

Reconfiguring Islamic Religious Authority: The Muhammadiyah Model for Gender Equality Reform in a Global Context

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Abstract: This article examines Ki Hadjar Dewantara's (KHD) contribution to early gender equality discourse in Indonesia through his writings in *Madjallah Wasita* magazines (1928–1935), produced in a socio-cultural context dominated by patriarchal norms and limited public awareness of women's rights. In addition to analyzing KHD's views on women, the study aims to assess the relevance of his thought for the development of gender reform within Islamic and educational thought in Indonesia and to situate it in dialogue with the Muhammadiyah Model for Gender Equality Reform in a Global Context. Employing a qualitative approach grounded in historical discourse analysis and informed by Muslim feminist theory, this research examines selected texts published in *Madjallah Wasita* as primary sources, supported by relevant secondary literature. This framework enables a contextual reading of gender, education, and moral discourse within early Indonesian reform movements. Findings indicate that KHD articulated three key ideas. First, he emphasized women's role as mothers as a moral foundation of society, framing motherhood as a source of dignity rather than subordination. Second, he strongly advocated higher education for women as a prerequisite for national progress. Third, he affirmed women's right to participate in the public sphere, including access to decent work, while maintaining ethical and social norms. These ideas resonate with the Muhammadiyah model, particularly in conceptualizing gender equality as compatible with religious values, educational reform, and social responsibility. The study concludes that KHD advanced a progressive and context-sensitive vision of gender relations that both preceded and complemented later Islamic reform movements, including Muhammadiyah's transnational approach to faith-based gender equality. It recommends integrating KHD's gender-inclusive educational philosophy into national education policies, teacher training, and gender-responsive curricula to strengthen contemporary reforms on gender equality and religious authority.

Keywords: Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Gender Equality, Muhammadiyah Model, Islamic Education, Gender Reform.

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 (Miswanto, 2020). 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.

During the period 1928–1935 in the Dutch colonial Indies, Indonesian women experienced constrained social, economic, and political conditions that reflected entrenched gender inequality and limited access to public life. Historical records highlight that the First Indonesian Women's Congress in December 1928 marked a watershed moment in articulating women's collective grievances and aspirations, bringing together more than thirty women's groups from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds to deliberate on issues such as education, political participation, and social reform ([Perikatan Perempuan Indonesia, 1928](#)).

Despite this organizational breakthrough, women's access to formal education and public roles remained restricted by both colonial governance and patriarchal norms, rendering many women confined to domestic roles with minimal empowerment (Rendall, 1999). Islamic and nationalist reform networks catalyzed early feminist consciousness among Muslim women in the 1920s, yet these transformations were partial and uneven across regions, revealing ongoing structural marginalization

(Muttaqin, 2015). Furthermore, economic participation of women in sectors such as plantation labour underscores dual burdens of wage work and household reproduction without commensurate rights or protections under colonial legal frameworks, pointing to lived realities of gender stratification (Elvira & Molina, 2025).

This historical configuration highlights a critical research problem: although early organizational mobilization illustrated burgeoning women's agency, the systemic constraints of colonial governance, patriarchal social structures, and limited structural reforms maintained enduring gender inequities. The emergence of formalized women's movements such as Perikatan Perempuan Indonesia (PPI) does not, in itself, explain how structural barriers were negotiated or demolished between 1928 and 1935.

Existing literature suggests that women's mobilization during this period was deeply intertwined with broader nationalist and anti-colonial discourses, yet the micro level impacts on women's socio-economic status, legal rights, and everyday agency remain under-theorized and empirically insufficient (Perikatan Perempuan Indonesia, 1928; Urifatulailiyah, 2017; Muttaqin, 2015). Addressing this gap is necessary to understand how early feminist thought and organization intersected with colonial power and social norms, thereby shaping trajectories of gender justice in Indonesian history.

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.

Several studies have examined aspects of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's educational and gender-related thought, yet none have comprehensively explored his discourse on women's rights as presented in *Wasita* magazines within a critical historical-discourse framework. Prior research on KHD's views on women's roles in education emphasizes cultural values and education but remains limited in scope and theoretical depth; for example, Kumalasari (2017) analyzed Dewantara's conception of women's essence and education, highlighting his support for equal educational opportunities within an Eastern cultural framework, yet this study does not engage with *Wasita* as a medium or situate gendered discourse within broader nationalist and feminist histories (Kumalasari, 2017). Similarly, a recent study of gender education in *Wasita Rini* focuses on women's personal independence and self-mastery but is primarily descriptive and confined to literary analysis of a single poetic text, lacking broader socio-historical

interrogation and theoretical grounding in feminist discourse (Nurdin et al., 2025). In contrast, broader historiographical work on Indonesian women's movements discusses the emergence of feminist consciousness and collective mobilization during the colonial period, yet these studies typically overlook the *Wasita* corpus and KHD's contributions to early gender thought (Rochimatun, 2023). Additionally, regional print media such as *Asjraq* has been analyzed for its role in modernity and women's empowerment, but this scholarship again pertains to regional magazines and not to *Wasita* or KHD's integrative philosophical perspective (Al-Insyi & Samry, 2025). Other historical analyses document women's rights struggles in nationalist movements and broader cultural narratives, yet they do not connect these developments to Dewantara's editorial interventions or the gendered content of his *Wasita* writings (Fitri Lestari, 2023). The current article fills these gaps by situating KHD's *Wasita* discourse within a historical-discourse and Muslim feminist framework, explicitly analyzing how his writings contributed to early conceptualizations of women's rights in Indonesia and how this intersects with broader nationalist and gender equality discourses, thus offering a novel synthesis not yet addressed in the literature.

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?

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with the primary objective of reconstructing and analyzing Ki Hadjar Dewantara's views on women and gender equality as articulated in *Wasita* magazine during the period 1928–1935. A qualitative method is appropriate because the research does not seek to measure variables or test statistical hypotheses, but rather to explore meanings, arguments, and discursive constructions embedded in historical texts. The method is used to examine how Ki Hadjar Dewantara's religious and intellectual authority was constructed, negotiated, and mobilized to address women's issues within the context of colonial rule and early Indonesian nationalism. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on ideological and discursive problems rather than empirical generalization.

The study adopts a historical discourse analysis approach, complemented by a Muslim feminist perspective. This approach enables the reading of *Wasita* not merely as a literary product, but as a social practice shaped by colonial power relations, patriarchal norms, and nation-building projects. Historical discourse analysis facilitates an examination of how concepts such as women's "nature," education, and public participation were articulated by Ki Hadjar Dewantara within their specific historical context, while also revealing his efforts to reform gender relations grounded in Islamic values and local cultural ethics. The Muslim feminist perspective is employed to assess the extent to which Ki Hadjar Dewantara's thought was emancipatory, negotiative, or accommodative toward patriarchal norms, without detaching it from the religious-ethical framework that underpinned his arguments.

The primary data sources consist of Ki Hadjar Dewantara's articles, essays, and editorials published in *Wasita* and *Wasita Rini* between 1928 and 1935. These documents were collected from digital archives of the National Library, cultural institutions, and academic repositories preserving colonial-era periodicals. Primary

sources were selected because *Wasita* functioned as Ki Hadjar Dewantara’s principal medium for articulating ideas on education, women, and public morality. Secondary data include scholarly books, peer-reviewed international journal articles, and previous studies on Ki Hadjar Dewantara, the history of Indonesian women, Muslim feminism, and Islamic religious authority in Southeast Asia. These sources provide historical context, support critical analysis, and situate the present article within broader academic debates.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic document study, involving the inventory of *Wasita* texts, the selection of writings relevant to women’s issues, and thematic coding of narratives concerning domestic roles, education, and women’s participation in the public sphere. Close textual observation was carried out iteratively to identify patterns of argumentation, normative language, and shifts in discursive emphasis across different issues of the magazine.

Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation, by comparing *Wasita* texts with Ki Hadjar Dewantara’s writings in other publications and with contemporaneous historical studies. Data analysis proceeded through thematic data reduction, discursive mapping, and analytical interpretation linking empirical findings with the frameworks of Muslim feminism and historical discourse analysis, resulting in a contextualized, critical, and academically accountable interpretation.

Findings/Results

Dominant Thematic Patterns in *Madjallah Wasita* (1928–1935)

The document analysis identified three dominant and consistently recurring thematic clusters in Ki Hadjar Dewantara’s writings concerning women. These themes appeared across multiple issues of *Wasita* and were articulated using normative, pedagogical, and moral language.

Table 1. Main Themes in Ki Hadjar Dewantara’s Writings on Women in *Madjallah Wasita*

No.	Core Theme	Empirical Indicators in Texts	Frequency of Appearance
1	Women as Moral and Educational Foundations of the Nation	Emphasis on motherhood, moral cultivation, family ethics, and child education	High
2	Women’s Education as a Prerequisite for National Progress	Advocacy for access to formal education, literacy, and intellectual development for women	High
3	Women’s Participation in the Public Sphere	Support for women’s involvement in work and social activities within ethical boundaries	Moderate

The data indicate that discussions of women were not incidental but constituted a systematic concern in *Wasita*, integrated into broader narratives of education, morality, and nation-building.

Representation of Women’s Roles in Domestic and Public Domains

Analysis of textual segments reveals a structured differentiation between domestic and public roles, while simultaneously affirming women’s agency in both domains. Ki Hadjar Dewantara repeatedly articulated women’s domestic roles not as biological destiny alone, but as socially and ethically significant positions.

Table 2. Empirical Mapping of Women’s Roles in *Wasita*

Domain	Description Found in Texts	Key Characteristics
Domestic	Motherhood and household education	Moral authority, character formation, cultural continuity
Educational	Learners and educators	Intellectual responsibility, national consciousness
Public	Workers and social participants	Conditional participation, moral safeguards, social contribution

The findings show that women’s participation in the public sphere was acknowledged as legitimate, provided that ethical norms and social responsibility were maintained. These positions appear consistently across different publication years, indicating continuity rather than episodic commentary.

Discursive Positioning of Gender Equality

The texts demonstrate an explicit rejection of women’s exclusion from education and public life. However, gender equality is articulated through complementarity rather than sameness, with repeated references to balance, harmony, and social order.

Table 3. Discursive Features of Gender Equality in *Madjallah Wasita*

Aspect	Empirical Expression	Observed Pattern
Equality	Equal access to education	Explicit and consistent
Difference	Recognition of gender-specific roles	Normative framing
Authority	Women as moral agents	Recurrent
Limitation	Ethical and cultural boundaries	Contextualized

This pattern indicates that equality was framed within moral and cultural constraints rather than legal or rights-based discourse.

Temporal Consistency of Ideas (1928–1935)

A longitudinal reading of *Wasita* shows that Ki Hadjar Dewantara’s views on women remained conceptually stable throughout the period under study. No significant ideological reversal was identified; instead, minor shifts in emphasis corresponded to broader socio-political developments.

Table 4. Continuity of Women-Related Themes Over Time

Period	Dominant Emphasis	Observed Change
1928–1930	Moral education and motherhood	Initial articulation
1931–1933	Expansion of women’s education	Increased frequency
1934–1935	Public participation and work	Greater contextual detail

These findings suggest a sustained engagement with women’s issues rather than reactive or temporary concern.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that *Wasita* functioned as a consistent platform for articulating ideas on women’s education, morality, and social participation. Women were presented as central actors in both private and public spheres, with education positioned as the primary mechanism enabling national advancement. These empirical results establish a foundation for subsequent analytical discussion regarding religious authority, gender reform, and historical discourse.

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 perdjoangan 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 5. 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 Sphere of Education	<i>Wasita</i> , December 1928, Volume 1 No. 3
3	Women's Influence on the Objects and Environments Surrounding Them	<i>Wasita</i> , December 1928, Volume 1 No. 3
4	Women and Sports	<i>Wasita</i> , December 1928, Volume 1 No. 3

5	Women's Role in the Formation of <i>Adab</i> (Manners and Ethical Conduct)	<i>Wasita</i> , July 1935, Edition 1 No. 6
6	Progress in Women's Manners: The Jakarta Congress and the Semarang Protests	<i>Wasita</i> , August 1935, Edition 1 No. 7
7	Employment Opportunities for Women	<i>Wasita</i> , October/November 1935, Edition 1 No. 9/10

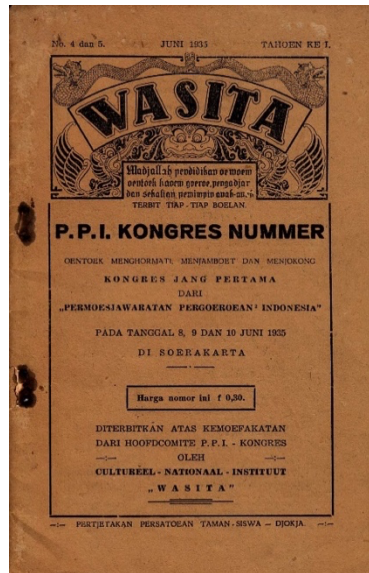


Figure 1. of *Madjallah Wasita*

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 dab 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 kodratnya. 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 mudahlah 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 Thoughts in the Context of Contemporary Muslim Feminism

Islam, at its normative core, upholds principles of justice (*'adl*) and equality (*musāwāh*) between men and women. The emergence of Islam constituted a paradigmatic rupture with pre-Islamic socio-cultural systems that systematically subordinated women. Historical and feminist scholarship has documented how women in pre-Islamic societies were treated as inheritable property, denied inheritance rights, and excluded from socio-political participation (Ahmed, 1992; Mernissi, 1975). The Qur'an explicitly challenged this condition by affirming women's legal subjectivity, including their right to inheritance, as articulated in QS. An-Nisa' [4]:7, which establishes women as autonomous rights-bearing subjects within the moral-legal order of Islam. This normative commitment to justice forms the epistemological foundation of Muslim feminist thought.

However, as Amina Wadud (1992) critically argues, the progressive ethical vision of the Qur'an has often been constrained by patriarchal interpretive traditions that

emerged from specific socio-historical contexts rather than from the text itself. Contemporary scholarship reinforces this critique. Safitri and Khumaedy (2023) demonstrate that Qur'anic inheritance principles reflect ethical proportionality rather than gender hierarchy, while Firdawaty et al. (2023) highlight Husein Muhammad's call for renewed *ijtihad* to address gender injustice embedded in inherited fiqh doctrines. Zubaidi, Arifah, and Sansayto (2025) further emphasize that divine justice (*al-'adl al-ilāhī*) must be the primary hermeneutical lens for evaluating gendered legal norms, including inheritance and testimony.

Within Indonesia's plural legal landscape, studies by Suharsono, Prasetyoningsih, and Usman (2024) as well as Sugiri Permana (2023) confirm that contemporary *ijtihad* and legal pluralism provide concrete opportunities to reinterpret Islamic law in ways that are more responsive to women's lived realities. These debates situate gender justice not as a deviation from Islam, but as its ethical fulfillment.

Against this theoretical backdrop, K.H. Dewantara's (KHD) thought articulated primarily through *Wasita* (1928–1935) can be read as an early indigenous articulation of principles now associated with contemporary Muslim feminism. KHD's critique of gender inequality resonates with the historical diagnosis offered by M. Quraish Shihab (1999), who describes how women were dehumanized in Greek, Roman, Hindu, and Chinese civilizations, often stripped of bodily autonomy and even the right to life. Importantly, KHD did not merely recount these injustices as historical facts; he treated them as cautionary legacies that could re-emerge when religion and culture were interpreted uncritically. In this sense, KHD anticipated a core concern of Muslim feminist theory: the danger of sacralizing patriarchal culture through religious discourse.

Contemporary Muslim feminists such as Amina Wadud, Asghar Ali Engineer, and Fatima Mernissi have consistently argued that gender oppression in Muslim societies stems not from Islam itself, but from patriarchal epistemologies that conflate sociological realities with theological absolutes (Engineer, 1994; Mernissi, 1994; Wadud, 2003). KHD's position aligns with this critical stance.

His call for women's autonomy, education, and public participation (Dewantara, 2013) directly challenges the cultural norms that confined women to domestic invisibility. Rather than rejecting tradition wholesale, KHD subjected tradition to ethical scrutiny, a methodological move that parallels feminist hermeneutics within Islam. This demonstrates that KHD's thought does not merely confirm Muslim feminist claims, but historically substantiates them within a non-Western, early twentieth-century context.

KHD's emphasis on women's equal right to education constitutes one of his most significant contributions to gender discourse. He explicitly rejected the notion that women were intellectually or spiritually inferior, arguing instead that national progress depends on the education of women (Dewantara, 2013).

This position not only reinforces Wadud's (2003) assertion that women's public participation is a key indicator of civilizational advancement, but also expands Muslim feminist theory by embedding it within a nationalist and pedagogical framework. KHD thus reframed women's empowerment not merely as an individual right, but as a collective ethical responsibility tied to social transformation.

Moreover, KHD's critique of patriarchy mirrors Engineer's (1994) structural analysis, which identifies women's limited awareness and male economic dominance as sociological not theological factors behind gender inequality. What distinguishes KHD, however, is his strategic response: he translated critique into institution-building. Through schools, publications, and women's organizations, KHD

operationalized gender justice in tangible forms. This practical dimension extends Muslim feminist theory beyond textual reinterpretation into the realm of social praxis, an aspect often underdeveloped in theoretical feminist discourse.

The findings of this study therefore strengthen and extend contemporary Muslim feminist theory in three key ways. First, they provide historical evidence that feminist interpretations of Islam are not exclusively modern or Western-influenced, but have indigenous roots in early Indonesian Islamic reformism. Second, they demonstrate that gender justice can be advanced through educational and institutional strategies, not only through hermeneutical critique. Third, they challenge the assumption that Muslim feminism is purely reactive, showing instead that figures like KHD proactively articulated egalitarian visions before the formal emergence of feminist Islamic scholarship.

In conclusion, KHD's thought on women was markedly ahead of its time and constitutes a critical precursor to contemporary Muslim feminist discourse. His contributions to women's education, organizational empowerment, and ethical public participation were neither rhetorical nor symbolic, but structural and transformative (Suswandari & Suwarno, 2010; Arifin, 2022). Subsequent studies confirm that Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah played a decisive role in expanding women's access to education and public life throughout the twentieth century (Smith-Hefner, 2008; Maraulang, 2025).

KHD's intellectual legacy, praised even by Sukarno for its selfless dedication (Sukarno, 2013), thus occupies a pivotal position in global discussions on Islamic modernity, gender equality, and educational reform (Zara, 2021; Kamila & Asrini, 2024). This study argues that revisiting KHD through the lens of Muslim feminism not only enriches Indonesian Islamic studies, but also contributes meaningfully to international scholarship on Islam and gender justice.

Muhammadiyah Model for Gender Equality Reform in a Global Context

Muhammadiyah model for gender equality reform in a global context is grounded in the paradigm of *Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam)*, which positions justice (*'adl*), equal human dignity, and social welfare (*maṣlaḥah*) as its core theological principles. Unlike secular feminist approaches that are often perceived as being in tension with religious values, Muhammadiyah conceptualizes gender equality as a normative consequence of *tawḥīd* and the prophetic ethical framework of Islam.

Accordingly, gender issues are not treated as an external agenda imposed upon Islam, but rather as an integral component of Islamic da'wah and social reform. This conceptual framework enables Muhammadiyah to bridge Islamic values with universal human rights principles, including global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), without undermining its religious legitimacy within Muslim communities (Yuda, 2025).

The most tangible foundation of this model is the establishment of 'Aisyiyah in 1917 as a pioneering modern Islamic women's organization. 'Aisyiyah has functioned not merely as an autonomous women's organization, but also as a social laboratory for the implementation of gender equality grounded in progressive Islamic theology. Through its engagement in education, healthcare services, and humanitarian activities, 'Aisyiyah has gradually repositioned women from the domestic sphere into the public domain in a manner that preserves dignity and moral agency.

Moreover, 'Aisyiyah has developed an ideological framework that interprets the Qur'ān and Sunnah contextually and through a gender-just lens, thereby positioning women as moral and social subjects rather than passive objects of protection. In global

scholarship, this model has been recognized as a successful example of *faith-based women's empowerment* in the Muslim world (Amini, 2021).

Another distinctive strength of the Muhammadiyah model lies in its institutional and participatory reform of religious authority. By promoting collective *ijtihad* through the Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid, Muhammadiyah opens deliberative spaces that enable women to participate in the production and authorization of Islamic discourse. This approach challenges epistemic patriarchy within religious interpretation while remaining firmly rooted in the classical Islamic scholarly tradition.

At the global level, such an approach resonates with contemporary Muslim feminist thought, which emphasizes the democratization of interpretation and the analytical distinction between normative Islamic values and patriarchal cultural practices (Smith-Hefner, 2007). Consequently, Muhammadiyah does not merely advocate gender equality at the level of social practice but also reconstructs its epistemological foundations.

At the global level, Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah have actively engaged in various international forums and collaborative initiatives that extend the reach of this model beyond the Indonesian context. Cooperation with international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), ASEAN, and diverse interfaith organizations reflects growing recognition of Muhammadiyah's contributions to social justice, human rights, and gender equality.

Furthermore, participation in global conferences on women and Islam facilitates cross-cultural and interreligious dialogue, while simultaneously introducing the Indonesian experience as an alternative model of gender reform within the Muslim world. International acknowledgment of 'Aisyiyah's role in strengthening women's community capacities underscores the global relevance of this model, rather than confining it to a purely local setting (Hasanah, 2024).

The global reach of the Muhammadiyah model is further evidenced by its institutional replication and transnational networks. The establishment of educational institutions such as the Muhammadiyah Australia College (MAC) and Universiti Muhammadiyah Malaysia, alongside the presence of Special Branches of Muhammadiyah (*Pimpinan Cabang Istimewa Muhammadiyah*, PCIM) in various countries, serves as a key medium for disseminating the values of progressive Islam, including inclusive perspectives on gender (Qodariah, 2016).

Through these networks, Muhammadiyah transmits educational, da'wah, and social empowerment practices that integrate gender equality with Islamic identity. This empirical reality indicates that the Muhammadiyah model is not merely a normative discourse but rather a transnational approach capable of adapting to diverse Muslim socio-cultural contexts. Accordingly, Muhammadiyah may be positioned as a significant global actor in faith-based gender equality reform in the twenty-first century (Nuwa, 2020).

Table 6. Global Impact of the Muhammadiyah Gender Model

Impact Area	Form of Implementation	Global Scope	Empirical Evidence/Indicators
Education	Equal access to women's education through Muhammadiyah-'Aisyiyah schools and universities	Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa	Increased female participation in formal education and academic leadership

Reproductive Health	Gender-just maternal and child health services	Indonesia; international humanitarian cooperation	Reduced maternal health risks and strengthened reproductive health rights
Social Empowerment	Strengthening women's roles within socio-religious organizations	Transnational Muhammadiyah-'Aisyiyah networks	Women's increased participation in public decision-making
Gender Advocacy	Progressive Islamic da'wah grounded in gender justice	Global forums of moderate Islam	International recognition as an inclusive <i>Islam Berkemajuan</i> practice
Humanitarian Response	Integration of gender perspectives in disaster relief and humanitarian action	Asia, the Middle East, Africa	Gender-sensitive and inclusive emergency response programs

The table titled “Global Impact of the Muhammadiyah Gender Model” demonstrates that the gender relations framework developed by Muhammadiyah extends beyond normative theology and discursive debates, translating into tangible, cross-sectoral, and transnational impacts. Across education, reproductive health, social empowerment, gender advocacy, and humanitarian response, Muhammadiyah together with 'Aisyiyah exemplifies *Islam Berkemajuan* by integrating principles of gender justice with concrete social action.

The model's global impact is evidenced by expanded access to women's education, gender-responsive maternal and child health services, increased female participation in socio-religious leadership, and international recognition of Muhammadiyah as an inclusive and progressive Muslim actor within global forums and humanitarian initiatives.

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. Overall, the Muhammadiyah model demonstrates that gender equality can be coherently grounded in Islamic theology while producing tangible social, institutional, and transnational impacts. Rooted in Islam Berkemajuan and institutionalized through 'Aisyiyah and participatory religious authority, the model successfully integrates gender justice with Islamic identity, aligns with global human rights agendas, and operates effectively across diverse socio-cultural contexts. Consequently, Muhammadiyah may be regarded as a significant global actor in faith-based gender equality reform in the twenty-first century.

Based on these findings, this article recommends the need to translate KHD's intellectual framework into more concrete and applicable national policies. First, gender equality values grounded in progressive Islamic ethics should be systematically integrated into the national education curriculum, particularly within character education and religious education, so that discourses on equality are not merely normative but genuinely transformative. Second, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, should strengthen affirmative policies to expand women's access to education and vocational training, especially in regions where gender inequality indices remain high. Third, the state should promote collaboration with religious organizations such as *Muhammadiyah* and 'Aisyiyah to mainstream gender justice perspectives within community empowerment programs. Through these measures, KHD's thought is not only preserved as a historical legacy but is also actualized as a foundation for public policy oriented toward gender justice and inclusive human development in Indonesia.

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