The Role of Women in History: The Contribution of *Ibu-Ibu Nagari* in the Logistics and Mobility of Female Students and Ulama in Pre-Independence Minangkabau

Author: Fajri Chaniago

Email: fajrichaniago25@gmail.com

Affiliation: Student, Islamic Civilization History Study Program, Faculty of Adab and Humanities, State Islamic University (UIN) Imam Bonjol Padang

ABSTRAC

This article explores the central role of mother-figures of the *nagari* (*ibu-ibu nagari*) in supporting the logistics and mobility of female Islamic students (*santri perempuan*) and *ulama* (Islamic scholars) in pre-independence Minangkabau (19th to early 20th centuries), focusing on the institution of the *dapur surau* (surau kitchen) as the backbone of the Islamic scholarly network. In the Minangkabau matrilineal system, women were not only responsible for household management but also served as the main pillars of sustenance for Islamic education through the provision of logistics such as food, accommodation, and funds for the *surau* (traditional Islamic learning center), and by facilitating the mobility of female *santri* and *ulama* across different *nagari* (traditional villages).

Based on an analysis of oral history, *surau* manuscripts, and colonial records, this article reveals how *ibu-ibu nagari* formed an informal network that connected *surau* throughout West Sumatra, such as Surau Parabek and Sumatera Thawalib, through the organization of the *dapur surau*. They not only provided the physical necessities for the *santri* but also played a role in negotiating customary norms (*adat*) to allow women to access religious education outside their home *nagari*, a progressive step amidst the social constraints of the time.

The article also highlights the contribution of *ibu-ibu nagari* in preserving the tradition of Islamic scholarship, such as the teaching of the Yellow Books (*kitab kuning*), by ensuring the continuity of knowledge transmission through material and social support. These findings affirm that the *dapur surau* was not merely a domestic space, but a strategic node in the Minangkabau Islamic intellectual ecosystem that reinforced women's position as agents of education and culture.

This article contributes to the study of local Islamic history by highlighting the role of ordinary women in intellectual and social dynamics, while also offering a new perspective on the intersection of gender, logistics, and scholarship in the Archipelago.

Keywords: ***dapur surau*** **(surau kitchen),** ***ibu-ibu nagari*** **(mother-figures of the village), female** ***santri*****, scholarly network, pre-independence Minangkabau, Islamic education logistics.**

A. INTRODUCTION

Minangkabau has a kinship system based on the maternal line, which grants women a very crucial role in managing the household and family wealth. Women serve as the primary owners and managers of the *rumah gadang* (traditional extended family house), not merely as family members living inside the house, but also as leaders in economic matters and moral values (*limpapeh rumah nan gadang*) within a family. This role enables them to directly manage resources to support various social and religious activities, including the burgeoning Islamic education which was facing challenges due to the influence of colonialism.

At that time, the Islamic education system, both the traditional *surau* system and the modern institutions like Diniyah Putri and Sekolah Kerajinan Amai Setia, heavily relied on community assistance. *Santri* (Islamic students), including female *santri*, often had to move to other *nagari* (traditional villages) to study under renowned *ulama* (scholars). In order to move and sustain their life during their studies, they required logistical support. In this context, the mother-figures of the *nagari* (*ibu-ibu nagari*) acted as an invisible form of aid, providing food, accommodation, and social protection for the students and teachers.

Mulyani in "*Taṭawwur Al-Tarbīyah al-Islāmīyah (Surau) Fī Minangkabau*" (1997) describes the evolution of the *surau* from a place of worship into a center for knowledge transmission, where the mobility of female *santri* was facilitated by *ibu-ibu nagari* through the provision of food and transportation between *nagari*, especially after the *Kaum Muda* (Young Faction) reforms in the 1930s. In that discussion, it was specifically described that Minangkabau women in the context of mother-figures were very active in the involvement of education for female *santri* led by El Yunisiah. The involvement of women was significantly influential in helping and *berjihad* (striving for the community/faith) through the energy and capabilities possessed by women.

The support from the *ibu-ibu nagari* was not merely material assistance; it also formed a strong network of social protection and moral values. In a matrilineal system, women determined the lineage heritage and acted as moral supervisors within the extended family. They ensured that women pursuing religious education and the presence of *ulama* in the *nagari* remained in line with the principle of "*Adat basandi Syarak, Syarak basandi Kitabullah*" (Custom based on Sharia/Islam, Sharia based on the Quran). These mother-figures also played a role in mediating various issues, ensuring that *ulama* who criticized non-conforming customs were still respected, while simultaneously ensuring that the religious education brought by *santri* and *ulama* did not disrupt the *nagari*'s social life. This balance was vital for maintaining the consistency and stability of religious knowledge development amidst the social and political changes occurring during the colonial era.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Peggy Reeves Sanday in *Women at the Center: Life in a Modern Matriarchy* (2002) explains that this matrilineality involves not only the inheritance of land and the house but also the role of women in maintaining social balance, where *ibu-ibu nagari* provided resources for the mobility of daughters and *ulama*, despite being integrated with Islamic values that arrived since the 16th century.

Other studies, such as Eka Srimulyani's work in *Women from Traditional Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia* (2012), highlight how Minangkabau women utilized

this position to support the transmission of Islamic knowledge, including through the management of household economics that financed the journeys of *santri*.

In the pre-independence context, women like Rahmah El Yunusiyah (1900–1979) revolutionized this role by establishing Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang (1923), the first Islamic school for women, which was supported by the **network of *ibu-ibu nagari*** for the logistics of food and accommodation for female *santri* from various *nagari*.

The historical study by Taufik Abdullah in *Sejarah Umat Islam Indonesia* (2001) indicates that pre-independence, the *surau* became a basis for colonial resistance through education, where female *ulama* like Teungku Fakinah (though from Aceh) inspired similar models in Minangkabau, with *ibu-ibu nagari* ensuring the mobility of female *santri* to distant *surau*.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs the literature review method. The literature review is a research technique/type of research that is most essential in any discipline. This research also includes a library study where the primary sources used by the author in this research are related writings such as 1) *Rahmah El Yunisiah dalam arus sejarah Indonesia* (Hendra, 2021) which elaborates on the figure of a woman actively striving in the world of education, and 2) *Perempuan yang melampaui zaman* (Zasmi, 2021) which also explains a female educational fighter from the Muslim community. For the validity of this research, the author performs verification through source criticism to identify and examine the shortcomings and strengths of the research to be conducted.

After entering the verification stage, the researcher then discusses and interprets all the information gathered from various sources that have passed through the previous stages

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Surau as a Center for Education

The *surau*, or *surao* in the local language, is a traditional institution of paramount importance in Minangkabau society in West Sumatra. Literally, a *surau* is a small place of worship, similar to a *musala* or a prayer room (*langgar*). However, the role of the *surau* was not limited to religious functions alone (Saharman, 2015). The *surau* also served as a vital center for social, spiritual, and educational activities. In the Minangkabau *adat* (customary law) system, which is based on the maternal line, the *surau* became a place for men, especially unmarried young men (*bujang*) or children of the *nagari* (*anak nagari*), to seek shelter, study, and develop life skills. This institution taught Islamic and customary values, thereby forming the foundation for the personality and morality of Minangkabau youth (Firdaus, 2014).

The primary function of the *surau* was not only as a place for *shalat* (prayer) and learning the Qur’an but also as an informal educational institution. In the *surau*, young men learned religious sciences such as *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tauhid* (monotheism), and *tasawuf* (Sufism) directly from the *ulama* or *labai* (religious teacher) (Afdayeni, 2017). Additionally, the *surau* was a place to learn traditional martial arts like *silek* or *silat*, musical arts like *rabab* or *saluang*, as well as Minangkabau *adat*, including the four types of communication known as *kato nan ampek* and the life philosophy of *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* (Custom based on Sharia, Sharia based on the Qur'an). This diverse education aimed to shape youth who were intelligent and possessed good character. Socially, the *surau* also functioned as a communal residence for adult young men until they married (Muhammad Khosim, 2018).

This system provided collective guidance and kept the young men away from sleeping in the *rumah gadang*, which was the decision-making center among women in the matrilineal system (Nurhadi, 2018). The presence of a *surau* in every *nagari* (traditional village) demonstrated the spiritual strength and unity of that community. Physically, the *surau* was usually located near the mosque and the *balai adat* (customary hall), reflecting the harmonious relationship between religion, custom, and village governance. Although the function of the *surau* has changed in recent decades due to modernization and the emergence of formal schools like *madrasah* and general schools, the *surau* maintains its historical and symbolic relevance. Many important figures and great Minangkabau *ulama* emerged from the *surau* education. Today, some *surau* are still actively functioning as places of study and residence for *santri*, while others have been converted into centers for religious activities and cultural preservation. The Minangkabau *surau* remains respected as an important institution in maintaining Minangkabau identity and cultural integrity (Azra, 2006).

b. The Role of the Dapur Surau in Education

The term *dapur surau* (surau kitchen) might be unfamiliar to some people. This term refers to the place used for cooking food during religious or communal activities at the *surau*, especially in the Minangkabau region, Indonesia. The *surau* is a place of worship and a center for social activities for the community. Besides being used for worship, the *surau* is also a place for learning and gathering (EErnatip, 2014). The *dapur surau* is certainly an important part of these activities, especially during religious events such as Islamic holidays, Quranic study groups (*pengajian*), or communal feasts (*kenduri*). This kitchen is usually managed collectively by the *surau* community, reflecting the spirit of mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) in their culture (MANGKUTO, 2023).

Historically, the *dapur surau* played a crucial role in strengthening social ties among the community. In Minangkabau, the *dapur surau* often became a place where mother-figures gathered, assisting each other and providing food for the congregation or guests attending *surau* events. The food prepared usually reflected the local culinary richness, such as *rendang*, *gulai*, or traditional cakes (Radhiatul Hasnah, 2024). This food was served as a form of togetherness and warmth. In addition to preparing food, the *dapur surau* was also a place for passing down recipes and cooking traditions from one generation to the next.

The *dapur surau* also reflected the values of sustainability and simplicity. The ingredients used typically came from local agricultural produce or community donations. All these ingredients were processed with a sense of gratitude. Sometimes, the *dapur surau* was used to manage *sadaqah* (charity) or *zakat* in the form of food, which was then distributed to those in need. The management of this kitchen was usually led by customary leaders (*ninik mamak*) or *surau* administrators, ensuring that all processes were orderly and in accordance with Islamic values and local *adat*.

In the present day, the existence of the *dapur surau* is beginning to change along with modernization and urbanization. Many urban *surau* do not have a physical kitchen due to limited space or changes in community culture. Nevertheless, the spirit of cooperation and togetherness represented by the *dapur surau* remains relevant, often realized through catering activities or collective food distribution during religious events (Moenada, 2018). The *dapur surau*, with its cultural and social significance, remains a symbol of solidarity and togetherness, reminding us to maintain traditions while adapting to the changes of the times.

c. Female Santri and Educational Institutions In Minangkabau

Female *santri* are an integral part of the *pesantren* ecosystem, a traditional Islamic educational institution in Indonesia that not only teaches religious sciences but also shapes character and morality. Female *santri* usually reside in dedicated female *pesantren* dormitories or *pesantren* that maintain a separation between male and female students. They follow a strict routine that includes studying the Qur'an, learning the Yellow Books (*kitab kuning*), and performing obligatory and optional acts of worship (*sunnah*). Additionally, female *santri* are often involved in skills training activities such as cooking, sewing, or handicrafts, aimed at equipping them with practical abilities that align with Islamic values and self-reliance (Muafiah, 2013).

The role of female *santri* in the *pesantren* is not limited to religious learning but also reflects social and cultural dynamics. In many *pesantren*, female *santri* have the opportunity to develop leadership through internal organizations, such as becoming dormitory administrators or coordinators of religious activities. They are also often involved in community activities, such as religious study groups for the surrounding community or social work, which strengthens their role as agents of change in society. However, challenges like gender stereotypes or certain social expectations sometimes still limit their scope of movement, although many modern *pesantren* are now giving more attention to the empowerment of female *santri* (Jannah, 2019).

Education in female *pesantren* is often designed to balance religious sciences and general knowledge. Many *pesantren* now integrate formal curricula, such as science, mathematics, or foreign languages, to prepare female *santri* for the modern world without abandoning Islamic values. Furthermore, female *santri* are educated to understand their rights and obligations as Muslim women, including in the context of domestic and public roles. This reflects a holistic approach in *pesantren* education, focusing not only on spirituality but also on intellectual and social development (Jannah, 2019).

Amidst the changing times, female *santri* are increasingly demonstrating significant contributions in various fields after graduating from the *pesantren*. Many continue their education to higher levels, becoming educators, female *ulama*, or social activists who advocate for issues like education and gender equality within an Islamic framework. Nevertheless, challenges such as limited access to higher education or stigma against women's roles in the public sphere are still faced by some female *santri*. With a spirit of scholarship and firm religious values, female *santri* continue to prove that they are capable of becoming important pillars in maintaining tradition while contributing to social progress.

Currently, the educational institution in Minangkabau known as Perguruan Diniyyah Puteri Padang Panjang was founded on November 1, 1923, by a prominent female *ulama* and reformist from Minangkabau, Syekhah Rahmah El-Yunusiyyah. This establishment arose from a deep awareness that in the early 20th century, opportunities for women to receive adequate education, especially religious education, were very limited and tended to be neglected by the male-dominated system (Adib, 2022). Rahmah saw that Minangkabau society, based on matrilineal principles and steeped in Islamic values (*Adat Basandi Syarak*), must provide comprehensive knowledge to women, as they are truly the foundation of civilization in the *Rumah Gadang* (Hamruni, 2004). She was determined to establish an institution specifically designed to meet the spiritual and intellectual needs of her gender. Rahmah El-Yunusiyyah's vision transcended mere reading and writing; she aspired to produce "Capable and Responsible Educator Mothers." This philosophy was based on the belief that the quality of a nation is determined by the quality of its mothers. If a mother is educated, she will be able to raise her children to be intellectually intelligent, morally strong, and steadfast in religion (Furoidah, 2019). Through this institution, she wanted to affirm that

women's education was not a secondary matter but a primary investment for the future. She aimed to change the stigma that reduced women's roles merely to matters of the kitchen, well, and bed, transforming them into active and independent agents of change in society.

Diniyyah Puteri implemented a curriculum that was highly unique and progressive for its time, strictly combining religious education (*tauhid*, *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadis*) with general knowledge and practical feminine skills. The *santri* not only studied the Yellow Books from *ulama* but were also equipped with abilities like sewing, weaving, cooking, and, most revolutionary, practical health science and midwifery. This integration aimed to create balanced women: pious in belief, competent domestically, but also capable of contributing in the public sphere and being economically self-reliant, a very advanced concept for the colonial era.

Diniyyah Puteri functioned as a platform to instill a spirit of leadership and independence in the students. The *santri* were trained to have the courage to express opinions, organize themselves, and face challenges—a character building crucial within the Minangkabau matrilineal system where women held customary authority. Beyond formal lessons, non-curricular activities and dormitory life were regulated to form a strong mentality, high work ethic, and discipline in worship, so that graduates were ready to become leaders in the family and the wider community.

Diniyyah Puteri's contribution extended beyond education and into the national struggle. During the War of Independence, Rahmah El-Yunusiyyah utilized her school's network and assets. The Diniyyah Puteri complex served as a communal kitchen and a hideout for fighters. Rahmah even personally sacrificed by donating her wealth and jewelry to finance the formation of the Merapi Battalion, a precursor to the Indonesian army. The *santri* were also trained and assigned as Red Cross personnel, demonstrating the active role of educated women in defending the nation.

The influence of the education pioneered by Rahmah El-Yunusiyyah was even recognized internationally. In 1957, she was honored with an invitation to Al-Azhar University, Cairo, and awarded the title *Syekhah* (equivalent to an honorary doctorate), an extraordinary recognition for a woman at that time. More significantly, the Rector of Al-Azhar at the time, Sheikh Abdurrahman Taj, was inspired by the Diniyyah Puteri educational model and eventually inaugurated the opening of Kulliyyah lil Banat (Special Faculty for Women) in 1958, making Diniyyah Puteri a recognized reference for Islamic women's education by the world's oldest Islamic study center (Irma Febriyani, 2023).

The contribution of Minangkabau mothers and women to education cannot be separated from their role as Bundo Kanduang or Limpapeh Rumah Nan Gadang in the matrilineal system. As inheritors and managers of ancestral property, Minang women held immense moral and domestic authority. This role automatically positioned the mother as the "first *madrasah*" directly responsible for instilling the noble values of *adat*, manners (*budi pekerti*), and Islamic teachings in their children and nephews/nieces. They are the main guardians of the philosophy *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah* within the family environment. The awareness of the importance of education did not only emerge from great figures but also from the collective consciousness of the mothers in the *nagari*. Besides Rahmah El-Yunusiyyah, other female figures like Rohana Kudus were also active in founding schools. This movement was supported by many young mothers who were willing to become early students of Diniyyah Puteri, showing a mass push from the women themselves to acquire knowledge. Their contribution was communal, including mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), small financial donations, and active participation in every school activity, making it a movement truly rooted in community needs.

To this day, Diniyyah Puteri Padang Panjang remains strong and continues to grow, inheriting the spirit of struggle of Rahmah El-Yunusiyyah. This institution serves as a reminder of the importance of education based on the female *fitrah* (innate nature), balanced between worldly and spiritual aspects. This legacy confirms that Minangkabau women are inseparable figures from the advancement of religion and nation, a principle embedded in their cultural identity, and an inspiring beacon for Islamic women's education throughout Indonesia (Muhajir, 2024).

E. CONCLUSION

This conclusion reiterates the important finding that the role of Minangkabau women, known as the "Ibu-Ibu Nagari" (Mother-Figures of the Village), was a crucial and invisible part of maintaining the continuity of Islamic education and the movement of *ulama* in the pre-independence era. Their role was not confined to the domestic sphere but formed the logistical and mobility foundation supporting the operation of *pesantren* and *surau*. Without the material support, security, and confidentiality provided by this network of women, religious educational institutions, especially for female *santri*, might not have been able to withstand colonial pressure.

The Ibu-Ibu Nagari served as the hub of activity for the movement of *pesantren* and *ulama*. They continuously provided food, clothing, and accommodation for female *santri* studying far from home. Additionally, they acted as secret guardians and critical supply chain managers, ensuring that food and medicine could reach educational communities in remote areas. This contribution reflects the Minangkabau *adat* philosophy which regards women as leaders (Bundo Kanduang) in the management of household and *nagari* resources.

Another important aspect is their role in mobility and security. This conclusion emphasizes how the *Ibu-Ibu Nagari* facilitated the travel of *ulama* and female *santri* through secret routes or routes less supervised by the colonial authorities. They utilized local knowledge of the *nagari* territory to provide early warnings against Dutch surveillance. Their function as a secret communication network not only safeguarded the physical security of the teachers and students but also helped maintain the independence of religious teachings from foreign interference. This role had a very significant political and spiritual impact.

Furthermore, this article concludes that the recognition of the role of the Ibu-Ibu Nagari in the history of education is part of the effort to decolonize history. Many historical studies focus only on male *ulama* figures (*Tuanku*) and political figures, often overlooking the role of women as agents of change and structural supporters. This finding adds previously neglected information, showing that the national struggle and Islamic education in Minangkabau was a collective effort driven by women's social consciousness, not merely a movement led by a handful of male elites.

In its entirety, the contribution of the Ibu-Ibu Nagari was not merely ordinary supporting activities but constituted the foundation for the sustainability of the Islamic intellectual tradition and the movement of educated women in Minangkabau

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