Cinta Sebagai Langkah Awal Kesetaraan Gender dalam Agama
(Studi Kasus Akan Pengalaman Cinta St. Teresa dari Avila dan Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyya)

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INTISARI

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan kesetaraan gender dalam perspektif cinta dalam Islam dan Katolik yang terpeloporiaskan oleh Rabi'ah al-Adawiyya's and St. Teresa of Avila's. Dalam perspektif sejarah, Dimana lampu perempuan merupakan sosok yang paling mula dimana mereka diasosiasikan sebagai tuhan; misalnya di India, ada berbagai-macam tuhan dengan ustadzat tertentu; tuhan Saraswati, Brigit, Nikeha, Cerruca, List, Most and Ibrat. Sementara sekarang sudah terlihat banyak budi bagaimana perempuan diposisikan sebagai sosok kedua setelah laki-laki. Ada dua tokoh yang dipandang di tes ini yaitu St. Teresa of Avila dan Rabi'ah al-Adawiyya's, mereka memiliki konsep cinta yang mirip walau pun berasal dari dua agama dan masa serta daerah yang berbeda. Disatu sisi pengalaman esoterik cinta berupa Spiritual Marriage (jawin secara spiritual) dimana Teresa mengalami proses perkawinannya dengan Jesus dan disisi lain Mahabbah (cinta esoterik) dimana Rabi'ah mengalami begitu kuatnya perasaan cintanya dengan Allah. Dalam penelitian ini, juga kami membandingkan dua pengalaman diatas dengan pengalaman cinta esoterik lainnya tapi dilalui oleh dua sosok laki-laki yang juga berbeda agama dan masa serta daerahnya yaitu John of The Cross dan Jalal al-Din al-Rumi. Akhirnya, hasil penelitian ini membuktikan bahwa dalam cinta esoterik, segala bentuk perenungan, pemahaman memosisikan laki-laki dan perempuan itu, setara karena Tuhan tidak melihat jenis kelamin, dengan demikian, cinta esoterik seharusnya menjadi kajian awal untuk melihat kesetaraan gender dalam agama.

Kata-kunci: Cinta, Kesetaraan Gender dan Agama

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Historically, in ancient times, women were main important creatures, which were identified as goddesses. This phenomenon did not only occur in certain area but mostly all over the world. In India for instance, Goddess Sarasvati was prayed to as the discoverer of the original alphabet. Goddess Brigit, who was located in Celtic Ireland, was prayed to as the goddess of language. In Sumer there was a goddess who was known as the creator of clay tablets and the art of writing. They called this goddess Nisaba. Furthermore, in Ireland, the goddess Celtic Carriduwen was famous as a smart and clever goddess. In pre-Greek there was Goddess Gea, as a wise figure. Isis was goddess of justice in Egypt as well as in Greek, and another Egyptian was Goddess Maat as a universal truth. Lastly in Mesopotamia, Ishtar was legendary goddess who was worshiped in the city of Nimrud.

Nowadays on, there is much evidence to prove that women have always been subordinated to men, for instance in ritual -women are not allowed to be imam sululat (prayer leaders)- and socially -women have less inheritance than men- and so forth. Furthermore, some religious leaders tend to ignore women’s contributions to religions, for instance in Islam there are at least three women, who contributed to developing this religion: (1) Khadijah who gave strong motivation to Muhammad from the early prophetic (2) Aisyah who is one of the main resources of Hadist (tradition), and (3) Fatimah who is called the mother of Sy’i’ah.

However in mysticism, there is no distinction between the sexes. God never considers men or women as unequal; instead both are equal before Him. Even Aisan claimed, “When a woman walks in the way of God, she couldn’t be called a woman.” Accordingly, when a man walks in God’s way he could not be called a man anymore.

Moreover, according to Frithjof Schuon, mysticism is not only dealing with gender equity but also it is a way to unite one religion to another. Because all religions consist of essence and form, the heart is esoteric (mystical experience) and the form is exoteric (ritual/syariah). So Schuon concludes that religion is like a heart in essence while differing in form.

According to the book “The Transcendent Unity Of Religion”, Frithjof Schuon states that religions in the world can be drawn into two general ideas. The first is esoterism, which is the essence or the heart of religion. And the second is exoterism, which is the existence or the body of religion.

Esoterism is a universal value, which is available in those religions especially three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).
according to Schuon, in order to be able to actualise universalism among religions, only after contracting with another civilization. Because understanding of only one certain religion we could be trapped into an exoteric point of view. Intellect as the existence of esoterism, which is also God's Pecency, is not only in a human being, but also in all order of nature. As the consequence all being has intellect faculty and it makes sense that God is all and all in God (Pantheism). Hence, the relationship is not only between God and human, but also among animal, vegetable, mineral and angelic states. Because every existence consists of intellect's potency and reason/ratio is an important tool to understand intellect. This is the main reason of human ability to know intellect, which is better than other existences. This indicates that esoterism is universal value.

On the other hand, in terms of esoterism, Schuon stated that it is identified as dogmatism in religion, which could make distinction among religions and tend to be exclusive. According to him religious dogma (exoterism) is limited by itself. It is hard to understand the light of its inherent truth, which is universal order. This idea is limited by philosophical-theology, historical, or sentimental proof, because esoteric requires an absolute belief in one particular religion and moreover every esoteric perspective claims their religion are the only true and the legitimate one. In other words, esoteric idea is trapped in a relative point of view. This view is not only against universal salvation but also could create conflicts among religions, for instance among Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) there some conflicts emerge such as in Iran (Percent; Poso, Maluku, Siaubondo, Tasikmalaya, etc.), Palestine and so forth. Did God wish to submit the world to one religion only? This question is needed to give awareness to those religious people who still insist to make all religions become one.

In short, the relationship between esoterism and esoterism is like the relationship between from and spirit or expression and symbol. Conversely esoteric people deny the reality of the intellect and also deny the presence of uncreated intellect. Those happen because, firstly every religious person has no direct participation in the Pericetic faculty and there will be a prejudicial view do those people who have experience of the presence of the uncreated intellect. And hopefully, for the esoteric, God is primarily loved, then they will know what they love, and for the esoteric God is primarily known, in the end they will love what they know. In short esoteric is merely transcending the form (esoteric) in the name of spirit.

Next, what is ultimate love? This term is really connected to esoterism. However, according to Al-Halal al-Din al-Rumi and Ibn Arabi love can't
be defined. Ibn Arabi explained

"Love has no definition through which is essence can be known, rather it is given descriptive and verbal definitions nothing more. Those who define love have not known it, those who have not taste it by drinking it own have not known it and those who say that they have been quenched by it have not known it. For love is drinking without quenching." 5

It is similar with what Al-Jalal al-Din al-Rumi said in his poem: "Some one asked, 'What is loverhood? I replied 'don't ask me about these meaning' When you become like me you will know: When it calls you and you will tell its tale'. 7

Historically there are some examples of women who reach the peak of spirituality or being in union of God, because women were able to have a great opportunity to attain the rank of sainthood either in Islam or Christianity.

In Islam, Lady Fatimah (daughter of Muhammad) was not only a mystic but also the first Qutb (spiritual leader). It was a good development in terms of Sufism that gave women opportunities to reach sainthood and also proof that a woman was able to lead a mystic group. In this religion, the relationship between saint and Lord has nothing to do with sexes as well as gender. Meaning there is being neither male nor female in spiritual life. 3

The holy prophet have laid it down that "God does not look upon your outward forms". It is not the outward form that matter, but the inner purpose of the heart, as the prophet said, "the people are resembled (on the Day of Judgment) according to the purpose of their heart".

... So also Abu Yus said that when on the Day of Resurrection the summons goes forth "Omen" (the first person to set foot in the class of men (i.e. those who are to enter the paradise) will be Mary, upon whom be peace. ... The true explanation of this fact (that women count for as much as men among the saints) is that wherever these people, the Sufis, are they have no separate existence in the Unity of God. In the unity, what remain of the existence of "I" and "Thou"? So how can men and women continue to be? So too, Abu Ali Faradad said, "Prophecy is the essence, the very being, of power and sublimity. Superiority and inferiority do not exist in it. Undoubtedly saintship is of the same type." 5

In this religion, mysticism seems a more negative image rather than positive, because the term of mysticism has been reduced into Sufism. And it has been clear that Sufism is so radical a distortion of the orthodox doctrine as to constitute almost a separate religion. This makes sense
because the Qur'an focuses on 'overwhelmingly the complete otherness of God' 18. However, mysticism is not only trans-doctrine, which is in the early steps use ritual (docile) then jump into the essence, but also there are some verses as well as Hadist, which support Sufism doctrine such as “I become the hearing with which he hears, the seeing with which he sees, the hand with which he grasps, the foot with which he walks” 19. And also the verse 35 in the chapter 24 “God is the light of the heaven and earth. The parable of His light is as if there were a niche, and within it a lamp; the lamp enclosed in glass as if it were a brilliant star, lit from the blessed tree, an olive neither of the East nor the West, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it. Light upon Light! God doth guide whom He will to His light. God doth set forth parables for men and God doth know all things”. 20

In Christianity there are many women mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Beatrix of Nazareth, Hadewijch of Antwerp and Maguerite Perete. Hildegard of Bingen was not only a mystic but also writer of books related to mysticism, for example Explanation of the Role of St. Benedict, Physica, Causae et Causar, Scivias, (Know the Way). Liber Vitae Meritorum (The Book of the Merits of Life), Liber Divinorum Operum (The Book of Divine Works). And Mechthild of Magdeburg had an experience of union of God through love as well as knowledge.

Love without knowledge
Seems darkness to the wise soul
Knowledge without fruition
Seems to her infernal pains
Fruition without death
She can't sufficiently deplore 21

Beatrice of Nazareth performed union of God through Holy Love by seven manners of love. 22 Hadewijch of Antwerp stated a mystical statement that "to become God with God but there are few of us who wish to be a man with his humanity" 23. And Maguerite Perete had mystical concept i.e. "The Mirror of Simple Annihilated Soul" meaning the liberation of the soul, which one attains by annihilating oneself in God through love, thus being transformed into Him. 24

Still, there are many other mystics in Christianity such as Gertrude the Great, Angela of Foligno, Birgitta of Sweden, finally, Julian of Norwich who stated Jesus is the True Mother, "and so forth.

Actually, According to Geoffrey Christianity is called as mystical religion. It does make senses, because Holy Books in all religions including
Christianity become the main source its Gospels especially the fourth Gospel (John) mentions so many verses, which can be identified as mystical verses, such as “Abide in me and I in you” (John 15:4) “I and the Father are one (John 10:30), etc. Furthermore, in the contemporary understanding of Christianity, Jesus is the revelation itself, which is performed by Word. And God Father never separated from His Word, so Jesus as Son or Word and Father were always in union.\(^7\)

Those examples are proof that women have a big contribution in mystical development both in Islam and Christianity. In this thesis write two well-known saintly women (St. Teresa of Avila and Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya) over others, because firstly, both are the most popular women mystics well known with the concept of love. Secondly, Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya and St. Teresa of Avila have similar mystical experiences (Majabbeel and Spiritual Married). Thirdly, Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya is not only the first mystic woman of union of God in Islam, but also the most important person in mystical love. Lastly, movie of “God of Avila” and some books, which are written by and about her as well as Doctor HC are indication that St. Teresa of Avila is also one of the most important persons in Christianity.

According to Farid al-Din Attar, Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya was born in Basra a city in southern Iraq around AH 513-589.\(^8\) While, Denise and Margaret Smith stated between 717 (AH 95 or 99) - 801 C.A.\(^9\) She lived in a poor family. Her name is Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya because she was born after three other children.\(^10\)

According to Rafie, who quote from Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya, there are four steps to be able to reach ultimate love;

Firstly, repentance (tanhuma) is the first step. It is an important way to demolish all sinful. As some people have known that sin is an obstacle to become close to God. Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya had many times asked forgiveness from God, because on one hand, her willingness to be close to God by ignoring the world, on the other hand, she could not avoid real life (world) especially when she was a slave. This is the main reason why Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya treated repentance as the first step. There are three kind of repentances; (1) repentance from sin (2) repentance from ignorance (3) repentance from seeing his/her own goodness.

Secondly, renunciation (zulhu) is the following step repentance. She thought that the world always tend to sinfulness. Then she tried to avoid any affords which can lead to loving the material world. Rabi’a al-Adawiyya often prayed “Oh my Lord, please make me ignore the world business to be able to be close to You”.\(^11\) One day she rejected an offering
from one of lester in Basra, it happened while she was sick, the man come and offered her some money to pay for going to the doctor, but she refused because she hesitated whether that money come from halal or haram sources. In addition when she wanted to ask help from other people, she always remembered that God never forgot anyone because of poverty nor remembered anyone because of wealth.

Renunciation is not symbol, which is performed by dirty, untidy cloths and so on. But it is essential behaviour, which is performed by living in this world based on reeds. According to Sari as-Saifi, renunciation is not poverty, which is only having a little money, but it is asceticism, which is a little love of money. Finally renunciation in Sufism is only away to come to ultimate love, it is not a purpose, which some zahids perform to hate their willingness-on those material in the world.

Thirdly, Rise means a certain characteristic, to accept the events that happen to someone. Rabia al-Adawiyya showed her rise not only during her daily activities but also she accepted her position as a slave, while she only asked whether God gave permission on this condition. But finally God decided not to leave her in slavery. According to al-Quyayri (376-458) someday Rabia al-Adawiyya was asked through what measurement be called rise, if anyone felt the same happiness in joy as well as sorrow / suffer / painul.

Fourthly, Marnabatih means Isam, which is prayer to God as if you see Him, not if you believe that God sees you. Rabia al-Adawiyya knew that God was always everywhere and all the time. God monitored all her activities including her willingness on something. He is everything and everything is Him. From this perspective, Rabia al-Adawiyya was included in pantheism.

Lastly, Majnabatih means ultimate love. After those four steps then, Rabia al-Adawiyya really felt that she was in love with God. Love is her spiritual peak. Rabia al-Adawiyya loved God not to gain heaven or because of fear of hell but she loved God because of God Himself. He says "O my lord, if I worship thee from fear of Hell, the burn me in the Hell, and if I worship thee from hope of paradise, exclude me then, but if I worship thee for thine own sake then withhold not from the thine eternal beauty". In which, Rabia al-Adawiyya said that God has His intellect softly through knowledge to those people who only have knowledge, through good deeds for people who zahed as goals, while God will open His intellect to those people who love him as the goal of their life.

Similarly, St. Teresa of Avila was born in the Castilian city of Avila, Spain, March 26th, 1515. Her full name was St. Teresa of Avila Sanchez.
de Cepeda y. Ahumada. She came from Jewish (grand father) and Christian (grand mother) family. Avila was added to her name (St. Teresa of Avila) because she was born in that area. She was a mystic woman who was concerned with ultimate love and she is one of only three women who received Doctors of the Universal Church. St. Teresa of Avila was known also as St. Teresa of Avila of Jesus. St. Teresa of Avila died in Alba, October 4th, 1582, at the age of 67.

There are seven dwelling places to reach ultimate love, three of first dwelling places focus on religious belief, while fourth comes into spiritual experience and lastly fifth, sixth and seventh are more in union of God.

Firstly, this dwelling place is certain situation, which people are only required to acknowledge the existence of God. This has something to do with belief. It is religious awareness.

Secondly, this condition can be identified by some value or norm or ritual in certain religion (Christianity), which is explored by priests or religious leaders through sermons, discussion, book, etc. It is claimed as religious devotion.

Thirdly, the situation of awareness, people sometimes feel bored in all religious activities, because some of those activities have nothing to do with their needs. In this dwelling place, people are aware that they come into spiritual surface, which is a little dangerous, because they feel guilty of their own religion and so on. It can be said as Spiritual Married.

Fourthly, this dwelling place is not only aware of spiritual condition but they begin to enter into supernatural experience.

Fifthly, this is the beginning of union of God. St. Teresa of Avila said “enter the center of the soul without going through any door” (V: 1.12).

Sixthly, this level is level of rapture (arrobamiento). St. Teresa of Avila stated “thus you will see what His Majesty does do conclude this betrothal, which I understand comes about when He gives the soul ruptures that draws it out of its senses” (VI: 4.2).

Seventhly, this last dwelling place is more controllable than the previous one. This level is a culmination of spiritual experience.

Those two examples show that females are able to reach the highest spiritual union of God through their loves and from such Rabi’ a al-’Adawiyya and St. Teresa of Avila’s experiences are indicated that men and women have no differences to reach the highest level of spirituality (to be united with God).
In addition, to compare between St. Teresa of Avila and Rabia al-‘Adawiyya, it is not only because both lived in different era, area as well as religion but also mystical experience is more as individual case. It is probably Mahabba, which was performed by Rabia al-‘Adawiyya never ever occur to anyone else, and so Spiritual Marriage.

However it will be more interesting and complete, when this thesis explain briefly the comparison between St. Teresa of Avila and Rabia al-‘Adawiyya either their life or spiritual experiences.

In terms of their life, St. Teresa of Avila lived in religious condition as well as institution almost in her all life, while Rabia al-‘Adawiyya was more complicated, in the early childhood she lived with his religious family then she was trapped into slavery (unreligious condition) and she never lived in religious institution. However, both came from poor family.

In terms of spiritual experiences, St. Teresa of Avila claimed her mystical experience as Spiritual Married. Meanwhile, Rabia al-‘Adawiyya’s was called as Mahabba (Love). It indicated that St. Teresa of Avila jumps one more step then Rabia al-‘Adawiyya, because St. Teresa of Avila enter into spouse not Rabia’s. But formulated love into marriage might be trapped into institutionalization (exotericism). It also can be seen from both steps to reach their ultimate love, St. Teresa of Avila with Seven Dwelling Places tend to more practical and it seems those steps are only available to Christian (exclusive). On the other hand, Rabia al-‘Adawiyya’s steps tend to more moral perspective so it looks like disarrange, random and more inclusive (not only Muslim).

Furthermore, Seven Dwelling Places was originally coming from St. Teresa of Avila herself. But Rabia al-‘Adawiyya’s step was coming from someone else.

To sum up, ultimate love as one of several mystical experiences of union of God is able to perform gender equity in religions. It is not only because religiously God never considered the outward form of human being whether male or female. Muslim or Christian, etc but also naturally male and female are not different. In case study of mystical experience St. Teresa of Avila And Rabia’s al-‘Adawiyya show clearly that ultimate love either theoretically or practically, are equal. Seyyed Hussein Nasr concludes that

"God, known by His Arabic name, Allah, is beyond all duality and relationality, beyond the differences of gender and of all qualities that distinguish being from each other in the world. Yet He is the source of all existence and all cosmic and human quality as well as the end to whom all things return."
NOTE IN THE TEXT

1 Carol P. Christ and Judith, Womenspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, Harper Collins Publisher, New York, 1979, p. 121, 122, 123


4 ibid, p.2


8 Margaret Smith, Muslim Women Mystics, Oneworld, Oxford, 2001, p.1

9 ibid.

10 R.C Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim Mysticism, 1960, pp. 2f

11 It is one of Hadist an-Nawawi from Shohih Bukhari 18, 38, Graham, Divine word and Prophetic word in the early Islam, translated by Michele Sells, Hague, 1977, p.173


13 Emilie Zum Brunn and Georgette Epiney Burgard, Women Mystic in Medieval Europe, Translated by Sheila Hughes, Paragon House, United State, 1991, p.46

14 ibid. p.79

15 ibid. p.204

16 ibid. p.151

17 ibid. p.196

18 Margaret Smith, Muslim Women Mystics, Oneworld, Oxford, 2001, p. 13

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