

# WOMEN'S POLITICAL COMMUNICATIONS: ASSESSING LEADERSHIP IN QUEEN SAFIATUDDIN IN ACEH DARUSSALAM IN THE 17<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

**Marlinda Irwanti**

Corporate Communication School of Communication Interstudi, Indonesia  
*e-mail: marlinda1610@gmail.com*

## ABSTRACT

Women leadership in the Kingdom of Aceh is inseparable from the prolonged debate because it is considered contrary to religious thought. Their appointment as the Queen cannot be separated because of the support of the party's pro stronger, so it can be powerful in the kingdom of Aceh. Support group consists of several important clerics, most of the royal princess and common folk. Scholars who support the removal of the of the queen are Nuruddin Al-Raniri and Abdurrauf Al-Sinkili. This paper aims to: 1) know how Queen Safiatuddin leadership in the kingdom of Aceh on the 17th century; 2) reveals objectively political communication strategy Safiatuddin Queen in her coronation as Queen of the Kingdom of Aceh; and 3) Factors Queen On being in Charge Increase Kingdom of Aceh.

**Keywords:** Sultanah, qadlimalikuladil, sulthanmalikuladil, political communications, women leadership.

Kepemimpinan Perempuan dalam sejarah Kerajaan Aceh tidak bisa dipisahkan dari kontroversial perdebatan panjang dalam pemikiran Islam. Pengangkatan tersebut menjadi tidak bisa dipisahkan dari para pendukung kelompoknya sangat kuat, oleh karena itu berimplikasi pada kekuatan politiknya di Kerajaan Aceh. Dukungan kelompok tersebut terdiri dari para pemuka agama Islam, para bangsawan kerajaan dan masyarakat umum, Para intelektual yang mendukung upaya penghilangan jabatan Ratu sebagai pemimpin politik adalah Nuruddin Al-Raniri and Abdurrauf Al-Sinkili. Penelitian ini bertujuan :1) untuk mengetahui bagaimana kepemimpinan Queen Safiatuddin di Kerajaan Aceh pada abad ke-17; 2) mengungkap secara obyektif strategi komunikasi politik Ratu Safiatuddin sebagai pemimpin Kerajaan Aceh dan 3) Faktor-faktor kepemimpinan Ratu dalam mengembangkan Kerajaan Aceh.

**Keywords:** Sultanah, qadlimalikuladil, sulthanmalikuladil, political communications, women leadership.

## Introduction

Politics is better known as the public sphere and the tendency of people to interpret this public area is as the area

of men. Therefore, politics at the highest level remains male-dominated and controlled conventionally by men. On

the other hand, women *conventionally* have a place in the domestic sphere, more preoccupied with family matters as well as a reconstruction of a biological mandate. Women are not suited to be in the public area, because of the *standards* and the size of the leadership at this time refers to the male *standard*.

Politics and political behavior are seen as masculine activities. Political behavior includes independence, freedom of opinion and aggressive action, while people judge women who are aggressive and independent as people who are not acceptable and desirable

However, the reality of history shows a row of women in politics that is considered as the world of men. Circumstances are indeed decisive. The women who are involved in politics were mostly born from the family environment politicians. Women's political consciousness based on the history of Indonesia has grown since the 16th century in various archipelagoes. Some that hold the existence of women in politics in the 16th century are the four queens who ruled the kingdom in Aceh Darussalam for 60 years. They were the descendants of the sultans of

Aceh, but they still had to fight because their leadership was full of *intrigues* and undermining that did not approve of women's leadership, either because of religious or cultural reasons. In fact, for those reasons, their powers had to end.

## **Leadership**

Leadership is a problem that is always factual to talk about. Leadership is the ability to influence others or followers so that the people will behave as what the leader wants. Leadership succession is one of the most important political agendas in politics.

For centuries, women are categorized as *the second class of people* (second class). The dominance of men in various sectors of life leads to this kind of thought. According to *Asghar Ali Engineer*; historically, there has been dominance in society throughout the ages. Women are less powerful than men. It emerges the doctrine of inequality between men and women; women are not as capable as men, women are restricted in the areas of kitchen and home, women are considered incapable of making decisions outside their territory, then

women do not have the skills or not worthy of being a leader (Engineer, 1994).

Leadership is only suitable for men, because women are restricted around "four-square" belonging to the father or the husband. Therefore, leadership is only suitable for men. This is the picture of the tragic history of the lives of women, particularly with regard to the political rights. Nevertheless, the historical reality uncovers data, where some women never become rulers. Through the pages of the history it can be seen that there was a row of women listed as queens. According to Mernisi (1994), it is not needed to look far away, like a fairy tale, *Malikah* and *Khatun* emerged piecemeal from pages that have yellowed in ancient books. Like in the archipelago of the Maldives, the reign of Queen had lasted for approximately 40 years (1347-1388). Those who became rulers were: *Sultanah Khadijah* (1347-1379), *Sultanah Myriam* (1379-1383) and *Sultanah Fatimah* (1383-1388).

### **Queens in Aceh Darussalam (1641 – 1699)**

In this archipelago, one of the Islamic regions that keeps the existence of women in politics is the kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. Four women had dominion in a row in the kingdom of the 17th century. The power of the Queens lasted for 60 years. The four queens were *Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Shah* (1641-1675), *Sultanah Naqiatuddin Nurul Alam Shah* (1675-1678), *Sultanah Zakiatuddin Inayat Shah* (1678-1688) and *Sultanah Kamaluddin Shah* (1688-1699).

The Kingdom of Aceh is located on the north tip of Sumatra Island, which is also known by the name of Aceh Besar district; in the Acehnese language is called *Aceh Rayeuk*. This area is also known as *Sago Lhee Aceh* (Aceh Three Aspects), and Core Aceh (*Aceh Proper*) (Alfian, 1972), or the real Aceh, because this area becomes the kingdom of Aceh, the center of the capital of the kingdom, which is named Bandar Aceh or completely called *Bandar Aceh Dar As-Salam* (Depdikbud, 1997).

Bandar Aceh Darussalam became the center of trade since the Strait of Malacca was a bustling commercial street, traversed many merchant ships from various Asian countries, especially

from India, Indonesia and China. For centuries, Malacca became the center of foreign trade for the three majors among India, China and Southeast Asian countries. Kingdom of Aceh made significant progress during the period of 17<sup>th</sup> century. The heyday peak occurred during the Sultan *Iskandar Muda Meukata Alam* (1707-1636).

Among the signs of the progress is the success of territorial expansion to several neighboring regions. From 1612-1624, *Iskandar Muda* had conquered several kingdoms beaches around the Strait of Malacca and the western part of the island of Sumatra and in 1612 Deli was recaptured. Johor royal that was located on the Malay Peninsula was conquered in 1613. Then, he successively conquered the kingdom of Pahang in 1618, Kedah in 1619, Perak in 1620 and Nias in 1624. However, according to Djayadiningrat (1982/1983), Bandar Aceh Darussalam was entirely in the dark before the 16th century.

*Sultan Iskandar Muda* established Aceh became the most powerful country in the western part of the archipelago. His successes, according to Ricklefs (1995), were based

on the strength of impressive military, including the navy that had large ships that were capable of lifting 600 - 800 soldiers, cavalry, which included the use of Persian horses, elephant forces unit, and many of artillery.

During the reign of *Sultan Iskandar Muda*, science was growing rapidly, because foreign merchants visited Bandar Aceh Darussalam. Most of them were not only trading, but they also had other purposes, such as preaching and teaching. The central government had established a college, *Jami'at Bait al-Rahman* (Hasjmy, 1983a). *Hamzah Fansuri* and *Syamsudin Sumatrani* were part of very well - known Islamic scholars. Both scholars provided various religious lives and the development of science.

### **Queen Safiatuddin (1641-1675)**

*Safiatuddin*, the daughter of *Sultan Iskandar Muda* was an Acehnese woman who was very lucky because she had the opportunity to explore her knowledge from some Islamic scholars who settled in the center of the kingdom. Although *Safiatudin* was a woman, she mastered a wide range of sciences,

including military science (Hasjmy, 1983b).

In 1636, *Sultan Iskandar Muda* died. He was replaced by his son in law, *Iskandar Thani Alaudin Mughayat Shah* (1636-1641), the crown prince of Pahang. He was the son of *Sultan Ahmad* of Pahang who brought along his father in 1617. In his tenure, there were no more aggressive actions and the palace became very famous as a center of Islamic knowledge. Here began to emerge the disagreements among the Islamic scholars, from each group about *Wujudiyah*, the teachings concerning to God and creatures. This involved the followers of *Fansuri* and *Syamsudin Hamzah al-Sumatrani* on one side and the followers of *Nuruddin Arraniri* on the other side. The opposition culminated with the judgment against the losing party and caused the burning of the results of work that they wrote. This seemed to give bitter memories for the losers.

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*Iskandar Tsani* died in 1641 after 5 years of his leadership, in such a young age (30 years) (Iskandar, 1966). He was replaced by his queen, *Safiatuddin* as a Queen. Then, three women successively replaced the position. The reign of *Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah* which ruled approximately 35 years, ran into resistance from most of the components of society because it was considered to be contrary to Islamic laws. Although the first coronation as Queen Aceh was not free from the action of the objections of some components of society, but *Safiatuddin* was the first Acehnese woman who dared to become the top leader in the kingdom of Aceh *Darussalam*. Her reign was not only marred by a conflict that was always trying to spread its influence in affluent areas, but also the danger of betrayal that want to seize her powers.

The supports from the Islamic scholars played a very big role especially *Nuruddin Arraniri* and *Abdurrauf Al-Singkil*. The Queen Power running can

not be separated from the two Islamic scholars ranging from the appointment of the first queen, the life of the power, nor the end of her reign. Moreover, the position of *Abdurrauf Al-Singkil* was as *Qadli Malikul Adil* during the reign of the four Queens.

### **Political Communications**

According to Dan Nimmo, political communication is a type of communication that manages a set of interests among groups and social institutions. And Nimmo defines the political communication as communication activities, which are based on its consequences (actual and potential) that regulate human behaviors in conditions of conflict. The development of women's education is able to change people's judgments, and women are able to be a leader in many fields, including in the political sphere. Strategies of political communication can be done through the counter of political communication that is done not only with the participation of women, but it also has to be able to build political communication that involves men.

Political communication as a whole cannot be understood without linking political dimensions with all aspects and problems. The leadership of Queen Safiatudin was full of conflicts because the female leadership at that time was also a dilemma but due to political participation of Safiatudin that involved the great scholars of the period (Nurudin Arraniri and Abdurrauf Al-Singkili), and also the position of Al-Singkili as Qadli Maliku Adil during the reign of the four queens became the strength of Queen Safiatudin in political communication

Counter efforts of political communication that was conducted by Safiatudin's father by providing education to Safiatudin also made the Queen intelligent at that time. If we talk about the culture of political patriarchy, it actually never changed in the 16th century and now. The strength of the political culture of the nation gradually made political culture that later became into people's perspective and perceptions regarding politics which became the male territory. During the reign of Safiatuddin, polemics and conflicts were also continuing. The era of about the Sultanah Safiatuddin Shah

that ran almost 35 years, got barriers by some components of the community because it was considered to be contrary to Islamic law. Rusdi Sufi recounts:

“And after three days of mourning, the authority of the kingdom agreed to elect his widow, Putri Sri Alam Permaisuri, became Sultanah. But ahead of her coronation, there were some opposition among the authorities of Aceh. This is partly because Sultan Iskandar Tsanidid not any son and some also were concerned about the feasibility of Women in her capacity as a king. The reason for the appointment as a King was against the Islamic law...”

One of the factors of Safiatuddin's strength during her leadership for more than 30 years was the political participation of the two great Islamic scholars of that era with their arguments that legitimized women's leadership. Queen's intelligence and prowess in the military field were also one of the strengths of the queen to empower herself with the education at that time, and resulted in some books. The phenomenal book at that time, written by Abdurrauf upon the request of Safiatuddin was the Fiqh book in the field of Muamalat, a masterpiece

named Mir'atalthullabfi Tashil Ma'rifatal - Ahkamal " Syar'iyat, translated by the author with " The Mirror of everything for Those that learn Fiqh Science is to Facilitate the laws / Syara' Allah ". The content was about the permissibility of women to become judges (more broadly, to become a leader).

Unusual opinions are in the other fiqh books, especially the books that were in the mazhab of Syafi'iah. More detailed views on women can be seen in his monumental work Tarjumalal "Mustafid", the first Quran translation in Malay. The interpretation towards the verses with the perspective in gender and the attitudes towards the queen reflected that in the 7th century there had been done a reposition of the role of women in Aceh Darussalam. From 1661 to 1693, approximately for 32 years, Abdurrauf held a position as a Mufti in the kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. However, when Abdurrauf died, the conspiracy to overthrow the queen recurred. And finally, Kamaltuddin (the fourth queen) was successfully ousted in 1699, because of the disruption from the authorities of the kingdom. After the clerics died, the leadership of the Queen in Aceh that had been lasted for more

than 60 years also ended

The legality of the *phenomenon* of women's leaderships in Aceh is still debated until this moment. Even though the leaderships never lasted for more than 60 years, of course they were very remarkable, especially *Safiatuddin* who controlled Aceh for 34 years. It is difficult to find primary data that Islamic scholars also had a very big role in legitimizing the queens' reigns, as *Nuruddin Arraniri* who played a major role in the process of the coronation of the first Queen and *Abdurrauf Al-Singkil* who perpetuated the reign of the Aceh Queens. The needs to study continuously and more *comprehensively* to see the evidence that exists, and presenting it as a whole without gender bias, are some of the reasons to review this article

## **Conclusion**

By raising women's history in Aceh Darussalam, it proves and provides knowledge, persuasion and confirmation on women's role in politics that should be the important agenda for women.

## **References**

Therefore, taking political communication with the government in order to have Good will to push gender mainstream needs to be done in order to increase the understanding of the gender perspective and gender sensitivity in all government institutions either executive, legislative and judicial and religious institutions such as MORA, MUI, and political parties and social organizations

Therefore, both the concept of leadership and political concepts that gain understanding of male pattern must undergo redefinition such a way that leadership can be seen from women's perspectives ; creating the combination of masculine and feminine traits in to the definition of the new powers that can be achieved by both men and women such as firm but sensitive, powerful but soft, tough but empathetic. So, power means to develop *Androgy* characters, for both men and women (Noerhadi, 1991). And the most basic is to empower the women themselves so that political communication strategies can work well.

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