

THE CONTRIBUTIONS *of* WOMEN in ISLAMIC STUDIES and EDUCATION

Malay Archipelago

This book is the result of a group of scholars' writings sponsored by Yayasan Bukhari who want to recognize the important role that women have played in Islamic education across the Malay archipelago. The book acknowledged that the pre- and post-colonial systems had an impact on popular perceptions and beliefs on Islamic studies, highlighting the diverse educational backgrounds of each individual. The purpose of this book is to explain and comprehend the ways in which women, particularly in the area of Islamic studies, contribute to the educational system. It uncovers how women's empowerment has been attained through the system, and how the system influences women's duties and responsibilities in all spheres of life. Justice in gender equality has been achieved as a result of the major works and writings in this book, which extensively discussed the importance of education as a game-changer that raises the bar for women's empowerment. The goal of the empirical facts and scientific research is to raise awareness, aid in understanding the importance of women's roles in Islamic studies and society, as well as encourage women everywhere to make positive contributions to their own well-being as well as the Islamic education of those around them.

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Edited by

RAUDLOTUL FIRDAUS FATAH YASIN
MEK WOK MAHMUD

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Foreword

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Editors

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CHAPTER 1

Education: The Game-Changer for the Role of Women in Education

RAUDLOTUL FIRDAUS FATAH YASIN,
MEK WOK MAHMUD,
NINA NURASYEKIN ZULKEFLI

1.1 Introduction

Women have a critical role in the nation's development. Women's responsibilities and positions have altered over time. Women today hold positions of prominence in various professions, including economics, politics, and social services. Women are also more accomplished nowadays, and they are capable of competing with men in a variety of sectors. While the number of women continues to grow, the percentage of women who have not had a decent education remains low, particularly in developing and underdeveloped countries. This, in turn, will have a detrimental effect on women's ability to fill employment openings, particularly in the political sphere. In contemporary politics, academic credentials are a critical indicator of a candidate's quality in the political realm, whether favourable or negative. As a result, women have a limited role in politics. Enhancing the quality and quantity of women in politics can motivate them to pursue the highest level of education. It is hoped that the rise of more educated women will transform a country's political landscape.

Indonesia and Malaysia are two Malay Archipelago countries that exemplify the narrative of women's evolution towards political and decision-making participation as a

result of adequate educational access. This situation was demonstrated when Indonesia and Malaysia demonstrated women's capacity to engage in and influence political decision-making. Since independence, both countries have seen steady growth in the ratio of women in politics and ministerial positions, despite still lack of fair representation in parliament (Hirschmann, 2021; Aspinal et al., 2021; Sood, 2022) As a result, the following parts will trace the history of education in both countries and serve as a catalyst for adding a new narrative to participation in politics and decision-making. The first section will define the concept of education and examine it from an Islamic perspective. The second section will address the role of education in societal change. The third section is intended to examine the history, role, and impact of education on the advancement of women's political engagement. The concluding segment will bring the research to a close.

1.2 What is Education: Definition and Views from Islamic Perspectives

Education, in general, is an endeavour to realise humanity's maximum potential. Education, according to Hasan (2003), can be produced from two perspectives. The first point of view is a society in its natural environment. Education is regarded as a continuous process of cultural succession or distribution that combines cultural values from the older generation to the younger generation in order for a society to exist (Balagova & Halakova, 2018, p. 465). Throughout the educational process, there is an interplay of encounters and communications between humans, whether official or informally, planned or spontaneous, which eventually leads to the general development of human beings and groups of people. However, in order for the educational process to be sustainable, the curricular component must be given attention and support.

The second point of view is that it results in people that mean individually. Education is the process of developing and refining human potentials so that these potentials might build

particular competencies to guarantee a balanced and normal human existence. Aside from the opportunity for individual growth, education allows people to communicate with one another. Education, according to Robiah (1998, p. 3), is defined as “contact between people and other persons or interaction between individuals and specialised social groupings”.

In the educational process, whether formally or informally, planned or unplanned, there is an interplay of interactions and communications between human, which ultimately leads to the general development of human beings and groups of people. To strengthen the educational process, however, the curriculum component must be given attention and support to assure the process’s continuation. The interaction between a student and the learning resources is referred to from another educational perspective. To put it another way, learning is a process of teaching someone who is learning from someone and something. Learning from someone refers to the learner’s interaction with human resources (materials, resources, environment, and media) during the learning process, whereas learning from something refers to the learner’s interaction with inhuman resources (materials, resources, environment, and media) during the learning process.

The nature of education is accomplished after this framework is constructed for a specific learning situation (Pakpur, 2011, p. 20). Dubois defined education as a complete organisation of the learner’s surroundings in particular situations, despite a relatively broad definition of education (Fardanesh, 2015, p. 12). Despite having a comprehensive definition of education encompassing a range of characteristics such as environment, results, and specific scenarios, it fails to address crucial considerations such as learners’ requirements, prior knowledge, and motivation. In this context, education is defined as a process formed by a specific institution through the teaching and learning provided to its students, whether formally or informally.

1.2.1 Education: Islamic Perspectives

In general, defining education from an Islamic standpoint requires combining three concepts: *tarbiyyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib*. According to Al-Attas (1991), the implications of the terms *tarbiyyah*, *ta'lim*, and *ta'dib* taken together include the entire concept of education. While all phrases refer to education, *ta'dib* is the most specific and accurate definition. *Ta'lim* is made up of knowledge and education components, and it has the meaning of instructing, teaching, training, schooling, and educating.

The Arabic word "*tarbiyyah*" means "nurture," "bear," "feed," "foster," "nourish," "make to grow," "raise," and "bring out ripe fruit" (Al-Attas, 1991). However, in terms of vocabulary, *tarbiyyah* is insufficient to express the concept of education. The definition includes not just human but also animals, minerals, and plants in its definition (Al-Attas, 1991). *Tarbiyyah* is concerned about man's physical and emotional well-being.

As a result, *ta'dib* (root word: "*addaba*"), which means to refine, educate, discipline, punish, and chastise (Wehr, 1980), is a better phrase to describe education as a whole since it conveys the process of intellectual, spiritual, and social education. It also includes the phrases *tarbiyyah*, *ta'lim* and knowledge or content in its definition (Al-Taftazani, 1986; Bidmos, 1984). When the Prophet said, "My Lord educated (*addaba*) me and made my education (*ta'dib*) most complete," the Prophet ﷺ used the term *ta'dib* (Al-Ghazali, 1998).

According to this *Ḥadīth*, an essential part of Islamic education is instilling *adab* in individuals. So, what exactly does *adab* mean, and how does it connect to education? *Adab* has initially been meant to be a feast invitation, implying a good and polite social encounter. *Adab*, in this context, refers to mental and spiritual discipline. It is also related to developing healthy mental and spiritual characteristics so that people can distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, and accurate and untrue (Al-Attas, 1979). Finally, Al-Attas defined *ta'dib* as the process of instilling something into

human beings and installing *adab* in man. The concept of *ta'dib* includes the technique or education (a process of imparting), the substance (something), and the receiver (human beings). Overall, the concept of education from an Islamic perspective is far more comprehensive, encompassing all aspects of the learning process, beginning with the instructor, learner, attitude, and improving the human soul.

1.2.2 Role of Education in Changing a Society

Education plays a crucial part in sculpting a person's progress, notably in terms of personality, attitude, and attainment of specific goals. First and foremost, education's fundamental objective is to advance the Kingdom of God (Abdullah, 1989). This is because God is divine and cherishes all goodness; man should be good. On this subject, different Muslim scholars (Hadi, 1979; Al-Attas, 1991) referred to a man as "the image of God" (vicegerent of God), as he participated in God's transcendence. Man is being made in the way he is so that he can comprehend all of God's qualities. As a result, Islamic education's fundamental objective is the creation of a moral man.

Apart from that, the definition of a perfect human being contains two attributes. The first dimension is concerned with man's relationship with his creator, and the second is his interactions with others. In the first dimension, a decent man is fully aware of his duty to the genuine God, comprehends God's might and unity, and cultivates God-consciousness in his soul (Hadi, 1979; Bidmos, 1984; Al-Taftazani, 1986; Al-Attas, 1991). In practice, he is the one who performs the essential components of Islam, such as five daily prayers, fasting during the Ramadhan, and pilgrimage to Mecca, while also adhering to Islamic rules in all their deeds. Regardless of his responsibilities to himself, man owes it to other species to build cordial connections in a reasonable manner (Bidmos, 1984; Al-Taftazani, 1986).

This is the second defining quality of a good man. God admires a human who defends his brother's dignity and

continually inspires others to do the same (Abdullah, 1989). Islamic education's second objective is to balance the human physique, whether positive (divine) or destructive (evil) components. The fundamental objective of balancing these two components is to enable an individual's body, mind, and spirit to develop in a balanced manner (Bidmos, 1984; Hassan, 1983). According to Al-Attas, a decent man is one who continually attempts to enhance every facet of his inner self in order to achieve perfection as an *adab* (well-mannered) man (Wan Mohd Nor, 1998).

In reference to this, the human spirit is dominated by three unique potentialities that symbolise both virtue and evil. The first possibility is that *nafs al-ammarah* is the cause of all evil. If this heinous character is greater and more powerful than the divine (sound) parts, the human soul will succumb to evil and follow desire, which will have an effect on his conduct and activities. On the other hand, if the divine (good) components are more potent and more mindful of God, they will be able to instruct the evil soul to submit to virtue (Nik Rosila, 2013). As a result, all evil traits are replaced with positive ones, bringing the human spirit to a condition of tranquillity known as *nafs al-mutamainnah*. The third choice is *nafs al-lawwamah*, which is in the centre of the wicked and useful aspects of *nafs al-ammarah*. Unless it is enlightened by virtue and becomes conscious, this soul is permanently unconscious (Al-Ghazali, 1998). In this situation, self-discipline and spiritual teaching are vital for developing the soul to be kind.

In conclusion, a sound understanding of education's role in human life will encompass all aspects of human development, particularly in terms of becoming a knowledgeable person with a positive attitude and a clear goal through the ability to impart knowledge to other humans. This knowledge serves as a barrier against evil, particularly from a spiritual standpoint, and finally, a knowledge that serves to make humans more civilised and disciplined, as explained by Islamic scholars. This is because it distinguishes different perspectives from those in the West, where education is more likely to focus on global issues and less on a person's

personality and spiritual growth. Nonetheless, a decent education will decide human quality, particularly in logical reasoning and self-character. However, as it is the most crucial value in political development, a good leader will guide a country towards quality advancement and concern for its residents' welfare. In this case, education helps to situate a better women's position in achieving gender equality in various aspects, most notably in the decision-making process.

1.3 Education in Malaysia: Where Were Women?

Generally, education was offered through a mix of formal and informal pedagogy. Prior to the pre-British period in 1824, education for women was primarily non-formal, concentrating on religious instruction, value and moral education, spiritual instruction, martial arts instruction, and handicraft instruction. Education is not restricted to the aforementioned aspects; it has been expanded to include survival skills such as gardening, fishing, and hunting. Political parties, government departments and agencies, police and military forces, corporate organisations and enterprises, voluntary societies, labour unions, and even individuals organised non-formal education throughout history (Jamilah, 1984, p. 12).

With the establishment of British colonial control, the education administrations on the Malay Peninsula were significantly impacted by the colonial policy of "Divide and Rule." In Malaya, they pioneered the introduction of formal education for both sexes (Jamilah, 1995, p. 15). This approach, due to geographic location and ethnicity, has resulted in disparate educational frameworks and unequal distribution of school facilities. Better schools were concentrated in urban areas, which provided a compelling argument for rural settlers' lack of access to quality education. In the worst-case scenario, women from poor economic backgrounds were frequently educationally disadvantaged and deprived (Jamilah, 1995, p. 55). In light of the Divide and Rule policy, a four-language education concept, colloquially referred to as a

vernacular system, was implemented in schools. It is argued that the split of one educational system is considered to serve distinct interests.

Women were discouraged from pursuing education due to the solid patriarchal ideology and belief system (O'Brien, 1984). As devoted housewives, women should stay at home and dedicate themselves to their husbands and families. Despite the barriers that prevent women from attending school, female participation increased from 1938 to 1967.

The post-independence period was formative for Malaysia's education system since Malay parents explicitly desired formal education for their daughters as a result of increased political awareness in the Malayan community. Notably, the same year saw phenomenal growth in the number of girls enrolled in both primary and secondary schools. In comparison to other races in Malaya, Malay women's progress was extremely slow in the early 1900s, owing to family and societal opposition. They retained the old belief that women were only allowed as male servants who dutifully obeyed the family head's directives. As a result, some parents believed that the girls should stay at home and learn some basic household management skills in order to eventually become housewives like their mothers, who were capable of educating and caring for their families despite a lack of formal education (Utusan Zaman, 1939). They received only an elementary education and only a smattering of Malay education. This was due to Malay conventions prohibiting young ladies from leaving the house unaccompanied.

This tendency shifted over the twentieth century as women, like other male youngsters, became exposed to formal schooling. Numerous factors influenced parents' decisions to educate their daughters and enrol all of their children in school, resulting in an increase in the number of girls enrolled in formal education. To begin with, there were a few academics who were progressive and recognised Malay women's right to better living conditions. They agreed on the importance of Malay women excelling in politics and competing with Malay men (*Utusan Zaman*, 1939). These men's openness was a result of repeated exposure to their

schooling. Several of them were well-educated Malays, such as Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba), who obtained a portion of his education in the Middle East, and Syed Syeikh al-Hadi (Adibah Sulaiman et al., 2011). As a result, they continually promoted women's growth, strengthened political organisations, and affected social change. Only a few Malay women at that time, except for the Malay elites, were able to attain a higher level of education.

Second, various newspaper and magazine articles emphasised the need for education for Malay youngsters, both male and female. Malay women's advancement became a major topic of discussion in Malayan newspapers and publications such as *Saudara*, *Majlis*, *al-Imam*, *al-Hikmah*, *Majalah Guru*, *Utusan Zaman*, *Bahtera*, and *Bulan Melayu*. For instance, *al-Imam* emphasised the benefits and significance of education for youngsters, particularly girls, in terms of Malays' future growth (Zaiton Ghani, 1985: pp. 210-211). Additionally, the newspaper and magazine's authors criticised some practices that made it difficult for Malay women to advance. They believed that these practices were obsolete in the 20th century. Between the 1920s and 1940s, most newspaper and magazine articles urged women to become more aware of development issues, owing to their perceived disadvantage compared to other races.

Thirdly, teachers urged students to pursue additional education in order to achieve success. For instance, Kontik Kamariah Binti Ahmad, a visiting teacher who visited numerous schools in Selangor in 1933, consistently urged students to excel academically (Aishah, 1992, p. 4). Mohd. Yusof Ahmad, who was also a visiting teacher, visited numerous schools in Selangor in the same year to select deserving pupils who would like to continue their education in English schools after passing Fifth Class (Abdullah Hussain & Khalid M. Hussain, 2000: p. 22). Teachers had to exert considerable effort because the percentage of Malay children enrolled in school, particularly in English schools, remained significantly lower than the percentage of other pupils (Aishah, 1992, p. 5).

Although women's participation in higher learning institutions was relatively limited in the 1970s, they began to travel overseas to pursue higher education from the perspectives of other countries. The experience was echoed by Wahibah in her thesis, Kulliyah Al-Banat Al-Islamiyyah Universiti Al-Azhar (KBIUA): *Sejarah Perkembangan dan Sumbangan Wanita Lulusnya dalam Pendidikan Islam di Malaysia (1964-1994)*, which stated factors contributed to the 'rihlah ilmiyyah' of Malaysian. The said factors were:

1. "perkembangan pendidikan tinggi Malaysia,
2. pengaruh gerakan *Islah* dan *Tajdid* dalam pendidikan wanita,
3. penubuhan institusi pengajian tinggi Islam,
4. jaringan pendidikan tinggi Islam wanita,
5. pengaruh pelajar lelaki Melayu Universiti al-Azhar, and
6. pengaruh kebangkitan Islam dan gerakan Islam" (Wahibah, 2014, pp. 146-182).

As a result of the benefits of educational attainment, several graduates from this educational institution have made important contributions to decision-making in political institutions, such as Aminah Zakaria, Faizah Ismail, and Rosenani Hassan (Wahibah, 2014, pp. 285-306).

Due to the efforts of various groups, parents were encouraged to enrol their daughters in Malay or English schools, as well as *Maahad* and *Madrasah* (Islamic schools). Female enrolment expanded year after year to the point where female students were enrolled in male schools due to a scarcity of female institutions. These middle-class, educated women gradually became interested in community activities. Their goal was to expand Malays' participation in all aspects of life while also defending their homeland and country. These goals eventually resulted in middle-class women becoming more involved in societies and movements aimed at increasing Malays' possibilities to participate in politics, the economy, and education.

Although Hajjah Zainon Sulaiman, also known as Ibu Zain, was an elite woman, she was the first to advocate for the importance of formal education for Malay women, despite opposition from *Kaum Tua*. However, she received support from others, most notably *Kaum Muda*. Ibu Zain recommended Malay female students join the Girl Guides in order to boost their self-esteem and compete against other countries (Dancz, 1987, p. 21). It began with the formation of the Malay Women Teachers Union and was followed by the formation of *Persatuan Kaum Ibu*. Later on, these organisations developed into political parties led by women seeking positions in Malaya's political arena. These groups' and others' efforts had a positive impact on women's educational achievement and literacy. It altered women's perceptions and pushed them to engage in politics in order to increase women's recognition and rights while also promoting gender equality.

1.3.1 Do Malaysian Women Change Role?

Women's positions evolved significantly from the early days to the early twentieth century. They were the wives and mothers who presided over the household, acting partly as heads of state and having a say in the king's future. Women's gentle disposition was one of the impediments to their involvement in external issues, particularly politics. Additionally, the majority of parents did not want their daughters exposed to political problems. This refusal aimed to avoid contributing to the collapse of Eastern values and customs by exposing Malay women to politics. Men, on the other hand, feared that their rights would be eclipsed by women, jeopardising their pride while still advocating for equality. After gaining education, women developed a greater awareness of their rights and responsibilities in all areas. This aspect influenced Malay women's subsequent participation in political, administrative, and social affairs. Education's involvement and continuous promotion of women's education led to the development of numerous political

parties and structures among women. The following examples demonstrate how education has enabled women to assert their capabilities and rights, hence altering the position of women in Malaysia. It described the landscape of women's political participation.

In 1929, Ibu Zain created Malaysia's first women's organisation, Kesatuan Guru Malaya (Malaya Teachers' Union). She even founded and administered *Majalah Guru* and *Bulan Melayu* newspapers, arguing topics such as monogamy, children's educational techniques, and jobs for men and women, in addition to creating and administering government schools throughout the state of Johor (*Bulan Melayu*, 1930, pp. 6-9). This organisation developed a desire for active participation in Malay mothers. On the 20th of January 1930, the *Kaum Ibu* (Women Organisation) of Johor Bharu conducted a debate, followed by a convention in Batu Pahat on the 25th of April 1930. The two meetings discussed the importance of establishing Persekutuan Perempuan Melayu-Johor (Malay-Johore Women Organisation). The discussion resulted in the establishment of the Persekutuan Perempuan Melayu-Johor in 1930. More organisations, such as the Melaka Teachers' Union in 1938, were eventually founded with the objective of uniting women in a cooperative relationship to safeguard religious dignity and race (*Bulan Melayu*, 1930, pp. 6-9).

Numerous organisations were formed in response to this development during this period. For instance, the Kesatuan Melayu Singapura (KMS), or Malay Union of Singapore, created a women's wing in 1940, followed by the establishment of the Persatuan Wanita Melayu Terhormat Johor. The association was founded by Azizah Jaafar (Dato' Onn's sister) with support from the wife of Johor's Chief Minister. The establishment's mission was to eradicate adult female illiteracy by training household skills such as sewing and cooking (Manderson, 1981, p. 77). According to Dancz, following the departure of the Japanese, Ibu Zain formed Kumpulan Ibu Sepakat (KIS) in Johor, and shortly thereafter, Dato' Onn requested that KIS be included in the Pergerakan Melayu Semenanjung (The Movement of the Malay

Peninsular). The emergence of these women's organisations paved the way for their subsequent involvement in politics following World War II (Manderson, 1981, p. 77).

Women's political participation began with their membership in numerous national organisations, including the Angkatan Wanita Sedar (AWAS), the Malay Nationalist Party's (Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM)) women's wing, and the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) via the Kaum Ibu UMNO (Women Association of UMNO). Following the administration failure of the Malayan Union, the people of Malaya at that time, particularly the Malay women, came together to defend the country and claimed to have their own government. It served as a springboard for them to join forces with males in order to accomplish the same aim in politics. Prior to the founding of AWAS, Aishah Binti Ghani was the leader of PKMM's women's wing.

Datin Sri Puteh Mariah Binti Ibrahim Rashid (a government officer with English education and also a representative of the Malay Association of Perak), Zainab Binti Abdul Rahman (a representative of the Malay Association of Seberang Perai), and Saleha Binti Mohd Ali (a representative of the Malay Association of Selangor) proposed the establishment of a women's movement at the UMNO's 1946 general meeting. Their conversations resulted in establishing the Women's Department, which assisted women in times of need. This section was enlarged to become Pejabat Setiausaha (the Secretary's Office) before being officially founded in 1949 as Pergerakan Kaum Ibu UMNO (Women's Association of UMNO, currently known as the Women's Wing of UMNO). Their primary objective was to encourage members to take on significant positions in general and in government in order to advance the interests of Malays in politics and to serve as their representatives in advocating for their rights in government (Manderson, 1981, p. 77; Dancz, 1987, p. 169).

Women's political consciousness was formalised with the foundation of the Pergerakan Kaum Ibu UMNO on 25th August 1949, three years after the UMNO's main body was established. This was because UMNO leaders believed that women could work effectively alongside men to develop the

party's organisation. Dato' Onn claimed in his address that "the voice of Kaum Ibu will be as powerful as the voice of a man—the voice of both will define the structure of the country's government" (Manderson, 1981). Puteh Mariah (1946-1949), Hajjah Zainun binti Sulaiman (1950-1953), Khatijah binti Sidek (1954-1955), and Datin Fatimah binti Haji Hashim (1956) were the early leaders of the Pergerakan Kaum Ibu UMNO (Manderson, 1981). This movement aimed to instil in women both the concept of independence and a sense of patriotism.

The Pergerakan Kaum Ibu UMNO's primary objective was to arrange numerous programmes to unite Malays in opposition to the Malayan Union and elevate women's roles in various professions. At the end of June 1946, 36 independent groups, including the Women Association of Selangor, united with UMNO in an effort to oppose the Malayan Union (UMNO Malaysia, 65). They felt that unification with the UMNO movement would indirectly benefit the Malay community as a whole by making it stronger and more active (Aishah, 1993, pp. 262-263).

Clearly, the knowledge gained by these Malay ladies enabled them to make a difference in people's lives. They began forming women's organisations and laid the groundwork for Malay women to form minor associations and participate in political activities. Indeed, these early platforms prompted them to become more overtly involved following World War II. Women's involvement in politics was critical at the time since it resulted in subsequent advancements for women in various spheres of life.

Fatimah Haji Hashim was Malaysia's first female minister following the country's independence. She was appointed as Minister for Welfare by Tunku Abdul Rahman, the country's first prime minister. Since then, women have been assigned to ministries deemed "appropriate" for their roles, such as the Ministry of Welfare or the Ministry of Women and Family Development, or to junior ministries such as the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports, which has since been renamed the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Arts (Wan Azizah, 2002, p. 2). Rafidah Aziz is the only woman to have held a top

ministerial position, appointed as Minister of International Trade and Industry in 1987. Even now, the proportion of female ministers or deputies is deficient in relation to male ministers, and the industrialised world lags far behind.

Malaysia previously did not have a quota system for increasing women's political representation. Women have only recently gained prominence in political parties. The ruling UMNO has elected only one woman to its supreme council out of around forty members, while Parti Keadilan has elected eight women to its leadership council. Apart from the eight women chosen for Keadilan's policymaking body (including the president and treasurer), two state committees of Keadilan are also led by women (in Sabah and Sarawak). It was more significant that the combined political and economic crises of September 1998 served as a catalyst for reviving the dormant popular demand for reform (reformation).

Additionally, these events prompted women to become increasingly involved in the country's social, economic, and political spheres. Women's significant participation in the reformation movement since that year demonstrates this. Women have definitely played an equal role to men in activating programmes aimed at effecting change.

Over the previous three years, we have seen women's continued contribution to efforts in creating a more open, just, and equitable society. Their commitment to these aims defies the oft-repeated cliché that women are weak and easily-influenced. The tenacity and perseverance of women in this struggle have resulted in a very natural bonding or synergy that generates strength and passion for working for a more just and equitable society and governance in Malaysia. As part of this effort, an alternative agenda must be formed that enables women to maximise their potential for personal well-being and societal progress. It is vital to build an alternative platform that transcends tokenism and does not merely employ women as a vote-gathering instrument for the political system during elections. If women are allowed to fulfil their full potential, they can contribute to the empowerment of all citizens.

This is feasible without jeopardising any woman's social, cultural, or religious commitments. While women's political positions are critical for progress, it is also critical to recognise women's contributions in other areas of society. Malaysia's experience demonstrates that any discussion of women's political involvement cannot be restricted to formal institutional representation. Following completion of their tertiary degree, a sizable proportion of women prefer to remain at home. While they may not occupy formal employment commensurate with their degree, they contribute to society's growth by raising their children and families in a more progressive atmosphere. Traditional conceptions of democracy and politics preclude a woman-friendly strategy. The convergence between democratic and gender concepts remains an unexplored subject.

1.4 Education in Indonesia: Inequality of Gender

Similar to Malaysia, the social consequences of education increasingly affect Indonesian women. Education's influence was sufficient to alter social expectations and goals (Pegues, 1998). Additionally, liberal feminists argued that in order to ensure that women's issues are not overlooked, women should be provided equal rights to participate in the production of knowledge. It instilled confidence and acted as a tool for women's empowerment through that education (Pegues, 1998). To understand why so many Indonesian women were illiterate, one needs to look at the Javanese society's history and culture (Arif, 2013). The traditional group's robust patriarchal belief system barred women from seeking education outside the community.

Additionally, Indonesian women were subjected to greater repression than Malaysian women due to their '*kodrat*' (nature) (McGregor & Hearman, 2007). Although they achieved independence much earlier than Malaysia, they remained committed to this conservative ideology. Indeed, the Indonesian government signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980 (Ayu, 2022). Nonetheless, the subtle persecution against gender equality persisted until the fall of the dictatorial Suharto regime. Despite this, it is worth noting that women's suffrage has never been a point of contention in Indonesia since independence.

Indonesian girls, in general, received informal education through their parents' schooling in order to prepare them for marriage or labour prior to the colonial period. Historically, Indonesian girls married young, making the prospect of acquiring a proper education via school appear hopeless for women whose lives were predestined to be spent at home. Prior to the colonial period, formal education existed, but it was primarily for men, and it was uncommon for women to attend. This pre-existing school was devoted to religious education in order to prepare boys to read sacred books. This custom, however, altered with the establishment of the Dutch colonial period in the Indies (Blackburn, 2004, p. 33). They founded a school to educate men in management with a Western-modern mindset. They employed the Malay language as the school system's *lingua franca*. Indonesian parents are fearful of sending their daughters to school for various reasons, including a lack of job possibilities for educated women and cultural aversion to educated women. According to Bemmelen (1982), just 15,000 Indonesian females were enrolled in Western-style schools despite the country's population of nearly 30 million.

The establishment of Ethical Policy in 1901 brought a new perspective on the school system, which is now based on modern-style education and incorporates secular training. The policy's stated objective was to raise the standard of living for their colonial people. Although there were numerous government-funded schools, they primarily benefited Europeans, while only a handful of indigenous people acquired an education. They developed vernacular language schools for Chinese and Malay but limited them to primary schooling under the influence of Western education. Meanwhile, Islamic institutions transformed to begin teaching secular subjects such as mathematics and non-Arabic literacy such as Malay.

Priyayi women become the earliest contributors to assert the importance of education among women. Kartini of Jepara (1879-1904) and Dewi Sartika of Bandung (1884-1947) were among the *priyayi* women who are known as famous national heroines and pioneers of women's emancipation in education (Robinson & Bassel, 2002). This trend began during the colonial period in the late nineteenth century. It fought and challenged the colonial rule for equal women's rights and women's education. Kartini was viewed as the Ethical Policy's protagonist, promoting a synthesis of the perspectives of educated Indonesian girls and colonial governmental forces. Education, she believed, was an integral component of 'the girls of the nobility.' The primary rationale for teaching them was moral, based on their possible civilising impact as spouses and mothers. Kartini defined liberation as a struggle to be free of the control of Javanese culture, which bound the women in her town at that time, and the desire to receive an education in schools and oppose polygamy. Kartini, on the other hand, died before she could complete her task. Kartini's Dutch friends have used her letters to bolster the push for girls' education (Blackburn, 2004, p. 37). Later, beginning in 1913, they privately created so-called Kartini schools for Javanese girls.

Another prominent figure who actively participated in women's emancipation in education was Dewi Sartika. In comparison to Kartini, Dewi Sartika empowered women via real action that embodied the spirit of women's struggle for freedom—specifically, the woman's goal to earn an education (Riska, 2013, p. 6). She founded her ideas on education values and perspective based on Sudanese local wisdom of *cageur* (high level of health), *bageur* (good personality), *pinter* (intelligent), *wanter* (brave and independent), and *bener* (right path) (Labibatusolihah et al., 2019, p. 454). Dewi Sartika's efforts to promote women's capability can be observed in the women's school she founded in West Java. Dewi Sartika established Sakola Wife (which was later renamed Sakola Kautamaan Wife or Women's Special School and is now known as the Dewi Sartika School), where she also expressed her views on how women should be and the

importance of education for women (Yeni & Lutfatulatifah, 2020, p. 120).

Apart from Kartini and Dewi Sartika, there are several proponents of female emancipation in this field of education. Ayu Surio Hadikusumo, Adjeng Martini, Ki Hajar Dewantara, Umi Kalsum, Jarisah, and Ayu Siti Sundari are a few examples. Each of them played a part in their area and region in raising awareness among girls and women about the need for education for life improvement. These were the years preceding Indonesia's independence. More figures were arguing for and demonstrating women's aptitude in politics and decision-making.

While other experts asserted that women with a higher degree have a better chance of gaining entrance to political parties and participating in decision-making processes, unfortunately, Parawansa believed pessimistically that highly educated women could not transform Indonesia's political landscape (2005, p. 82). Participation of women in politics in Indonesia began with the inaugural 'Kongres Perempuan Indonesia' (Indonesian Woman's Congress) convened in 1928. This conference encouraged women to take part in political arenas (Parawansa, 2005, p. 82). Women won 6.3% of seats in the Indonesian parliament in the 1955 general election. In Indonesia, the growing number of educated women suggests a more active role for women in politics. Nonetheless, female members of parliament were significantly less involved in politics than projected by Indonesian feminists, at less than 30%. As time passed, there was a noticeable improvement in the number of women involved in the political sphere despite not reaching the quota system.

While women's empowerment initiatives are already in place, their effectiveness is contingent not only on women's capacity to engage in the empowerment process but also on fostering gender sensitivity. In Indonesia, women participate in school at a much lower rate than men. This is mainly because men wield authority and deny women access to government-funded education in Indonesia. Indonesian men continue to preserve the patriarchal system because they

believe that investing in women's education delivers unacceptably low returns (Sri Lestari & Prisilowati, 2000, p. 10).

1.4.1 Evolution of Indonesian Women in Education to Political Participation

According to statistics retrieved from the World Bank (2020), despite the fact that women's education in Indonesia is gradually increasing, total achievement still lags behind that of men. Indeed, the Indonesian government attempts to empower women by making education more accessible and incorporating them into numerous public groups. Nonetheless, significant impediments to education for women persist, including social, cultural, and economic impediments. Their persistent presence is primarily a result of Indonesia's patriarchal society, which is steeped in centuries of cultural history (Nilan & Argyo, 2012, p. 280).

The rise of women's organisations started to flourish with the establishment of the Indonesian Women's Congress in 1945. During the Sukarno era (1945-1966), women invented the names of some prominent politicians and political groups. Kartini Kartaradjasa and Supeni were both well-known members of the Indonesian National Party (PNI). Walandauw was a significant member of the Indonesian Christian Party (Parkindo); Mahmuda Mawardi and Wachid Hasyim were notable members of the Nadhlatul Ulama Party; and Salawati Daud was a prominent member of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). All of these ladies, however, forcibly disappeared when the Sukarno regime collapsed in a coup led by General Suharto (Febriana, 2019). During Suharto's reign, he tried to replace women's organisations that promoted women's political activism with Dharma Wanita, or domestication and femininity. For decades, women have been pushed away from the political stage and into the 'kitchen.' Nonetheless, the spirit of the women's movement, on the other hand, has persisted among Indonesian women, both those living

Under Suharto's restrictions, particularly in Java and indigenous women (Febriana, 2019).

During the authoritarian "New Order" era (1966-1998), women were represented in limited numbers and had minimal influence in Indonesia's national legislature (Bessell, 2004). Women's presence in national legislatures averaged 9% and peaked at only 12.4% in 1992 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2015). Women entered the public sphere mainly through religious organisations (such as Nahdlatul Ulama, NU, and Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's major Muslim organisations) or state-corporatist organisations such as Dharma Wanita (for the wives of civil officials) or Family Welfare Empowerment (Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, PKK). These organisations emphasised the significant roles of women in the domestic environment.

Megawati Sukarnoputri's election as president in 2001 eclipsed Abdurrahman and nearly discredited the significance and relevance of education for women. Megawati has been labelled as intellectually deficient due to her lack of education. Despite this, she was able to solidify and exert her leadership in order to administer a country due to her strong will. Megawati's appointment in a crucial moment has steadily transformed and institutionalised gender equity in Indonesia's democratic transition. However, despite Indonesia's female leadership, improved gender equity is far from inevitable since Megawati was not a vocal advocate for women's rights. As a result, when the women's organisation persuaded the new president to expand the number of women in the cabinet, they had a few successes.

In spite of various struggles and a number of lengthy processes, the Indonesian government ultimately established copyright legislation for women, a law that permits women to equalise men and women in the political discipline (electoral system). Indonesia enacted Law No. 10 of 2008, establishing quotas for women's political involvement, specifically 30% for legislative candidates and 30% for party electoral candidates (Rhoads, 2012). Thus, given the fact that Indonesia is a democratic country that anticipates women's efforts, the law is highly beneficial for women in attaining their rights to

participate in politics. Even if there is a rule prohibiting discrimination against women's political involvement in social life, it is obvious how women's rights would still be neglected.

It is critical to increase women's awareness in order to enable them to participate more actively in politics. It is vital to have a robust educational system so that the stigma of women not deserving to enter politics directly is recognised as a mistaken notion. Women's limited engagement in politics has become a source of contention for all players in the sector, considering that women have the same right to enter politics as men do. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the global average of women in lower chambers of parliament was 24.6% in late 2019; in Asia, it was 20.1% (with Indonesia coming in just above this figure, at 20.9%). Indonesia came up in 120th place out of a possible 187 countries. (Aspinall et al., 2021, p. 5). In terms of social indicators, Indonesia has also made significant strides towards achieving a number of development goals. Profits have been invested heavily in education and health care, to the point where the country can brag of universal primary or basic education and nearly 97% school enrolment rates in 2009. As a result, adult literacy has increased to 92.8%.

Besides that, according to research undertaken by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 2017 at the ASEAN level, women's representation remains low and has not attained the aim of 30%. Women's representation in Indonesia is still only 19.8%, well below the Philippines' 29.50% and Laos' 27.50% (Gerintya, 2017; Untung & Diastama, 2019, p. 134). Two recurring topics are the material resources that female candidates use to run for office and the networks that they use to organise their campaigns. Indonesia has adopted an election system that places a premium on personal campaigning by individual candidates and on party support for nominees. As a result, a political landscape dominated by personalised campaigns has emerged, in which politicians form their own campaign teams (success teams) and reach voters through their connections to established social networks. Such efforts are costly, as are the gifts of money,

products, and community infrastructure that have become an integral component of campaigning in Indonesia's highly clientelist electoral landscape (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2016; Burhanuddin, 2019). Due to Indonesian society's entrenched patriarchal structures, women candidates frequently face disadvantages when it comes to mobilising the material resources and networks necessary to win elections: they frequently have fewer material resources than men and are less deeply embedded in dominant informal political networks at the local level (Aspinall et al., 2021, p. 5).

Apart from Megawati Sukarnoputri, other women have been documented in history for their involvement not only in national politics but also in international organisations. Among prominent figures who have served as cabinet ministers in Indonesia were Maria Ulfah Santoso (Minister of Social Welfare), Soerastri Karma Trimurti (Minister of Labour), Khofifah Indar Prawansa (Minister of State for Women's Empowerment), Artati Marzuki (Minister of Basic Education and Culture), Siti Fadilah Supari (Minister of Health), Mari Elka Pangestu (Minister of Trade), and Armida Alisjahbana (Minister of Human Development and Culture). Among these names are a handful dedicated their expertise to international organisations. Siti Fadilah Supari's contributions to the World Health Organisation's research on the sharing of avian influenza virus samples (WHO, 2007). Meanwhile, Mari Elka Pangestu and Sri Mulyani Indrawati are both economists. Both of these individuals were named Managing Directors of the World Bank Group due to their extensive experience and understanding of economics (World Bank, 2016; Marchio, 2020). Another example would be Armida Alisjahbana. She was the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific from 2007 until 2011 (United Nations, 2018).

To summarise, women's engagement in the political arena and decision-making processes has significantly enhanced as a result of their high educational attainment. The value of education has been widely propagated throughout

The country through the development of several schools with the goal of establishing an equitable society in Indonesia.

1.5 Conclusion

Malaysia and Indonesia, in general, are grappling with implementing women's empowerment in their own countries. Malaysia is a small country with few ethnic groups and races in comparison to Indonesia. Indonesia was a relatively huge landmass inhabited by hundreds of ethnic groups and races. As a result, women's empowerment is not limited to Malay society but has been found in many races and ethnic groups. Both countries now have a quota system that allows 30% of women to participate in the political process and decision-making. Women should seize newly acquired opportunities to progress and study all facets of how women might maximise their human potential. It is evident that education has played a significant impact on women's participation in politics based on the above narrative.

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