

# Reimagining Leadership: A Hamka's Perspective on Women's Role in Power

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## Abstract

This research aims to delve into the perspectives of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka) concerning the role of women in Islamic leadership. Through a qualitative analysis of the Tafsir al-Azhar, this study reveals that Hamka emphasised the significance of justice, integrity, and consultation as the foundations of leadership, regardless of gender. By analysing various verses, interpretations, and written works on his thoughts, this research identifies several inclusive leadership principles within Hamka's thinking, such as the principle of prioritising the collective good over individual interests. These findings suggest that Hamka opened up opportunities for women to play a more active role in leadership, challenging patriarchal norms that restrict women's potential. This research is anticipated to contribute to the development of a more inclusive framework for Islamic leadership and to foster efforts to empower women in various fields, including politics and religion.

**Keywords:** *Leadership, Women, Hamka, Islam, Gender*

## Introduction

The discourse surrounding women's roles in leadership within an Islamic context is often confined by classical interpretations of the Qur'an and cultural biases that frequently overlook the potential for women's empowerment. This article aims to revisit these narratives through the lens of Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (Hamka), a prominent Indonesian Islamic scholar and thinker. His works, particularly his Qur'anic commentary such as the Tafsir al-Azhar, provide a rich foundation for understanding leadership from an Islamic perspective, while also emphasizing the importance of context, moral integrity, and social responsibility.

Hamka's perspective on leadership is deeply rooted in the principles of justice and compassion, which he identified as essential qualities for a leader. Citing the example of the Prophet Muhammad's leadership in Surah al-Tawbah verse 128, Hamka

outlined three primary attributes necessary for successful leadership: firstly, a deep sense of empathy and sympathy; secondly, a strong focus on the well-being and safety of the people; and thirdly, compassion and love for one's people<sup>1</sup>.

This indicates that, for Hamka, leadership is not merely a position of authority but a weighty responsibility that demands a leader to act with integrity and care for those they lead. However, a leader's firmness must be upheld, just as the Prophet Muhammad firmly distinguished between state and religious matters.<sup>2</sup> Muhammad's status as a prophet and messenger made him a leader who was to be obeyed. However, the Prophet Muhammad used consultation to make decisions in matters of state. Hamka explains this in his interpretation of Surah Āli 'Imrān, verse 159.<sup>3</sup>

Equally important, a leader must have strong convictions and not be easily swayed by external influences. Hamka explains this stance in his interpretation of Surah Yunus, verses 88-89. Moses, as a prophet and messenger, possessed unwavering conviction, courage, and extensive knowledge, enabling him to resist anything contrary to God's commands and prohibitions. This steadfastness was crucial for Moses because the people he led were often swayed by immediate gratification. Consequently, when promised benefits, they would readily rejoice and abandon their beliefs.<sup>4</sup> While the conduct of both the Prophet Muhammad and Moses cannot be entirely replicated by ordinary humans, the values they upheld, such as honesty, justice, and compassion, can still serve as guiding principles for leadership and everyday life.

In discussing the integrity of leaders, Hamka does not impose any gender restrictions. The example of male prophets does not automatically make leadership an exclusive right of men. Hamka provides a framework that supports women's participation in dynamics of power traditionally dominated by men. His insights

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<sup>1</sup> Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (Singapore: Kerjaya Printing Industries, 2003); Sulaeman Sulaeman, "A Review of Servant and Transformational Leadership Style in Islamic Perspectives: A Lesson from the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) as an Excellent Role Model for Muslim Leaders in Indonesia," *Nazharat: Jurnal Kebudayaan* 26, no. 02 (2020): 371–387; Irfan Yusuf and Dedi Kuswandi, "Buya HAMKA Character Education: Understanding Traditional Values in Learning Science in the 21st Century Digital Era," *Journal of Research in Instructional* 3, no. 2 (2023): 285–295.

<sup>2</sup> Mazlan Abraham, Muhd Najib Abdul Kadir, and Latifah Abdul Majid, "The Concept of Leadership from the Perspective of Hamka" (2012), <https://www.aensiweb.com/old/jasr/jasr/2012/4328-4334.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

encourage a re-evaluation of cultural norms that have historically marginalized women's voices, and indirectly challenge the notion of Islam as a misogynistic religion.

A deeper exploration of this topic reveals that revisiting the Islamic understanding of leadership through Hamka's perspective offers a transformative approach. This study aims to elucidate how the application of these principles can foster an environment where women's voices are not only heard but also celebrated as an integral part of the progress of Islamic society.

### **Hamka's Intellectual Context and Reformist Approach**

Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, better known as Hamka, was a prominent Islamic scholar and thinker in Indonesia who played a pivotal role in the Islamic renewal movement in the Nusantara. Born on February 16, 1908, in West Sumatra, Hamka grew up in a family that highly valued Islamic principles. The religious education he received from a young age, particularly under the guidance of his father, Sheikh Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah, laid a strong foundation for his thought, which subsequently became one of the primary references in modern Indonesian Islam.<sup>5</sup>

Hamka's monumental work, *Tafsir al-Azhar*, is a prime example of his endeavor to integrate the interpretation of the Qur'an with the socio-cultural context of Indonesian society. This tafsir not only provides an in-depth understanding of Qur'anic verses but also offers interpretations relevant to the challenges faced by Muslims in the modern era. Through his tafsir, Hamka emphasizes the importance of universal values such as justice, tolerance, and brotherhood, and provides practical guidance in confronting the challenges of daily life. Nevertheless, Hamka was a scholar who adhered strictly to Islamic teachings. Shari'ah provisions deemed irrelevant in the modern era were not arbitrarily reinterpreted by Hamka. Instead, Hamka preferred to offer interpretations that were anchored in historical context or logical reasoning.

When Hamka was a lecturer, he was once asked by a student about the permissibility of striking a disobedient wife, as mentioned in *al-Nisā'* 4:34. In response to his student's query concerning the beating of wives, Hamka explained that such violence would only occur with wives who exhibited conduct deviating from Islamic norms, such as neglecting domestic duties and demanding only their rights. He implied

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<sup>5</sup> Irfan Hamka, *Ayah: Kisah Buya Hamka* (Republika Penerbit, 2013).

that such a situation would not arise with a wife possessing noble character, like the student who was asking the question<sup>6</sup>. Through this response, Hamka intended to demonstrate that the permissibility of striking a wife is not a universal principle that can be arbitrarily applied. Rather, this provision is intended as a last resort for wives who have persistently failed to fulfill their marital duties.

Hamka's adherence to Islamic law is also evident in his reluctance to provide a solution for a woman who was in a polygamous marriage. When faced with this dilemma, Hamka did not advise the woman to divorce her husband, as divorce, while permissible, is disliked by Allah. Conversely, polygamy is permitted within Islamic jurisprudence. After explaining the religious provisions, Hamka left the decision to the woman herself<sup>7</sup>.

Hamka believed that reason must be guided by revelation from the Qur'an and Hadith, creating a balanced framework for understanding Islamic principles without succumbing to blind adherence to tradition or extreme modernism. This position enabled Hamka to navigate between traditionalist and modernist perspectives, fostering a dialogue that encouraged critical engagement with Islamic texts while remaining faithful to their core messages.

Through his *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, Hamka challenged prevailing patriarchal norms by advocating for women's empowerment as a foundation of Islamic tradition<sup>8</sup>. By contextualizing Qur'anic verses within contemporary society, Hamka sought to demonstrate that Islam inherently supports justice and equality for all individuals. Moreover, Hamka's cosmopolitan reformist approach reflected his ability to integrate various intellectual traditions. He drew from diverse sources, both Islamic and Western, to develop a comprehensive understanding of social justice that encompassed concepts such as the divine trusteeship (*khalifah*), responsibility (*amanah*), and consultation (*musyawarah*). This framework not only promoted ethical leadership but also aligned

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<sup>6</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

<sup>7</sup> Hamka, {*AYAH*}...

<sup>8</sup> Norbani B Ismail, "The Quranic Exegesis, Reformism, and Women in Twentieth Century Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 24, no. 3 (December 7, 2017): 469–501, <https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/studia-islamika/article/view/5187>.

with democratic principles, demonstrating that Islam can coexist harmoniously with modern governance structures.<sup>9</sup>

In essence, Hamka's reformist approach to Islamic thought represents a significant shift towards inclusivity and social responsibility within Muslim communities. His legacy continues to inspire contemporary discussions on gender equality and social justice, affirming that a renewed understanding of leadership rooted in Islamic values can make a positive contribution to societal development. Hamka's intellectual contributions serve as a valuable resource for those seeking to reconcile traditional Islamic teachings with the challenges of modern society, making him a pivotal figure in the landscape of Islamic reform.

Hamka endeavored to integrate traditional Islamic values with a modern approach. In this regard, Hamka emphasized the importance of a rational understanding of Islam that is relevant to modern social, economic, and political contexts. In essence, Islam is not merely normative but capable of providing practical solutions to societal problems. Hamka frequently advocated for Islam's role in building social justice that reflects the spirit and attitude of nationalism without compromising Islamic values.

### **A Quranic Perspective on Women's Leadership Through Hamka's Lens**

#### **1. Quranic verses related to leadership**

Verses such as Surah al-Nisā', verse 58, which emphasizes the importance of just and trustworthy leadership, and Surah Āli 'Imrān, verse 159, which encourages leaders to consult with their ministers in making important decisions, serve as fundamental principles for a leader. Further exploration of these Qur'anic verses reveals a comprehensive ethical framework, whereby a leader is not only required to possess managerial abilities but must also serve as a role model in upholding values. A leader's integrity is paramount, demonstrated through the fulfillment of one's trust. In Surah Al-Nisā', verse 58, Allah commands leaders to be trustworthy and just<sup>10</sup>. This verse establishes justice as a fundamental quality

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<sup>9</sup> Ahmad Nabil Amir and Tasnim Abdul Rahman, "Hamka and the Rise of Kaum Muda (the Modernist) in Indonesia," *Jurnal Muhammadiyah Studies* 9, no. 1 (December 7, 2024): 1–8, <https://ejournal.umm.ac.id/index.php/jms/article/download/35642/15010>.

<sup>10</sup> Nurul Iman Maulana, "The Principles Of Prophet's Leadership In Organizational Management," *International Journal of Sharia Business Management* 3, no. 1 (2024): 24–29.

of Islamic leadership. Leaders are expected to uphold justice and equality in their affairs, ensuring that all individuals are treated fairly regardless of their background or status.

A leader's integrity can be demonstrated by their attitude towards challenges and decision-making. A leader with good integrity will face challenges with compassion and consider consultation as the best approach to decision-making, while remaining resistant to external interference. This is explained in Surah Āli 'Imrān, verse 159. The command for consultation in leadership is also stated in Surah al-Shūrā, verse 38. Hamka highlighted the principle of consultation as a crucial aspect of the decision-making process. Despite receiving divine revelation, the Prophet Muhammad still involved his companions in discussions, demonstrating that inclusive leadership fosters a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among followers<sup>11</sup>.

The public sphere is a common domain, and since life in a social realm is inevitably marked by a diversity of characters and thoughts, it follows that such differences can be mediated through consultation. The command for consultation is not exclusive to men or women; rather, it extends to all individuals to express their opinions. As leaders, both men and women are expected to make decisions through consultation.

The position of leadership in Islam is not exclusively reserved for men. This is evident in Surah Al-Tawbah, verse 71, which highlights the role of both men and women as mutual helpers in upholding truth and righteousness. This implies that when a man holds a position of authority, whether in a professional or social context, he is obligated to protect and assist all individuals, including women. Conversely, when a woman holds a position of authority, she is likewise expected to fulfill this role. Therefore, regardless of gender, those in positions of leadership must be fully cognizant of the rights, roles, and responsibilities of all individuals.

Rank and status in leadership are, in essence, divine trusts that must be upheld. In Surah al-Baqarah, verse 124, Allah states to Prophet Abraham:

*"And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands, which he fulfilled: He said: "I will make thee an Imam to the Nations." He*

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<sup>11</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

*pleaded: "And also (Imams) from my offspring!" He answered: "But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers."*<sup>12</sup>(Q.s. al-Baqara [2]: 124)

This verse underscores that true leadership is a divine appointment, emphasizing the responsibility that leaders have to serve their people. The Arabic term "imam" signifies a leader who serves others, reflecting the Islamic principle that leadership is fundamentally about serving others rather than wielding power over them.

The statement about Abraham being made a leader is followed by the phrase "*wa min dhurriyyati*" [and from my descendants], indicating a hope that any shortcomings in fulfilling the duties of leadership might be complemented by his offspring. This implies that the status of leadership was not confined to Abraham alone, but would extend to those who came after him. The moral of the story lies in the phrase "*la yanalu 'ahd al-zalimin*," which asserts that oppressive behavior, towards oneself or others, is not befitting of a leader. The rank and duties of a leader are not bestowed upon the unjust or those with impure souls.

Based on the interpretations of these verses, leadership emphasizes several key qualities, namely justice, compassion, consultation, and integrity. These principles not only guide individual leaders but also shape a broader understanding of governance in Islamic society. The Qur'an provides a comprehensive framework for understanding leadership that transcends mere authority. By emphasizing qualities, the Qur'an promotes a model of leadership rooted in ethical principles. These teachings remain relevant today, offering valuable insights into how leaders can effectively serve their communities while upholding Islamic values.

This exploration highlights how the Qur'anic verses articulate a vision of leadership that prioritizes ethical conduct and social responsibility, setting a standard for both historical and contemporary leaders within the Islamic tradition. Essentially, Islam does not discriminate between the rights and responsibilities of men and women, except in certain roles that are biologically determined. In matters of leadership, demonstrated ability, morality, and justice are far more relevant criteria than gender.

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<sup>12</sup> Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (Wordsworth Editions, 2000).



**Table 1:** The attributes of leadership as prescribed in the Qur'an.

Surah	The attributes of leadership
al-Nisā': 58	Just and trustworthy
Āli 'Imrān: 159	Skilled in consultation or deliberation
al-Syārā: 38	
al-Taubah: 71	Possessing empathy and a protective nature
al-Baqarah: 124	Not oppressive and of pure heart (or: free from corruption)

## 2. Hamka's interpretation of verses emphasizing qualities over gender

It has been explained that the Qur'anic verses discussing the principles of leadership generally do not mention gender. However, Surah al-Nisā', verse 35, which is often cited as evidence of male authority over women, has various interpretations. Classical exegetes, such as Ibn Kathir, tend to interpret this verse in light of hadiths that are considered gender-biased by some groups. One such hadith states that a community will not prosper if led by a woman. Ibn Kathir uses this hadith to explain the phrase *al-rijāl qawwāmūna 'ala al-nisā'i bimā faḍḍalallāhu ba'dahum 'alā ba'din*. This interpretation is also supported by historical data showing that all prophets, from Adam to Muhammad, were male.<sup>13</sup> This verse has indeed been the subject of much commentary by academics and gender activists alike.

In response to the various interpretations of Surah al-Nisā' verse 35, Hamka offers his commentary in Tafsir al-Azhar:

*"Here (in Surah An-Nisa: 34), it begins to explain the most important reason for the division of inheritance where men receive twice the share of women, and why men are the ones who pay the dowry, why the command falls on men to treat their wives well. Why are men allowed to have up to four wives if they are able to be just? While women are not? This verse is the one that provides the answer."*

<sup>13</sup> Ismail Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (Bairut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 1996).



Substantively, Hamka also holds the understanding that men are leaders of women. However, Hamka emphasizes this within the domestic sphere. This is evident in his analogy of the Captain (husband) and the Engineer (wife) of a ship. The position of the Engineer is crucial; without her, the ship would not be able to function. However, the Engineer also understands that the highest position on the ship is that of the Captain<sup>14</sup>.

Based on his analogy, it can be understood that male leadership in the household is a functional role to ensure measured and directed communication. This is because it is unlikely for an organization to function well if it is led by two leaders. However, Hamka does not rule out the possibility of a woman becoming the head of the household if her husband is incapable, either due to ignorance or other limitations. Nevertheless, this cannot be used as a context to change the general rule. Hamka refers to this context as abnormal<sup>15</sup>. Based on this discourse, it can be inferred that Surah al-Nisā' verse 34 discusses the division of functional roles between men and women within the domestic sphere.

It has been stated that the qualifications of a leader as described in the Qur'an do not include gender restrictions. This is evidenced by a verse that praises the integrity of a Queen in the time of Prophet Solomon named Balqis. This story is immortalized in Surah al-Naml verses 23-44. In interpreting this verse, Hamka praises the integrity of Queen Balqis when she received a letter from King Solomon inviting her to worship Allah. When facing this letter, Queen Balqis displayed a calm demeanor and a firm stance, making her impervious to intervention. Queen Balqis' wisdom is also evident when her ministers did not dare to intervene and left all decisions to her<sup>16</sup>.

Hamka portrays Queen Balqis as an extraordinary female leader who is intelligent, just, wise, and strategic in her dialogue with Prophet Solomon. She is also capable of leading her people towards wise decisions. This story proves that leadership is not exclusive to men, as long as the leader fulfills the requirements of wisdom and justice in carrying out their role as a leader. The story highlights

<sup>14</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

<sup>15</sup> Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, *Buya Hamka Berbicara Tentang Perempuan* (Depok: Gema Insani, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

that effective leadership can be embodied in women who possess the necessary qualities<sup>17</sup>. Hamka's interpretation of Surah al-Naml verses 23-44 indicates that Hamka does not evaluate the integrity of leadership based on gender but rather on the qualifications of each individual, regardless of gender.

For Hamka, female leadership places greater emphasis on the importance of quality and moral character over gender. His approach seems to re-examine the interpretations of classical commentators, which have often been criticized by certain groups. The significance of both classical and Hamka's interpretations is indirectly influenced by the horizon of the interpreters themselves. In the classical era, interpreters were confronted with a condition where women were often relegated to a secondary position in the social strata. In contrast, during Hamka's era, the role of women began to be recognized and valued.

This is evident from Hamka's response to the prohibition of female leadership in an Islamic state. Hamka approached this issue from a historical perspective. It is recorded in Islamic history that Islamic states were occasionally led by women, such as in Egypt in 1249 AH, albeit under duress due to the death of her husband (the king at that time) in battle. However, in the history of Islamic kingdoms in Indonesia, Aceh was once led by a Sultanah named Sultan Taj'ul Alam Shafiyatuddin Syah, who succeeded her husband, Sultan Iskandar Muda Mahkota Alam, who had passed away<sup>18</sup>.

This leadership was continued by female sultans for half a century. Historical records indicate that their reigns were relatively smooth and peaceful. This was because their governments were supported by wise and prudent councilors. Hamka stated that this event does not contradict the Prophet's hadith stating that a community will suffer if led by a woman who rules without consulting wise advisors. Indeed, even men will face similar consequences if they rule without consulting wise advisors<sup>19</sup>.

Apart from Balqis, other central female figures in history immortalized in the Qur'an are Āsiya binti Muzāḥim, the wife of Pharaoh, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Qur'an portrays them as women possessing the qualifications of a

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah, *1001 Soal Kehidupan* (Gema Insani, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

leader. Āsiya exhibited courage and moral conviction in supporting Moses against the tyranny of her husband, Pharaoh. Hamka interprets her actions as a strong example of resistance and leadership grounded in faith. Similarly, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is revered for her steadfastness and piety. Hamka demonstrates that Mary's unwavering faith and resilience in the face of social challenges reveal the mentality required of a leader<sup>20</sup>.

By highlighting these figures, Hamka underscores the Qur'an's recognition of women's capacity for leadership through their moral character and contributions to society. Hamka's interpretation of Qur'anic verses related to leadership provides a compelling framework that prioritizes quality over gender. By focusing on essential attributes such as knowledge, compassion, and the ability to engage others in the decision-making process, he advocates for a more inclusive understanding of leadership in Islam.

Hamka was among those who believed in the innate, natural roles of men and women, particularly within the domestic sphere. For Hamka, the man would forever remain the head of the household, even if his wife held a leadership position outside the home. He considered it unnatural for a woman to lead within a household while the man is led. The male leadership that Hamka envisioned was not associated with negative connotations but rather represented a blueprint for a man to fulfill his responsibilities fully and justly.

### **Reimagining Women's Role in Leadership: A Hamka's Perspective**

#### **1. The evolution of women's education**

The core of Hamka's vision is the belief in the transformative power of education for women. Hamka emphasized that education is crucial to empowering women to take on leadership roles in various aspects of life, including politics, business, and community service. Educated women are better equipped to make meaningful contributions to society and sound decisions. Hamka viewed equal access to education for women as a fundamental right aligned with Islamic principles. Not only in formal schools, but also the role of women as educators within the family is equally important. He argued that

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

women play a vital role in educating future generations and instilling values of justice and compassion in their children<sup>21</sup>.

Female figures who serve as role models in Islamic history, such as Mary, Āsiya, and Queen Bilqis, exemplify a vision of female leadership. Hamka highlighted their intelligence, resilience, and moral courage as qualities that should inspire contemporary women. For instance, he noted how Queen Bilqis demonstrated diplomatic skills and wisdom in her interactions with the Prophet Solomon, indicating that effective leadership is rooted in strategic thinking and consultation<sup>22</sup>. Such qualities can only be attained through education.

The turning point in elevating the status of women began during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, in fact, as early as the revelation of the first verses of Surat al-'Alaq, verses 1-5. This revelation ushered in a new era that placed knowledge at the forefront of Islamic life. Hamka explained that although the command to read was initially addressed to the Prophet Muhammad, its message was universal, encompassing all Muslims, both men and women. At that time, the status of women in Arab society was marginalized, but the Prophet Muhammad introduced revolutionary changes that gradually elevated the status of women.

Tangible evidence of the elevation of women's status can be seen in several policies implemented by the Prophet Muhammad. For example, he allocated specific time for teaching religious knowledge to women. This is recorded in hadith literature where women requested a dedicated time to learn directly from the Prophet, and he granted their request<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, the Prophet encouraged women to take an active role in social and religious life. This is exemplified by Asma' bint Yazid, who was known for advocating for women's rights, and Aisha, who became a primary reference point for Islamic knowledge after the Prophet's demise.

Moreover, the Prophet emphasized the importance of treating daughters equitably, including their right to education. In a society that previously devalued

<sup>21</sup> Siti Defiani, Ahmad Fauzi, and Ummi Lailia Maghfiroh, "Pendidikan Perempuan Dalam Perspektif Buya Hamka," *BEST Journal (Biology Education, Sains and Technology)* 7, no. 1 (December 9, 2024): 1010–1016, <https://jurnal.uisu.ac.id/index.php/best/article/view/9046>.

<sup>22</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

<sup>23</sup> Muhammad bin Ismail Bukhari, *Al-Jāmi' Al-Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Musnad Min Ḥadith Rasulullah* (Kairo: Maktabah al-Salafiyah, 1980).

the birth of girls, the Prophet Muhammad declared, "Whoever raises two daughters until they reach adulthood, he will be with me in Paradise like this," while gesturing with his two fingers close together<sup>24</sup>. This hadith not only revolutionized the paradigm of women's value but also emphasized the responsibility to educate them. Hamka argued that this intellectual movement not only liberated women from ignorance but also expanded their contributions to societal development. This view aligns with Quraish Shihab's interpretation in *Al-Misbah*, which asserts that biological differences between men and women should not impede women's access to education. Education, according to him, is a tool to empower women, improve their quality of life, and educate future generations<sup>25</sup>.

Grounded in Islamic teachings that mandate the pursuit of knowledge for all, the status of women has been significantly elevated. The first revelation from Surah al-'Alaq symbolizes the commencement of a social transformation where education is positioned as a primary tool for building a more equitable society and uplifting the dignity of women as integral members of a knowledgeable and empowered community.

The educational system has undergone a significant transformation between Hamka's era and the digital age. However, Hamka's vision for educational reform has yet to be fully realized, particularly within traditional societies. One of Hamka's primary concerns was elevating the status of women's education as a means of fostering a more equitable society. In this regard, Hamka frequently emphasized the divine promise outlined in Surah al-Tawbah, verse 71. This verse clearly demonstrates that men and women hold equal status in terms of faith, righteous deeds, and the reward of Paradise from Allah. However, in practical *da'wah* (Islamic preaching), there is a phenomenon that obscures these values. One example is the misinterpretation of hadiths concerning *men receiving houris* (virgins) in Paradise.

Hamka emphasized the importance of education for women so that they could comprehend religion comprehensively and rationally. For him, an educated woman would not only elevate her own status but also play a significant role in

<sup>24</sup> Muslim Abū Ḥusayn, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (Riyadh: Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> M Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir Al-Misbah* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002).

educating the next generation of believers and people of quality. By fostering awareness of equal educational opportunities for both men and women, Hamka's vision of a just and civilized society could be realized. In relation to this, Hamka recounted a story about an event that occurred in 1963. In that year, a preacher delivered a hadith that exaggerated the pleasures of paradise, provoking a sexist backlash. When questioned about the authenticity of the hadith, the preacher became angry and insisted on the unquestionable truth of his claims<sup>26</sup>.

Based on his interpretation, Hamka promoted a transformation in religious education. He emphasized the importance of critical thinking about religious information to eliminate gender bias that has been ingrained in societal understanding. Hamka's perspective aligns with Zaitunah Subhan's view that gender bias in Islam is caused by the misinterpretation of religious texts by religious authorities<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, the transformation needed in women's education is to instill a critical attitude towards existing religious understandings, so as to create a generation with an inclusive and just understanding of religion.

Education has been widely recognized as the most effective instrument for promoting gender equality and empowering individuals to create a more just society. By providing equal access to quality education, societies can dismantle barriers, challenge gender stereotypes, and foster an environment conducive to the growth and development of all individuals, regardless of gender. However, the challenges of achieving inclusive education free from gender bias are complex and require synergy from various stakeholders. Teachers in formal education and communities in informal education play a crucial role in educational transformation<sup>28</sup>.

On the other hand, public perception of education is diverse and influenced by two main factors: culture and economy. Societies that still strongly hold patriarchal values tend to find it difficult to break free from social systems that place women in a subordinate position. This means that no matter how highly

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<sup>26</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

<sup>27</sup> Zaitunah Subhan, *Al-Qur'an Dan Perempuan Menuju Kestaraan Gender Dalam Penafsiran* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia Grup, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Dewi Ratnawati, Sulistyorini Sulistyorini, and Ahmad Zainal Abidin, "Kestaraan Gender Tentang Pendidikan Laki-Laki Dan Perempuan," *Jurnal Harkat: Media Komunikasi Gender* 15, no. 1 (December 9, 2019): 10–23, <https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/psga/article/view/13436>.

educated a woman is, she is still considered better off as a housewife. Meanwhile, economic factors are also a significant obstacle, especially for lower and middle-class communities who often prioritize economic needs over formal education. This is due to pressing living demands and limited economic resources. Conversely, the upper middle class tends to have easier access to quality education because their basic needs are met<sup>29</sup>.

Highlighting the distinction between the rights and obligations of women and men, Hamka often includes in his tafsir, narrations of women's participation in various situations, including war. This is undoubtedly aimed at refuting the widely circulated narratives that rarely mention the roles of women. In Surah Āli 'Imrān verse 195, Hamka mentions the roles of women in the advancement of Islamic civilization. Khadijah, as the first woman to believe in the Prophet and sacrifice all her wealth for the sake of da'wah, and Ummu Yasir, the first female martyr in Islam for upholding her faith, as well as other women who participated in battles to uphold the teachings of Allah. These roles are rarely known to the general public<sup>30</sup>.

This means that the massive opening up of access to education for women in the modern era has not immediately solved the problem of improving the quality of women. Many women, both children and adults, still face obstacles in pursuing education. Factors such as poverty, cultural norms, early marriage, and discrimination often prevent women from attending school or completing their education. The massive spread and normalization of immoral content on social media also often becomes an obstacle for the younger generation of women, and even men in general, to improve themselves.

One of the negative impacts of social media use is the erosion of children's morals due to their immature mental and thought patterns. The presence of social media can also reduce concentration during the learning process. This indicates that the positive impacts of social media are not proportional to its negative

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.



impacts<sup>31</sup>. The complexities of the digital era certainly demand that women have a good education so that their children are not swept away by the massive wave of digital development. This is because mothers play a very vital role in the mental and intellectual development of their children.

Slowly but surely, the problems mentioned above have begun to be resolved. The transformation of women's education has yielded tangible results with an increasing number of women actively contributing in the public sphere, from politics to da'wah. Women's involvement in a wider public sphere promotes the realization of equal rights and obligations between women and men. Women can also provide valuable input in policy decision-making, both in politics and education. This further facilitates efforts to achieve gender-neutral education.

In the digital era, advancements are faced with new challenges. The proliferation of content on social media, which often contains inaccurate information, hoaxes, or negative content, can be a serious threat, especially for young people who do not yet have adequate digital literacy. The normalization of content portraying women in a hypersexual manner, such as provocative dances or revealing clothing, further blurs the boundaries of social norms and religious values. This phenomenon, often referred to as radical post-feminism, can hinder efforts to achieve genuine gender equality. This is because boundless liberalism often sacrifices the dignity of women and unconsciously reinforces negative stereotypes about women.

Hamka had anticipated challenges like this. This can be seen in how he responded to criticism from groups who considered Islam to be demeaning to women. Hamka emphasized the importance of equal education for both men and women, but always within the framework of Islamic values. The equality he meant was not absolute equality that ignores the differences in the fitrah between men and women, but rather equality in the opportunity to achieve their best potential according to religious teachings. Thus, the vision of women's educational transformation initiated by Hamka is to produce a generation of women who are

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<sup>31</sup> Nisa Khairuni, "Dampak Positif dan Negatif Sosial Media terhadap Pendidikan Akhlak Anak (Studi Kasus di SMP Negeri 2 Kelas VIII Banda Aceh)," *Jurnal Edukasi : Jurnal Bimbingan Konseling* 2, no. 1 (December 9, 2016): 91–106, <https://jurnal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/cobaBK/article/view/693>.

not only intelligent but also have noble character and understand their important role in the family and society<sup>32</sup>.

Hamka, in interpreting Surah Al-Nisa verse 34, emphasizes the difference in roles between men and women within the context of the household. Hamka sees that this verse indicates the natural division of human tasks, where men as heads of the family are responsible for providing for their families, while women have an important role in managing the household. However, Hamka does not at all belittle the role of women. On the contrary, he sees that women and men are complementary partners. Women have the right to education, careers, and contributing to society. However, in the context of the family, the husband remains the leader<sup>33</sup>. It is important to understand that the husband's leadership does not mean absolute authority to act arbitrarily, but rather the responsibility to lead the family towards happiness and prosperity. According to Hamka, a deep understanding of this concept will be a valuable asset for women in managing their careers and family life<sup>34</sup>.

Education also plays a crucial role in increasing women's participation in political and civil life. Educated women are more aware of their rights and better prepared to engage in the political process. They can advocate for policies that promote gender equality and challenge discriminatory practices in their communities. By cultivating informed citizens who actively participate in government, education contributes to a more representative and just decision-making process<sup>35</sup>.

In addition, education serves as a vital tool in preventing gender-based violence. By incorporating comprehensive sexuality education into school curricula, students learn about consent, healthy relationships, and respect for

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<sup>32</sup> Amrullah, *Buya Hamka Berbicara Tentang Perempuan*.

<sup>33</sup> Siti Halimah Putung and Raihanah Azahari, "Kepemimpinan Suami Dan Hubungannya Dengan Kefungsian Keluarga: Satu Perbincangan," *International Research Journal of Shariah, Muamalat and Islam (IRJSMI)* 3, no. 7 (2021): 1–12.

<sup>34</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

<sup>35</sup> Elly Malihah et al., "Peningkatan Kapasitas Kader Perempuan Melalui Pendidikan Politik Berbasis GEDSI," *Indonesian Journal of Sociology, Education, and Development* 6, no. 1 (December 9, 2024): 69–80, <https://ijsed.ap3si.org/index.php/journal/article/view/158>.

others. This knowledge helps to foster an environment that promotes safety and equality while reducing the risk of violence against women<sup>36</sup>.

Therefore, education plays a crucial role in eliminating gender stereotypes and misogynistic traditions that still prevail in society. Education acts as a catalyst for empowerment by providing the tools individuals need to challenge societal norms, pursue economic opportunities, and participate actively in political life. By ensuring equal access to quality education for all genders, society can create a more just and inclusive future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Investing in education is a strategic step to advance individuals and society collectively. By providing equal access for both men and women, education is key to creating a more empowered generation, reducing poverty, and strengthening social justice. When women are educated, the impact is far-reaching, from improving family quality of life to transforming society to be more inclusive. However, structural and cultural barriers often limit this access, so cross-sector collaboration is needed to ensure education becomes a universal right. Ultimately, fair and equitable education not only empowers individuals but also creates a stronger and more prosperous society.

## 2. Rectifying Gender Stereotypes

One of the main causes of gender inequality in a religious context is the misunderstanding of the interpretation of sacred texts that are not contextualized and are influenced by patriarchal cultural values. Such misunderstandings ultimately lead to stereotypes that limit women's mobility in the public sphere and place women in an inferior position. In fact, if examined more deeply, the teachings of Islam are not gender-specific<sup>37</sup>. Quality education for women on a regular basis can eradicate gender bias stereotypes prevalent in society.

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<sup>36</sup> Andhika Nugraha Utama and Raymond Marhehetua Hutahaeon, "Pentingnya Implementasi Pendidikan Seksualitas Dalam Upaya Pencegahan Kekerasan Seksual," *Sindoro: Cendikia Pendidikan* 6, no. 6 (December 9, 2024): 31–40, <https://ejournal.warunayama.org/index.php/sindorocendikiapendidikan/article/view/5639>.

<sup>37</sup> Yuni Sulistyowati, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Lingkup Pendidikan Dan Tata Sosial," *Ijouds: Indonesian Journal of Gender Studies* 1, no. 2 (December 9, 2020): 1–14, <https://jurnal.iainponorogo.ac.id/index.php/ijouds/article/view/2317>.

The negative perception of women's intellect and physique is one stereotype that needs to be corrected. The interpretation that considers women inherently possess limited intellect, resulting in them being deemed unfit for positions of leadership, judiciary roles, or even as sole witnesses, has been a common view since ancient times<sup>38</sup>. Such interpretations, as adhered to by some scholars like Ibn Kathir, have indirectly hindered women's progress in various fields<sup>39</sup>. Historical, cultural, and social structures have also contributed to reinforcing social constructions of gender. For centuries, women have been discriminated against and placed in subordinate positions<sup>40</sup>. This is reflected in various social institutions, including family, education, and politics. These social constructions have then been reinforced by gender-biased religious interpretations, creating a vicious cycle that is difficult to break.<sup>41</sup>

The limited intellectual capacity of women is actually due to the lack of opportunities for them to receive a proper education. Therefore, investing in women's education will provide significant benefits to society. Educated women are more likely to obtain better-paying jobs and contribute to economic growth. This not only reduces poverty levels but also increases overall societal progress. Additionally, when women are economically empowered, they are in a better position to invest in the education and health of their children, thereby breaking the cycle of intergenerational inequality.

Hamka firmly rejected the view that belittled women's abilities. He argued that the realities of life demonstrated that women possess the same potential as men to achieve excellence in various fields. In his interpretations, Hamka often cited examples of strong women in Islamic history, such as Khadijah bint Khuwailid, a successful businesswoman, and Nasibah (Nusaibah), who

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<sup>38</sup> Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*.

<sup>39</sup> Shinta Nurani, "Implikasi Tafsir Klasik Terhadap Subordinasi Gender: Perempuan Sebagai Makhluk Kedua," *Jurnal Muwazah* 7, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>40</sup> Simon P Saragih S, "Working Women Have Been Discriminated Against for Hundreds of Years," *Kompas*, last modified 2023, <https://www.kompas.id/baca/english/2023/10/10/en-perempuan-pekerja-terdiskriminasi-ratusan-tahun>.

<sup>41</sup> Sulistyowati, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Lingkup Pendidikan Dan Tata Sosial."

participated in battles. This demonstrates that Islam does not limit women's roles, and they have made significant contributions to the course of history<sup>42</sup>.

Often, Surah Al-Nisā' verse 34, particularly the phrase *al-rijal qawwamuna 'ala al-nisa* (men are in charge of women), has been narrowly interpreted, thus limiting women's roles in various aspects of life. This view has been used to justify male dominance in the public, legal, and domestic spheres. Although Hamka acknowledged the differences between men and women, especially in terms of physicality, he did not limit women's roles solely to the public and domestic spheres.

Hamka's statement is supported by numerous scientific studies that show that the average muscle mass of women tends to be lower than that of men. Anatomical differences between men and women, particularly related to the reproductive system, have shaped different biological roles in the context of reproduction. Women have a uterus as a place for fetal growth, while men have sperm as male gametes<sup>43</sup>. These biological differences have served as the basis for the division of roles in society for centuries.

Hamka interpreted Surah Al-Nisā' verse 34 as a natural disposition, an innate nature that describes the different roles of men and women in the family. He rejected the view that places women as inferior or deserving of oppression. Instead, Hamka emphasized the importance of equality and mutual respect in the husband-wife relationship. For Hamka, husbands and wives have their respective rights and obligations that must be balanced<sup>44</sup>.

Hamka encouraged society to be more open to various career choices for women. He argued that both a loving homemaker and a successful career woman are equally valuable, as long as they can fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. However, he also emphasized the importance of the husband's role as the head of the household. Hamka considered it a deviation from the ideal social order for a husband to be unemployed while the wife is the primary breadwinner, unless the husband has limitations that prevent him from fulfilling his responsibilities.

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<sup>42</sup> Amrullah, *Tafsir Al-Azhar*.

<sup>43</sup> Ayu Indriyani Utami et al., "Hubungan IMT Dengan Kekuatan Dan Ketahanan Otot Tungkai Pada Mahasiswa PPSKPD UNUD Angkatan 2016," *Jurnal Medika Udayana* 9, no. 11 (2020): 8–9.

<sup>44</sup> Amrullah, *Buya Hamka Berbicara Tentang Perempuan*.

Education can be a powerful tool in transforming these norms by providing a broader understanding of gender equality and individual rights. With the right education, individuals can be taught to challenge stereotypes and advocate for equality in all aspects of life. This aligns with research showing that education contributes to a reduction in gender-based violence and increases women's participation in public life<sup>45</sup>.

The persistence of patriarchal norms influences every aspect of societal dynamics. These norms shape power structures, institutional arrangements, and everyday interactions, consistently hindering the path towards positive peace. Particularly, when women face complex realities, where they must navigate and negotiate their way within pre-determined norms, values, traditions, and beliefs. This situation requires proactive steps to challenge these entrenched patterns<sup>46</sup>.

Several strategies have proven effective in challenging patriarchal norms and stereotypes, one of which is empowering women-led initiatives. Locally-led responses by women themselves offer unique solutions tailored to specific contexts. For example, in the Philippines, women-led networks have successfully navigated patriarchal norms and contributed to effective actions that meet the needs of their communities<sup>47</sup>. Similarly, in Indonesia, the presence of women in various leadership roles, such as politics, da'wah, and research, has significantly contributed to changing societal perceptions of gender roles. By being directly involved in policymaking, women can ensure that their voices and aspirations are represented, thus gradually dismantling entrenched gender stereotypes.

Educational interventions, in which education plays a significant role in changing behaviors and challenging stereotypes, are crucial. Comprehensive sex education programs can help reduce gender-based violence by teaching consent

<sup>45</sup> Inayah Cahyawati and Muqowim Muqowim, "Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Pendidikan Menurut Pemikiran M. Quraish Shihab," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Agama dan Ilmu Pengetahuan* 19, no. 2 (December 9, 2022): 210–220, <https://journal.uir.ac.id/index.php/alhikmah/article/download/8338/4899>.

<sup>46</sup> Puspita Rani Swari, "Budaya Patriarki Dan Tantangan Dalam Kebebasan Berekpresi (Analisis Menggunakan Teori Konflik Ralf Dahrendorf)," *Jurnal Dinamika Sosial Budaya* 25, no. 2 (December 9, 2023): 213–218, <https://journals.usm.ac.id/index.php/jdsb/article/view/7166>.

<sup>47</sup> Herinto Sidik Iriansyah, "Tantangan Dan Peluang Perempuan Dalam Berpolitik Di Indonesia: Masyarakat Patriarki," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan (JIP) STKIP Kusuma Negara* 8, no. 2 (2017): 1–14, accessed December 9, 2024, <https://jurnal.stkipkusumanegara.ac.id/index.php/jip/article/view/23>.

and respectful relationships<sup>48</sup>. In addition, cultural platforms can be a powerful instrument to question existing patriarchal norms. By continuously challenging patriarchal norms and stereotypes, society can move closer to creating an inclusive environment where all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive. It is crucial for us to pay attention to the influential voices advocating feminism—a movement from various perspectives dedicated to promoting gender equality—and work together to build a just future for all.

## Conclusion

Hamka reshaped the concept of female leadership, emphasizing the principles of justice, compassion, knowledge, empathy, and commitment to the welfare of society. The vision of women's education he envisioned has begun to materialize. However, the dynamics of the digital world today present new challenges in efforts to realize neutral and inclusive education. Female leaders in the digital era face a double challenge. On the one hand, they must contend with the challenge of low digital literacy among the public, which can obscure gender equality issues. On the other hand, they are also expected to be able to play a dual role as leaders and as mothers and wives. Nevertheless, with the right support, women can overcome these challenges.

Overall, this article affirms that a new understanding of leadership rooted in Islamic values can contribute positively to societal development, emphasizing the importance of women's education and empowerment as well as awareness of the natural roles of women and men. Hamka offers a more inclusive and transformative perspective on the role of women in leadership, challenging cultural norms that have historically marginalized women's voices.

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<sup>48</sup> Utama and Hutahaeen, "Pentingnya Implementasi Pendidikan Seksualitas Dalam Upaya Pencegahan Kekerasan Seksual."



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