

THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY, SUFISM, ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE AND JAVANESE TRADITION ON WOMEN

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Abstract

Islamic philosophy, Sufism, Islamic jurisprudence, and Javanese traditions offer diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the status and role of women. While some schools of thought position women as subordinate to men, others advocate for gender equality and even recognize female leadership over men. This study aims to analyze and compare these varied viewpoints through a qualitative literature review, drawing primarily from foundational texts and primary sources. The findings reveal that Islamic philosophy, as represented by al-Fârâbî (870–950), and Sufism, particularly in the works of Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), uphold a vision of gender equality, emphasizing the shared spiritual and intellectual capacities of women and men. In contrast, classical Islamic jurisprudence tends to place women in a subordinate position, often restricting their roles in public and legal spheres. The Javanese tradition presents a dualistic stance: while it recognizes women as integral to male identity and capable of leadership, it simultaneously perpetuates notions of women as possessions or appendages to men. This ambivalence reflects the syncretic nature of Javanese culture, shaped by both indigenous and Islamic influences. Given the persistent gender disparities in contemporary Muslim societies, this study argues for a greater dissemination and integration of the more egalitarian views found in Islamic philosophy and Sufism. Such perspectives offer theological and cultural resources for advancing a more balanced and respectful relationship between men and women. Ultimately, the

study contributes to broader debates on gender, religion, and tradition in the Muslim world, advocating for a reevaluation of normative frameworks surrounding women.

Keywords: *Islamic philosophy; Sufism; Islamic jurisprudence; Javanese tradition; women*

Received: March 10, 2023; Revised: May 18, 2023; Accepted: May 26, 2023

Introduction

Women and their relationship with men have been the object of study since the classics. Greek and Western philosophy generally judged women as weak and flawed creatures, so they placed women as second-class human beings after men. The most frequently cited reason for this issue is that women are weak-minded creatures. Arivia's study points out that from the idealist Plato (427-347 BC) and the empirical Aristotle (384-322 BC) to the existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) have similar views as what was mentioned previously, almost all of them. Only a few philosophers offer a balanced assessment of women. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was one of a few philosophers who considered women are equal to men in term of abilities (Arivia 2003, 75). Islamic philosophy, Sufism, Islamic jurisprudence and Javanese traditions provide different assessments of women. These four perspectives have their assessment of women, which is different from philosophical thought in the West.

Several studies have written certain perspectives on women. Among them are, (1) Kilwouw, Kumari and Tahir's study on violence against women from the perspective of Islamic philosophy (Kilwouw 2020, 89; Kumari 2013, 136; Tahir et al. 2021, 340) and (2) Sandano and Haitami's study on feminism based on the view of Sufism (Haitami 2014, 190-212; Sandano et al. 2021, 22-31). Specifically, Khotimah examines the view of Sufism about women as a manifestation of God (Khotimah 2018, 151). Some articles also examine the relationship between women and Sufism in certain countries. Some of the them are Saad Khan's study on female Sufism in South Asia, el-Haithami's study on Sufi women in Morocco, and Neubauer's study on female Sufism in contemporary Turkey (el Haithamî 2014, 190-212; Khan & Bano 2020, 202-214; Neubauer 2016, 150-166).

The study on the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence and Javanese traditions on women is also abundant. One of them is (1) Yanggo and Ibn Khoir's study on leadership as seen from the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence (Ibnu Khoer et al. 2021, 42-49; Yanggo 2016, 1). The other one is (2) Lutfiyah's study on women migrant workers based on the perspective of Islam jurisprudence (Lutfiyah et al. 2020, 17-36). The next one is (3) Kasdi's study on minority women as seen from the perspective of *Maqâsid al-Sharî'ah* (Kasdi et al. 2021, 1-12). Other studies include Dahwadin's article on the role of women in trial witnesses, Sahriati's study on the relationship between husband and wife as in accordance with the perspective of Mubadala, and Jalaludin and Sofiani's study on husband-and-wife relations in unregistered marriages (Dahwadin et al. 2019, 61-80; Jalaludin & Sofiani 2020, 181-196; Syahriyati 2020, 187-194). There are studies discussing the perspective of the Javanese tradition. First, it is Hanipuddin and Cristianna's study on female characters in the Javanese tradition (Christianna 2020, 33-48; Hanipudin & Habibah 2021, 1-16). Second, it is Alnoza's study on the construction of Javanese society on women in the 9th-14th century AD (Alnoza & Dian 2021, 51-64).

The description above shows that no study examined women from several perspectives simultaneously. Only certain perspectives are used. In addition, the existing study needs to place women on an equal footing to men. This study fills this gap. This study aims to analyse the perspectives of Islamic philosophy, Sufism, Islamic jurisprudence, and Javanese traditions on women. Furthermore, this study compares the four perspectives to support the idea of equality between men and women. This study is made based on two assumptions. First, each perspective has its different view of the object. Multiple analyses can provide a holistic and balanced perspective on women. Second, certain perspectives on women cannot be separated from the context and content of their views. Comparative analysis of existing perspectives can provide an adequate understanding of the background of their differences.

Research Method

The focus of this study is the perspective of women that is the perspective of Islamic philosophy, Sufism, Islamic jurisprudence, and Javanese tradition. The primary data of this study are primary books discussing these four perspectives related to women. The supporting data are

women's perspectives, which were written by people, not the ones conveyed by these four groups. Researchers also use other reference sources related to the subject matter. The main source referred to is as follows:

Figure 1
Main Sources

No	Perspectives	Main Source
1	Islamic Philosophy	<i>Al-Fârâbî, Arâ ahl al-Madînah al-Faḍîlah</i> , ed. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)
2	Sufism	Ibn Arabî, <i>Fuṣûṣ al-Hikam</i> (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub, n.d.). Ibn al-Jauzî, <i>Sifat al-Ṣafwah</i> , (Heiderabad: Loknow, 1938).
3	Islamic Jurisprudence	Ibn Rushd, <i>Bidâyah al-Mujtahid wa Nihâyah al-Muqtasid</i> , (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.). Al-Sha'rânî, <i>al-Mizân al-Kubrâ</i> , (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1985).
4	Javanese tradition	Krishna Bayu Aji, <i>Perempuan-Perempuan Tangguh Pengusaha Tanah Jawa</i> (Yogyakarta: Araska, 2018)

The data obtained from the main sources were then analysed using the content analysis method (Elo et al. 2014, 21). This analysis explains the concept of women from four perspectives. The researcher also cross-checked the data with other data. Cross-checks are carried out to anticipate the possibility of misunderstanding the reference sources (Turner 2003, 269-277).

The research results described are then discussed using interpretative analysis methods (Alejandro 2021, 150-174). In this section, the researcher further criticizes the four perspectives on women by tracing their background, predicting their logical consequences, or comparing them with other theories using comparative analysis (Adams & Collyer 2019, 405-425; Pringle et al. 2011, 20-24). Based on this, important conclusions are drawn.

Results and Discussion

Islamic Philosophy Perspective

Islamic philosophical thought positions women equal to men as long as they have the same abilities. Islamic philosophy focuses on intellectual ability more and not gender. Therefore, when talking about poetry, al-Fârâbî

(870-950), a figure in the Neo-Platonist Islamic philosophy, stated that the criteria required for the excellence of a poem are not determined by who created it, whether it is male or female, but rather by the beauty of its composition (Arberry 1937, 266-278). Al-Fârâbî's statement is also evident in his concept concerning the criteria for a major state leader. Al-Fârâbî stated that a leader of a major state should possess 12 traits. Those are physical health, intellectual perfection, passion for science, ability to speak (orator), good morals, wisdom, understanding of the traditions and culture of the nation, and the ability to produce appropriate regulations. All criteria refer to things that are intellectual and spiritual. Al-Fârâbî does not require a certain gender; it must be male, as in most Islamic jurisprudence (Farabi 1985, 269; Soleh 2021, 140-149).

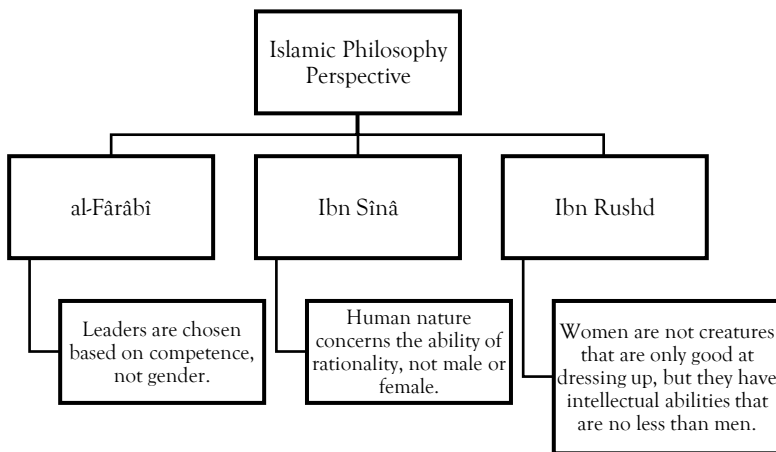
The assessment that is not based on gender but intellectual ability is also conveyed by Ibn Sînâ (980-1037). Ibn Sînâ states that every human being has three potentials, namely the potential of plants, animals, and rationality. The potential of plants makes humans physically develop, the potential of animals makes humans able to move, and rational potential makes humans able to think and make choices in their lives. For Ibn Sînâ, the essence of man is his potential for rationality, and in these faculties, there is no difference between the souls of men and women. For Ibn Sînâ, anyone has the right and can improve the quality of his soul if he tries hard. There is no difference in the soul of men and women (Hur 1991, 68). Najati's research also shows that Islamic philosophical thought, especially Ibn Sînâ's, does not distinguish between men and women (Najati 1993, 56).

Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), a Muslim philosopher known as a commentator on Aristotle (384-322 BC), also positively assessed women. When commenting on Plato's book entitled "Republic" (428-348 BC), Ibn Rushd criticized Plato's thinking. In this book, Plato states that women are imitation creatures. Ibn Rushd states that Plato's statement is misleading because, for Ibn Rushd, women are not only creatures who are good at dressing but also have good speech and intellectual abilities (Rushd 1974, 27).

It is true that Ibn Rushd seems cautious and does not give a firm response when discussing women from the perspective of Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Regarding the matter concerning a woman leading a congregational prayer, for example, Ibn Rushd does not provide legal provisions because there is no rule for him. The same applies to women's

positions as judges. However, Ibn Rushd explains that other opinions get women to become the *Imams* or leaders of prayer for men and become judges. Ibn Rushd stated that Ibn Jarîr al-Tabarî (836-922) was a figure who allowed women to be judges and imams of prayer for the male congregation (Rushd n.d, 105). That is, Ibn Rushd still gives a positive assessment of women and does not just put the position of women below men. The perspectives of Muslim philosophers regarding women above are described in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Islamic Philosophy Perspective



Sufism Perspective

Sufism also gives a positive view on women. Sufism places women in an equal position with men. This perspective may be due to the main teachings of Sufism, which emphasize the cleanliness of the heart to bring the heart closer to God. It teaches Muslims about how to be as close as possible to God and how He is more and more missed and loved. There is no gender requirement to reach this level because both men and women have the same rights and opportunities (Siraj 1995, 46-62).

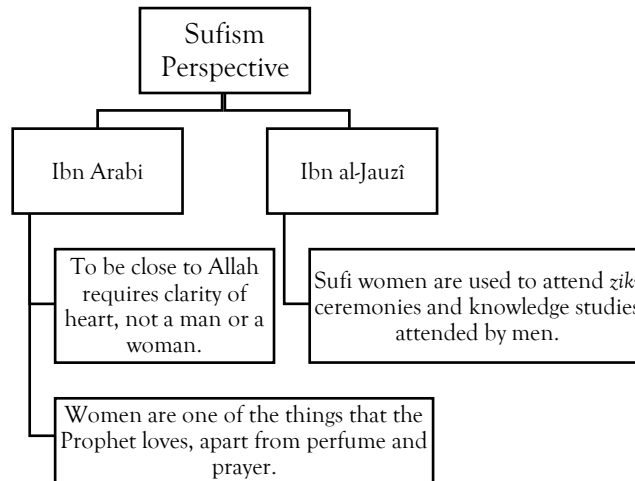
Ibn Arabî (1165-1240), a Sufi philosophical figure, did not see women as a source of immorality but as a means of reaching God. A man's love for a woman and the desire to unite with her symbolize humans' love and longing for God and vice versa. Within the love of men for women, the love

for God and the essence of love for God also exist (Nor 1995, 178). The Apostle once stated that there are three things that make him happy: women, perfume, and prayer (al-Nasâi 3940; Ḥanbal 14037).

Moreover, Ibn Arabî (1165-1240) taught about the unity of reality (*waḥdah al-wujûd*) and the unity of religion (*waḥdah al-adyân*). The unity of the universe declares that God and the universe are an inseparable unity. God is the substance of nature, and nature is the expression of God's will. No phenomenon in the universe happens not because of the will of God. Meanwhile, religious unity affirms that the substance of all religions is the same although the aspects of the formal rules differ (Arabî n.d., 248). When it is believed that there is no substantive difference between Islam and other religions, and there is even no distance between God and the universe, then what is the difference between men and women?

The absence of differences between men and women in Sufism does not only lay in the concept but also in daily interactions. Ibn al-Jauzî (1116-1201) narrates stories about the association of Sufi men and women in the book of *Sifah al-Ṣafwah*. Sufi men and women used to meet to discuss spiritual matters. Sufi women were also used to attend *zikr majlis* meetings (meetings held to praise or remember Allah, the Almighty God) and hold other activities in a place where men were present (al-Jauzî 1938, 326). Their togetherness was carried out naturally, without hindrance. Fatimah, a wife of Ahmad ibn Khazruya (d. 864), is said to have met Abû Yazîd al-Buṣṭâmî (804-877) often and discussed spiritual matters with him without wearing a veil and covering her hands so that her jewellery and nail polish were visible. Her husband was jealous and criticized Fatimah, but Fatimah replied that there was only God in her heart (Attar 2006, 108; Roded 1994, 134). The perspective of the great Sufi leaders on women above is depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Sufism Perspective



Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh) Perspective

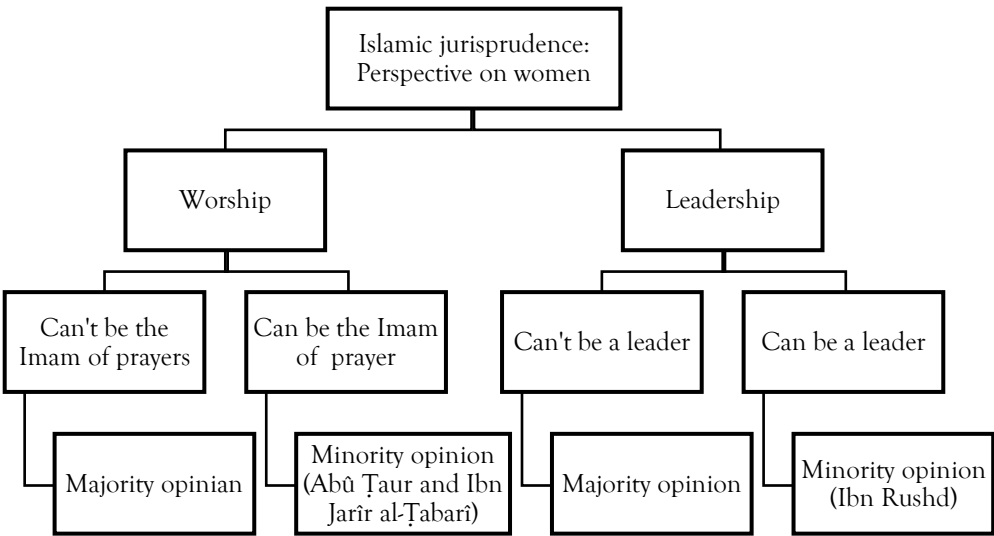
Islamic jurisprudence assesses women from a legal perspective, and the study of Islamic jurisprudence distinguishes women from men. What is the view of Islamic jurisprudence on women? The views of Islamic jurisprudence on women can be divided into two groups. First, the group that considers women to have certain weaknesses place women under men. Second, it is the group that considers women as having no less potential than men, so they give equal rights to men and women. These two perspectives are evident in the case of the Imam praying in the congregation. The first opinion appears in the opinion of four Imams of the madhhab of Islamic jurisprudence, namely Abû Hanîfah (699-767), Mâlik (716-795), Shâfi'î (767-820), and Ibn Hanbal (780-855). The four madhhabs agree that women should not be Imams of prayer for men. Currently, this opinion is followed by Yûsuf al-Qaraḍâwî (1926-2022). The second opinion appears in the opinion of Abû Taur (792-862) and Ibn Jarîr al-Ṭabarî (839-923). These two figures allow women to become Imams of prayer for men (Sha'rânî 1985, 262).

The Islamic jurisprudence perspective is also patterned in two opinions about women's leadership in the public sphere. The first opinion states that women should not be leaders, in government or courts, because

of certain weaknesses in women. The majority of the Imams of the madhhab of Islamic jurisprudence fall into this group. Therefore, when Megawati ran for President of Indonesia in 2001, most Indonesian Muslims rejected the nomination. The reason for the refusal was that Megawati was a woman. The second opinion states that women can be leaders as long as they can do so. This second opinion judges a person based on ability or competence, not gender. Ibn Rushd (1126-1198) supports this second opinion (Rushd, n.d. 183).

Scholars who forbid or refuse women to be leaders refer to several hadiths of the Prophet as the basis. Some of them are Saḥiḥ al-Bukhârî (4425 & 7099), Sunan al-Turmudzî (2262), Sunan al-Nasâi (5388), and Musnad Aḥmad (20402) (Apkpure 2023). The content of the hadith states that a society that lays its leadership to women will not be successful. Muḥammad al-Ghazâlî (1917-1996), a contemporary Muslim thinker from Egypt, criticized the use of this hadith as a basis for prohibiting women from appearing in public spaces. Al-Ghazâlî stated that these hadiths were more of the Prophet's response to the conditions of the Persian empire at that time, which was led by an incompetent woman, not a prohibition on women to be leaders. al-Ghazâlî bases his criticism on two reasons. One of them is (1) Quranic information about the leadership of Queen Bilqis at the time of Prophet Solomon (Q.S. al-Naml (27):23-44. The Quran describes Bilqis as a successful woman leader in bringing her people to prosperity and truth. For al-Ghazâlî, the second one, the Quran cannot praise Bilqis if Islam forbids women from being leaders. The second one is (2) The decision of the Caliph Umar ibn Khathab (634-644) to appoint al-Syaffa (a woman) as a financial supervisor in the Medina market. It is impossible for the caliph Umar ibn Khattab who is known to be strict and firm, to raise al-Syaffa if women are not allowed to appear in public spaces (Ghazâlî 1989). Several perspectives from the Imams of Islamic jurisprudence regarding women are depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Islamic jurisprudence perspective on women



Javanese Tradition Perspective

The Javanese tradition referred to here are the customs and judgments adopted by the Javanese people who inhabit the island of Java. Also, great numbers of Javanese people are spread in Jakarta, Sumatra, and Suriname. Javanese tradition has various views on women. In a household relationship involving husband and wife, Javanese tradition places women in two different positions. First, it places women as assets belonging to the husband. Javanese tradition classifies women in this position using the term “simah” (household). The fate of these women, prospering and suffering in their life, depends on the fate of their husbands. If the husbands climb a rank, these women also rise through the rank, and vice versa, as expressed by the Javanese phrase “*suwargo nunut neroko katut.*” Second, it places women as equal partners to their husbands. Javanese tradition calls it “garwo” (husband's soulmate). These model women become an inseparable part of their husbands’ success. These women are not placed as the husbands’ wealth but an inseparable part of their husbands. In other words, women are placed on an equal footing to men and become men's main partners.

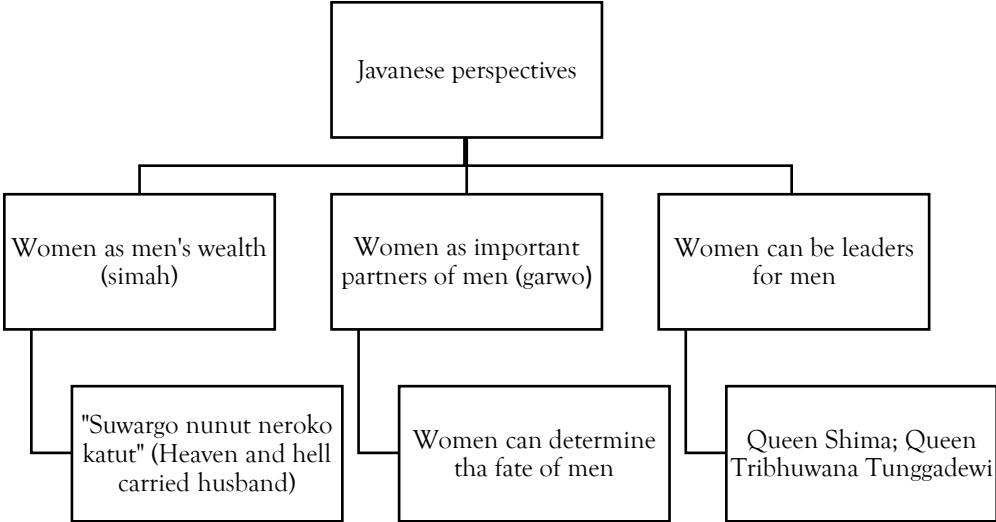
The first perspective that places women as men's treasures seems to be related to the Javanese concept of the ideal woman. Some Javanese people

teach certain attitudes to be the ideal women in the household. Ajrin's study states that the Javanese tradition teaches eight attitudes that women must do after marriage, namely, obedient, loyal, responsive, ready, devoted, sincere, self-care, and skilled (Ajrin 2017, 26). These eight ideal women's attitudes, in turn, push women to have positions such as the wealth for their husbands.

However, Javanese tradition can accept if women come forward to the public sphere or even become leaders. Javanese people are known as great female queens. As an example, Queen Shima became the ruler of the Kalingga kingdom (674-695), the area of Jepara, Central Java. Queen Shima was known as a just female ruler and was able to bring prosperity to her people. Another female ruler was Tribhuwana Wijayatunggadewi who became a queen in Majapahit (1328-1351) after Jayanegara (1309-1328). Discussing this matter, Fithoh's study states that the daughter of Raden Wijaya, the founder of Majapahit (1293-1309), was referred to as a female ruler who whispered to the next king, Hayam Wuruk (1350-1389) and Mahapatih Gadjah Mada (1331-1364) to rule the archipelago (Aji & Achmad 2018, 228; Fitroh 2017, 298-308).

Javanese tradition also recognizes a female leader named Srimat Tribhuwanaraja Mauli Warmadewi who became a queen of the Dharmasraya Kingdom (1286-1316), West Sumatra region. This female queen was known as a great ruler. It made Phrabu Kartanegara (1268-1292), the king of Singhasari, now it is a part of Malang region, feel the need to cooperate with her. The cooperation between king Singhasari and female rulers in Sumatera occurred in 1286 is known as the Pamalayu expedition. At that time, King Kartanegara gave a statue of the Amoghapasa statue as a gift of friendship (Shima, 2022, 1). Three perspectives in the Javanese tradition concerning women are depicted in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Javanese perspectives on women



The perspective of Islamic philosophy towards women is very positive. This perspective arises because philosophical studies are more concerned with human abilities, not on physical form or gender. This perspective necessitates two things. The first one is about the perspective of Islamic philosophy that becomes egalitarian as it views women and men, so there is no discrimination against women or superiority of men. The second one, it is about Islamic philosophy that can appreciate the potential and goodness of wherever it comes from, male or female, even from non-Muslim nations. Islamic philosophy can in fact accept Greek philosophy such as the thoughts of Plato (423-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322) who come from outside Arabia and outside Islam (Soleh 2016, 43).

Even though they both have philosophical thinking, Islamic philosophy's assessment is not the same as Greek philosophy's assessment of women. As written earlier, Greek philosophy's assessment of women tends to be biased, not respecting women. Plato (427-347 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) viewed women as imitations or imperfect humans. Therefore, for Plato, women, and children do not have the right to vote in a democratic system (Rushd 1974, 168). The assessment of Islamic Philosophy to women is also different from Western Philosophy. As Arivia wrote, most Western

philosophical thought places women as subordinate to men, not equal to men, let alone accepting women as male leaders (Arivia 2003, 74).

Sufism's perspective on women is also very positive. The assessment of Sufism seems to be motivated by his view, which looks more at the human substance, not the physical form or gender. The evaluation of Sufism on the substantive aspects of objects is performed on humans, other objects, and even religion. Schuon's study states that Sufis judge religion from two dimensions, namely the esoteric and exoteric dimensions. The esoteric dimension is the substance of religious teachings, while the exoteric dimension is related to the formal rules of religion. The exoteric aspects of religion are different, but the esoteric aspects of all religions are basically the same (Schuon 1975, 108). The abovementioned teaching of Ibn Arabî (1165-1240), regarding religious unity (*waḥdah al-adyân*), is classified into esoteric perspective.

There are two perspectives of Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) on women, which tend to be biased and the other one was equal to men. However, this gender-biased thought did not appear since the beginning of Islam. In the early period of Islam, classical literature mentions the existence of equal relations between men and women. This condition lasts until the *tabi'in* period. They are ordinary and can mix naturally and freely. During the reign of the Umayyads (661-750), precisely during the reign of al-Walid II (732-34), a policy appeared to separate men and women (Yatim, 1995). In the next phase, this policy will lead to the marginalization of women from the public sphere. The Imams of Fiqh schools of *madhhab* such as Abu Hanifah (696-767), Mâlik (716-795), Shâfiî (767-820), Ibn Hanbal (780-855), and other legal thinkers, who were mostly born after the policy prevailed, could not be separated from the existing conditions. The legal decisions that emerge are closely related to the context and the interests of the surrounding power, so gender bias occurs.

The perspective of Javanese tradition on women is more varied. First, it places women as the husbands' assets; second, it places women as the important partners of their husbands; and third, it accepts women as the male leaders. This variation in the Javanese perspective on women seems to occur due to Javanese traditions that have been adopted from many sources encompassing the teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, as well as other

local teachings. The richness of the treasures of this Javanese tradition assesses Javanese tradition on women, not singular. Although in one aspect, it places women under men, Javanese tradition can accept women who are in the public sphere.

The Javanese perspective requires two things. Firstly, Javanese society's relationship between women and men becomes dialectical. It means that the relationship between men and women is not only one-way but two-way, from men to women and from women to men. Because of this, the relationship between men and women in Java is dynamic and flexible. They do not force men to be in the front, but women may take the front row and lead. This statement is in line with Syed and Derado's study, which states that gender relations will be dynamic when men and women can play various roles because of their balanced abilities (Derado et al. 2020, 321-351; Syed & Ali 2019, 4-24). Secondly, the Javanese tradition becomes close to the teachings of Sufism, suggesting to place more value on the substance of a person as human being, not on the physical form and gender. The main concern is whether a person has the required abilities and competencies, not male or female.

If these four perspectives are compared, then the perspective of the Javanese tradition appears to be more varied and the most egalitarian one towards women. Below this tradition, it is the perspective of Islamic Philosophy and Sufism. The lowest position is the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence because it seems gender biased. Thoughts on Islamic philosophy and Sufism that prioritize human substance and abilities should be socialized to reduce thoughts that allow the discrimination applied for gender and women. Historically, Javanese tradition has accepted women's leadership, but this attitude is less popular than the first and second attitudes. It is the attitude of placing women as men's property and husband's partners. A comparison of four perspectives on women, namely Islamic philosophy, Sufism, Islamic jurisprudence, and Javanese tradition, is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6
Perspective Comparison

No	Issues	Islamic philosophy	Sufism	Islamic Jurisprudence	Javanese tradition
1	About men and women	Does not distinguish between women and men because it assesses the aspect of rational ability.	Does not distinguish between women and men because they value the substance of their souls.	Differentiate between men and women because of the physical aspects of both.	Differentiate between men and women.
2	Worship (congregational prayer)			The majority of scholars say that women cannot be Imams of prayer.	
3	Leadership			The majority of <i>Fiqh</i> scholars stated that women cannot be political leaders or leaders for men.	Can accept women as leaders for men
4	Husband and wife relationship in the household.				1. Wife as the wealth for husband. 2. Wife as the husband's important partner.

Conclusion

Based on the description above, several things are conveyed as follows. First, among the four perspectives studied, the Javanese tradition has a perspective that is in line with the other three perspectives. From one perspective, the Javanese tradition positions women as the wealth of men,

per Islamic jurisprudence's perspective. From another perspective, the Javanese tradition places women as important partners to men, as in Islamic philosophy and Sufism. From the other perspective, the Javanese tradition can accept women as leaders who lead men.

Second, this study makes an important contribution. It is the perspectives that assess the substantive aspects of human, which can provide a good and balanced understanding of women. Islamic philosophy and Sufism's perspective on women prove the truth of this statement. Therefore, a perspective that views the substance rather than the gender needs to be developed properly. In the early stages, Islamic philosophical thought and Sufism needed socialization to provide a balanced understanding between women and men.

Third, study on women's abilities and achievements needs to be intensified. This study supports women's empowerment, not as the rivals for men, but as people who play an important role in preparing future generations. If the mother is the first and foremost educational institution for children, then women, as prospective mothers, must get the best education.

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