Thoughts and Da’wah Activities of Female Islamic Preachers in Medan, Indonesia

Abdullah, Mohammad Hatta, Muaz Tanjung, Mukhtaruddin and Rahmah Fithriani
Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Jl. Willem Iskandar, Medan, Indonesia

Keywords: Da’iyah, Da’wah Activities, Religious Assembly, Thought, Women.

Abstract: The number of female Islamic preachers or da’iyah in Medan, Indonesia is very few compared to the number of women’s religious assemblies (majelis taklim) existing in the city. The existences of some da’iyahs to guide people through religious assemblies today is an interesting phenomenon to be expressed. This study aims to reveal the thoughts and da’wah activities of da’iyahs. Using purposive sampling technique, five da’iyah were selected as the participants and informants of this qualitative research. The data were obtained through semi-structured interview techniques and documentation. The findings of the research reveal that all da’iyahs were not from ulama (clerical) families and their families’ economic level was low. The most important educational stage was during Islamic high school (Aliyah) and higher education time when they had good learning achievements and involved in extracurricular activities as they were activists of religious organizations. Their existence as da’iyah was not much motivated in formal education of da’wah, but their talent and mastery of good Islamic science. Da’wah through oral communication is more prominent than the written one. Furthermore, they generally use lecture and question & answer (Q & A) methods. While the techniques and approaches used varies from one dai’yah to another. Finally, the massage of da’wah was adjusted to the condition of the congregation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Through history, women have played various roles and functions which are not less important than men’s. It is similar in the postmodern era today, where the struggle for emancipation has become the demands of women. Since the general election in 2004 for example, the demand resulted in the recognition of 30 percentage of legislative candidate spots that must be filled by women. The roles of women are not only limited to domestic territory but also to the public domain. Women are no longer perceived with the paradigms of biological perspective and patriarchal culture that tend to reduce their roles and functions. Women are no longer perceived as biological beings whose basic functions carry out natural tasks and domestic duties such as pregnancy, childbearing, breastfeeding, home keeping, and husband comforting, but rather are positioned on important roles as well as the roles of men in various fields in social, political, economic and religious life.

This began to emerge recognition, appreciation and giving such a great socio-cultural opportunity to build all aspects of life for women. The appearance of women being the supreme leaders of the state, corporate leaders, science and technology experts, as well as professionals in various fields are essentially a concrete reality of the potential and abilities possessed by women.

Indonesia as an integral part of the world community and global civilization, also has many female characters. They can also be found in Medan, the capital city of North Sumatra where there are a significant number of female individuals who are socially accepted, acknowledged, and positioned as role models of society because of their knowledge, devotion as well as real work in the midst of society. In the field of religion, there are a number of female figures whose abilities and dedication are recognized and have contributed positively to the development of the nation. Some of them work in the field of Islamic da’wah or become daiyah (also known as ustazadah).

Islam as a religion of da’wah, demands its followers to spread Islam in the midst of society. The task is an obligation for every Muslim, both male and female. However, it must be admitted that men outnumber women taking part in the field of
2.2 The Law of Da’wah

Islam is a religion of message or religion of da’wah. This is in accordance with the duties of Prophet Muhammad SAW. Namely to convey the revelation it receives to mankind. In fact, da’wah is a linking link between the revelation that comes from Allah SWT with human beings whose directive, guidance (hidayah) and way of life are to be passed. Furthermore, preaching is the journey of the life of the prophets which is then forwarded by friends and Muslims.

Based on the texts of the Qur’an and Sunnah the scholars have tried to establish the law of da’wah. They agree that the law is compulsory. But there is still a difference of opinion, between fardhu ‘ain (individual obligation) or fardhu kifayah (collective obligation). Among the scholars who argue fardhu ‘ain is Muhammad Abduh. While those who say fardhu kifayah include As-Syaukani, Qurthubi, and As-Suyuthi (Farid Ma’ruf Noor, 1981: 6-10).

Natsir (1983:111) states that the core of da’wah is the enforcement of amar ma’ruf nahi munkar. This is an absolute requirement for the perfection and safety of people's lives. This obligation as the human nature that tends to the truth. In realizing an Islamic society, responsibility should be given to every member of the community and enliven the conscience of individuals to self-control, which then develops into society's prince, to stem and eradicate munkar (the evil), for the sake of the safety of society as a whole.

Da’wah in the position of fardhu-‘ain, is a duty for every Muslim who is mukallaf (mature), both men and women. That obligation was at first an obligation to the Prophet Muhammad only, but on the 9th of Dhu al-Hijjah when the Prophet undertook the pilgrimage, there had been a handover of da’wah from the Prophet to the Muslims present at Arafat. At that time the Prophet advised that those present should let the non-attendants present.

2.3 Female Islamic Preacher

As mentioned above that da’wah is an obligation upon every Muslim person both male and female. The task is a feature and Muslim identity wherever they are. The proposed verse of Surah al-Tawbah verse 71: And those who believe, men and women, some of them (are) to be a helper to others. They enjoin (do) the ma’ruf (the good), prevent from the munkar (the evil).

According to Taufik Yusuf Al-Waie (2004:68), there are a number of propositions about da’wah...
duty without giving differences between men and women and they even tend to be absolute. Further, he said, that the scholars require the establishment of *amar makruf nahi munkar* which takes leadership, and mutual help to help between men and women. It has been shown by the Prophet Muhammad SAW. His wives greatly sacrificed and played an active role in the development of da’wah. Khadijah and A’ishah were two of the wives of the Prophet who did a lot of in defending and preaching Islam, especially among women.

Polygamy as performed by the Prophet has its own meaning in the perspective of Islamic da’wah. More broadly according to As-Shobuni, (tt: 20-29) the Prophet’s polygamy had significance in terms of educational, da’wah, social and political aspects. In terms of propagation, the prophet’s wives took the role of explaining the laws relating to women, such as menstruation, *nifas*, *wiladah* etc.

At present time, Islamic da’wah desperately needs human resources of women who become da’wah perpetrators to preserve da’wah especially among women themselves. Da’wah bil kitabah also need the writings and opinions of women for newspapers, magazines and various other print media outlets. The role of da’wah of women is also needed in the field of education, medicine, kindergarten, and all fields of work in accordance with the nature of women, without prejudice to the main task, which is taking care of the family and educate the child.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

This research focuses on women religious leaders, who became the female Islamic preachers or da’iyahs in Medan. The term da’iyah in this study refers to female individuals who have the ability to motivate and influence the religious behaviour of society through da’wah activities.

3.1 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to inventory, decrypt, analyse, and gain a comprehensive understanding of da’iyah in Medan. While practically, this study aims to write or compile biographical history of da’iyah in the form of biographies that can provide a comprehensive picture of various aspects of life, including their influence and role on development. In more detail the purpose of the study is aimed to know the background of the life of da’iyah include: heredity, educational background, the thoughts and activities of their da’wah. In addition, this study also records the works they produced, both concerning theoretical work of science and practical one.

3.2 Research Approach

This research is a figure research conducted with qualitative approach, oriented towards phenomenologism and *verstehen*, which focuses on the understanding of the object under study by using the” frame of reference "of the researchers themselves. Thus, clarity, wealth and depth of data are a measure of the validity of this study.

3.3 Source of the Data

The research data was obtained from two sources, namely primary source and secondary source. The primary source was from five da’iyahs; Aminah, Badriah, Dawiyah, Fauziah, and Halimah (pseudonyms) who were designated as research subjects who also became informants. While the secondary data was obtained from the family of da’iyah and the congregation of religious assembly (Majelis Taklim) as well as from religious organizations, in which those da’iyahs become a board or member.

3.4 Data Collection Technique

As a qualitative research, the researchers were the instruments in this study. To facilitate the acquisition of data, the data collection techniques used were interviews and documentation. Interviews were semi-structured but focused on the da’iyahs defined as both subject and research informant. Interviews were also conducted with informants who personally knew the subjects of this research well as their immediate family, the board of the religious assembly and the committee of the organization. Documentation was done through reading, reviewing and understanding documents, especially personal documents such as diaries, letters, autobiographies, and books so as to clarify and enrich the data.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data that had been collected, were then unitized and categorized. These two steps were done to make data analysis process and research report writing easier. Based on data that has been grouped by type, analysis was done to find out meaning, relationship and main theme. Qualitative data obtained from
observation, interview and documentation were analysed qualitatively. The process of analysing this data includes three stages performed in cycles as suggested Miles & Huberman (1984) i.e. data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. The interview transcripts and field notes were reduced, coded and categorized by type and relevance in answering research questions.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A character-at any level-does not appear without cause. It arises because of the particular atmosphere or fruits of an individual and collective struggle which can then improve the situation when it becomes a character in the field in which it is engaged. Empirically the appearance of a character, is usually influenced by four main factors of heredity, education, organization and talent. The four factors can exist together or there can be only one, two or three factors that exist. The factors mentioned above were used in analysing the findings of this study.

Female figures of da'wah or da'iyyahs in this study have varied life history. Variations can be seen in terms of family background, education, the level of activity in the organization, and thoughts and activities of their da'wah. Despite those varieties, all of them appear to be women who participate in giving enlightenment, especially to their people in the city of Medan. In social reality, scholars such as da'i and da'iyyah are not always born from families or parents who are also scholars or da'iyyah. The data related to the heredity, particularly in terms of educational background of the da'iyyahs in this research can be summarized as follows:

Table 1: Da'iyyahs’ parents’ educational background.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Da'iyyah</th>
<th>Father’s Education</th>
<th>Mother’s Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aminah</td>
<td>Primary school (not graduated)</td>
<td>Primary school (not graduated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badriah</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawiyah</td>
<td>Junior high school</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fauziah</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>Primary school (not graduated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halimah</td>
<td>Junior high school</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data above show the educational level of da'iyyahs’ parents is relatively low. It is actually understandable because at that time- in 1930-1950-access to the world of education was not easy and only certain people who can get education, i.e. people close to the Dutch government or colonial.

On the other hand, there are among the da'iyyahs who have separated from their parents - one or both since childhood. For example, the father of Fauziah passed when she was only one year old while Badriah’s father died while she was in the first grade of primary school or seven years of age. This means that the role of the mother is very decisive and able to control the household, although in a position as a single parent.

Except the parents of Halimah and Dawiyah, the level of economic life of the da'iyyahs’ families were quite low. But one important thing to know that all da'iyyahs have had high motivation and enthusiasm of learning since childhood and they were supported by their parents, so they become successful and influential da'iyyahs in Medan.

4.1 Da'iyyahs’ Education

Their parents’ economic difficulties did not discourage the da'iyyahs to gain knowledge through school. Despite facing many obstacles and challenges they succeeded in completing their education up to undergraduate (S1) and master (S2) degrees, except Fauziah Noor, who only reached Islamic High School (Aliyah) level. Some of them had to delay continuing their studies to undergraduate level due to some factors such as economy (Fauziah) and marriage life (Badriah).

Table 2: Da'iyyahs’ levels of education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Da'iyyah</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Graduation Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aminah</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badriah</td>
<td>Magister</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawiyah</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fauziah</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halimah</td>
<td>Senior High School</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As da'iyyahs who need to develop religious Assembly, they have never experienced difficulties although none of them graduated from the Faculty of Da’wah (Islamic Communication). The mastery of da’wah materials seem to be more important than just the mastery of theoretical methods. In addition, for some of them (Aminah, Badriah, and Fauziah), their professions as teachers and lecturers also determine their success in developing their religious assemblies.
4.2 Involvement in Organization

Organizations usually follow to forge the maturity of one's personality because every organization usually hold trainings for its cadres and members. The five da’iyahs, either during the study Tsanawiyah (Islamic junior high school) or Aliyah (Islamic junior high school) levels and in college actively involved in student’s organizations. The list organizations they joined is shown in the table below:

Table 3: Activities in Students’ Organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Da’iyah</th>
<th>Organization in High School</th>
<th>Organization in College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aminah</td>
<td>Al-Washliyah Student Association (ASA)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badriah</td>
<td>ASA</td>
<td>ASA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawiyah</td>
<td>ASA</td>
<td>ASA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fauziah</td>
<td>Indonesian Muslim Students Association</td>
<td>Islamic Student Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halimah</td>
<td>ASA</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not only during their study time that they were active in organizations, but after graduation they are also still active in various organizations. They vary greatly in their positions in organizations; some of them hold positions of coaches and advisors, day-care boards and members of the organization. Apparently, they do not only involve in one organization at a time, but also in some such as what Halimah, Aminah, and Fauziah do. Meanwhile, Dawiyah is also active in Partai Bulan Bintang (the Crescent Star Party).

4.3 Thoughts of Da’wah

The da’iyahs have brilliant minds in the field of da’wah. Their thinking which includes syllabus, material and method of da’wah deserves to be known by the public in an effort to build a vibrant Muslim society. According to Aminah, the syllabus of da’wah should be prepared by a da’iyah by taking into account the condition of the congregation in each the religious assembly. But she also strongly hopes there are parties who take the initiative to arrange them, such as the Faculty of Da’wah for example. She furthermore stated that the institution has many experts who can formulate syllabus aiming to reach various targets of da’wah, including the religious assembly whose members are women.

There is a similar view among Badriah, Dawiyah, Fauziah, and Halimah who design their da’wah syllabuses based on Islamic teaching, that is, fiqh and akhlak. Then in conveying it in the order of chapters contained in fiqh. Fauziah stressed that it is necessary that material begins with thaharah chapter, both about birth cleanliness and inner cleanliness or heart. According to Halimah, the life problems of a Muslim from birth to death are around fiqh. She gives an example when a mother gives birth, it will be related to the issues of nifas and wiladah, as well as the child like aqiqah. However, she also believes that syllabus of da’wah should not be rigid but must be flexible and consider the development of the times.

According to Badriah, the syllabus of da’wah that she designs for her religious assembly is taken from the fiqh books for students of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic primary school) or Tsanawiyah. That’s because the knowledge of Islamic law among members of the Assembly Taklim women is still low. For the order of da’wah delivery, she simply follows the sequence of materials contained in the books of fiqh.

4.4 Da’iyahs’ Da’wah Activities

Although they are not graduating from the Faculty of Da’wah, generally they have started da’wah activities as early as they were Aliyah students. Early da’wah activities vary greatly according to the conditions, the momentum that is around their lives. The beginning of their da’wah activities can be seen in the table below.

Table 4: Da’wah activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daiyah</th>
<th>Early Da’wah Experience</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aminah</td>
<td>During college year in Egypt</td>
<td>1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badriah</td>
<td>Since a student</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawiyah</td>
<td>During KKN (Student Study Service)</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fauziah</td>
<td>Taking part in a speech contest in Aliyah (high school)</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halimah</td>
<td>Being a Master of Ceremony</td>
<td>1964</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Based on the above table, it can be seen that these daiyahs have a talent in the field of speech and lecture. This talent is then developed through organizations and social activities. In addition, they are also supported by close relatives and husbands after they get married but there are fluctuations in their level of da’wah activity which closely relates to to their position as wives and mothers of their children. When they children were still very young, their da’wah activities were decreasing, but when their children were getting older, they became more active in fostering religious assemblies. As of this present time, all of them are still actively preach in a number of different religious assemblies.

In addition to actively delivering lectures and recitation in religious assemblies in Medan, they also lecture in institutions in various regions of North Sumatra, especially at the time of the anniversary of Islam (PHBI), which is the memorial of the Prophet Mauulid, Isra’ Mi’raj, Nuzul Qur’an and the Islamic New Year. In fact, some of them (Badriah and Halimah) are also invited to leave Medan to permanently live in Aceh due to their capacity as daiyahs.

Based on the results of interviews with the five daiyahs about da’wah material, that each has a stress or dominant field in particular study of Islamic teachings. Due to the differences in da’wah material, the literature they use is also different. It can be seen in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daiyah</th>
<th>Da’wah Material</th>
<th>Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aminah</td>
<td>Tafsir</td>
<td>Ilyya Ulumuddin/Al-Ghazali, Fiqh Kontemporer (Yusuf Qardhowi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badriah</td>
<td>Fiqh</td>
<td>Fikih Islam (Sulaiman Rasyid)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dawiyah</td>
<td>Akidah, Fiqh dan Akhkak</td>
<td>Tafsir Al-Mishbah (M. Quraish Shihab)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fauziah</td>
<td>Fiqh</td>
<td>Ilyya Ulumuddin (Al-Ghazali), Bidayatul Mujahid, Fiqh Sunnah Sayyid Sabiq, Tafsir Al-Maraghi (Musthafa Al-Maraghi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halimah</td>
<td>Fiqh</td>
<td>Al-Qurroh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, the da’wah materials they convey are about the teachings of Islam that come from the Qur'an and Hadith. But each of them is more dominant in the field mentioned above. Three dai’yahs; Badriah, Fauziah, and Halimah are more dominant in fiqh and one (Aminah) in Tafsir as she has been teaching Tafsir at about 30 religious assemblies in Medan. The interpretive method used is ijmali. The choice to teach tafsir because she has a background of Tafsir science while studying in Al-Azhar Egypt. For the literature, each of them uses a lot of literature as their reference in preparing da’wah material while the books mentioned in the table above are only some of them.

In terms of da’wah methods, they generally use lecture method with varying techniques each. For example, Aminah leads the congregation by Q & A and dialogue from the beginning to the end of lecture. While Fauziah emphasises on practice in relation to worship.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The five dai'iyahs in this study were born neither from parents with high education level nor in families of ulama's descendants. From the economic point of view, their families can be classified in low income level. During their study, the dai'iyahs were among those who stood out academically or had other achievements in co-curricular activities. They were also active in organizations and they remain actively involve in various organizations until now. Their emergence as dai'iyahs was not as a result of their formal education, but because of their talent and good mastery of Islamic science. In terms of the forms of da’wah they use, da’wah with oral communication is more prominent than that through writings. In the context of da’wah development, the dai’iyahs have sought to exploit the potential of pilgrims for da’wah activities, such as assisting the poor, dhua’afu and training of adolescents, and village-led programs. Finally, they generally apply lecture and Q & A as their methods of da’wah with materials about Fiqh and Tafsir. There is no standard syllabus that they use or apply, they tend to compile the materials themselves or use one prepared by other parties.

Based on the research findings as described above, the following suggestions need to be ensured to be done in the future by some parties. First, dai’iyahs need to balance the three forms of da’wah,
namely bil-lisan, bil-kitabah and bil-hal as the integration of these three forms is needed to a civilized society. Second, it is necessary to improve the Medan da’iyah corps to be a forum to overcome various da’wah problems in religious assemblies. Third, in order to prepare the regeneration of da’iyah, trainings for the cadres of da’iyah are needed to be held by Islamic organizations, such as Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), Al-Washliyah, Muhamaddiyah, Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) and other Islamic organizations. Fourth, Faculty of Da’wah should be proactive in finding prospective students who have the talent of preaching in Middle School as a prospective student and then they are trained intensively in order to appear to be da’iyah in the middle of society in an effort to anticipate the lack of da’iyah in Medan.

REFERENCES


Qardhawi, Y. 1983. Kritik dan saran untuk para da’i [Critics and suggestions to Islamic preachers], Media dakwah. Jakarta.

