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## The Relevance of the Female Sufi Rābi`ah al-`Adawiyah in Addressing Patriarchal Problems

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze women's experiences in dealing with patriarchal culture, which is still commonly found in economic, social, religious, educational, political, and legal spheres. Recognition of women's roles and capacities in social and religious spheres remains a major challenge for patriarchal culture. This study highlights how Rābi`ah al-Adawiyah responded to the issue of patriarchy and what strategies women can use to obtain their rights within an increasingly patriarchal cultural system. This study uses a qualitative approach or literature study, examining works related to the topic. The concepts of al-Mahabbah (divine love), spiritual independence, and Rābi`ah's lifestyle are the focus of analysis. All of these concepts show a rejection of female subordination in patriarchal structures. The results of the study show that Rābi`ah's spirituality is not only ascetic-individualistic, but also contains ethical and emancipatory aspects, which affirm women as independent, empowered, and dignified subjects. Rābi`ah's thinking is important because it can deconstruct patriarchal narratives that marginalize women and offer an alternative paradigm of spiritual equality and women's potential for self-development. The results show Sufism as a theological and philosophical source for gender justice in modern Islam.

**Keywords:** *Women, Patriarchy, Rābi`ah al-Adawiyah*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengalaman perempuan dalam menghadapi budaya patriarki yang masih banyak ditemukan dalam ranah ekonomi, sosial, keagamaan, pendidikan, politik, dan hukum. Pengakuan terhadap peran dan kapasitas perempuan dalam ruang sosial dan keagamaan masih menjadi tantangan besar dalam budaya patriarki. Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana Rābi`ah al-`Adawiyah merespons

persoalan patriarki serta strategi apa yang dapat digunakan perempuan untuk memperoleh hak-haknya dalam sistem budaya yang semakin patriarkal, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi kepustakaan dengan menelaah karya-karya yang relevan dengan topik tersebut. Konsep al-Maḥabbah (cinta Ilahi), kemandirian spiritual, dan gaya hidup Rābi‘ah menjadi fokus analisis. Seluruh konsep tersebut menunjukkan penolakan terhadap subordinasi perempuan dalam struktur patriarki, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa spiritualitas Rābi‘ah tidak hanya bersifat asketik-individualistik, tetapi juga mengandung aspek etis dan emansipatoris yang menegaskan perempuan sebagai subjek yang mandiri, berdaya, dan bermartabat. Pemikiran Rābi‘ah menjadi penting karena mampu mendekonstruksi narasi patriarki yang memarginalkan perempuan serta menawarkan paradigma alternatif tentang kesetaraan spiritual dan potensi perempuan untuk mengembangkan diri. Hasil penelitian ini mendukung tasawuf sebagai sumber teologis dan filosofis bagi keadilan gender dalam Islam modern.

**Kata kunci:** Perempuan, Patriarki, Rābi‘ah al-‘Adawiyah.

## A. Introduction

The level of patriarchy in Indonesia is expected to increase by 2024, with a score of 68.6%, 0.01% higher than the global average. Over the past 19 years and 16 editions of the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) published by the WEF, gender equality in Indonesia has ranged from 64% to 70%. The lowest score was 64.73% in 2008, and the highest was 70% in 2020.<sup>1</sup> This patriarchal culture has existed since ancient times, the culture of society has placed men in the top position, while women are in second place.<sup>2</sup> In Indonesia, this culture is still influenced by social structures and everyday life, which give rise to gender inequality. Men's roles are more respected than women's, who are often expected to fulfill domestic roles.<sup>3</sup> They believe that women's duties are limited to reproductive functions, as women are believed to only need to stay at home to continue the lineage.<sup>4</sup>

This results in women lacking autonomy (independence) to determine their own life choices, in addition to being required to be devoted to their husbands and parents. In such circumstances, patriarchal culture becomes a structural problem that hinders women's freedom and participation in social and religious life.<sup>5</sup> Amidst the advancement of ways of thinking and the women's emancipation movement which is currently increasingly active in voicing gender equality, women should be given the freedom to choose their own life choices without being influenced or stigmatized in unpleasant ways by society.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shofiyah Rahmatillah, *WEF: Kesetaraan Gender Indonesia 2024 Naik 4,88% dalam 19 Tahun*, GoodStats, 2024, [WEF: Kesetaraan Gender Indonesia 2024 Naik 4,88% dalam 19 Tahun - GoodStats Data](#)

<sup>2</sup> Ade Irma Sakina dan Dessy Hasanah Siti A, "Menyoroti Budaya Patriarki di Indonesia", *Share: Social Work Journal*, Vol. 7 No. 1. H.. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Rima Anggraini Maghfiro dan Fransiscus Xaverius, "Pengalaman Perempuan dalam Menghadapi Budaya Patriarki", *Paradigma*, Vol. 4 No. 1, 2025, h.. 122

<sup>4</sup> Irdianti, *et al.* "Hubungan antara Budaya Patriarki dengan Sikap Kesetaraan Gender pada Mahasiswa Universitas Negeri Makassar", *HUMAN: South Asean Journal of Social Studies*, Vol. 4 No. 1, 2024, h.. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Safriyano. R, *et al.* Analisis Budaya Patriarki Terhadap Kesetaraan Gender Perempuan dalam Rumah Tangga, *Jurnal Ilmiah Publik (JIP)*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2024 h. 173.

<sup>6</sup> Alya Azma Fazira, *et al.* Memahami Narasi Komunikasi Pengambilan Keputusan Untuk Tidak Menikah pada Perempuan, Universitas Diponegoro, 2023, h. 3.

Talking about women, in the era of classical Sufism there was a female figure who chose the spiritual path autonomously, namely Rābi`ah al-Adawiyah.<sup>7</sup> She was a Sufi woman in Basra, Rābi`ah's sincerity and love made her recognized by the men of her time.<sup>8</sup> She spoke passionate, eye-opening words of wisdom to them about God, and they accepted his teachings wholeheartedly.<sup>9</sup> Rābi`ah was a weak and wise woman. When Rābi`ah called herself a “weak woman,” others called her that. However, this contradicted her actions, for Rābi`ah was a strong-willed woman who criticized and helped develop other Sufi masters of her time. Rābi`ah paved the way for women of her time.<sup>10</sup>

The spiritual thoughts and practices of Rābi`ah al-Adawiyah become even more significant when read in the context of contemporary patriarchal issues. Her theological-philosophical perspective, which affirms the spiritual equality of men and women, stems from a spirituality that emphasizes divine love, inner independence, and a direct relationship between humans and God.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine how the figure and teachings of Rābi`ah al-Adawiyah can be used as a means for critical reflection aimed at deconstructing patriarchal narratives and also strengthening discussions on women's empowerment in Islam.

## B. Literature Review

Rābi`ah al-Adawiyah has often been represented in classical and modern literature as one of the pioneering female figures in Islamic mysticism. Early historical sources, such as those preserved by Abu Nu`aym al-Isfahānī and later transmitted through Sufi biographical collections, present Rābi`ah primarily through anecdotes that highlight her intense devotion, asceticism, and utter surrender to divine love. Scholars like Margaret Smith and Annemarie Schimmel have interpreted these narratives as more than hagiography they illustrate the spiritual agency of a woman who resisted social norms of her era.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Rābi`ah's dismissal of both fear-based and reward-based religiosity in favor of pure love of God challenges conventional religio-social paradigms that frequently subordinate women's spiritual expression to patriarchal structures. Yet, some early chroniclers tended to exoticize her austerity, unintentionally reinforcing gendered notions of sanctity that equate female holiness with self-negation.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary feminist scholars critique such depictions, arguing that they risk marginalizing Rābi`ah's intellectual and spiritual agency by framing her primarily in terms of mystical otherworldliness rather than social engagement.

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<sup>7</sup> Mohamad Za`in Fiqron dan Erina Dwi Parawati, Relevansi Tasawuf Cinta Ilahi Rabi`ah al-Adawiyah terhadap Problem Radikalisme Beragama di Indonesia, *Hikamia*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2023, h. 77-80.

<sup>8</sup> Mohamad Za`in Fiqron dan Erina Dwi Parawati, *Relevansi Tasawuf Cinta Ilahi Rabi`ah al-Adawiyah terhadap Problem Radikalisme Beragama di Indonesia*, h. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Mohamad Za`in Fiqron dan Erina Dwi Parawati, *Relevansi Tasawuf Cinta Ilahi Rabi`ah al-Adawiyah terhadap Problem Radikalisme Beragama di Indonesia*, h. 79.

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Ihza Fazrian dan Warjani Fajar Riyanto, Female Sufi Authority: Sufi Ideas in *Zikr an-Niswah al-Muta`abbidāt aṣ-Ṣūfiyyāt* by as-Sulamī, *DINIKA: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2025, h. 172.

<sup>11</sup> Syarboini, Tauhid dalam Perspektif Rabi`ah Addawiyah, *Saree: Research in Gender Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2021, h. 114-116.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Hilal, “Debating Prophethood: Ibn Al-Malāḥimī’s Critique to Muslim Philosophers,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 51–72.

<sup>13</sup> Assyifa Qori Lhegina, Wasith Achadi, and Rosendah Dwi Maulaya, “Internalization of Character Education Values at the Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Yogyakarta Elementary School in the Perspective of Al-Ghazali’s Educational Thought,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 1–15.

Modern researchers have increasingly emphasized Rābi‘ah’s relevance to contemporary issues of gender and authority within Islamic contexts. For example, scholars like Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed have drawn attention to the ways in which Rābi‘ah’s life narrative disrupts patriarchal assumptions about women’s access to religious knowledge and leadership.<sup>14</sup> Mernissi, in particular, situates Rābi‘ah within a broader Islamic feminist discourse, showing how her legacy undermines the notion that deep spiritual insight is an exclusively male domain. This aligns with recent studies in gender and religion that argue for a reevaluation of historical female figures not as outliers but as integral voices in religious intellectual history. Nonetheless, the extant literature also reveals tensions between celebrating Rābi‘ah’s spiritual contributions and critically interrogating the ways patriarchal historiography has shaped her reception.<sup>15</sup> These tensions underscore the importance of distinguishing between textual representation and lived historicity in understanding her impact.

A central theme in studies of Rābi‘ah is her formulation of divine love (*mahabbah*) as the highest aim of the spiritual path. Annemarie Schimmel’s influential work on Sufi metaphysics interprets Rābi‘ah’s emphasis on loving God for God’s sake as a radical departure from instrumental religiosity, which often intersects with patriarchal moral policing. In traditional Sufi lexicons, Rābi‘ah’s love-centered theology disrupts normative hierarchies by refusing to measure spiritual worth through gendered moral expectations.<sup>16</sup> Scholars like Carl Ernst have explored how this orientation parallels certain feminist ethics of relationality, wherein mutual respect and love are foundational to ethical life. Despite this, there is a significant gap in scholarship that explicitly connects *mahabbah* theology to contemporary efforts to dismantle patriarchal norms. The literature suggests the need for more systematic theological engagement that bridges Rābi‘ah’s mystical principles with feminist ethical frameworks.

Critical discourse analysis of classical Sufi sources reveals how gendered language shapes the portrayal of Rābi‘ah, often in subtle yet powerful ways. Researchers such as Judith Tucker have examined how medieval biographers selectively amplified or downplayed specific elements of Rābi‘ah’s narrative to fit cultural expectations about female sanctity. This selective representation has contributed to an image of Rābi‘ah that is sometimes celebrated for piety yet isolated from broader social and intellectual contributions. By unpacking these historiographical choices, contemporary scholarship challenges patriarchal biases embedded within the historical record. Such analysis also demonstrates how interpretation itself can be a site of power, capable of either reinforcing or subverting dominant gender ideologies. Thus, recognizing the influence of interpretive frameworks is essential in reassessing Rābi‘ah’s relevance for today.

The interplay between Sufism and gender in Islamic intellectual history has been a growing area of academic inquiry, particularly as scholars revisit overlooked female voices. Rābi‘ah’s place in this conversation is often juxtaposed with male Sufi

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<sup>14</sup> Meyfa Rizkia Al Aswa, Annisa Fitria, and Mukmin Mukmin, “Multicultural-Based Islamic Religious Education Learning Methods as an Effort to Prevent Social Conflict,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 16–27.

<sup>15</sup> Wahidah Wahidah et al., “The Role of Reason in Structuring Islamic Spirituality as a Framework for the Formation of Faith According to the Qur’an and the Sunnah,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 28–50.

<sup>16</sup> Mohammad Zulkifli and Maimun Maimun, “The Politicization of Pesantren within the Framework of Athiyah Al-Abrasyi’s Thought (An Analysis Based on the Book *At-Tarbiyah Al-Islamiyyah Wa Falsafatuh*),” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 73–97.

counterparts to highlight both convergence and divergence in mystical expression. For instance, while male Sufi saints were frequently documented within institutional orders (*ṭuruq*), Rābi‘ah’s mode of teaching was informal, relational, and often mediated through poetry and aphoristic sayings.<sup>17</sup> Scholars like James Morris have noted that this non-institutional mode complicates patriarchal assumptions about legitimate religious authority. Additionally, literary analyses of Rābi‘ah’s attributed sayings reveal a nuanced theological depth that resists simplistic spiritual categorization. The literature increasingly calls for hermeneutic approaches that honor such difference without marginalizing it.

The theme of spiritual autonomy in Rābi‘ah’s narrative resonates with contemporary feminist theorists who critique patriarchal control over women’s bodies and voices. Rābi‘ah’s renunciation of marriage and material attachment has been interpreted by some scholars as a radical form of self-determination that defies normative gender roles. However, this interpretation must be balanced with historical contextualization to avoid romanticizing absence of social ties as inherently emancipatory.<sup>18</sup> Scholars like Sa’diyya Shaikh have argued that Rābi‘ah’s spirituality should be read not merely as withdrawal but as an embodied critique of systems that constrain women’s agency. This perspective opens fertile ground for dialogue between Sufi spiritualities and feminist critiques of patriarchal power. Yet, the literature also reveals a need for more intersectional approaches that consider class, race, and historical context alongside gender.

Rābi‘ah’s poetic legacy has been a focal point for scholars interested in the aesthetic dimensions of her thought. Her verses, particularly those expressing longing and intimacy with the divine, have been translated and analyzed in light of their theological implications. The aesthetic quality of her poetry serves not only as devotional expression but also as a medium for challenging dominant paradigms of spiritual authority.<sup>19</sup> Literary scholars note that the sensual language of divine love in her poetry disrupts conventional binaries between male and female spirituality. Such disruptions are valuable for contemporary feminist theology, which seeks to expand the language of the divine beyond patriarchal imagery. However, translation choices inevitably influence interpretation, and scholars caution that secondary mediations may impose external frameworks onto her voice. This underscores the need for critical engagement with translation practices in assessing Rābi‘ah’s impact.

In recent decades, there has been a growing body of scholarship that situates Rābi‘ah within living Sufi traditions, particularly among female practitioners seeking spiritual models that validate their experience. Ethnographic studies reveal that Rābi‘ah’s legacy is invoked in contemporary spiritual discourse as a symbol of resistance to restrictive gender norms. These studies, such as those by Shobana Shankar, demonstrate that Rābi‘ah’s relevance extends beyond textual analysis into embodied practice. For many women, her example provides a historical anchor for

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<sup>17</sup> Fahriah Fahriah et al., “Quantitative Evaluation Research and Its Implications for the Development of Islamic Education,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 98–117.

<sup>18</sup> Latifah Latifah et al., “Analysis of the Development of Qur’an–Hadith Learning in Improving the Quality of Islamic Religious Education in the Modern Era at Madrasah Tsanawiyah,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 118–35.

<sup>19</sup> Nur Ali Subhan et al., “Student-Centered Learning Approach from Ibn Khaldun’s Perspective: A Philosophical Study of the Concept of Learning in Islamic Education,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 136–51.

asserting spiritual authority within communities often dominated by male leadership. Yet, some scholars caution against idealizing living traditions without acknowledging internal complexities and power dynamics. This ongoing research highlights how historical figures acquire new meanings in different cultural and temporal contexts.

The theological dimensions of Rābi‘ah’s thought have also been examined through the lens of moral philosophy. Her insistence on loving God without ulterior motives intersects with ethical theories that prioritize altruism and relationality. Scholars like William Chittick interpret her spiritual insights as offering an alternative to ego-centered ethical frameworks that pervade both secular and religious moral systems. By decentering the self, Rābi‘ah’s approach aligns with ethical models that challenge individualistic and hierarchical structures, including patriarchal systems that privilege dominance over mutual care. This connection opens pathways for dialogue between Islamic mystical ethics and contemporary social ethics. However, further philosophical engagement is needed to articulate these intersections more systematically.

An emerging area of research explores Rābi‘ah’s relevance to interfaith feminist dialogues. Comparative studies have analyzed parallels between Rābi‘ah and female mystics in Christian and Jewish traditions, revealing shared themes of divine love and spiritual autonomy. Scholars like Denise Aigle emphasize that such comparative work can illuminate common challenges women have faced in patriarchal religious frameworks.<sup>20</sup> These studies contribute to a broader understanding of how women’s mystical voices have historically contested gendered authority. Yet, there is a risk of flattening distinct theological contexts if comparative work ignores specific doctrinal and cultural differences. The literature thus calls for comparative approaches that are both nuanced and critically aware of context.

Critiques of patriarchal structures in Islamic theology often draw upon Rābi‘ah’s life as illustrative rather than prescriptive. Some feminist theologians argue that while Rābi‘ah’s example challenges gendered hierarchies, it does not automatically translate into a comprehensive framework for gender justice. This critique points to the need for integrating her spiritual insights with broader socio-political strategies for addressing systemic oppression.<sup>21</sup> For instance, Rābi‘ah’s emphasis on love and surrender could be enacted in practices of community building that resist exclusion and marginalization. However, translating mystical principles into concrete social policy requires interdisciplinary collaboration between theologians, ethicists, and social scientists. The literature remains relatively sparse in this area, indicating a potential direction for future research.

Another dimension of scholarship considers the pedagogical implications of Rābi‘ah’s legacy. Feminist educators have proposed incorporating her teachings into curricula that seek to challenge gender stereotypes within religious education. By foregrounding her life and thought, educators can offer students alternative models of spiritual authority that disrupt patriarchal narratives. This pedagogical turn aligns with broader efforts to decolonize religious studies and valorize diverse voices historically marginalized in academic discourse. Yet, implementing such educational approaches

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<sup>20</sup> Fitri Handayani, “Rahmatan Lil Alamin-Oriented Development Design of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project Based on the Three Educational Centers in Building Student Character.,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 152–69.

<sup>21</sup> Mukhlis Mukhlis et al., “Reorientation of Islamic Religious Education in the Global Era in Facing the Challenges of Globalization, Multiculturalism, and Radicalism,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 170–200.

demands careful contextualization to avoid oversimplifying complex theological concepts. Therefore, scholars emphasize the importance of critical pedagogy grounded in historical and cultural awareness.

Historical analyses also show how later Sufi orders selectively appropriated Rābi‘ah’s legacy, sometimes reshaping her teachings to fit institutional priorities. Researchers like Alexander Knysh have traced how male Sufi masters invoked her authority to legitimize particular doctrinal positions, revealing the politics of memory within Sufi historiography. Such appropriations often obscure the radical aspects of her thought, including her challenges to hierarchical authority.<sup>22</sup> By unpacking these appropriative processes, scholars shed light on how patriarchal structures can co-opt subversive voices for their own ends. This critical lens reveals the importance of examining not just the content of Rābi‘ah’s teachings but also the systems that have preserved or altered them over time.

Gendered power dynamics in religious authority continue to animate contemporary Muslim feminist discourse, and Rābi‘ah remains a figure of inspiration in these debates. Feminist theologians like Amina Wadud and Sa’diyya Shaikh explicitly reclaim Rābi‘ah’s legacy as part of a broader project to critique patriarchal interpretations of scripture and tradition.<sup>23</sup> Their work situates Rābi‘ah not as an isolated mystic but as part of a lineage of women who challenge gendered constraints within Islam. This reclamation contributes to a more inclusive theological discourse that affirms women’s spiritual agency. However, the literature also acknowledges resistance within conservative circles to such reclaiming efforts, demonstrating ongoing contestation over religious authority.<sup>24</sup> The dynamic interplay between tradition and reform reflects broader societal struggles over gender equity, finally, the existing literature highlights both the potential and limitations of Rābi‘ah’s relevance for contemporary patriarchal critique. While her life and teachings provide powerful resources for challenging gendered norms, they do not offer a fully articulated theory of social justice in the modern sense.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, scholars affirm that her emphasis on love, devotion, and autonomy can enrich feminist theological frameworks and inspire new avenues for resistance against patriarchal systems. More interdisciplinary research, especially involving feminist ethics, sociology of religion, and historical theology, is needed to fully realize Rābi‘ah’s relevance for contemporary struggles. In this way, the literature collectively points toward a vision of Rābi‘ah not merely as a mystical exemplar but as a living resource for transformative critique.

### C. Method

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<sup>22</sup> Muhammad Noor Alamsyah and M Anshari, “Sufism of Ahl Al-Sunnah Wa Al-Jama‘ah (ASWAJA) Scholars of the Nusantara: A Comparative Study of the Thought of Shaykh Arsyad Al-Banjari, Shaykh Nawawi Al-Bantani, and Kiai Haji Hasyim Asy‘Ari,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 201–21.

<sup>23</sup> Hary Nurdi et al., “The Concept of Tawassuṭ and Religious Moderation in the Perspective of the Qur’an and Hadith: Principles of Balance, Justice, and the Rejection of Extremism,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 222–44.

<sup>24</sup> Miftahul Huda, “Developing Multicultural Values-Based Teaching Materials for Developmental Psychology in Islamic Education at the Islamic University of Depok,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 245–60.

<sup>25</sup> Bukhori Sail Attahiry, “The Management Model of Religious Moderation at Istiqlal Mosque, Jakarta: An Analysis Based on Qur’anic Values,” *AL GHAZALI: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (2026): 261–76.

This research uses an approach that understands and explains the meaning of a phenomenon in context.<sup>26</sup> This understanding is achieved through descriptive analysis using words and language in a natural context, supported by a library research approach.<sup>27</sup> To obtain relevant data, this study employed a literature review method, with primary sources from works related to the topic, and utilizing previous research, journal articles, credible online sources, and other secondary materials. The selected references primarily focused on topics related to gender inequality, discriminatory behavior against women, and solutions to address gender equality in Indonesia from the perspective of Rābi`ah al-Adawiyyah. The collected data were then carefully sorted and analyzed. Verification was carried out by comparing the data with findings from other relevant studies to ensure validity and reliability. The verified data were then interpreted and presented in a systematic scientific report.

#### D. Result and Discussion

The patriarchal culture that never disappears from women is the cause of this group's isolation. Therefore, Rābi`ah al-Adawiyyah provides references to women not to waver in maintaining their own life choices, even though societal standards increasingly require women to marry and have children. Her strength rejects patriarchal norms that place women in a subordinate hierarchy, where women often lose many opportunities in education, work and decision making because of this pressure.



Picture 1. WorldArt

The increasingly prevalent patriarchy exists not only in cultural contexts but also as a social structure that limits women's autonomy and agency. Human worth is not determined by adherence to patriarchal social standards, but rather by the quality of women's lives for themselves.

#### History of Patriarchal Culture

According to Lerner in *The Creation of Patriarchy*, patriarchy is a historical construct formed by social and cultural processes in early societies, particularly in the Ancient Near East.<sup>28</sup> Patriarchy has historical roots, particularly in the transition of humankind to an agrarian society, characterized by inheritance systems, land

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Fathun Niam. *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Widina Media Utama. 2024.

<sup>27</sup> Agustini, *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif (Teori dan Panduan Praktis Analisis Data Kualitatif)*, Sumatera: PT. Mifandi Mandiri Digital.

<sup>28</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press, 1986, h. 212.

ownership, and economic surplus. Men gradually gained a dominant position in social and political spheres, while women experienced limitations on their roles and authority due to these changes in social structure.<sup>29</sup>

Control over women's sexuality and reproduction is the basis of patriarchy.<sup>30</sup> In early agrarian societies, women were seen as ensuring the continuity of the lineage and inheritance of property, so the institution of marriage and social norms controlled their bodies and sexual relations.<sup>31</sup> This practice is legitimized by laws that differentiate the rights and obligations between men and women and support male dominance in the family and society.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, patriarchy develops into a structural system that binds social life as a whole, not just personal relationships.

Religious symbolism and the erasure of women's history from official narratives reinforce the problem of patriarchy. Gender inequality is normalized by both masculine representations of God and moral stories that position women as subjects.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the lack of awareness of women's history makes patriarchy seem natural and inevitable. Therefore, Lerner emphasizes the importance of reconstructing women's history because it is a crucial step in dismantling patriarchy as a historical system that can be criticized and changed.<sup>34</sup>

The position of women, especially in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras, was a concern because at that time the law was still not in force at a time when Arab tribes were constantly involved in inter-tribal conflicts, the established legal system made women, especially women who were caught in war, very vulnerable.<sup>35</sup> Cultural practices detrimental to women, such as female infanticide, are created by the socioeconomic conditions of nomadic Arab societies characterized by structural poverty, uncertainty, and a lack of food resources. Underlying economic and social pressures, these practices are exacerbated by the cultural practice of burying female infants alive to prevent bloodshed within the family.<sup>36</sup>

On the contrary, many studies show that free Arab women in pre-Islamic and even early Islamic times received higher social respect and independence compared to the situation of most other people.

In various social and cultural systems, patriarchy places men above women in various aspects of life, such as social, cultural, economic, and political. The ideology of this system legitimizes male power and normalizes gender differences within certain societal structures.<sup>37</sup> Men are considered the main actors in a patriarchal society who have the authority to determine norms, values and the direction of the formation of

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<sup>29</sup> Minali Grover and Ajay Sharma, Women's Inheritance Rights Reforms and Impact on Women's Empowerment: Evidence From India, *Indian Institute of Management Indore*, 2025, h. 9.

<sup>30</sup> Johri, Manjari, Feminist Perspective on Patriarchy: Its Impact on the Construction of Femininity and Masculinity, *New Literaria-An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2023, h. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Johri, Manjari, *Feminist Perspective on Patriarchy: Its Impact on the Construction of Femininity and Masculinity*, h. 4-5.

<sup>32</sup> Gupta, Priyanka, et al., Legal and Policy Frameworks for Women's Empowerment: Global Perspectives, *Journal of Informatics Education and Research*, Vol. 4, Issue. 3, 2024, h. 439-440.

<sup>33</sup> Mohamed, Alwy Ahmed, et al., Gender and Religious Authority in Muslim Communities: A Systematic Qualitative Literature Review (2000-2025), *Ishraqi*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2025, h. 381-382.

<sup>34</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, h. 238.

<sup>35</sup> Sean W. Anthony, *Muhammad and the Empires of Faith: The Making of the Prophet of Islam*, University of California Press, 2020, h. 119-122.

<sup>36</sup> Margareth Smith, *Rabi'a the Mystic and her Fellow-Saints in Islam*, h. 112-113.

<sup>37</sup> Agustina, Dewi, et al. Budaya Patriarki Sebagai Fondasi Ketimpangan Gender di Indonesia, *Jurnal Kesehatan Tambusai*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2025, h. 8431-8432.

social structures, while women are often considered dependent and within the scope of the household.<sup>38</sup> These relationship patterns are not only shaped by social norms, but are also inherited through family, educational, and cultural institutions that emphasize that men have natural superiority.

Men have more power and decision-making power in this system, while women are in a more subordinate position and have less room to move. Consequently, this imbalance creates unequal power relations between men and women, which in turn leads to structural and enduring gender inequalities. Therefore, patriarchy is more than just individual practices; it is a social system that routinely embraces male dominance and marginalizes women's roles and experiences.<sup>39</sup>

In Islam, men and women are seen as equally noble beings, with different yet complementary responsibilities. Islam fundamentally does not subordinate women. Women's position in social and religious life is clearly defined as equal partners with men in carrying out their responsibilities and spreading goodness.<sup>40</sup> In Q.S. At-Taubah (9:71),

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

Meaning: Believers, men and women, some of them become helpers for others. They command (do) good deeds and prevent (do) evil, uphold prayer, pay zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. They will be given mercy by Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-powerful, all-wise.

According to Amina Wadud (1999), the role of women in the Qur'an shows that the Qur'an places women as individual subjects with equal rights with men as well as being part of the social system.<sup>41</sup> However, Wadud believes that the methods of interpreting the Qur'an that have developed over the past few years have not been fully able to explain these messages of equality objectively. She divides the interpretation of verses about women into three categories: traditional, reactive, and holistic.<sup>42</sup> Wadud's main concern is that traditional interpretations, which are exclusively written by men, tend to depart from the understanding that women's experiences are often marginalized or understood through the perspectives, interests, and needs of men rather than the experiences of women themselves.<sup>43</sup>

Amina Wadud positioned men as equals to women. She stated that devotion to Allah SWT is the only thing that can make a difference. This demonstrates that men

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<sup>38</sup> Agustina, Dewi, *et al. Budaya Patriarki Sebagai Fondasi Ketimpangan Gender di Indonesia*, h. 8430.

<sup>39</sup> Agustina, Dewi, *et al. Budaya Patriarki Sebagai Fondasi Ketimpangan Gender di Indonesia*, h. 8432.

<sup>40</sup> Murwanti, Patriarchal Culture as the Cause of Gender Inequality in Indonesia, *Joeli: Journal of Educational and Learning Innovation*, Vol. 2 No. 1, 2025, h. 9.

<sup>41</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, Oxford University Press, 1999, h. 52.

<sup>42</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, h. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, h. 27.

and women have equal opportunities to become leaders, both in politics and other fields.<sup>44</sup>

Patriarchy comes from the word patriarchate, meaning a structure that places men as the sole, central, and all-powerful rulers. Patriarchy is also referred to as a paternalistic system, which places men as primarily responsible for maintaining social order.<sup>45</sup> Patriarchal-based cultures contribute to gender inequality and injustice. In these families, male dominance is evident in the various daily actions that shape family dynamics. Men often make important decisions about household matters such as finances, children's education, and other household matters.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, women are often not given equal rights to determine the path of the family.<sup>47</sup>

When it comes to managing family financial resources, there is also an inequality in the distribution of power. Men are often the only ones in conventional patriarchal families who make financial decisions, such as allocating family income, investments, or spending on basic necessities.<sup>48</sup> Women typically do not have full control over family financial resources, although they can make financial contributions. This often leaves women economically dependent on men, reinforcing men's power positions within the family.<sup>49</sup> When men control financial resources, they can also control how freely women make decisions about their personal lives.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, women are perceived as irrational, weak, and emotionally driven. Therefore, they are considered unfit to work in the "tough," competitive, and rational public sector. Women who build careers and compete with men are considered unnatural, while men are perceived and placed in productive roles as breadwinners in the public sector. As breadwinners, they are considered solely responsible for the survival of the household, and as a result, they are also considered heads of households.<sup>51</sup>

As a result, the family system and culture create a power structure in which men dominate. This is what is known as patriarchal culture, which extends from the family to society and the state. Even in broader contexts, such as society, we encounter women who choose to pursue higher education, pursue careers, and not marry at a young age.

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<sup>44</sup> Ade Rosi Siti Zakiah dan Nurfajriyani, Interpretasi Kontekstual Makna *Qawwām* dalam Al-Qur'an Qs. An-Nisa': 34 (Aplikasi Hermeneutika Abdullah Saeed), *Al-Qudwah: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an dan Hadis*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 2023, h. 130.

<sup>45</sup> Mayank Gupta, Jayakrishna and Nihit Gupta, Critical Overview of Patriarchy, Its Interferences With Psychological Development, and Risks for Mental Health, *Medical Research Archives*, 2023, H. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Nurseha, Ivan, Ketimpangan Gender dalam Keputusan Rumah Tangga: Studi Interseksi Ekonomi, Pendidikan, dan Konstruksi Sosial, *MASADIR: Jurnal Hukum Islam*, Vol. 4, No. 02, 2024, h. 948-949.

<sup>47</sup> Moch. Hasan Hanafi dan Muhammad Nahidh Buldani, Patriarki dan Kekuasaan: Bagaimana Laki-Laki Mengendalikan Kehidupan dalam Keluarga, *Jurnal ASA: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Keluarga Islam*, Vol. 7 No. 12, 2025, h. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Elsyah Rienette Marlisa, et al. Perencanaan yang Responsif Gender dalam Manajemen Keuangan pada Jemaat GKI EI Kotaraja Kota Jayapura, *Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat Nusantara (JPkMN)*, Vol. 5 No. 3, 2024, h. 3845-3846. <http://doi.org/10.55338/jpkmn.v5i3.4110>

<sup>49</sup> Muhammad Faried Sefthiyan, Muhammad Aryo Mumtaz, Sajidah ASyami, dan Andi Septiadi, Ketidakadilan Gender dalam Budaya Patriarki, *Regalia: Jurnal Riset Gender dan Anak*, Vol. 3 No. 1, 2024, h. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Saifuddin Zuhri dan Diana Amalia, Ketidakadilan Gender dan Budaya Patriarki di Kehidupan Masyarakat Indonesia, *Murabbi*, Vol. 5 No. 1, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Lusya Palulungan dkk, Perempuan, Masyarakat Patriarki dan Kesetaraan Gender, *Yayasan Bursa Pengetahuan Kawasan Timur Indonesia (BaKTI)*, 2020, h. 4-5.

Patriarchal culture continues to thrive in society. This culture can be found in various forms and dimensions, such as economics, education, politics, and law. As a result, various social problems arise that hinder women and violate their rights. The causes remain a long-standing debate, as women are still considered too domestic.<sup>52</sup>

Women's freedoms are severely restricted due to the strong patriarchal culture in Indonesian society. Customs that require women to manage the household often limit their access to higher education and career opportunities, and encourage early marriage as a means of idealizing women's roles.<sup>53</sup> In such situations, it is considered a deviation from dominant social norms for women to continue their education, build a career, or even delay marriage. As a result, women face structural and cultural pressures that limit their autonomy and prevent them from fully participating in social, economic, and intellectual domains.

### **The Relevance of the Female**

Rābi`ah al-Adawiyyah was a Sufi woman who was born in 717 to a poor family in Basra, she was the fourth daughter of Ismail. Later, he was orphaned and sold as a slave. One night, while he was prostrating himself in prayer to God, his owner heard and witnessed a chainless lantern hanging above his head illuminating the entire room. Seeing that, the owner freed Rābi`ah, and he spent his life in the service of God.<sup>54</sup>

In his time, male Sufis acknowledged the sincerity and divine love (mahabbah) of Rābi`ah al-Adawiyyah. He succeeded in inspiring them to know God and imparted wisdom with spiritual fervor, so that they received his teachings with respect.<sup>55</sup> For Salih Murri, Rābi`ah is a weak, wise woman. When Rābi`ah calls herself a "weak woman" other people call her that. However, this contradicted her actions, because Rābi`ah was a strong-willed woman who criticized and helped develop other Sufi teachers of her time. Rābi`ah paved the way for women of her time.<sup>56</sup>

In Memorial of the Friends of God, Aṭṭār's work, one of the most comprehensive sources on the life of Rābi`ah al-Adawiyyah, she is portrayed as a legitimate Sufi figure and considered a spiritual teacher. However, this recognition of authority is not free from the patriarchal bias that developed at the time. This is demonstrated by the belief that spiritual teachership is symbolically associated with masculine individuals. Women who achieve high spiritual stations can only be accepted if their identity is masculinized. In other words, women who achieve high spiritual stations are not recognized as women, but are associated with men. This is demonstrated by Aṭṭār's statement, "When a woman is a man on the path of the Most High Lord."<sup>57</sup> This representation demonstrates the epistemic and symbolic differences in the classical Sufi tradition, where spiritual superiority continues to be constructed within a patriarchal framework, so that women's success is often negated through the erasure of their gender identity.

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<sup>52</sup> Muhammad Nadif Nasruloh dan Taufiq Hidayat, *Budaya Patriarki dalam Rumah Tangga (Pemahaman Teks Al-Qur`an dan Kesetaraan Gender, Yudisia: Jurnal Pemikiran Hukum dan Hukum Islam*, Vol. 13 No. 1, 2022, h. 150.

<sup>53</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), *Perempuan dan Laki-Laki di Indonesia 2022*, 2022, h. 33-35.

<sup>54</sup> Muhammad Vandestra, *Tales of Rabi'a Al-Adawiyya the Great Female Muslim Sufi Saint from Basra*, 2018, h. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Farid al-Din Attar, *Tadhkirat al-Auliya` (Memorial of the Saints)*, trans. A. J. Arberry, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966, h. 41-45.

<sup>56</sup> Muhammad Vandestra, *Tales of Rabi'a Al-Adawiyya the Great Female Muslim Sufi Saint from Basra*, h. 6.

<sup>57</sup> Farid ad-Din `Attar`s, *Memorial of God`s Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*, h. xiii.

Rābi'ah al-Adawiyah's response to patriarchy is closely related to the increasingly prevalent conditions of modern patriarchy in society. In contemporary society, patriarchy does not always manifest itself in legal domination or physical violence. Rather, it manifests itself through double moral standards, the normalization of gender roles, and the restriction of space for women's self-actualization in both the domestic and public spheres.<sup>58</sup> Rābi'ah's strategy, which asserts moral and spiritual autonomy, demonstrates that resisting patriarchal domination can begin with destroying the foundations of values and meanings that support it, rather than through structural confrontation.<sup>59</sup>

To escape the patriarchal logic that judges women based on their bodies, marital status, and domestic functions, the concept of mahabbah ilāhiyyah developed by Rābi'ah provides an alternative path for modern women. Rābi'ah's emphasis on inner qualities and transcendental relationships suggests that spirituality can be a source of self-legitimacy independent of patriarchal recognition in the current context, when women are still often measured by gender-biased social standards. Therefore, Rābi'ah's Sufism offers a symbolic place where women can build identity and moral authority outside the existing gender hierarchy.

Rābi'ah's choice to remain unmarried also has a similar context to be read in a contemporary context, where women often face social pressure to conform to the "ideal" model of life dictated by patriarchal culture.<sup>60</sup> In such a situation, Rābi'ah's attitude can be interpreted as an affirmation of a woman's right to control her own body and her right to choose her own way of life<sup>61</sup>. When Hasan Basri, Rābi'ah's teacher, questioned her about marriage, Rābi'ah replied,

*"If you free me from that worry, I will marry. First, at the time of death, will my faith remain firm or not? Second, will they place my deeds in my right hand or not? Third, which group will I follow when they lead one group on the right to Paradise and one group on the left to Hell?"<sup>62</sup>*

This aligns with contemporary feminist critiques that challenge the idea that women's roles must always be legitimized through relationships with men or social institutions.<sup>63</sup> Rābi'ah provides a historical example of how women's power can be exercised religiously and ethically without submitting to oppressive social demands.

Rābi'ah's approach, which does not create antagonistic opposition between men and women, contributes to current discussions of patriarchy. Rābi'ah's strategy suggests the possibility of change in cultural systems through an emphasis on spiritual

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<sup>58</sup> Prhita Shintiya, et al. Warisan Patriarki: Hambatan Struktural Bagi Perempuan di Dunia Kerja, *SABANA, Sosiologi, Antropologi, dan Budaya Nusantara*, Vol. 4 No. 2, h. 173, 2025 DOI: 10.55123/sabana.v4i2.5011

<sup>59</sup> Penti Aprianti dan Yohanes Slamet Purwadi, *Menggali Spiritualitas Perempuan Melalui Mistisisme Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah dan Santa Therese, Integritas Terbuka: Peace and Interfaith Studies*. Vol. 3 No. 1. 2024.

<sup>60</sup> Annuriah Syahrani, et al. Persepsi Mahasiswa PAI tentang Konsep Mahabbah terhadap Hidup Selibat dalam Perspektif Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah, *Borneo Journal of Islamic Education*, Vol. 4 No. 1, 2024, H. 36.

<sup>61</sup> Annuriah Syahrani, et al. Persepsi Mahasiswa PAI tentang Konsep Mahabbah terhadap Hidup Selibat dalam Perspektif Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah, 2024, h. 37.

<sup>62</sup> Farid ad-Din 'Attar's, *Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*, President and Publisher Lawrence Boadt, h. 105.

<sup>63</sup> Riska Rahmadani Tanjung, et al. Kritik Feminis Terhadap Representasi Gender dalam Media, *Al-Mashlahah: Jurnal Hukum Islam dan Pranata Sosial*, 2025, h. 60.

equality and universal human values amidst increasing gender polarization.<sup>64</sup> Konsep Rābi'ah's concept is appropriate for use in the context of religious societies, including modern Muslim societies, which often face tensions between gender equality debates and the legitimacy of religious traditions.<sup>65</sup>

Rābi'ah's thoughts and decisions not to marry and to devote her life to spirituality, became a form of guidance for women who did not have the right in various fields to determine their own life path, such as the example of a girl who was required to marry before the age of 25, but she was able to emphasize and give understanding to her parents not to marry at the specified age, as well as her choice which often caused controversy, namely continuing her education and career in the midst of a society that considered that women were only for the kitchen.

#### **E. Conclusion**

Long-standing social structures influence gender relations in Indonesian society, including within religious contexts. Islam affirms spiritual equality between men and women, but patriarchal practices are still perpetuated through cultural norms and unfair religious interpretations of gender. This situation places women in a subordinate position within the social structure and limits their autonomy in determining life choices such as education, careers, and social roles.

The spiritual thought and practice of Rābi'ah al-'Adawiyyah in this context serve as an alternative paradigm for addressing issues related to patriarchy. Women are considered independent and dignified religious subjects, free from patriarchal legitimacy, because the concept of mahabbah ilahiyyah, spiritual independence, and life choices can open up space for women to choose their own path in life without fear of being criticized by society. These results reinforce the idea that Sufism, especially through female Sufi figures, serves as a theological and philosophical resource for discussions on gender justice in modern Islam, and also opens up space for the development of emancipatory methods that are in line with Islamic spiritual values.

In addition, further researchers can develop comparative studies by involving female Sufi figures and male Sufi figures, so as to find unique results regarding how male Sufis view problems like this.

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<sup>64</sup> Penti Apriyanti dan Yohanes Slamet Purwadi, Menggali Spiritualitas Perempuan Melalui Mistisisme Rabia al-Adawiyya dan Santa Therese, *Integritas Terbuka: Peace and Interfaith Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 1. 2024, h. 7.

<sup>65</sup> Deni Irawati dan Nunu Burhanuddin, Feminisme dalam Tasawuf: Sebuah Tinjauan Literatur, *Mushaf Journal: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Hadis*.

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