



Fighting Discrimination Against Women: The Spirit of Muslim Feminism in Ki Hadjar Dewantara's *Madjallah Wasita* [1889-1959]

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Abstract: This study is significant for understanding Ki Hadjar Dewantara's (KHD) contribution to the fight for women's rights, particularly through his writings in *Wasita* magazines (1928-1935). During this period, public awareness of women's rights was limited, and patriarchal traditions were deeply rooted in Indonesian society. The focus of this study is to analyze KHD's thoughts on women, as reflected in *Wasita*, and their impact on the development of women's thought in Indonesia. The research method employed a qualitative approach, analyzing texts published in *Wasita* magazines. The results show that KHD emphasized three main points: first, the importance of returning women to their natural role as mothers, which is considered as the foundation for maintaining moral values and customs. Second, higher education for women is the key to national progress. Third, women's right to participate in the public domains, including obtaining decent work, while still observing norms of decency and security. KHD's thoughts in *Wasita* demonstrate an understanding far ahead of his time and are a valuable contribution to the fight for equal rights between women and men in Indonesia.

Keywords: Gender Justice, Humanity, Women, Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Islam. Women.

Introduction

Women have always been a compelling topic of discussion. Ki Hadjar Dewantara (KHD) [1889-1959] stated that discussions about women are crucial (Dewantara, 2013). In fact, according to KHD, no single issue has more influence on the lives and livelihoods of humankind than women. Whether in religion, morality, and knowledge, in scripture, chronicles, and stories, both in the West and the East, discussions about women's issues continue to attract attention. Throughout history, especially in discussions of current issues, women's positions have always been contested. Consider, for example, discussions within Islamic religious organizations, particularly within the discourse of the Islamic revivalist movement (Zuhdi, 2010). Why are women always contested?

Women's observers agree that women are contested because they embody various symbols: life; power; truth; morality; and purity of religious teachings (Mulia, 2007). It is from these various strategic symbols that women become an attractive object for competition, both by secularists and especially by traditionalist Muslims. This phenomenon is also emphasized by various contemporary studies. For example, researches that highlight how women are often used as a battleground between conservative religious interpretations and progressive discourses (Karimullah & Aliyah, 2023; Rusydiana, Virga, & Muadom, 2025). In other contexts, women even become symbols of purity and religious authority within *tarekat* communities (Smith, Hamdi, & Muzayyin, 2023) and as archetypes of morality in Islamic tradition (Religions, 2024). Furthermore, women are also positioned as a symbol of modernity by secularists and a symbol of religious purity by traditionalists (Akalay, 2022; Hornbacher-Schönleber, 2024). The Indonesian experience shows that female clerics

through the Indonesian Women's Ulema Congress (KUPI-Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia) utilize their symbolic position to promote equality based on Islamic law (Adalah Journal, 2024; Fuad, 2021).

Unfortunately, discussions about women in history often conclude that social and environmental conditions were unfriendly to them. This is evidenced by the abundance of empirical evidence demonstrating women's weak and inferior position in society, particularly in Islam and in the historical pages of Islamic scriptures. Many researchers highlight how patriarchal interpretations of religious texts have dominated views of women in Islam (Syamsul Bakri, 2021; Rizky Amelia et al., 2024). Many women's stories in history end with stories of decline and oppression, particularly in the domestic sphere. In this sphere, many women are victims of domestic violence and viewed as sexual objects. In the public domain, women are also often treated with disdain, even being prevented from fully participating in politics, obtaining a proper education, or obtaining jobs that match their potential. History also records that women in the past were often denied the right to express opinions, participate in politics, or have full rights in social and economic life, and were even prohibited from becoming national leaders (Fatmawati et al., 2024; Gunawan Abdi, 2024). This interpretation severely limited women's freedom of movement and hampered their advancement in broader society.

Based on the brief description above, it is interesting to examine and analyze KHD's thoughts on women's issues. We have long known KHD as a prominent figure or father of Indonesian education. He consistently upheld the values and rights of women. KHD's thoughts on women are neatly expressed in *Madjallah Wasita*. *Madjallah Wasita* was first published in Yogyakarta from October 1928 to 1935. *Madjallah Wasita* served as a forum for KHD to express his thoughts on the realities he faced at the time, particularly his views on women. KHD's concern for women apparently became a serious concern. KHD at that time saw how women were being severely marginalized.

Seeing this deeply concerning condition of women, KHD fought to uphold the rights of marginalized women. KHD considered women to have a strategic position in the progress of the nation and the advancement of humanity in general (Dewantara, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to place women in a place that honors, not degrades. According to KHD, not only men deserve a decent education and employment. Women also have the same rights as men. This was evident in one of his ideas regarding the establishment of a special school for women, which KHD envisioned. In one of his articles, entitled "The Influence of Women on Goods and Their Surroundings," he emphasized the importance of Taman Siswa (Schools) having a "Wisma Rini" space, or a place called "keputren" (a place for female teachers and students), used for dormitories.

KHD's thoughts on women are interesting to revisit, considering that during that period, specifically between 1928 and 1935, awareness of the importance of fighting for women's rights was still a cause for concern. KHD's thoughts are necessary and important to revisit as material for reflection and discussion, especially regarding gender equality in the contemporary era. The academic question that arises is: how did KHD think about women in *Madjallah Wasita*, both in the domestic and public spheres? To what extent are KHD's thoughts relevant to contemporary Muslim feminist thought, particularly on gender issues?

Findings/Results

Get to Know *Madjallah Wasita* (1928-1935)

KHD is a prominent figure in Indonesian education. He is known as the Father of Indonesian Education. His contributions to independence and the advancement of Indonesia are recognized to this day, including his thoughts on women. Public recognition of KHD's contributions is evident in the establishment of National Education Day, which falls on May 2nd. National Education Day, in fact, is named after the date and month of his birth. KHD's struggle to uphold justice and promote educational values was manifested in the founding of Tamansiswa University Yogyakarta (UST). His legacy can still be felt by today's generations.

From 1928 to 1935, KHD disseminated his ideas by writing. These writings were later published by *Madjallah Wasita*, a journal first published in December 1928 in Yogyakarta. *Madjallah Wasita* was managed and published by the Tamansiswa Yogyakarta Foundation. Between 1928 and 1935, KHD wrote extensively about his thoughts, including those on women. *Madjallah Wasita* was an educational magazine that championed the cause of disseminating educational values, particularly for teachers and parents. In *Madjallah Wasita*, KHD expressed many of his ideas on the importance of education for Indonesia's children. According to KHD, education is crucial for a nation's progress and development. Therefore, education is crucial not only for men but also for women.

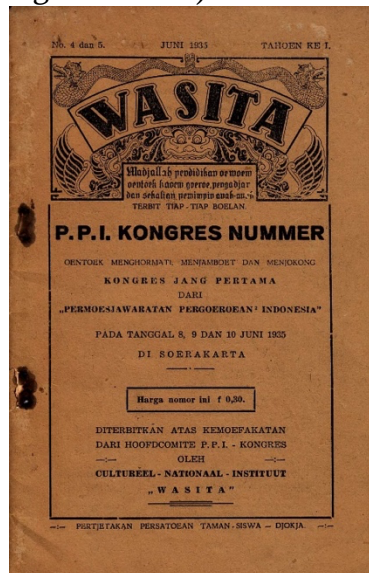
KHD's thoughts on women were expressed in *Madjallah Wasita*, which was published from 1928 to 1935. To preserve the ageing and difficult-to-read magazine, the Supreme Council of the Tamansiswa Association published KHD's works in complete book form. KHD's works, which initially consisted of articles in small magazines, were later compiled into a book entitled "*Kebudayaan: Pemikiran, Konsepsi, Keteladanan, Sikap Merdeka - Culture: Thoughts, Conceptions, Role Models, and Independent Attitudes*" (Dewantara, 2013). This book consists of two large volumes. The first volume consists of 555 pages and the second volume consists of 392 pages. KHD's articles on women are included in the second volume. KHD's articles on women are arranged into one chapter, namely chapter 3, which consists of 9 sub-themes about women. This book was first published in 1961. KHD's works have provided a very important contribution to Indonesian thought, especially in the field of education and his struggle to raise the dignity of women. Even in his foreword to the first publication of KHD's book, the first President of the Republic of Indonesia, Sukarno, said that: "*Karangan2 beliau adalah sangat luas dan mendalam, jang tidak sadja dapat membangkitkan semangat perdjolongan nasional sewaktu djaman pendjadjahan, tetapi djuga meletakkan dasar2 jang kuat bagi pendidikan nasional jang progressip untuk generasi sekarang dan generasi jang akan datang* (His writings are very broad and profound, which not only raised the spirit of national struggle during the colonial era, but also laid strong foundations for progressive national education for the current generation and future generations)" (Sukarno, 2013).

In this study, the author used seven articles about women in the *Wasita* manuscript as primary data. These seven articles were selected based on their relevance to the research theme. The seven articles used as primary data are:

Table 1: Primary Data of the Study

No	Theme	Edition
1	The Nature of Women	<i>Wasita</i> December 1928, Volume 1 No. 3
2	Women in the World of Education	<i>Wasita</i> December 1928, Volume 1 No. 3
3	The Influence of Women on the Goods and Places They Surround	<i>Wasita</i> December 1928, Volume 1 No. 3

4	Women and Sport	<i>Wasita</i> December 1928, Volume 1 No. 3
5	Women in the Growth of <i>Adab</i> (Manner)	<i>Wasita</i> July 1935, Ed. 1 No. 6
6	Progress in Women's Manners: Jakarta Congress and Semarang Protests	<i>Wasita</i> August 1935, Ed. 1 No. 7.
7	Employment for Women	<i>Wasita</i> Oct./Nov. 1935 Ed. 1 No. 9/10.

Figure of *Madjallah Wasita*

The themes about women written by KHD were written in *Wasita* over a period of 7 years (1928-1935). The publisher of *Madjallah Wasita* was the Cultureel National Institute "Wasita". The *Wasita* publishing office was located at Stationsweg 26, Mataram-Jogja. *Madjallah Wasita* was led directly by KHD. *Madjallah Wasita* was a general education magazine specifically for teachers, educators, children's leaders and parents. *Madjallah Wasita* was published monthly. There was a total of 9 articles about women written by KHD in *Wasita*. This indicates that KHD really pays attention to women's issues in Indonesia.

Women, Rights for Education and Public Space

1. Discourse on Women in *Madjallah Wasita*

From 1928 to 1935, Ki Hadjar Dewantara's (KHD) thoughts on women provided significant enlightenment for the people of the Indonesian archipelago. At that time, Indonesia—then still known as the Nusantara—was shackled by a deeply patriarchal culture. This culture placed men in dominant positions of authority, while women were considered inferior and confined to domestic roles. This patriarchal culture considered women to be limited to wives serving their husbands and mothers taking care of the household, thus severely limiting their roles in the public sphere. This was reflected in the fact that, at that time, women did not have the right to participate in politics, education, or decent work. Formal education and prestigious jobs, such as political office, were reserved for men, while women were denied equal opportunities to pursue higher education or pursue careers outside the home. According to some researchers, this situation demonstrates how patriarchal societal mindsets at that time hindered women's advancement in education and employment. Ki Hadjar Dewantara, through his thoughts, sought to free women from the shackles of this tradition by calling for equal education for women, which subsequently had a significant impact on social change in Indonesia.

Seeing the social phenomena of the time, KHD felt both worry and concern. In addition to social movements, KHD fought for women by establishing Taman Siswa as a learning platform for Indonesian women. One manifestation of KHD's concern was the provision of the "Wisma Rini" space, also known as "keputren" (a place for female teachers and students) for women (Dewantara, 2013).

After discussing and analyzing KHD's seven articles in the Wasita magazine on women, we can conclude that he had at least three main points about women. These three main points about women are: emphasizing the importance of women's nature, the importance of women's educational rights, and women's rights in the public sphere (careers). These three points were echoed by KHD in his fight for women's rights. KHD emphasized the importance of considering these three crucial elements when discussing women's issues, especially in the contemporary era. These three elements must be considered in upholding and fighting for women's rights in Indonesia.

2. Normative Role of Women

In fighting for women's rights, Ki Hadjar Dewantara (KHD) emphasized the importance of continuing to pay attention to women's nature. KHD recognized that while it is important to fight for equal rights between women and men, this must not ignore women's nature as women. The nature referred to here is women's biological and social roles as mothers and wives, which also influence their roles in society. According to KHD, fighting for women's rights does not mean eliminating or abandoning this nature, but rather providing space for women to develop according to their nature without being shackled by unfair social restrictions. On several occasions, KHD emphasized that women's rights to education, careers, and active roles in society must still consider cultural and moral values that prioritize women's roles as mothers and shapers of generations. This, according to KHD, will maintain a balance between women's emancipation and the recognition of existing social values. Unfortunately, in many feminist discourses, the natural aspects of women are often forgotten or even sidelined in the struggle for equality, which, according to KHD, requires serious attention to avoid an imbalance in understanding women's emancipation.

In Wasita Desember 1928 Volume I No. 3, KHD emphasized:

"Tentang soal perempuan, maka yang terpenting dan sama sekali tak boleh kita lupakan atau kita pungkiri ialah "kodratnya" perempuan. Inilah keadaan yang nyata, yang hak dan yang sebenarnya harus menjadi penunjuk jalan untuk sekalian orang, yang wajib memikirkan soal perempuan (Regarding women, the most important thing, and one we must never forget or deny, is their "nature." This is the real situation, the right one, and what should actually serve as a guide for all people who are obligated to think about women)" (Dewantara, 2013).

KHD has reminded Indonesian women that the development of technology and science has begun to penetrate the homeland. Consequently, information from abroad, including the lifestyle of women in Europe, became a concern by KHD that it can influence the culture of women in the Eastern world, especially in Indonesia. According to KHD, in the that day (1928), women in the Western world were busy and enthusiastic about moving and trying to get equal rights with men (Dewantara, 2013). Although KHD was aware that the efforts made by Western women were their rights, however, according to KHD, the movement to get equal rights over time gives rise to conditions that were not in accordance with the nature of women (Dewantara, 2013). Because the demands of women in the West in fighting for their

rights to be equal to men might go beyond the nature of women. For example, women could be equal to men in education and employment, but they should not demand equality with men in all matters, especially in dress, which, according to KHD, should not be imitated by men. This became a depiction of women's development in the West, which, according to KHD, could transcend their nature as women.

Therefore, Ki Hadjar emphasized the importance of elevating women's rights to equality with men. However, KHD emphasized the importance of remembering women's nature as gentle, with maternal qualities that nurture their children. KHD emphasized that:

"...gambarannya angan-angan perempuan Eropa pada zaman sekarang yang lupa akan kodratnya. Yang lupa, bahwa tubuh perempuan itu berbeda sekali dengan badan orang laki-laki, karena perbedaan itu berhubungan dengan kodrat perempuan yaitu kewajibannya akan menjadi ibu, akan mengandung anak, melahirkan anak, dan lain-lainnya (The image is the dream of European women in this day and age who have forgotten their nature. They have forgotten that women's bodies are very different from men's bodies, because this difference is related to women's nature, namely their obligations to be mothers, to conceive children, to give birth to children, and so on)" (Dewantara, 2013).

Based on the statement above, KHD emphasized that women's natural state must be remembered. While it is important to uphold women's rights so that they are equal to men, it is also important to remember the nature of women. Because, according to KHD, not all jobs that can be done by men must also be done by women, and vice versa. Therefore, what is meant by equal rights between men and women does not mean that women must imitate all the behavior and actions of men.

"...berhubungan dengan kewajiban-kewajiban yang tak akan dapat dipungkiri tersebut, maka nyatalah sekali, bahwa persamaan hak antara laki-laki dan perempuan itu belumlah megandung arti bahwa orang perempuan boleh menjalankan tingkah laku orang laki-laki. Seringkali perempuan tak dapat meniru perbuatan dan pekerjaan laki-laki, karena bukan kodratnya. Dan kalau mereka dapat melakukan tenaga laki-laki, boleh jadi akan berbahaya untuk kesehatan tubuhnya (In relation to these undeniable obligations, it is clear that equality between men and women does not mean that women can carry out men's behavior. Often, women cannot imitate men's actions and work, because it is not their nature. And if they can do men's work, it may be dangerous for their health)" (Dewantara, 2013).

From this opinion, it is clear that KHD wants to emphasize that equal rights between men and women in all matters are indeed important, but it is important to remember that when fighting for women's rights to be equal to men, it is important to adapt to women's nature, so as not to harm women themselves. Here, KHD emphasized not to rush to imitate modern or European ways; also, not to be bound by conservative or narrow feelings, but to adapt everything to their natural state. In this theme of equal rights, KHD reiterated that the equality between men and women that applies is equality of rights, equality of status, and equality of (self) worth, not equality of life or livelihood (Dewantara, 2013).

KHD emphasized the importance of Indonesians being selective in imitating cultures that come to Indonesia. They should not be easily carried away and influenced by customs that were actually destructive. In Wasita, he emphasized:

“Janganlah tergesa-gesa meniru cara modern atau cara Eropa; janganlah juga terikat oleh rasa konservatif atau rasa sempit, tetapi cocokkanlah segala-galanya dengan keadaan kondratnya. Persamaan antara laki-laki dan perempuan yang hak dan harus berlaku, yaitu persamaan hak, persamaan drajat, dan persamaan harga, bukan persamaan sifat hidup atau penghidupan (Don't be in a hurry to imitate modern or European ways; don't be bound by conservative or narrow-minded feelings, but adapt everything to the natural state. The equality between men and women that is right and must apply, namely equality of rights, equality of status, and equality of worth, not equality of nature of life or livelihood)” (Dewantara, 2013).

KHD's concern about the loss of Eastern culture among Indonesian women is understandable. KHD's criticism and concern for the importance of preserving the noble values of Eastern culture, especially for women, are based on KHD's experiences during her stay in Europe during her exile by the colonialists. During her time in Europe, KHD witnessed many European women's cultures that, according to KHD, had exceeded their nature as women. According to KHD, many of the behaviors and actions carried out by European women exceeded their nature. This is what KHD did not want to happen in the archipelago. KHD wanted Indonesian women to not forget their nature when fighting for their rights.

3. Education Rights for Women

Ki Hadjar Dewantara highly valued the importance of education for women. He even stated that education is the most suited to women's nature. Why is this so? The previous explanation describes the importance of choosing any profession women undertake that aligns with their nature, and according to KHD, education is the most suited to women's nature.

“...Untuk mengetahui perbuatan atau pekerjaan manakah boleh dilakukan oleh perempuan, haruslah kita senantiasa mengingat kodratnya perempuan. Berhubungan dengan itu, maka mudalah kita mengerti, bahwa dunia pendidikan itulah tempat kaum perempuan yang sangat laras dengan kodrat isteri, lahir dan batin (To understand what actions or jobs women are permitted to perform, we must always remember their nature. In this regard, it is easy to understand that the world of education is the place where women are most in harmony with the nature of wives, both physically and spiritually (Dewantara, 2013).

KHD's statement emphasized that education should be a field in which women should be involved, not prohibited. Indonesian women should be educated, not outdated. KHD's statement clearly states that Indonesian women should have a higher education. Indonesian women deserve an education just as much as men.

Why did KHD believe that education was so suited to women's nature? He argued that young children attending school, both boys and girls, still desperately needed a spiritual connection with their mothers; therefore, according to KHD, schoolchildren were more attracted to female teachers than male teachers. KHD viewed female teachers as more appropriate than male teachers in educating and instilling moral values. Female teachers were considered more knowledgeable in understanding children's psychological states. This is because women are more sensitive than men, who rely more on physical strength than gentleness.

According to KHD, it was undeniable that even though male teachers understood and master their rights and obligations, they still retained their masculine qualities. Their patience, thoroughness, nurturing, compassion, and other qualities were not comparable to those of women. Female teachers, on the

other hand, could instill love, not fear, towards teachers. This is what we have experienced: many students are afraid of male teachers. Therefore, according to KHD, the world of education is the most suitable for women. This is why KHD emphasized that women must possess adequate skills in education. Women must be educated and not be left behind.

Regarding the importance of Indonesian women achieving the highest possible education, KHD emphasized:

"...Hai, kaum perempuan Indonesia, masuklah ke dunia pendidikan! Disitulah kamu akan merasakan kenikmatan diri, karena kamu bekerja guna memuliakan rakyat dan bangsa, selaras dengan kodratmu lahir batin (Hey, Indonesian women, enter the world of education! That's where you will experience personal fulfillment, because you are working to honor the people and the nation, in harmony with your inner and outer nature)" (Dewantara, 2013).

It's clear that KHD wanted women in Indonesia to be aware of the importance of education. A country where women are educated will progress and develop. Because the progress or decline of a nation depends on the level of education of its women. Therefore, education is crucial for women.

"Maka kepada perempuan Indonesia saja serukan: ketahuilah, bahwa kamu sekalian berkuasa mendidik keutamaan, karena besarlah pengaruhmu pada barang dan tempat kelilingmu dalam hal kesucian, kehalusan dan dalamnya batin. Ingatlah, bahwa kamu berhak turut campur dalam semua perkara. Hukum adat kita memberi hak dan kelonggaran padamu lebih daripada hak-hak orang perempuan Eropa. Usahakanlah kekuatanmu! Pergunakanlah hak-hakmu! Guna keselamatan rakyatmu dan keselamatan dunia (Thus, say to Indonesian women: know that you all have the power to educate virtues, because your influence on the things and places around you is great in terms of purity, refinement and depth of mind. Remember, that you have the right to intervene in all matters. Our customary laws give you more rights and concessions than European women's rights. Strive for your strength! Exercise your rights! For the safety of your people and the safety of the world)" (Dewantara, 2013).

From this statement, it is clear that KHD supported women in obtaining a proper education. In fact, KHD strongly supported women's active participation in the public sphere, both as educators and in politics. This is KHD's understanding of the importance of education for women. Education is not solely a male right.

According to Ki Hadjar Dewantara (KHD), women had the same rights as men to receive a proper and equal education. Education, for KHD, was not merely a matter of academic knowledge, but also a profound cultural endeavor to guide students in living life according to their nature and facing various social challenges wisely. Therefore, it is not surprising that KHD founded an educational institution that has now become one of Indonesia's educational icons, the Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa University in Yogyakarta, which continues to play a role in educating the nation. For KHD, education is a means to achieve progress in life, both physical and spiritual, encompassing the development of students' full potential (Boentarsono, 2015).

KHD believed that education is the key to creating a just and equitable society, where women and men have equal opportunities to participate in national development. This is in line with KHD's belief that education is a basic right for every individual regardless of gender, and every child, both boys and girls, has the right to receive an education that can develop their full potential. Therefore, proper

and equal education for women is part of KHD's struggle to achieve a more just and free society.

4. Women and Public Sphere

Historically, the position of women in the domestic sphere, let alone the public sphere, has been deeply concerning. The culture of women's dark past saw men restricting their rights. Forget about being active and free in the public sphere, even in the domestic sphere, women were constantly restricted and oppressed. Here, KHD aimed to revive the rights that women deserve, especially in the public sphere, namely employment.

KHD did not prohibit women from working, just as men did. According to KHD, women had the same rights and were equal to men in obtaining decent employment. However, KHD emphasized that choosing suitable work for women was crucial to adapting to their natural abilities. Therefore, according to KHD, suitable work for women was work that did not violate or infringe on women's natural rights. According to the KHD, women should be selective in choosing jobs. Indonesian women should not simply imitate European customs and styles, which, according to the KHD, often violated the nature of women. Particular attention should be paid to clothing and the nature of the work, to avoid violating their purity, which is their feminine nature (Dewantara, 2013). Women should not choose jobs that could diminish their feminine nature, making them resemble men.

In Wasita Oct./Nov. 1935 Year 1 No. 9/10, the KHD emphasized:

"Menurut kodratnya perempuan, sudah teranglah hidup perempuan itu berbeda dengan hidup orang laki-laki; tak boleh kedua-duanya itu disamakan. Perbedaan itu tidak saja mengenai hidup jasmaninya, pun juga hidup rohaninya. Maka dari itu, wajiblah kita yang pertama kali mengingat, bahwa tidak semua pekerjaan yang hingga kini hanya dilakukan oleh kaum laki-laki, boleh juga diberikan pada orang perempuan (By nature, women's lives are clearly different from men's; the two cannot be equated. This difference extends not only to their physical lives but also to their spiritual lives. Therefore, we must be the first to remember that not all jobs that have been done exclusively by men can be given to women)" (Dewantara, 2013).

KHD's statement clearly demonstrates the importance of choosing a career for women. It's crucial to avoid jobs that endanger women themselves. KHD also emphasized the importance of fighting for women's rights, especially in the workplace, but it's crucial to remember and not forget the nature of women. According to KHD, not all jobs performed by men are also suitable for women.

KHD emphasized the crucial role of parents. Parents should supervise their children's development, especially girls. If a child makes a mistake, the parents are the first to be blamed. Returning to the world of suitable jobs for women, KHD emphasized that when choosing a career, it's important to pay attention to values of decency. The careers chosen should not be detrimental to women, as is the case in the Western world.

KHD also criticized the current era of many women being unknowingly used as tools in politics and economics. Many jobs involve women, but behind them, there is abuse. Women are unaware that they are exploited for advancement, whether in economics, politics, or other fields. They are often used to lure consumers into buying. Women are often displayed as a tool to attract consumers. This is often seen in various ways, such as restaurants, malls, cafes, certain products, and so on (Dewantara, 2013). Almost everything now uses women as a magnet.

On this issue, KHD emphasized:

“Banyak pula macam-macam mata pencaharian yang melulu mempergunakan orang perempuan selaku penarik, misalnya perempuan dijadikan “mannequin” (orang yang disuruh mengenakan sesuatu model pakaian untuk menarik perhatian publik buat sesuatu mode-atelier), perempuan sebagai penari atau pemain musik, dan sebagainya (There are also many kinds of livelihoods that only use women as models, for example women are made into “mannequins” (people who are asked to wear a certain type of clothing to attract public attention for a fashion atelier), women as dancers or musicians, and so on)” (Dewantara, 2013).

According to KHD, women's involvement in politics and economics was solely aimed at attracting buyers with their beauty and bodies (Dewantara, 2013). This is what KHD worried about regarding the development of women in the public sphere. Therefore, it is crucial for women to be educated. KHD wanted the Indonesian nation to be aware and critical of the growth and development of women's issues, particularly regarding the employment market for women.

Therefore, KHD emphasized the importance of considering women's safety and decency when choosing a job. It is crucial to avoid jobs that are detrimental to women themselves. Many jobs pose an unsafe position for women and even violate Eastern norms that women should uphold. KHD continued to emphasize this point:

“...dalam kita berdaya upaya mencari pekerjaan bagi anak-anak perempuan kita, janganlah sekali-kali kita lupa akan apa yang sudah kita tegas... yaitu tentang bedanya pejabat laki-laki dengan perempuan. Dimana orang perempuan senantiasa dikelilingi oleh macam-macam keadaan yang mengkhawatirkan keselamatannya, maka perlulah kita selalu menimbang-nimbang, berat manakah kepentingan penghidupan (ekonomi) dengan kepentingan kehidupan (kebahagiaan) (...in our efforts to find jobs for our daughters, we must never forget what we have already emphasized... namely the difference between male and female officials. Where women are constantly surrounded by various situations that worry their safety, we need to always weigh up, how much heavier are the interests of livelihood (economic) or the interests of life (happiness))?” (Dewantara, 2013).

These are KHD's thoughts on the world of occupation, which women need to pay attention to. He also favored women's participation in education. In the topic of women, KHD clearly believed that women's positions were crucial in determining the progress and development of a nation. He believed that women's issues should not be viewed from a single perspective, according to a single school of thought, because women's lives were nothing more or less than a matter of complete humanity (Dewantara, 2013). Women hold a strategic position in the advancement of the nation and the advancement of humanity in general (Dewantara, 2013).

Undeniably, KHD's intellectual contributions deserve recognition. At that time, specifically between 1928 and 1935, KHD advocated the importance of equal rights for women. Yet, at that time, awareness of the importance of women's rights, particularly in education, was still relatively low among Indonesians. Therefore, the ideas promoted by KHD must be maintained and continue to be fought for so that these ideals can be realized.

Discussion/Analysis

K.H. Dewantara's Thoughts in the Context of Contemporary Muslim Feminism

Islam highly upholds the values of equality between men and women. The advent of Islam has changed human thought patterns, especially in the treatment of women.

Before Islam, history records how the fate of women was very concerning: women were often viewed as objects of ownership, even inherited as property, and had no rights to inheritance or socio-political rights. Leila Ahmed (1992) and Fatima Mernissi (1975) emphasized that pre-Islamic culture placed women in a subordinate position. However, with the arrival of Islam, the Qur'an affirmed women's rights, including the right to inheritance as stated in QS. An-Nisa' [4]:7.: "Men shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, and women shall have a share in what their parents and closest relatives leave, whether the legacy be small or large: this is ordained by God."

Amina Wadud (1992) asserts that the Qur'anic text is progressive towards gender justice, although often limited by classical patriarchal interpretations. In contemporary studies, Safitri & Khumaedy (2023) highlight equality in the distribution of inheritance according to the Qur'an and Mawaris fiqh, while Firdawaty et al. (2023) demonstrate the thoughts of Husein Muhammad, who encouraged *ijtihad* for inheritance equality. Furthermore, Zubaidi, Arifah, & Sansayto (2025) emphasize divine justice as the basis for examining inheritance rules and women's testimonies in the Qur'an. In the Indonesian context, research by Suharsono, Prasetyoningsih & Usman (2024) and Sugiri Permana (2023) shows that contemporary legal pluralism and *ijtihad* open up space for a more just reinterpretation for women. Thus, Islam brings a spirit of universal justice that encompasses both men and women, both in the private and public spheres.

M. Quraish Shihab explains that at the peak of Greek civilization, women were merely instruments for fulfilling male sexual desires (Shihab, 1999). Likewise, in Roman civilization, men wielded complete power over women. This power included the authority to sell, banish, abuse, and kill. The same was true during the Hindu and Chinese civilizations. A married woman's right to life ceased at the death of her husband. In Hindu and Chinese traditions, when a husband died, his body was cremated, and at the same time, the wife was also cremated alive. This tradition ended only in the 17th century AD.

Unfortunately, the legacy of this grim civilization still remains today. Religion's role has even exacerbated the situation. A textualist understanding of religious teachings on holy scriptures has resulted in unequal interpretations. Many interpretations are gender-biased. Many interpretations seem to marginalize and demean women. In response to this, contemporary Muslim feminist thinkers emerged to address the plight of women. Examples include Amina Wadud (1992), Asghar Ali Engineer (1990), Fatima Mernissi (1991), Bintu Syati, and others. All Muslim feminists desire women's independence and rights to be upheld. This spirit of struggle to uphold justice for women aligns with the thinking of KHD.

KHD wanted women to have equal rights with men in all matters. Women should have the freedom to determine their own lives. Women also have the right to participate in all public affairs (Dewantara, 2013), even to become leaders. This idea also broke with long-standing traditions that had shackled women. Forget becoming leaders, even leaving the home was considered taboo at the time. This is what feminist Fatima Mernissi criticized and focused on. Women in the past were always restrained and restricted in their movements (Mernissi, 1994). Women should be given the same rights as men to be creative, as long as they are within normal limits. This issue also concerns KHD. According to KHD, women also have the right to actively participate in public activities (Dewantara, 2013). Women should not be shackled by old traditions that narrow their mindsets (Dewantara, 2013).

KHD also emphasized that women have equal rights to a proper education (Dewantara, 2013). Men are not the only ones entitled to school and college. KHD countered the erroneous paradigm that women are intellectually and religiously weak by championing women's rights. He strongly encouraged every woman to attain a higher education. According to KHD, the progress and development of a nation lies in the hands of educated women (Dewantara, 2013). KHD's thinking aligns with that of Amina Wadud. According to Amina Wadud, the advancement of civilization is reflected in the level of women's participation in the public sphere and the recognition of the importance of women's human resources. If the understanding of the source of Islamic teachings (the Qur'an) is correct, in the sense that it is not patriarchal in nature and does not shackle or marginalize women, Islam will become a global force that empowers women (Wadud, 2003).

According to Engineer, if there are products of interpretive thought that are biased toward patriarchy, it doesn't mean that Islam (the Quran) is wrong, but rather that its patriarchal culture is problematic. Patriarchy, according to Engineer, occurs because sociological realities in its development are often perceived as theological concepts or doctrines. According to Engineer, this patriarchal culture was formed by two fundamental factors. First, women's awareness at that time was still very low, and domestic work was considered a woman's obligation; second, men considered themselves superior due to their power and ability to earn a living and spend it on the needs of women (wives) (Engineer, 1994).

This model of religious understanding was what KHD attempted to break down. This unfriendly perspective on women had apparently become deeply rooted in society, including in Indonesia at that time. Therefore, seeing this reality, KHD was concerned and called for a change in this erroneous perspective on women. KHD's thoughts, expressed in Wasita (1928-1935), were truly extraordinary at the time. At a time when society was still unaware of women's rights and equality, KHD came up with enlightening ideas. Interestingly, KHD's ideas at that time aligned with contemporary Muslim feminist thought. At the time, the struggle for Muslim feminism was not as prominent as it is today. However, KHD, through his ideas, initiated it.

It can be concluded that K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's thoughts on women at that time were ahead of their time. His contributions to promoting women's education, establishing women's organizations, and empowerment programs demonstrate that KHD's ideas were not merely rhetorical but also practical and institutional, thus having a significant influence on the development of contemporary Muslim feminist thought in Indonesia (Suswandari & Suwarno, 2010; Arifin, 2022). Historical evidence and modern studies place KHD and the Muhammadiyah/Aisyiyah movement as important drivers in promoting women's access to education and social participation since the early 20th century (Maraulang, 2025; Smith-Hefner, 2008).

KHD's intellectual contributions are worthy of appreciation, considering that at that time, the archipelago was not yet independent, but systematic initiatives to educate and empower women had already emerged through schools, magazines, and women's organizations that he or his followers facilitated (Zara, 2021; Muhammadiyah, 2023). Thus, KHD's role was crucial to the development of contemporary Islamic thought in Indonesia—not only as a local legacy, but also as an example of Islamic reformist practice relevant to international studies on women, education, and Islamic modernity (Kamila & Asrini, 2024).

KHD's intellectual contributions even received praise from the late Indonesian president, Sukarno. In the foreword to KHD's book, Sukarno praised KHD as a national figure who "*sepi ing pamrih rame ing gawe* (free from selfish ambition, full in efforts)"

(Sukarno, 2013). KHD's dedication and contributions to his ideas are still felt today, particularly in education and his struggle to elevate the dignity of women in the archipelago. Indonesians recognize KHD as the father of Indonesian national education. National Education Day, which falls on May 2nd, even commemorates KHD's birthday. This great honor is due to KHD's invaluable dedication to education. This invaluable legacy of our ancestors should continue to be preserved and practiced by the Indonesian people. Thus, Indonesia's dream of becoming a great and dignified nation will be realized.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that Ki Hadjar Dewantara (KHD) upheld the humanitarian values of women, who had been marginalized. For KHD, women had the same rights and obligations as men, although they must remember their nature as mothers, which serves as the foundation of Eastern morality and customs. KHD's main thoughts on women can be grouped into three points. First, KHD emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between the struggle for equality and an awareness of women's nature. Second, KHD strongly emphasized the importance of higher education for women. He believed that the quality of women's education would significantly determine the nation's progress. Third, in the public sphere, KHD emphasized that women have the same rights as men, including obtaining decent employment, while still maintaining safety and decency to avoid harming themselves.

KHD's thoughts deserve appreciation, as they emerged during a time when awareness of women's rights, both in education and employment, was still low. During the period 1928–1935, the majority of society still relegated women to the domestic sphere. The presence of KHD with his progressive ideas demonstrates that Indonesia had a visionary figure championing the well-being of women. KHD's contributions align with the thinking of contemporary Muslim feminists such as Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Asghar Ali Engineer, who advocate for gender equality. Thus, KHD can be seen as a pioneer whose contributions are invaluable to the development of contemporary Islamic thought in Indonesia, particularly on women's issues.

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