

Women and Islam Disability in Ratna Indraswari Ibrahim's Works

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intersection of women, Islam, and disability as represented in the literary works of Ratna Indraswari Ibrahim (RII), a disabled woman author. RII's work is significant for its advocacy of women's independence and equality with men, while also highlighting the potential and agency of people with disabilities. The research aims to uncover how RII, as a disabled author, promotes innovation, independence, and resilience in the face of life's challenges. Employing a qualitative methodology, this study analyzes RII's writings through the lens of hermeneutic theory, encompassing textual, contextual, and critical interpretations. Feminist theory is also utilized to examine RII's personal advocacy for women's dignity. Data, derived from RII's authorship and literary works. This research lies in its unique intersectional approach, examining the representation of women, Islam, and disability in the work of a single author. The study reveals that while the struggles and rights of women, as portrayed in RII's novels, align with Islamic values of equality as found in the Qur'an, the lived experiences of people with disabilities often fall short of this ideal. RII's work seeks to challenge societal perceptions and advocate for justice and inclusivity, aiming to transform perspectives on disability and promote equality in all aspects of life. This study has the potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of the representation of disability in literature, particularly within the context of Islamic and feminist discourses. It can inform discussions on social justice, inclusivity, and the rights of marginalized groups.

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INTRODUCTION

Ricoeur (1973) said that hermeneutic is a methodology in interpreting symbols, text or meta-text. The point of hermeneutic is "to understand" (*verstegen*). It is the reason that it needs approach and methods such as philosophy, theology, anthropology, sociology, semantic, linguistics, philology, phenomenology, psychology, discourse analysis, and so on. Hermeneutic was born and developed widely in West-Christian, even it recently spread in East-Islam. This development makes hermeneutic emphasized on different meaning caused by different concentrations of its reviewers.

Abrams (in Khan, 2021) explained that literature work reflects its society and it cannot be avoided by society condition or the powers in its era. Basically, the literature work is the personal individual's work realized by the authors' imagination. The literature work is the reflection of personal individual in the form of ideas, expression, intention, tendency, and

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ideology of the author. The literature work cannot deny the background of history or literature system: the universe, the reader, and the author. The information of the author has an important role in the review of literary studies. This is because literary work is essentially a form of the author's experience (Rahayu, 2020; Tevdoradze, 2023; Khikhlushko, 2023)

Ratna Indraswari Ibrahim (hereinafter abbreviated as RII) is the author with the tight bond on her era's power. As the author, she has experienced important roles in her life (Mossaik, 2003). Her experience is not immediately changing her life in direct. There is a process in her journey as an author. The value of this struggle is related and outlined in Islam and the emphasis of hermeneutic can be categorized in three domain interpretation, interpretation "from within" the text (meaning within text), interpretation of elements around the text (meaning behind the text), and critical interpretation on the text (meaning in front of the text).

There are some researches that discuss about women, Islam, and disability. Goudarzi (2021) discuss about Ayatollah Saanei's work focuses on reinterpreting religious legal texts to promote gender equality, that works within a jurisprudential framework. In addition, Giladi (2022) analyzes 30 Saudi novels from 1980 to 2000 to examine how the ideal Muslim woman is portrayed in literature, in relation to evolving Saudi attitudes about women's education and employment. He argues that while the Saudi regime promoted a traditional ideal of women as wives and mothers confined to the domestic sphere, the novels presented more complex perspectives on these issues. Hashim et al. (2022) discuss about women and disability that analyzes two popular Malay novels and their telenovela adaptations to explore Malaysian attitudes toward disability. It compares the perceptions of disability in these works of fiction to real-world experiences of caregivers and families of children with autism. The article also examines how the concepts of forgiveness and repentance are portrayed in the Malay worldview in relation to disability. Attallah (2023) uses a "feminist disability" lens, combining disability and feminist studies, to analyze infertility in the Qur'an's annunciation scenarios. It re-reads these texts in the context of gender and disability studies to illustrate the complexities of Qur'anic bodies, affirming and destabilizing binary readings of gender. The study engages with theoretical paradigms, including feminist theories, to create a dialogical encounter between the Qur'an and intellectual conversations. Fadhillah et al. (2024) examines gender equality in four novels by Egyptian feminist Nawal el Saadawi. It employs a qualitative method, using Charles Sander Peirce's trichotomy model, to analyze aspects of gender equality in the texts. The research identifies subordination, stereotypes, and violence in Islamic ideology as the dominant aspects of gender inequality in the novels.

Based on the previous studies, this study focusses on the intricate ways in which RII's literary works navigate the complexities of being a woman with a disability within a specific socio-cultural and religious context. Her narratives offer a unique lens through which to examine the interplay between personal experience, societal expectations, and religious beliefs. By analyzing her writings, this research seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how marginalized voices articulate their identities and challenge dominant discourses. The significance of studying RII's work lies in its potential to shed light on the lived realities of individuals who occupy multiple marginalized positions. Her perspective

as a disabled woman writing within an Islamic context provides valuable insights into the ways in which these different aspects of identity intersect and influence one another.

Furthermore, this research aims to explore the extent to which RII's literary works engage with and contribute to feminist discourses. Her portrayal of women, particularly women with disabilities, may offer alternative perspectives on traditional feminist theories and debates. By examining the themes of agency, empowerment, and resistance in her writings, this study seeks to determine how RII's work aligns with or diverges from established feminist frameworks.

In addition to its focus on gender and disability, this study also considers the role of Islam in shaping RII's worldview and literary expression. It examines how Islamic teachings and values are reflected in her portrayal of characters, themes, and narratives. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between faith, identity, and creative expression, particularly in the context of a Muslim woman with a disability.

Ultimately, this research endeavors to provide a comprehensive analysis of Ratna Indraswari Ibrahim's literary contributions, highlighting their significance in the fields of disability studies, feminist studies, and Islamic studies. By examining the intersectional themes present in her work, this study seeks to amplify marginalized voices and promote a more inclusive and equitable understanding of literature and society.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach, recognizing that the nature of the data and data sources are non-numerical (Creswell, 2007). The research utilizes a hermeneutic framework, drawing on its three components (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014): (1) interpretation "from within" the text, to analyze the meaning within RII's works; (2) interpretation of elements around the text, to explore the contextual factors influencing her writing; and (3) critical interpretation of the text, to examine the broader implications and impact of her work. In addition, a feminist perspective informs the analysis, acknowledging RII's own independence as a disabled woman and her advocacy for women's dignity and equality.

The primary data for this study consists of documents related to RII's authorship and her literary works. While this focus allows for an in-depth exploration of RII's perspectives and representations, it also presents certain limitations. The study is necessarily constrained by the availability of RII's written works and any existing scholarly literature or biographical information. Further research might benefit from incorporating other data sources, such as interviews or critical reception studies, if available, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the context and impact of her work.

Data collection involved a thorough review of RII's published works, focusing on the themes of women's rights, disability, and their intersection with Islamic values. The analysis of this data followed a three-component model: data reduction, data presentation, and deduction. These components were applied iteratively, with the analysis process involving a cyclical approach to data collection and interpretation. This iterative process allowed for a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between the literary texts, RII's perspectives, and the broader socio-cultural context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Interpretation “from within” The Text (Meaning Within Text)

The main objective of interpreting “from within” is finding the meaning objectively as desired by the text initiator (author). The model of interpretation often regarded as theoretic hermeneutic or romantic hermeneutic. The steps are initiated by two approaches toward a statement – as offered by Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher (Schleiermacher et al., 1977), (a) historic-objective reconstruction, and (b) historic-subjective reconstruction. Historic-subjective reconstruction tries to discuss a statement in relation to language on the whole (text analysis with linguistic approach). Meanwhile, historic-subjective reconstruction is aimed to discuss the beginning the statement comes to someone’s idea (psychological analysis of the initiator). It is that the text will still live if the author pays her/his attention to the context of the text history, and the understanding subtlety and explanation subtlety would be found. In line with the works of RII and disability, the interpretation “from within” the text has main purpose to find out the objective meaning as desired by the text initiator (author), Ratna Indraswari Ibrahim.

Adopting Schleiermacher (Schleiermacher et al., 1977), the steps conducted undergoes two approaches: (1) historic-objective reconstruction, it tries to discuss a statement by RII in relation with overall language relationship. This study used critical approach to analyze RII’s works. Critic to the works and disability of RII is based on the association determination, literary expression of RII. (2) Historic-subjective reconstruction aims to discuss psychological situation of RII and her disability during stating something (psychological analysis of the initiator). A statement is a sequence sequentially; experience, understanding, and expressive statement. Therefore, RII’s experience (the initiator) is a structural picture of a stated literary text of disability. The text is, therefore, a historical expression in its era.

RII is a literary author with disability. Accordingly, there are three of her works presented disability, novelette *Batu Sandung* and *Cerpen Ki Dalang*. RII emphasizes that disability is not influencing their perfectness in front of Allah as long as they have strong faith. The prophet also taught that it is not like others’ faiths where disability is not the punishment from Allah SWT but it is forgiveness for the sins. As his word, “No Muslims picked by thorns or more than that except Allah takes note on his/her kindness and remove all of his/her sins” (HR. Bukhari). Not to forget, the Prophet also protects the human rights of disabled people and eliminates discrimination based on disability, which was prevalent before the arrival of Islam. In one of the narrations, the Prophet once appointed one friend named Abdullah Bin Ummy Umm Maktum, a blind person as a muezzin.

RII's life changed after experiencing leg paralysis. RII's physical changes have an impact on changes in perspective and a paradigm shift in life. RII feels grateful because there is still a perfect intelligence and heart. RII can live independently and does not want to be given privileges as a disabled person.

In Islam, such a life makes a person never feel satisfied, and always agitated, because he/she does not turn to spiritual things, does not feel spiritual pleasure because his/her heart's eyes are blind and his soul is shackled by material things. Someone who is blind in heart will be resurrected blindly in the future according to God's word

“Maka sesungguhnya bukanlah mata itu yang buta, tetapi yang buta, ialah hati yang di dalam dada”(QS. Al-Hajj: 46). It means, their eyes are not blind (physical) but the blind are the eyes of their hearts. Even then it was revealed in the journey of her life as below:

"Mommy and my family did not question my physical disability at all. Instead, I realized or not, the family constantly encouraged me to move forward, appearing like someone who was physically normal. Yes thank God ..."

The culmination of RII lies in the awareness of its detachment. Basically because of internal reasons from the personal RII. RII has physically completed the task as a human. The state of disability requires that she survives in real life. Awareness of labelling provides a starting point for change and revolution in life as a writer, activist of Forum Pelangi and chairman of the Bhakti Nurani Malang Foundation, Disable Person Organization, as Director I of Entropic NGO Malang.

The Interpretation of Elements around the Text (Meaning Behind the Text)

Interpretation conducted is no longer focused on the meaning of the text correctly and objectively, but rather on how "action" understands itself. The psychology of the reader / interpreter becomes the object read in this interpretation.

Edmund Husserl (1889-1938), a figure of phenomenological hermeneutics, said that the process of correct understanding must be able to free themselves from prejudice, by "letting the text speak for itself". Therefore, interpreting a text means methodologically isolating the text from all things that have nothing to do, including the biases of the interpreter's subject and allowing it to communicate its own meaning to the subject (Wodak, 2011). This kind of meaning develops suspicion over the interests of the interpreter / reader. This remembers an understanding — as Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) (in Goldberg, 2021) stated — something that emerged and already existed before cognition. Therefore, reading or interpretation is always a re-reading or reinterpretation. Heidegger also called language as a moving dimension of life that enabled the creation of the world from the beginning. Language has an existence where humans participate. So, when a text is read by someone, whether they realize it or not, the interpretation of the text will emerge relatively as well.

This meaning behind the text approach rejects theoretical hermeneutics that seeks to find objective meaning. Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) for example, judged it was impossible to obtain an objective understanding of a text. According to him, the interpreter may not be able to position himself in the position of the author or know the original meaning exactly, because after all the interpreter always grasps the subjective meaning. This statement assumes that humans cannot escape the confinement of the tradition in which he lives, including when he intends to interpret a text (Skinner, 1972). The "pre-understanding" factor (schemata) in the reader / interpreter certainly influences it in dialogue with text and context.

In connection with this, in hermeneutics there are two opposing thoughts, "Intentionalism" and "Gadamerian Hermeneutics". Intentionalism views the meaning as already existing because it is brought by the author/compiler of the text so that it is just waiting for the interpreter's interpretation. While the Gadamerian Hermeneutic is on the contrary that the meaning is sought, constructed, and reconstructed by the interpreter according to the context of interpretation made, so that the meaning of the text is never standard but always changes depending on how, when, and who the reader is.

The truth can be achieved not through methods, but through the dialectic between the interpreter's horizon and the text horizon which is then called the hermeneutic circle. Gadamer also means that hermeneutics is related to the nature of interpretation, not the theory of interpretation, because the meaning holds more value for the life of the reader/interpreter, not the life of the initiator.

Approach to the meaning behind the text, if applied in RII's literary work on disability and feminism, the interpretation of this model develops suspicion of their "interests", because it is impossible to obtain an objective understanding of a text. However, the interpreter always grasps his subjective meaning through "pre-understanding" factors (schemata) and the confinement of tradition. However, the "meaning" of a text is basically fixed, except that "its significance" is constantly changing following the life of the interpreter from one era to another.

In a meaning behind the text, RII's literary work has its author, namely RII herself. RII is an individual test which includes aspects of religious integrity, daily behavior, religious perceptions, ideology and politics adopted, in addition to tests of memory resilience and intelligence levels. The production of the meaning of the work of RII disability and feminism based on the interpreter's "taste" can be seen from the following interpretations.

The majority of RII's work defends women, fights for humanity and disability which provides mental education and usability for others. Women are led to realize the role as a whole subject and a strong will (good will) to change and change the life journey that is more useful and useful.

RII gives an example to the public when she undergoes social functions in resisting oppression smoothly and softly without being anarchic and open. Through her literary work it can provide fundamental mental education to fight in a significant way. Literary works are made into the awareness of various parties as well as sharp weapons in countering injustice and making human beings humanist.

A concrete example of the result is novelette Batu Sandung (2007) as a representation of the culmination of RII's labeling. Novelette, which consists of three chapters with the main character, is a woman who tells herself, her mind, and her attitude of life is RII's inner expression personally. Through the novel, RII reveals interesting aspects of women with all their problems, including RII's own inner self.

The Epiphany relevance RII disability as an author with literary work was actually experienced as a disabled person. In a literary work entitled Batu Sandung (2007), it tells Irina's character who lives as a disable person. The figure is actually a representation of RII itself. RII tells stories, about all desires, ideals and obsessions in his life.

RII wants to persuade the reader in a dilemma faced by Irina - a disabled woman who is the main character of the novel. Irina tried to struggle in overcoming her ego and turned upside down to prove that she was actually no less normal than anyone else. Irina's figure as an illustration of RII as a disabled person who must be pitied, assisted and given privileges.

"... Oh, I hate it so much! I feel underestimated. I think Adis is so knowledgeable about all my life's problems. Maybe he doesn't understand at all that I feel insulted by his attitude. Isn't what can be protected continuously only people who are considered unable to grow up? Has my paralysis become an excuse for others to intervene way of my life?"

In this novel, it seems the nuance of war against the marginalization of disabled people. Irina's inner opposition between an existence and love, was combined precisely with a straightforward yet interesting language by RII. Novelette Batu Sandung (2007) is more accurately called the autobiography of the author. In Islam, what RII aspires for and fights for is reflected in QS. Al-An'am: 39, *And those who reject Our verses are deaf, mute and in complete darkness. Whoever is desired by Allah (his error), He will surely be led astray* 58. *And whoever Allah wants (to give guidance), surely He will put Him on a straight path.*

As an illustration to connect the hermeneutic of RII's literary works can be seen in the following chart.

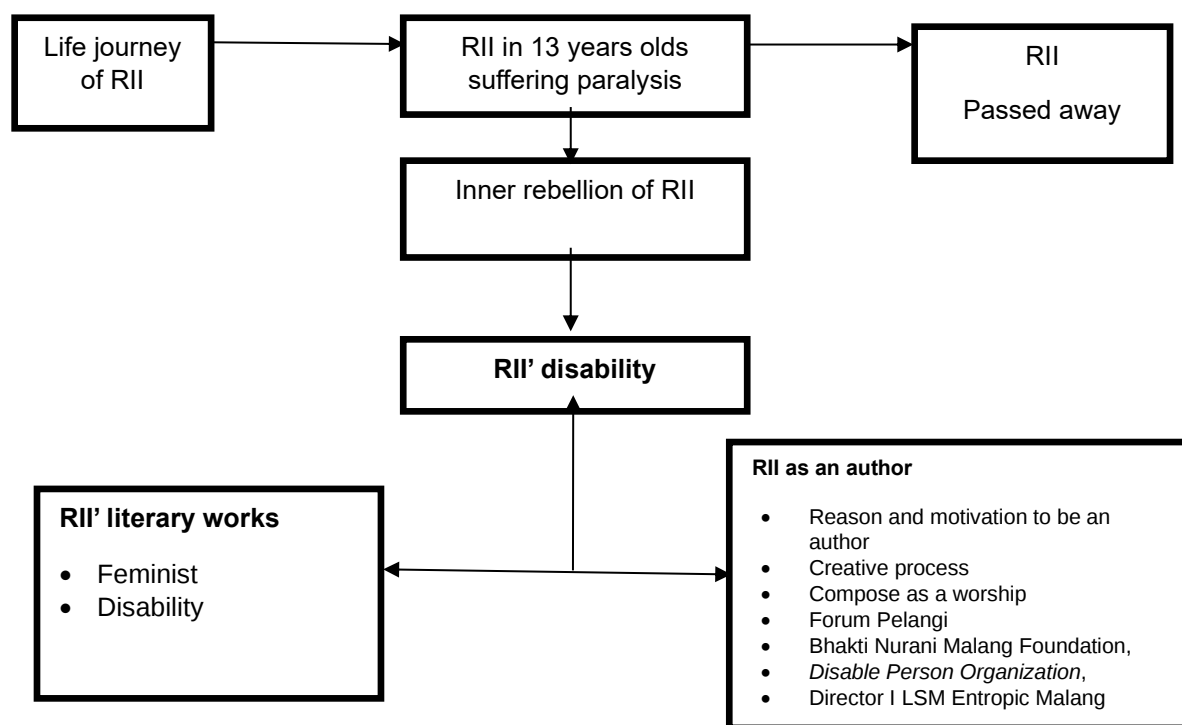


Figure 1. The correlation between hermeneutic literary work and RII as the author

Based on the Figure 1, the method adopted by RII is in a subtle way, or more precisely, in making changes it must be in accordance with the principle of justice. Method conducted to improve mental is by constitution and peace. The excerpt of John Lenon song, "Imagine", is as a proof of RII's thought and view of the world where she wants to live in harmony and humanity filled with peace.

Interpretation "opposing" the Text (Meaning in Front of the Text)

The interpretation of this stage is deliberately trying to uncover the content of interests behind the text. By questioning the relationship of the micro text to the macro community context, this interpretation combines the tradition of textual interpretation - which always sees the text in a closed space - with the broader context of society. The biggest point of this interpretation is seeing text as a practice of power that carries certain ideological values. Language, socially and historically, is a "form of action" in the dialectical relationship between text and social structure. Therefore, the meaning must be focused on how the text is formed and formed from social relations and certain social contexts.

This is because, as Jurgen Habermas stated (in Goldberg,2021), critical hermeneutic figures, an understanding is preceded by certain ideological interests and content. Therefore, determining the horizon of understanding is a social interest that involves the interests of the interpreter. Every form of interpretation is dissected from bias and elements of political, economic, social, and ethnic and gender interests. In this hermeneutic model, the text is assumed not as a medium of understanding as in the previous hermeneutic model, but as a medium of domination and power (Schleiermacher et al., 1977). That is why, since in the process, the text must have been suspected.

Likewise with short stories, novels, and RII's novels, if it is examined, dissected, and sharpened more is 'blind' feminism. This terminology is based on various works of RII in fighting for women that are still not specific and general.

"I think this country has a masculine character. Therefore, she likes symbols of violence. As an illustration, the patriarchal ideological biases that exist in our country give rise to a big impact, widening on the system in this country. This means that the country in this context presents men. And what kind of woman is raised by a masculine tradition? As usual, they are formed into silence mass and marginal communities. Whether we realize it or not, men in this country still think that the role of women is still on the domestic social level. Thus, in any story the super hero is male." (Ibrahim, 2007)

Certain social relations and social contexts, the RII era in composing literature are literary texts with assumptions as a manifestation of psychological, biographical and ideological authorship. Thus, the author's aspect becomes a focal point in the interpretation and analysis of literary works. RII's literary works in the form of novels, novelette, and short stories are the manifestations and expressions of the authors as the results of contemplation psychologically, biographically and ideologically. The building of ideology as the culmination of RII's work in the form of harmony is the end result of achieving his thoughts.

Literary works are seen as symbolic-structural as a textual code whose formation is closely related to both authorship and sociocultural expressions. The texts worked on by RII have a network of meanings ranging from themes, thoughts to ideology. Implicitly, RII has never discussed literature or is religious in nature, but if studied on its substance it gives meaning to the nature of one's own religion. The manifestation of social godliness in the form of humanitarian (humanist) struggle and struggle against the preservation of the environment, it is an affirmation as a religiosity of RII.

Reflectively, the interpretation and analysis of the codes of literary texts are constructed by social forces in discourse. In summary, literary texts have historically been the work of authors and authors themselves positioned as part of a network of discourse and order (episteme) of their society. Therefore, the focus of the study is the discourse that surrounds and shapes the creation and meaning of literary texts.

CONCLUSION

Hermeneutics is one methodology in interpreting symbols, both in the form of text and meta-text. The essence of hermeneutics is "understanding" (*verstegen* / to understand). Therefore, hermeneutics requires a set of other approaches and methods such as philosophy, theology, anthropology, philology, sociology, semantics, linguistics, phenomenology, psychology, discourse analysis, and others. In relation to the interpretation of literature, Hermeneutics is a "tool" (not a substitute) in order to sharpen interpretation. Thus, the literary works of RII will be more effective when complemented by a hermeneutic approach that examines not only from the point of view of the text, but also the perspective of the initiator, the reader and its context. RII's literary works are effective media to influence the reader's mind to behave in the same way. RII's literary work provides significant changes that occur in discourse, thought, paradigm, mentality in the public and the environment. RII's desire is to have evolutionary changes, namely changes not physically but changes to the mental. The proof of evolutionary change is always repeated the theme in RII literature.

This is an indication that the community or the system it has changed is so dominant and strong. In addition, the planting of ideology through ideas in literary works takes a long time because it is through a long process. However, changes resulting from an ideological awareness are more important and meaningful in people's lives. RII's literary works are healing literary works. All humans are equal and have self-potency. Disables and perfect humans has no preferential treatment in everyday life. RII's awareness as a disable is the starting point of the change and shift of life (the epiphany culmination) into a humanist and feminist human. Islam provides relief for persons with disabilities, such as being allowed not to join jihad (during the time of the Prophet). Islam does not allow discrimination against disabled person and get the same rights as those who are perfectly physical. Because what God judges is people's faith. In addition, this research can still be continued with various forms of approaches other than hermeneutics, some approaches related to relationships and more specific gender approaches can be done to strengthen this research.

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