

Thoughts And Work Of Rasuna Said 'Lioness' Minangkabau, Women's Emancipation And Indonesia's Independence

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Abstract. *The conditions of colonial Minangkabau society presented social injustices for women. Such as the inequality of education, became divorce victims and the injustice of polygamy practices. Therefore, one of the heroes such as Rasuna Said changed the stigma of Minangkabau women not only playing a big role in the domestic sphere (home) but also playing a role in the public sphere. This research method uses historical research with analysis using a character study approach. The research data was collected using literature review techniques. The findings showed that Rasuna did not question the concept of differences between men and women, but about the injustice done to women by the unjust interpretations and actions of irresponsible parties regarding the differences between men and women. In order to achieve her goals, she did so through education and then maximised it through political movements. This finding can have implications for changing the mindset of contemporary Indonesian Muslim women that the emancipation movement does not mean a free-fall into Western liberal values, but a movement to change the mindset of those who misuse and misinterpret the meaning of differences and advantages of men in traditional culture and the teachings of Islam itself.*

Keywords: *emancipation of women; feminism; gender equality; Rasuna Said; Minangkabau.*

Abstrak. Kondisi masyarakat Minangkabau pada masa kolonial menghadirkan ketidakadilan sosial bagi kaum perempuan. Seperti ketidaksetaraan pendidikan, menjadi korban perceraian dan ketidakadilan praktik poligami. Oleh karena itu, salah satu pahlawan seperti Rasuna Said mengubah stigma perempuan Minangkabau tidak hanya berperan besar di ranah domestik (rumah tangga) tetapi juga berperan di ranah publik. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian historis dengan analisis menggunakan pendekatan studi tokoh. Data penelitian dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan teknik studi pustaka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Rasuna tidak mempersoalkan konsep perbedaan antara laki-laki dan perempuan, tetapi tentang ketidakadilan yang terjadi pada perempuan akibat penafsiran dan tindakan yang tidak adil dari pihak-pihak yang tidak bertanggung jawab terhadap perbedaan laki-laki dan perempuan. Untuk mencapai tujuannya, ia melakukannya melalui pendidikan dan kemudian memaksimalkannya melalui

gerakan politik. Temuan ini dapat berimplikasi pada perubahan pola pikir perempuan Muslim Indonesia kontemporer bahwa gerakan emansipasi bukan berarti terjun bebas ke dalam nilai-nilai liberal Barat, tetapi gerakan untuk mengubah pola pikir mereka yang menyalahgunakan dan menyalahartikan makna perbedaan dan kelebihan laki-laki dalam budaya tradisional dan ajaran Islam itu sendiri.

Kata kunci: emansipasi wanita; feminisme; kesetaraan gender; Rasuna Said; Minangkabau.

INTRODUCTION

When talking about Indonesian independence, many male figures are recognised for their work and contributions. Not only men, but also women have their place in the struggle for independence and their work for social change (Pratama & Alimina, 2022). Some of them fought through the battlefield, education, politics, journalism, women's emancipation and so on (Suhra, 2019; Pradita, 2020). The fate of these heroines has different endings. The average figure is imprisoned or exiled, but each figure has a different fate, half lonely in futile suffering and the other half receiving joy from the public (Arsa, 2017). A famous Minangkabau heroine is Rasuna Said.

Hj. Rangkyo Rasuna Said (14 September 1910 - 2 November 1965) was a national fighter who participated in the national struggle from 1926 to 1965. Rasuna Said was known as an activist who played a very important role in Indonesia's independence, especially in the fields of education, women's empowerment and national journalism. She was very confident in her speeches and writings. Rasuna was known as a woman who was critical, sharp and anti-Dutch colonialism. Rasuna Said dedicated her life to the advancement of women and Indonesia. For her, women's rights could be fought for through education and politics (Kamajaya, 1984, p. 75; Jahroni, 2002, p. 68).

The role of Minangkabau women is very unique in terms of their position and influence in the community, family and social life. their position

and influence in the community, family and social life. with the use of matrilineal kinship patterns. The large role of women in household, family, tribal and nagari work. and nagari work. From another perspective, however, Minangkabau women have a different perspective. Minangkabau women have a long history of struggle to achieve independence for themselves and their nation. independence for themselves and their nation.

Reading feminist thought is not easy because feminism is not a single thought, but consists of a variety of different thoughts that are polarised into feminist schools. In terms of feminism, Minangkabau is one of the regions that uses this understanding because Minangkabau society uses the matrilineal system. Matrilineal culture in West Sumatra is a culture rich in nuances of emancipation and feminist teachings. The matrilineal system is a kinship system in which lineage is traced through the mother's bloodline. With this matrilineal system, the role of women has special rights for the Minangkabau people.¹

In terms of independence and individually freedom, Minangkabau women have never been independent or had freedom of choice. Minangkabau women will only gain independence in making choices and their opinions can be taken into consideration after Minangkabau women reach the position of *Bundo Kanduang*. Therefore, until they reach the position of *Bundo Kanduang*, Minangkabau women will continue to live under the influence and pressure of men who hold the title of *Mamak*.

As for the very sad phenomenon in the lives of Minangkabau women during the Dutch colonial period, women were considered second class in all respects. When she was in the position of *Bundo Kanduang*, she only had

¹ Minangkabau society has a matrilineal system, which is used as a customary rule in Minangkabau society. In determining the place of residence of husband and wife, Minangkabau custom follows the matrilineal system. In Minangkabau custom, it is the mother who is in charge and responsible for the household, accompanied by the *mamak* (mother's brother), while the father is only a guest.

power in her domestic area, the house. Minangkabau women at that time could not taste the sweetness of education, except for those of noble descent. Women are still underestimated when it comes to entering the public sphere because there is a negative feeling that women are enough to take care of the basic things at home, namely "mattress" and "kitchen".

The next form of injustice that occurred was the misuse of the Qur'anic injunction against polygamy. Many Minangkabau women at that time were victims of divorce and injustice by their husbands in the practice of polygamy. Rasuna Said saw this as something that dehumanised women.

Women began to be influenced by the explosion of the educated Minangkabau elite in the early 20th century. Education itself proved to be a fundamental factor in the emergence of the women's movement. Thus, the first feminist movement in the Minangkabau in the 20th century aimed to give women equal access to education as men.

The active involvement of women in solving social problems that often affect women, such as injustice, domestic violence, social violence and harassment, and employment injustice, is considered effective when women are directly involved in finding solutions. Women's problems are certainly better understood by women (Arifi & Fathurrohman, 2023; Fithri, Yulika, & Ermagusti, 2023). The activism of female heroes in the field of education is a form of women's emancipation movement because education is one of the solutions to the problem of injustice felt by women, or as an empowerment for women to fight the great opportunity for early marriage due to poverty (Nadlir, Fahmi, Prasetya, & Muallifah, 2023; Muzdalifah, Syukur, & Elizabeth, 2021). From an Islamic perspective on the roles and positions of men and women, the Qur'an explains that men and women have different roles but are complementary and cooperative with each other (Febriani, 2017).

The Government of the Republic of Indonesia named Rasuna Said a hero based on the National Hero Award given to Rasuna Said by the

Government based on the Decree of the President of the Republic of Indonesia No. 084 / TK / Year 1974 dated 13 December 1974. There are so many female figures born in this country, but unfortunately many do not know that there are female fighters who walk the path of feminism, but still uphold religious values and are not liberal as the West wants. With this in mind, this paper tries to explain Rasuna Said's struggle for the emancipation of Minangkabau women and Indonesian independence.

This research aims to explain the form of Rasuna Said's struggle in women's emancipation and Indonesian independence. In an effort to reconstruct the progress of the thoughts of figures in the past and reported scientifically, the research method used in this research is the historical research method (Kartodirjo, 1982, p. 68). The process of examination and analysis is carried out critically on historical sources of past heritage (Gottschalk, 1986, p. 32). Historical research analysis is carried out as the process of collecting research data sources and source criticism. This process aims to select sources that are considered valid for the process of analysing and writing the results of historical interpretation (Kuntowijoyo, 1999, p. 64; Sjamsuddin, 1996, p. 89). This research uses a character study approach in analysing the object of research. The character study examines three indicators, namely: 1) the integrity of a figure, which can be in the knowledge possessed, the manner and quality of leadership, achievements, contributions, moral integrity, and the uniqueness of the figure during his lifetime compared to other people in his era; 2) monumental physical or non-physical works that have an impact and benefit on society and the future; 3) the real contribution of a figure, be it thoughts, exemplary, recognition and inspiration. Thus, the character study approach can be used to study both living and deceased figures (Harahap, 2006, pp. 9-10).

Data was collected through a literature review. The primary sources of this research are colonial and pre-independence Indonesian newspapers that

contain news about Rasuna Said, such as 1) *Bataviaasch nieuwsblad*, December 1932; 2) *Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisisch-Chinesche press.* no. 6. Weltevreden: Drukkerij Volkslectuur, 11 2 1933; *Pikiran Rakjat*, 19 & 22 January 1953; *Indonesia Raja*, 27 November 1953; *Bintang Timur*, 17 March 1958. Books and journal articles containing information about Rasuna Said have also been used as sources for research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Establishment of the Rasuna Said Framework

Rasuna Said was born on 14 September 1910 in Panyinggahan, Maninjau, Agam, West Sumatra. She was descended from an honourable Minang family. Her father was Muhamad Said, a Minangkabau businessman and former activist in the national movement (Agesti & Sanjaya, 2021, p. 174). The genetics of being a movement activist were passed on to Rasuna Said. Rasuna Said's family was a devout Muslim family. Rasuna Said grew up in her uncle's house because her father was busy working. Her uncle, who was active in politics, raised little Rasuna Said with courage and intelligence. Sometimes Rasuna Said practiced giving speeches and even writing about resistance issues (Nurjanah, 2017, p. 6).

Unlike her relatives, she went to a more religious school rather than a public school. Rasuna attended Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang, which combined religious and technical subjects. Rasuna Said excelled and by 1923 she was already a cooperating teacher. Three years later, however, she was forced to return to her village after the great earthquake that struck Padang Panjang. During this time, she spent two years studying at a school that was involved in political activities, following the headmaster's discourse on patriotism and Indonesian independence (Winda, 2009, p. 115; White, 2013, pp. 100-104).

After completing primary school, her father sent her to Pesantren Ar-Rasyidiyah to continue her studies. She was the only female student at the time. She was known as a hardworking and brave person. Rasuna Said continued her studies at Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang, where she met Rahmah El Yunusiyah, a pioneer of the 'Thawalib movement' (Noer, 1980, p. 44). Where Rasuna Said's modernist and nationalist Islamic ideas were strengthened during her studies here (Sufyan, 2022, p. 74). Rasuna Said also studied religion with a prominent young Minangkabau cleric, Haji Rasul or H. Abdul Karim Amrullah, who taught her the importance of changing Islamic thought and freedom of thought. This understanding later became the basis of Rasuna's political movement. The reformist Islamic movement in West Sumatra was heavily influenced by the Islamic nationalist movement in Turkey (Hasjmy, 1985, p. 61; Thalib, 1974, p. 6).

2. The Background of the Struggle for the Emancipation of the Minangkabau Women by Rasuna Said

In addition to her participation in the world of education, Rasuna Said also experienced the struggle of a domestic ark, with problems ranging from her own family, the issue of young marriage and different 'social classes', to the issue of managing time as a housewife and fighter for women and Indonesian independence. As well as being known as a pioneer of women's activism in Indonesia, Rasuna Said married for the first time at the age of 19. It turns out that the reason Rasuna Said married young was her desire to follow religious teachings. She also knew her future husband, Duski Samad, who was also an activist. Said's family objected to their marriage. Not because their marriage was relatively young, but because Duski Samad came from a poor family. Said's family did not want their daughter to suffer because her husband did not have enough money after the wedding. However, due to the bride and groom's

strong determination as activists and fighters, the wedding was solemnised. Their marriage was blessed with two children, one of whom died in infancy. Due to their respective activities in the struggle, they did not have much time to communicate with each other, so they decided to separate, but still worked together in the struggle for nationality and independence (Djaja, 1985, p. 78).

A phenomenon that was seen as a major factor in Rasuna Said's movement for the emancipation of Minangkabau women was the rampant and questionable issue of polygamy in the Minang area in the 1930s. This led to an increase in the number of couples separating. Rasuna saw this as an act that degraded women (Djaja, 1985, p. 78). One of the ways that Minangkabau women leaders such as Rahmah el-Yunusiyah and Rasuna Said saw to overcome this problem was through education, coupled with the political movement that Rasuna Said emphasised (Lindayanti, 2019). Rasuna Said's thinking can be seen as an attempt to realise the concept of *Bundo kanduang*, which has been implemented and seen in the country. The role and contribution of women cannot be limited to the family and household, but must also realistically contribute to the public sphere (Helfi & Afriyani, 2020).

According to Rasuna Said, one of the gates to the achievement of women's equality with men is the fulfilment of the right to education. The education in question is religious education, education to increase women's willingness to progress and develop, political education, journalism education, emancipation education, organisational education, parliamentary education and da'wah education (Zen & Hasnawati, 2020; Rahmana, Nurdin, & Wirman, 2021). Rasuna Said's concern for women's education was expressed while she was teaching at Diniyah Putri. However, she stopped teaching at Diniyah Putri in 1930 due to an argument with the headmaster, who thought it was wrong for Rasuna to

teach politics as a medium for the students to strive for independence. Rasuna realised that it was not possible to bring about major change by relying on the struggle within the school walls (Sari, Wahyuni, & Purnomo, 2021, p. 54).

Some people might think that what Rasuna Said did smacked of the liberal feminism popular in the West. In fact, as a Minangkabau woman, Rasuna Said did not question the existence of gender differences in some roles, based on her understanding of Islam, "adaik basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah". What Rasuna Said was fighting for, however, was not the differences in question, but the social injustice experienced by Minangkabau women. Injustice resulting from a one-sided interpretation of the meaning of existing gender differences (Fakih, 1996, p. 12), As a result, it is difficult for women to enjoy the same human rights as men, such as the most basic education. This is certainly contrary to what the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) fought for by raising the status of Muslim women, who had previously been degraded. While the Prophet himself also became a direct teacher of Muslim women who were studying (Octofrezi, 2020; Afif, Azhari, Safri, & Rehani, 2023).

Indeed, Islam explains the differences between men and women in various areas. However, Islam also opposes any form of oppression and injustice against women, so Islam and feminism are considered compatible for the advancement of women in both the domestic and public spheres (Aliyah, Komariah, & Chotim, 2018; Abidin, Ratnawati, Taufiqurrahim, & Aziz, 2020). As Rasuna Said intended as an Islamist feminist, her concept of thought in women's emancipation is to criticise the "reality of injustice", not the "concept of difference". Majid (2021) explains that respect for women is based on the principle of justice, while the relationship between men and women is based on the principle of balance and complementarity. So that the emancipation of women that Rasuna Said

fought for did not contradict the teachings of Islam, because Islam itself highly respects the dignity of women. Rasuna Said remained on the path that was in accordance with Islamic teachings, without immersing herself in the values of Western liberalism, which became the main watchword of the feminist movement (Kasir, 2016).

3. The political movement, emancipation and independence agenda of Rasuna Said

Rasuna Said began her political career as a member of the communist Sarekat Rakyat in 1926, but the organisation was dissolved after the failed communist uprising in Silungkang in 1927. A year later, she joined the Sarekat Islam party and became a pioneer of the Maninjau branch. Founded in 1930, Sarekat Islam later collaborated with Persatuan Muslimin Indonesia (Permi), which was characterised by Islamist nationalism. In the Permi organisation, Rasuna Said had an equally important position in Sarekat Rakyat, teaching oratory and debating techniques.

Oedin Rahmani, chairman of PSII in Maninjau, mentored Rasuna's political activities. Rasuna was encouraged by Oedin's speeches. In Oedin's hands, Rasuna became a dynamic, radical and determined figure. Rasuna had to discuss and struggle with the preparations under Oedin's guidance. Not surprisingly, Rasuna's speeches could shake and excite those who listened to her. Rasuna Said's powerful oratory earned her the nickname "Lioness" (Sufyan, 2022, pp. 74-75). The following year, she returned to Padang Panjang to resume teaching, but ran into the same leadership problems described above. Rasuna then moved to the Permi headquarters in Padang and set up a girls' school.

As a devout Muslim, Rasuna was active in the women's emancipation movement for education and political aspirations, where she

had been taught and believed since childhood that women also had the right to education and politics. This was also based on the fact that in the Minang Empire at that time, women were restricted in their education, teaching and participation in political activities. In 1933, she established a special office for Permi women in Padang. These activists continued to campaign for women's rights to education and so on. As a result, Permi soon had thousands of women members. Unlike other organisations at the time, Permi women also had a role in party administration. These women continued to campaign for Islamic laws, including polygamy, which is actually in Islamic law. The issue of polygamy, which is rampant in Minangkabau land, is a problem of the individual or social environment, not the content of Islamic religious law itself (Winda, 2009, p. 115; White, 2013, pp. 99, 105, 112-114).

In addition, at the Permi meeting in Padang on 23 October 1932, Rasuna, in an open meeting, strongly condemned the suppression of people's livelihoods and explained all the losses caused by colonialism. At another meeting in Payakumbuh, attended by a thousand people, Rasuna preached that the Permi considered imperialism to be an enemy that was very much against the Qur'an. Soon after, she was arrested and charged with 'spreading hatred', becoming the first Indonesian woman to be charged with sedition or *Speekdelict*² (Daya, 1990, pp. 108, 275). Rasuna Said was arrested because her writings were considered a threat to the colonial party, as the issue emphasised a sense of nationhood and was considered high politics (Overzicht van de Inlandsche en Maleisisch-Chineesche pers, 1933, p. 93). Rasuna was charged with the article *vergader verbond* on 15 November 1932. (Bataviaasch nieuwsblad, 1932).

Propaganda is the process of disseminating information to influence

² *Speek Delict* is used to express or demand dissatisfaction with the Dutch Government.

the attitudes and behaviour of a person or group of people with the motive of indoctrination. Rasuna Said's propaganda was complemented by the colonial government's methods of repression and silencing as a form of social control. Rasuna and her colleague Rasimah Ismail were later sentenced to 15 months in prison (Sufyan, 2022, pp. 71-72). But on the positive side, her name became widely known and she used it during her trial to speak out for independence. Rasuna was imprisoned in Semarang and her transfer from Padang to Java was witnessed by more than a thousand people (Winda, 2009, p. 115; White, 2013, pp. 100-117; Tejomukti & Muftisany, 2014).

After her release from prison in 1934, Rasuna taught for four years at the Permi Teacher Training College in Padang. Rasuna was also active in the world of journalism through her scathing criticism of the Dutch East Indies colonial government in *Raya* magazine. The magazine was soon labelled radical and dangerous by the Dutch East Indies government, and through the Dutch secret police (PID), the colonial government restricted the space for Rasuna and her friends to develop. The Permi, who Rasuna hoped would limit the colonial government's movement, was unable to do anything. Disappointed, she decided to move to Medan, North Sumatra.

In the city of Medan in 1937, Rasuna Said was still active in the political movement and women's emancipation. She soon founded a women's college and a weekly newspaper, *Menara Poetri*, to spread her ideas. The main aim of the newspaper was to explain the importance of the struggle for women's rights and to make women aware of the movement, the anti-colonialist movement. Rasuna Said wrote the column "Pojok". She often used a pen name: Seliguri, which is known to be the name of a flower. Rasuna's writings were known to be insightful, well analysed and always took a bold anti-colonial stance. This was her new

struggle to mobilise the wider community. Sadly, the magazine went bankrupt due to lack of funds. It is known that only 10 per cent of Menara Poetri's readers paid their bills. At the time, many magazines and newspapers were closing due to financial problems. Rasuna decided to return to her hometown in West Sumatra.

During the Japanese occupation, Rasuna Said was arrested by the Japanese army for allegedly joining the pro-independence movement, but was soon released for fear of causing a public uproar. In 1943, Rasuna Said joined an organisation formed by the Japanese called Giyugun, which had a nationalist tone in Sumatra. Rasuna joined the group in charge of logistics. She also helped set up the Hahanokai women's division. During the Japanese occupation, Rasuna Said co-founded the youth organisation Nippon Raya in Padang to help Japan win the Asian War (White, 2013, p. 114; Cribb & Kahin, 2004, p. 160; Nurjanah, 2017, p. 11).

CONCLUSION

Rasuna Said made a major breakthrough in changing the views, positions and roles of Minangkabau women, which had been regulated and perpetuated by the matrilineal culture. Rasuna Said changed the stigma of Minangkabau women not only playing an important role in the domestic sphere (home) as taught in the values of Bundo Kanduang. But also in the public sphere. Rasuna Said's struggle for women's emancipation was not like the liberal feminist movement as practised by Western society and contemporary society today. Rasuna Said did not question the differences between men and women, which are natural and explained in Islam. But what she did challenge was the form of social injustice experienced by Minangkabau women as a result of radical and one-sided interpretations of these differences. Rasuna Said reflected on the low educational opportunities for Minangkabau women and the high rates of divorce and polygamy. In

other words, Rasuna was challenging the reality, not the concept. In her movement, Rasuna Said also supported Islamic values such as polygamy, but opposed people who did not think about the fate of women or who abandoned women through divorce or polygamy.

In order to achieve her goals, she started with education and then maximised it with political movements. Not just to fight for women's emancipation, but to fight for Indonesian independence. This finding may have implications for changing the mindset of contemporary Indonesian Muslim women that the emancipation movement does not mean a free-fall into Western liberal values, but a movement to change the mindset of people who misuse and misinterpret the meaning of differences and advantages of men in traditional culture and the teachings of Islam itself.

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