

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

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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'iyahs* 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'iyahs* 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 message 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 *ustadzah*).

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

*da'wah*. The reasons behind this number difference are not found out yet. The demand is definitely not one of them as there are a lot of Religious Assembly that is managed and consists of women. These groups need the presence of *da'iyah*. In addition, there are several religious issues relating to women's lives and the role of *daiyah* is extremely important to explain these issues more transparently. During the era of the Messenger of Allah, this role was done by his wives, Especially Khadija and Aishah. They played active roles in explaining the religious laws relating to the problems faced by women.

Based on the reality in the community that the number of *da'iyah* relatively fewer than that of *da'i* (male Islamic preachers), it is necessary to find out the reasons. Furthermore, it is also interesting to explore the factors that lead current active *daiyah* to become Islamic preachers and the reasons behind their decision to become ones despite their other roles as the wives for their husbands and the mothers for their children.

## 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 Understanding and Scope of *Da'wah*

*Da'wah* in the same limited sense with the lecture is the activity to invite people to understand, live and practice Islam and prevent people from doing that is forbidden by Allah SWT. These two activities are summarized in terms of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*. The meaning as stated by Sheikh Ali Mahfudh (1952: 17) is to motivate people to goodness and guidance, enjoins good deeds and prevents from evil, for the happiness of the world and the hereafter.

In a broad sense, it is understood as an effort to reconstruct society in accordance with Islamic social ideals, which is a mercy for the universe. To be realized it must be done in the form of a triad of *dakwah bil Lisan, bil kitabah* and *bil Hal*. *Da'wah bil lisan* can be done through face to face communication, such as lecture or hear and learn in a religious assembly, or using electronic media such as radio and television. *Da'wah bil katabah* or through writing conveys religious messages through print media such as bulletins, brochures, newspapers, magazines and books. While *da'wah bil hal* is *da'wah* with exemplary and social action.

### 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 (*hudan*) 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-attendees 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 *daiyah* 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 *daiyah* 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'iyahs* 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'iyah* are not always born from families or parents who are also scholars or *da'iyah*. The data related to the heredity, particularly in terms of educational background of the *daiyachs* in this research can be summarized as follows:

Table 1: Da'iyahs' parents' educational background.

Da'iyah	Father's Education	Mother's Education
Aminah	Primary school (not graduated)	Primary school (not graduated)
Badriah	Primary school	Primary school
Dawiyah	Junior high school	Primary school
Fauziah	Primary school	Primary school (not graduated)
Halimah	Junior high school	Primary school

The data above show the educational level of *da'iyahs'* 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'iyahs* 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 *daiyachs'* families were quite low. But one important thing to know that all *da'iyahs* have had high motivation and enthusiasm of learning since childhood and they were supported by their parents, so they become successful and influential *daiyachs* in Medan.

##### 4.1 Da'iyahs' Education

Their parents' economic difficulties did not discourage the *daiyachs* 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'iyahs' levels of education.

Da'iyah	Level of Education	Graduation Year
Aminah	Magister	2007
Badriah	Magister	2008
Dawiyah	Bachelor	1988
Fauziah	Bachelor	1979
Halimah	Senior High School	1964

As *daiyachs* 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.

Da'iyah	Organization in High School	Organization in College
Aminah	<i>Al-Washliyah</i> Student Association (ASA)	-
Badriah	ASA	ASA
Dawiyah	ASA	ASA
Fauziah	Indonesian Muslim Students	Islamic Student Association
Halimh	ASA	-

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 fro 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.

Daiyah	Early Da'wah Experience	Year
Aminah	During college year in Egypt	1982
Badriah	Since a student	1975
Dawiyah	During KKN (Student Study Service)	1987
Fauziah	Taking part in a speech contest in <i>Aliyah</i> (high school)	1964
Halimah	Being a Master of Ceremony	1964

Based on the above table, it can be seen that these *daiyachs* 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 their position as wives and mothers of their children. When their 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 *Maulid*, *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 *daiyachs*.

Based on the results of interviews with the five *da'iyachs* 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 5: *Da'wah* materials and the literature.

Daiyah	<i>Da'wah</i> Material	Literature
Aminah	<i>Tafsir</i>	<i>Ihya' Ulumuddin/Al-Ghazali Fiqh Kontemporer</i> (Yusuf Qardhowi)
Badriah	<i>Fiqh</i>	<i>Fikih Islam</i> (Sulaiman Rasyid)
Dawiyah	<i>Akidah, Fiqh dan Akhlak</i>	<i>Tafsir Al-Mishbah</i> (M. Quraish Shihab)
Fauziah	<i>Fiqh</i>	<i>Ihya' Ulumuddin</i> (Al-Ghazali) <i>Bidayatul Mujtahid, Fiqh Sunnah Sayyid Sabiq, Tafsir Al-Maraghi</i> (Musthafa Al-Maraghi)
Halimah	<i>Fiqh</i>	<i>Al-Qurroh</i>

In general, the *da'wah* materials they convey in 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 *da'iyachs*; *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 *da'iyachs* 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 *da'iyachs* 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 *da'iyachs* 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 *da'iyachs* have sought to exploit the potential of pilgrims for *da'wah* activities, such as assisting the poor, *dhua'afa* 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, *da'iyachs* 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.

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