve their own standard of living, women also are participating in the development of the country. At the same time, the leadership of 'Aisiyah extols the initiative of 'Aisiyah members who have formed their own co-operatives.

This experience has shown not only the urgency of devising a new approaches to economic development but also that women's economic empowerment is an essential element in any strategy for poverty alleviation. 'Aisiyah defines economic empowerment as having access to and control over the means to make a living on a sustainable and long-term basis, and receiving the material benefits of this access and control. Such an approach, thus, goes beyond short-term goals of increasing women's access to income and looks for longer term sustainable benefits, not only in-terms of change in laws and policies than constrain women's participation in and benefits from development, but also in terms of changes in power relationships at the household, community and market levels.⁴⁰⁶

Nowadays the presence of women as one of the potentials in enhancing development is very essential. Women have double roles in development process: on the one hand as mothers/wives, they

Anggota (Jakarta: Graduate Program of women Studies University of Indonesia, 1995), p.59

404 See Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan 'Aisiyah*, pp.79-82.

405 *Ibid*

406 *Ibid*

responsible for the welfare of the family; on the other, they also serve as breadwinners. There are positive and negative impacts in these double roles. On the positive side, women can help raise the family income, which can have a positive impact on the social status of women. Furthermore, women's potential in decision making can be raised due to their increased importance. As well, women can be more autonomous so they can provide a better model for children. And finally, giving a woman a wider perspective helps her in mastering her environment.

Some negative impacts are that women are overloaded with work. In rural areas, this can be seen from the fact that many must distribute their household duties to their children and are less able to be present for their children. This can attenuate the hoped-for effect of the mother's impact on her children. However, while there are some decided challenges in these double roles, women are still making valuable contributions to their families. And 'Aisyiyah faces these challenges with an emphasis on family values and on strong faith.⁴⁰⁷

Gender equality is a central feature of sustainable human development because equal recognition for women is a sign of a just society. The concept of women's development entails the empowerment of women as equal members of a society. Additionally, upholding equality of rights is not an act of benevolence by those in political power, but a necessity for economic development in every society. Thus, gender equality as a matter of social justice and as matter of good economic policy should be considered an essential national goal in its right. Promoting the full participation of women in social and economic development is impossible without strong political commitment and fundamental changes to societal norm and values. Development can be effective only if it empowers women and

407 *Ibid*

counts them among its most important human resources. Strong basic educational skills, knowledge, and appropriate vocational and technical training of women provide the quality of human resources necessary to ensure the future economic vitality and viability of the country.

In the religious field, initially the activities of 'Aisyiyah were directed towards *pengajian* (informal Islamic teaching) in order to promote the status of Indonesian women, especially Muslim women, through introducing the principles of Islam based on the Qur'an and the *Sunna* of the Prophet. In the beginning the female religious meeting (*pengajian*) was held in the homes of members,⁴⁰⁸ it constituted a woman's social and religious network. *Pengajian* included instruction in Islamic teaching, Islamic law, and reciting the Qur'an. The news of a *pengajian* was often spread by word of mouth to neighbors, relatives and friends. These activities stressed the importance of the duties and obligations of women. Later the activities of the *pengajian* were oriented towards informal Islamic teaching in giving guidance to women in regard to their functions as a wife, as a mother, and in their responsibilities to the society.⁴⁰⁹ However, these religious meetings also mediated by everyday social and political events.

'Aisyiyah organizes many centers of religious activities for women in order to improve their knowledge and practice of the teaching of Islam based on the Qur'an and *Sunna*, since religion is regarded as one of the motivating forces for active participation in development. 'Aisyiyah provides Islamic training ranging from comprehension of Qur'anic verses to reinterpretation and updating of religious thought to conform with changing times. This education is provided through *Majlis Taklim*⁴¹⁰ or *Pengajian* from the provincial down to the village level.

408 See 'Aisyiyah, *Anggaran Pokok dan Peraturan Rumah Tangga 'Aisyiyah*, p.58

409 *Ibid*, pp.74-75

410 Coordinating institutions for Qur'an recitation or the pursuit of Qur'anic knowledge.

Like Muhammadiyah, 'Aisyiyah sought to concentrate on religious, educational, and social activities among Muslim women. It was to have its own *muballighat* (women propagators), religious training courses, and a cadre-school, *Waal-'Asri*. One interesting aspect of 'Aisyiyah's activities was its involvement in giving basic religious training to the women workers in the various cottage *batik*⁴¹¹ industries in Yogyakarta. It appears that Muhammadiyah/'Aisyiyah had a very strong following among those *batik* entrepreneurs/traders.⁴¹²

In 1978, the 'Aisyiyah Congress put forward the rural women's development program to intensify the efforts of Muhammadiyah's general family welfare program. Since then, the new program was to be implemented by using, and building upon, the traditional Qur'an reading group system. Traditionally, illiterate women have learned and memorized the holy text by participating in *pengajian* where verses of the Qur'an are recited and quoted.

The Qur'an reading groups traditionally have the following structure: first, the participants are not obliged to follow the course regularly; second, the curriculum is up to the teacher giving the lessons; third, there is no target or conclusion decided for every lesson; and finally, there is no general syllabus for every Qur'an reading group. The main purpose of these groups is to get women together for religious lessons relevant to them, at their own age and educational level.

In 1978, the 'Aisyiyah Congress had decided to initiate its new program in five areas, with ten Qur'anic reading groups in each area. Each of the fifty Qur'anic reading group sites was to have at least forty 'Aisyiyah members, thus involving a minimum of two thousand women. The emphasis would be on women between 20 and 35 years,

⁴¹¹ Cloth dyed using a wax-resistant process. Repeated dyeing with wax applied to different sections of the cloth creates intricate colored patterns. Traditional batik patterns used for sarongs for court officials in Javanese palaces are done in brown and black tones. Other regions feature different color combinations in their traditional batik cloths.

⁴¹² Alfian, *Muhammadiyah: Political Behaviour of a Muslim Modernist Organization under Dutch Colonialism* (1989), p.172

i.e. those of childbearing age.⁴¹³ The ultimate objective of the project was to provide information and training to rural women. In addition to the religious instruction of the traditional Qur'an reading group, these groups would emphasize health education, nutrition, family planning, and home economics, with the stress on skill training for income-generating activities.

During the first year of this three-year pilot project, the goal was to train 30 'Aisyiyah leaders to implement the program, to select the 50 Qur'an reading groups to participate, to encourage at least 55 percent of the non-users in these groups to accept family planning by the end of the year, and to reach at least 10,000 followers of 'Aisyiyah with family planning information. The second year of the program included an evaluation procedure, with means to communicate the results of the evaluation to the leaders of the Qur'an reading groups. The third year aimed at maintaining at least 2,500 women of childbearing age in the Qur'an reading group program and to motivate at least 500 new women in this group to accept a family planning method. In addition, the program aimed to attract at least 800 active family planning users by the end of the three years and to reach at least 5,000 more 'Aisyiyah followers with family planning information.⁴¹⁴

Having carried out this program, 'Aisyiyah realized that utilizing the Qur'an reading groups was a new and important method of rural education and development. 'Aisyiyah has expanded this program from the five original areas to other provinces, including those outside Java. Through this program, 'Aisyiyah is able to reach into rural areas and to teach members how to make their lives better, as well as that of their family and community.

The dissemination of Islamic knowledge within a family is not the only source of transmission of religious knowledge, but it has

413 See Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan 'Aisyiyah*, 1997
414 *Ibid*

extended the series of formal Islamic educational institutions. Today the practice of memorizing the Qur'an and its meaning is not found just in Muhammadiyah schools but also encouraged for children at Islamic State National School.

In the field of health care, 'Aisyiyah is aware that due to the low level of education, particularly among the women, in the villages, there is inadequate understanding and insufficient awareness among them of health problems. Superstitious beliefs also inhibit attempts to improve health conditions by modern means.

Although the development of Indonesia's economy shows great improvements, at the present stage, when annual income per-capita is still low, it will be very difficult to raise sufficient funds for development in the health sector and to offer better food and nutrition.

Therefore, 'Aisyiyah has established PKM, *Pelayanan Kesehatan Masyarakat* (Public Health Care Services) and BKIA,⁴¹⁵ *Balai Kesehatan Ibu dan Anak* (Mother and Child Health Care Centers), as well as health care programs aimed at family planning and nutritional education. BKIA founded by 'Aisyiyah are found in almost all areas of the country.⁴¹⁶ 'Aisyiyah also has a paramedic program, which was developed with two purposes: to establish a maternity hospital⁴¹⁷ and health services, and to train paramedics.⁴¹⁸ Each BKIA branch not only implements family planning programs, but also provides health and nutritional education. Earnings from BKIA go to support the organization's needs.

'Aisyiyah also participates in government health care programs like PKHA, *Proyek Kelangsungan Hidup Anak* (Project for Child Survival). This project is the product of co-operation between the

415 In 1995 'Aisyiyah already had 133 BKIA (Mothers and Child Health Care Centers) around the country.

416 See Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan 'Aisyiyah*, p.74.

417 According to the report by the Central Board of 'Aisyiyah (*Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah*) 1995, 'Aisyiyah already had established 63 clinics and 33 hospitals throughout Indonesia by that date.

418 See Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan 'Aisyiyah*, p.39

Department of Religious Affairs and UNICEF and aims at lowering infant and child mortality. PKHA also provides health and family planning education, and mass medical treatment. The PKHA project is supported by tens of thousands of motivators and thousands of supervisors who implement this program effectively.

Furthermore, 'Aisyiyah also constantly participates in government programs such as family planning and maternal and infant health. And 'Aisyiyah is the first women's organization to help really change the social image of the family planning program in Indonesia. Traditionally, family planning was thought of in a negative way in Indonesia. Religious peoples in general, and the Muhammadiyah in particular, thought that birth control was forbidden in Islam. 'Aisyiyah followed suit. In 1957, when 'Aisyiyah's representative visited the United State as a member of Indonesian women's delegation, she did not join the observation problems of the family planning activities, because family planning problems were still "taboo" among Indonesian Muslims.

When it became clear that a family planning program would be carried out by the government in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah started to discuss Islamic teaching in relation to family planning in its forum on Islamic laws. That was in 1963. The discussion concluded that family planning was justified, when medical consultation showed the mother's health required family planning.⁴¹⁹ In Islam there are also teachings involving family planning. For example, there is the teaching that the time span between one childbirth and the next should be at least 30 months, as well as the teaching that parents should not leave their children in a state of neglect, and the saying that a strong Muslim is more loved by God than a weak one. According to Islam, Muslims should be strong people--physically, mentally, economically

419 See Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah, *Sejarah Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan 'Aisyiyah*, 1997

and educationally--able to observe the religious teachings well, in order to create strong members in society. Moreover, they should be able to provide for their children and descendents.

Since then, family planning program in Indonesia have been justified by Muhammadiyah and by 'Aisyiyah as based upon Islamic teachings. One feature of family planning that is prohibited, however, is killing the fetus, or abortion. Also, family planning should, if at all possible, make use of contraceptive equipment that does not do harm to the human body, as do tubectomy or vasectomies.

In 1971, during the Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah Congresses, family planning was adopted within the framework of guiding families and insuring family welfare. Soon 'Aisyiyah began to realize the usefulness of family planning programs, since they involved family welfare in a wider scope--including health problems, nutrition, education and improved skills for the augmenting of family income. Since then, information on family planning based on Islamic law has been put forth by 'Aisyiyah. The program has been centered at 'Aisyiyah's maternity clinic and hospitals. There information on family planning is given and carried out under the supervision of 'Aisyiyah medical officials.⁴²⁰

It is obvious that family welfare is closely related to the implementation of family planning and population programs. It is imperative that Indonesian women, especially those in the rural areas, are given information and education on health care and child care to enable their offspring to develop in properly and to ensure for them a better quality of life. In this context educated religious teaching is a necessity and also in this respect the role of women is very important.

⁴²⁰ Empowering women through improving information on reproductive health and reproductive rights needs to be carried out. Reproductive health knowledge covers information about the menstrual cycle, the reproductive process, pregnancy, female reproductive infection, sexually transmitted diseases and the danger of HIV/AIDS. These topics must be introduced to the young to prevent unnecessary pregnancy and morbidity/mortality in the future.

Another ‘Aisyiyah activity is the ‘Aisyiyah rural women’s program. This program seeks the promotion of the status of women in rural areas, as well as the programs regarding issues of over-population and the environment, and special programs for family income generation. ‘Aisyiyah has been involved in the government’s IDT poverty alleviation program. IDT is the Presidential Instruction on Assistance to Less-Developed Villages (*Instruksi Presiden Desa Tertinggal*); its focus is on increasing the income of villagers through skills training and development of small-scale enterprises.

‘Aisyiyah has always stressed the importance of the position of women as mothers. It has argued that since the first education a child receives is at home, women as mothers had the greatest responsibility for the advancement of society through the child’s upbringing. A girl could easily be sent to school for her training and education, but adult women, especially at the time of the establishment of the ‘Aisyiyah, could only be trained through the willingness of their Muslim sisters to give information on anything of value to the mother. ‘Aisyiyah also paid attention to younger as well as older girls, and a special section called *Nasyiyatul ‘Aisyiyah* was founded for them.⁴²¹

To raise the economic level in rural areas, ‘Aisyiyah has implemented a program called *Qoryah Topyibah*, which aims at developing a village until it meets the criteria of a “prosperous village”, as measured by achievements in education, health, economic improvement and religious practice. ‘Aisyiyah encouraged families to provide religious education for their daughters and therefore, increased women’s access to religious learning relative to what had been available before ‘Aisyiyah began the program.

According to ‘Aisyiyah, the measure of educational success is the percentage of school-age children actually attending school.

421 Noer, *The Modernist*, p.79

Concerning health care, all women are given access to medical check-ups by the Muhammadiyah Health Care Group (*Pembinaan Kesehatan Muhammadiyah*). Every woman should have income-generating skills, while with regard to religion, every member should be able to meet her religious obligations.

And the *Qoryah Toyyibah* program is currently being extended to all provinces, with the goal that every province should have at least one such program.

One of the 'Aisyiyah's first important efforts was the building of women's mosques and prayer-houses--institutions allegedly unique to Indonesia. The first such mosque was built by 'Aisyiyah in the Kauman of Yogyakarta in 1920 (some say 1919). The women's mosque in Yogyakarta is a white building in which an old woman beats a drum, rather than calling, to signal that it is time for prayer.⁴²²

Another mosque was built by 'Aisyiyah in a Kauman village in 1922 and another was built in the Yogyakarta *santri* neighborhood of Karang Kadjen in 1923; another was built in Garut, West Java and afterwards, subsequently many such buildings were constructed throughout Java and Indonesia. The mosque offered space not only for communal prayer and learning but also for socializing.

The mosques, called Musalla 'Aisyiyah, enabled women to gather to pray together (*jama'ah*) five times a day. They also provided meeting places for 'Aisyiyah women, and were the natural centers for religious courses, and communities activities, such as the distribution of food alms (*Zakat fitrah*). This function of the Mosque as philanthropic institution is very important for the *ummah*.

All of 'Aisyiyah's activities are carried out by its boards, called *Bagian* (Bureaus) on the central, provincial, and regencial level, or *urusan* (Sections) on the district level. These bureaus are as follows:

422 See James L. Peacock, *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam*, p.51

- *Bureau for the Preaching of Islam:*

Its activities are related to the programs for preaching Islam through the founding of *pengajian*, the upgrading of *mubalighat* (women preachers), developing the character of Muslim women, and publishing a manual on how to improve the happiness of families (*Keluarga Sakinah*, literally means “tranquility”).

- *Bureau for Education and Culture:*

Its activities center on establishing infant schools named *Taman Kanak-kanak ‘Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal (TKABA)*; vocational schools of religious teaching for women, named *Ibtidaiyah* on the elementary level, *Tsanawiyah* on the secondary level, and *A’liyah* on the highest level; and establishing other vocational schools for women.

- *Bureau for the Guiding of the People’s Welfare:*

Its activities are related towards improving the welfare and health of the community through founding clinics for maternal and infant health, clinics and maternity centers, orphanages, centers for the care of the aged, and nurseries.

- *Bureau for Economic Affairs:*

Its activities are concerned with setting up ‘Aisyiyah’s Board of Economic Activities. The activities of this board are related to the cooperatives.

- *Bureau of Paramedical Training:*

Its activities are related to establishing schools for nursing, maternity nurse training programs and to other programs for paramedical training.

- *Bureau for Training Cadres:*

Its activities concern training young women of ‘Aisyiyah.

Beside the above activities, ‘Aisyiyah Press and Publication Foundation, which was founded in 1926, publishes a monthly magazine named *Suara ‘Aisyiyah*, (The Voice of ‘Aisyiyah). This is

for disseminating the organization's messages, religious preaching, legal information and news on family life in publications which are disseminated to all local branches. This is also the voice for women concerned beyond the issue of welfare, even stretching to political support for women who demand rights in the political arena. This publication is probably the oldest women's magazine in Indonesia. It has been able to survive since the time of Dutch colonization, through the period of Japanese occupation, and Indonesian independence, up to the present time.

All these 'Aisyiyah activities are financed by the funds raised by its members and through other kinds of assistance from the community, as well as from other institutions.

In all of these activities 'Aisyiyah has brought about significant kinds of social change. First, 'Aisyiyah releases housewives from bondage to the household alone. They can leave their homes to spend time at 'Aisyiyah centers, tending to their own growth and education, and to that of their children. Second, in seeking knowledge and improving themselves, 'Aisyiyah's women have developed the ability to observe their environment. They understand what it means to be active in an organization and in the public domain to improve the social environment, based on Islamic teachings. Third, they are conscious through 'Aisyiyah of the value of their role as mothers in bringing up the younger generation and implanting peace and harmony in society. Fourth, they begin to feel like subjects, not just objects. They begin to realize they can do many things. Finally, they are able to join in decisions about the problems that they are facing, because they are conscious of being involved in something larger--the society.

However, it is still the case that all decisions made by 'Aisyiyah, especially those made at conferences, have to be formally approved by Muhammadiyah, since 'Aisyiyah operates

under the auspices of Muhammadiyah.

Despite this, some positive effects of this relationship cannot be denied, especially with regard to increasing women's role in development and improving their access to benefits through complying with the government's policy on the integration of women into development.

6. 'Aisyiyah and Its Network

'Aisyiyah was one of seven women's organizations which joined in establishing the Federation of Indonesia's Women Organizations in 1928, called *Kongres Wanita Indonesia, or Kowani* (The Indonesian Women's Congress).⁴²³

After *KOWANI* was established (already 75 years ago), 'Aisyiyah was a member and constantly joined its programs with those of *KOWANI* which were not contrary to 'Aisyiyah's goal. 'Aisyiyah cooperated with all the activities of *KOWANI*'s committees. And through *KOWANI*, which is as a member of ASEAN Council of Women, 'Aisyiyah takes part in international NGO conferences. Also in order to relate to other Islamic organizations in the Asia-Pacific region, 'Aisyiyah is a member of the Regional Islamic Council for Asia and the Pacific, RICSEAP.

Together with other Islamic women organizations (Muslimat NU, Wanita Islam, Wanita Tarbiyah and others), 'Aisyiyah also has established a federation called the Conference of Indonesian Islamic Women's Organizations, BMOIWI (*Badan Musyawarah Organisasi Islam Wanita Indonesia*). The federation has widened both its national and its international scope. One example is its achievement in 1977 of obtaining government attention to women-specific issues when on pilgrimage, which had been a long-standing concern of BMOIWI. Delay of menstruation, the selection of suitable male relatives to

⁴²³ Today this women's organization coalition has branches in several parts of the country, and is on its way to becoming an alternative to the *KOWANI* as an umbrella for women's organizations.

accompany female pilgrims, the rules for pregnant women, the preparation for the pilgrimage's ceremonies, are issues specific to women pilgrims. A number of seminars were held on these topics and the outcome handed to the Department of Religious Affairs. Not long afterwards the Department published a manual for pilgrims called *Buku Pedoman Haji* (The Pilgrim's Guidebook)

In other fields, 'Aisyiyah cooperates with semi-governmental women's organizations, for example, *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*, *PKK* (Promotion of Family Welfare Program), *Yayasan sayap Ibu* (Mother's Wing Foundation or Foundation for Helping Disadvantaged Children), and *Majlis Ulama Indonesia*, *MUI* (The Indonesia Council of *Ulama*).

'Aisyiyah also cooperates with international organizations such as the Overseas Education Fund (OEF), Mobil Oil, The Pathfinder Fund, UNICEF, NOVIB, The New Century Foundation, and The Asia Foundation.

These cooperative efforts involve the preparation of fund-raising and grant proposals and making donations for facilities and equipment, to finance courses, and for attending international seminars by 'Aisyiyah delegates, as well as other activities.

7. 'Aisyiyah and Its Participation in Nation-Building and Development.

In this era of national development, 'Aisyiyah has contributed several programs in the fields of education, health, nutrition, population and environment, economic affairs, and training of women's skills. Education has become even more important for women in this era to have true, meaningful political participation. To many of the women entering into the political arena, this can only

be achieved if they are involved in decision making.⁴²⁴

Besides its educational programs, which aim at helping women who wish to have access to political power or “participation”, ‘Aisyiyah also promotes the status of Indonesian women by implementing *Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara* (Guidelines of National State Programs. The role of women in development is marked by women’s participation in “*segala bidang*” (all fields) of development as stipulated by GBHN,⁴²⁵ but with the caution that this participation does not reduce women’s role in promoting the prosperous family.⁴²⁶ And when it comes to defending the role of women in development, the Country’s Broad Guidelines of State Policy (GBHN) and Successive Long and Short Term Development Plans have been unequivocal. Women, both as citizens and as human resources for development, have equal rights and obligations with men in all sectors of development.⁴²⁷ Women have the same rights, duties and opportunities to participate in all development activities as men. The first GBHN, issued in 1973, discussed women’s role in development under the larger rubric of “Religion, Belief in God and Social Cultural Matters.”⁴²⁸

The formulation of women’s development functions in Outlines of State Policy (GBHN 1998) was influenced by the prevailing atmosphere of political and social unrest. GBHN 1998 stated that:

- a. Women are equal partners of men, but perform their development functions with reference to their nature, dignity and status as women;
- b. The socio-cultural climate should be made more conducive for

⁴²⁴ Many of women who think that they should be involved in political leadership are aware of the obstacles, especially because leadership means power, and the very word makes men feel threatened.

⁴²⁵ *Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara, GBHN* (Broad Outlines of State Policy), Jakarta, 1993

⁴²⁶ Guidance of the prosperous family is an instrument for guidance of the young generation. For the guidance of the (prosperous) family, women’s rights are guaranteed and their position in society is likewise secure

⁴²⁷ See *Indonesia Source Book 1996* (Jakarta: Indonesia National Development Information offices, 1996)

⁴²⁸ In recognition of a changing reality, the 1993 GBHN suggests the creation of a “social” cultural climate which is more supportive of the effort of raising the *harkat* (dignity) and *martabat* (status) of women to enable them to play a greater role in society and in the family in light of these factors.

women to become more active in decision-making in all fields of developments, in the family environment and in the community in a harmonious, complementary and balanced way;

- c. Efforts to improve family welfare should be increased, including through the Family Welfare Movement (PKK);
- d. Women's role in developing the community—in rural and in urban areas—in order to deal with socio-economic problems should be increased;
- e. Women should be developed as a source of employment.⁴²⁹

'Aisyiyah has been successful in implementing a number of government programs, specifically those directly related to the lives of women and their families.⁴³⁰ Experience suggests that state intervention on behalf of women can enhance women's rights and improve women's condition significantly, particularly in the field of law, economics, and education. However, the issue is complex.

From one viewpoint, the concept of women as protectors of the moral and social order was more empowering than that of women as in need of protection and seclusion from corrupting influences. It was through this latter kind of idea, however, that the State worked to co-opt women as force for political conservatism and continuity.⁴³¹ The heightening awareness amongst women of the interplay between what used to be typical women's concerns and their newer political role has brought new life to politics, and is creating a new understanding of the term.

The definition of the role of women in development has been formulated, planned and coordinated by the State Ministry for the Role of Women in line with Presidential Decree No.25, 1983.

According to the Ministry's Analysis of the Situation of Indonesian Women, women's integration in development covers the

⁴²⁹ *Garis-Garis Besar Haluan Negara, GBHN* (Broad Outlines of State Policy), 1998, Jakarta

⁴³⁰ The 1988 GBHN recognized the need for women's participation in development; **however this participation still anchored their position firmly in the family environment.**

⁴³¹ Center of Southeast Asian Studies, Working paper of Indra McCormick, *Women as Political Actors in Indonesia's New Order* (Victoria, Australia: Monash University Press, 2003), p.9

following sectors:

1. The economic sector, including labor, agriculture, services (trade, transport and communication, finance and services), natural resources and the environment, co-operatives and transmigration;
2. The socio-cultural sector, including education, health, nutrition and family planning;
3. Others sectors, including politics, government institutions, law, information, mass media and internal relations.

The Minister for Women's Affairs, Islamic preacher Tuty Alawiyah, elaborated further on the proper role for women in 1998. She told thousands of Muslim students on 23 April 1998 that women were the "pillars of the nation" (*Wanita Pilar bangsa*). She said, "[I]n addition to being wives and mothers, they are the nation's moral guardians."⁴³² This formulation reminded women that they were perceived by the State as socially conformist and firm sponsors of the status quo. Accordingly, the Minister's speech invited immediate criticism from feminist activists who argued that equal partnership rhetoric of the GBHN was preferable to one where women single-handedly shouldered the burden of responsibility for national development.

The challenge lies in giving practical effect to the national ideal of equality. That challenge is by no means confined to Indonesia, as is attested to by the continuing call for recognition and safeguarding of women's rights not just in developing nations but in advanced countries as well. Nevertheless, for Indonesia the task is perhaps more complicated than in many other parts of the world, given a country with more than 300 separate ethnic groups, each of which has its own traditions and precepts concerning the respective roles of men and women in society. Moreover, as a signatory to the United

432 "Pilar Bangsa dari Tuty," *Gatra* (May 2, 1998).

Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Indonesia has to be committed to elevating the status, rights and protection of women.

‘Aisyiyah has made significant contributions towards improving the Indonesian woman’s status, particularly with regard to her role in improving the education and the welfare of the community and Indonesian society. Through efforts to fulfill the people’s basic needs, many and considerable changes have taken place in the Muslim community as the result of the development of the educational process.

‘Aisyiyah seem to have had a significant effect on women, not only with regard to increasing their role in development and improving their access to benefits complying with government’s policy on the integration of women into development, but also particularly by emphasizing the importance of education in the family and by stressing the role of the mother.

‘Aisyiyah has certainly increased women’s social access; however it is difficult to say that ‘Aisyiyah has succeeded in increasing women’s power. According to Baried:

‘Aisyiyah is a superior kind of school for housewives, who are able to produce social changes that could release housewives from being chained only to responsibilities and duties in the household. They can leave their home to do something which is necessary to upgrade themselves to be more useful to settle their household and in the process make them conscious about their position and function as the savior of the younger generation, as the mother of society.⁴³³

From the colonial period until today, ‘Aisyiyah has been implementing development activities as best it could with its respective conditions and potentials, and has sought to embody the confirmation of women’s position in the world of men.⁴³⁴ The voices of women, as

433 I.H.B Baried, “Aisyiyah and Social Changes in the Indonesian Woman’s Life,” p.18
434 Kuntowijoyo, “Arah Pengembangan,” p.5

a component of civil society, were eliminated by a regime determined to manufacture political and social conformity. State planners employed women's organizations to promote the official ideology of "womanhood," which included an emphasis on domesticity, political conservatism and social conformity. This discourse substantially limited the public space within which women could legitimately operate. State planners considered women to be the social and moral glue in an increasingly restive social and political environment, whereas in fact, women openly flouted the official gender discourse and were at the forefront of pressure for political and social change. We are again in the middle of witnessing a women's movement to help build a more just future for Indonesia. With the greater presence of women in politics, it is hoped that policies will be formulated that will empower all kinds of people, ridding the society of cultural discrimination and putting a stop to violence against those in lower positions. 'Aisiyiyah indeed optimistically is hoping that involvement of women in larger number of areas will provide a greater opportunity for justice and prosperity for all. Indonesian women, and, indeed, the whole population will have to stand together to fight to gain this end.

As women start to perform more visible roles in society, attitudes towards women's roles tend to change on the ideological level. There is still a nation among some Muslims that women are in charge of domestic affairs, but the emphasis has shifted from regarding the home as the woman's only responsibility. Thus, it is acceptable for a Muslim woman to work outside the home, if she takes care to fulfill primary tasks inside the home first. 'Aisiyiyah has shown that effective education can begin to reshape women's consciousness and is sharpening its ability to influence the situation of women in positive ways in the face of challenges as yet to be fully met.

Chapter 4

CONCLUSION

The Muslim women's movement in Indonesia was influenced by the Islamic reform movement in the twentieth-century. The reformists tried to return to the fundamental truth of the Islamic texts and tradition, as articulated in the Qur'an and *Hadith*. The women's divisions of religious reform movements played active roles in advocating and implementing social and educational reforms. An example is 'Aisyiyah, the group founded 1917, which is the women's section of the Islamic reformist movement, the Muhammadiyah. Initially, their efforts were directed towards increasing awareness of nationalism while also encouraging women to take up public roles.

Among Indonesian Muslims it was recognized that women as well as men should acquire a religious education. The emphasis on women's education took on another dimension in the 1930s when Muslim women became actively involved in the nationalist movements. Given the prevailing attitude that women and men have an equal right to education (particularly Qur'anic education), Islam became a legitimating force for women's entry into political activity.

The establishment of Aisyiyah was intended to promote Indonesian Muslim women and to strive to return Indonesian Muslim women (*Muslimat*) to the teachings of the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. Analyzing Islamic teaching from gender perspectives was an innovative initiative to and led to change in thinking patterns on gender issues. The 'Aisyiyah movement provides a good reference point for examining the vertical and horizontal mobility of the Muslim women's movement. 'Aisyiyah seems to have had a significant effect on women, particularly by emphasizing the importance of education in the family and by stressing the role of

women in the Muslim community.

In the Muslim tradition, it is often said that women and family are the foundations of the Islamic community, the heart of Muslim society. That centrality is reflected in Islamic law, the ideal blue-print for a Muslim society, within which family law has often seemed sacrosanct. The Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet provide the textual sources for the development of law. The word of God, however, is interpreted and applied in socio-historical contexts by human beings. Cultural values related to women's sexuality, which reflected the inequality of gender, very much influenced the formulation of law in Indonesia, both secular law and Islamic law.

Islamic law is thus the product of divine law (*syari'ah*) as understood (*fiqh*), interpreted and applied by male religious scholars who are both using reason and precedent and are being influenced by diverse geographic locations and customs and cultural assumptions.

Historically, women's role in society was determined as much by social and economic factors as by religious prescriptions. Social customs, property, and illiteracy often eroded or subverted Qur'anic objectives. While Islamic law did provide the parameters for behavior regarding marriage, divorce, and inheritance, the actual roles in practice, such as whether or not men took more than one wife, or whether divorce was common, or modesty expressed itself in terms of women's dress or participation in the work place, were the results of local conditions and social class, which often differed from urban to rural settings and from one country or region to another.

In the case of women's social and public status in Indonesia, *adat*, important as it might be in the thousands of relatively isolated villages throughout the country, is not necessarily of direct relevance to political behavior at the national level. This is not to say that *adat* norms have no significance in determining opportunities and actual participation

of Indonesian women in national politics. However, it may be true that traditional attitudes toward women are not directly carried over into the modern bureaucracy's parties, and differential economic interests in the capital and other urban centers.

On the other hand, popular and preferred thinking regarding the role of women in Indonesia provides an excellent example of the selective utilization of the *adat* in the formulation and propagation of a sociopolitical myth, a myth not in the sense of an erroneous belief, but rather in the sense of a belief shared widely enough and valued highly enough that it helps integrate the political culture. Although in Indonesia, the 1945 Constitution ensures rights and equal responsibilities for men and women, this is still far from the daily social reality. The heightening awareness amongst women of gender perspectives in politics has brought new life to politics, and is creating a new understanding of these issues. The political arena belongs to all citizens, but usually men monopolize it. Legislation that differentiates between men and women is grounded in interpretations of beliefs and culture. The question of women's roles in decision-making processes and participation in leadership and management is far from simple. The opportunities and environment created for men and women in all political areas do not converge. The representation of women in political parties, government, and leadership positions is still quite small.

Beyond this kind of extremely broad comparison, however, it is difficult to specify the nature and degree of variation in women's politics attributable to cultural influences. Part of this difficulty stems from the incomplete and dated character of the scholarly literature on *adat* as it relates to gender roles. However, the more important point is that in Indonesia, as in most transitional sociopolitical systems, different levels of loyalty and activity, which might be called local, regional, and national, are not neatly interrelated or mutually reinforcing. In the

case of women's social and political status, the consequence is that the *adat*, important as it might be in the thousands of relatively isolated villages throughout the country, should not necessarily be expected to be of direct relevance to political behavior at the national level.

Finally, in this sense, it becomes important to conceptualize the bargaining power of women because the process of subtle negotiation is such an important constant in social relations. To put it briefly, Indonesian Muslim women have a strong bargaining position within their households and their social spheres because they have some control over the acquisition and use of individual skills and resources. When compared with women in societies where households are hierarchical, embodying the ideal of age and gender distinctions in specific role constraints, Indonesian Muslim women are less bound by hierarchical constraints and somewhat freer to make independent, responsible decisions.

The question of the role of religion on gender constructions in Indonesia has not been asked often enough, but is clearly of great relevance to contemporary debates, as Indonesia struggles towards democracy. Respecting the rights of women and accepting their equality with men is not an easy task that can be achieved overnight. Society's traditional notions in general and the negative attitude of the majority of men towards women, in particular, must be changed. But this is a struggle against a problem caused by ignorance, religious beliefs, culture, and impressions developed over many centuries.

Indonesian Muslim women are taking an active role in current debates on the ratification of women's social, cultural, legal, and economic roles in their society. Indonesian Muslim women professional groups, such as the 'Aisyiyah organization, have been spearheading a reexamination of traditional Islamic sources for answers to these complex matters. For 'Aisyiyah, there is a need for change and it urges women to improve their lives, obtain their rights,

and realize their duties. Education, both secular and religious, is a key to women's programs. Aisyiyah inspires Indonesian women to dedicate themselves to establishing educational opportunities for women.

To change in attitudes requires a change in method, even in organizations where family ties and kinship seem to have strong roots. Therefore it may be noticed that the way 'Aisyiyah develops strategic programs for regulating the well-being of the religious community illustrates a shift in orientation towards the values of work and education. 'Aisyiyah's influence has made a difference for many Muslim women by its emphasis on the mother's role as an educator, as well as on the need for women to be economically independent and make decisions on their own. However, like other women groups within some large social organizations controlled by men, 'Aisyiyah cannot make its own decisions when it comes to the important spheres of politics and religious laws. For this, they must follow the decisions made by the Muhammadiyah, which consists of all men. Although 'Aisyiyah is legally independent, in reality it is not.

There are also a number of Indonesian women's organizations that appear to have increased in diversity of forms and goals. Their activities today not only center on the improvement of women's legal status, which includes placing women in decision-making positions, but they also focus on improving the welfare of women who still suffer from deep poverty, which remains an urgent priority in Indonesia.

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