

The Kisaran Mengaji Movement Among Salafi Congregations: Between Religious Tradition and Modernity

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Abstract

The socio-cultural friction experienced by Salafi women often leads to misconceptions about Salafi concepts. This study aims to determine how Salafi women view religious traditions and how they adapt their religious activities to the tide of modernity. This study uses a case study approach with qualitative research. Data collection techniques were carried out through non-participant observation and in-depth interviews. The results show that 1) Salafi women in the Kisaran Mengaji Movement view local religious traditions through a strict categorization between practices that are considered in accordance with the Sunnah and practices that are considered bid'ah, there is a negotiation between Salafi manhaj commitment and social harmony, participation in the Mengaji Movement contributes to the formation of the religious identity of Salafi female congregants, and the dynamics of the relationship between Salafi female congregants and the social environment that still strongly holds on to local traditions; 2) Salafi women in the Kisaran Mengaji Movement adapt religious activities to the tide of modernity by utilizing digital technology to strengthen religious practices, negotiating time between domestic demands, work, and studies, forming a religious-modern lifestyle in public spaces and the world of work, parenting, digital literacy, and control over the tide of modernity.

Keywords Salafi, Salafi Women, Religious Tradition, Modernity, Quranic Study Community

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modernization has also penetrated Islam. This has led to changes in the understanding of religious values, religious practices, and expressions of religiosity in Islam. For example, in the past, a cleric would only preach in places of worship, but now preaching can also be done through electronic media such as the internet, television, or radio. The problem for Muslims is whether, with increasingly intensive modernization, noble values can be maintained so that Muslims can be part of a modern society while still maintaining a clear sense of identity.

Many people also maintain conservative aspects of religion, so they remain

Introduction

Salafi, Salafi Women, Religious Traditions, Modernity, Quranic Study Communities. Modernity. People who think this way can be found among both Muslims and non-Muslims. However, in reality,

steadfast in their adherence to traditional religious values. The ideology followed by these people is called Salafism. Salaf itself means the predecessors. The word *al-Salaf* literally means the people who preceded us or those who lived before our time. The people who preceded us in the explanation above are the companions of the Prophet, *tabi'in*, and *atba' al-tabi'in*. Therefore, a Salafi is someone who claims to follow the path of the companions of the Prophet SAW, *tabi'in* dan *atba' al-tabi'in* in all aspects of their teachings and understanding (Nazwa, 2022). Salafism is a religious movement rooted in puritanical and conservative religious understanding. The word salafi refers to the abbreviation "*al-salaf al-salih*" which means the previous generation. Salafis are a group of people who adhere to *ahlussunnah wal jamaah* which is a principle rooted in the Salafi methodology, whose references originate from the Qur'an, Hadith, and Ijma salaful salih or Salafi scholars.

The development of the modern world has influenced socio-cultural changes in society. These socio-cultural changes have not only affected countries with open ideologies but also societies in Muslim-based countries around the world (Sirait, 2020). The changes that have occurred in the cultural tendencies of Muslim societies include aspects such as their perspective on things, openness, and even the way they dress. Salafis, who believe in *al Salaf al salih*, are one of the groups that are strongly opposed to socio-cultural changes, especially criticizing the Westernization of the Islamic world.

The socio-cultural friction that occurs among Salafis often leads to misconceptions about the concepts brought by Salafis. Salafis are considered a conservative, radical, and anti-modernization Islamic community, which changes the way the general public treats the Salafi community. These misconceptions make Salafi women vulnerable to negative perceptions. Salafis regulate how to dress in accordance with Sharia law, social interactions, and almost all aspects of human life. Salafi women are viewed negatively because their characteristic of dressing in a completely covered manner makes the general public's understanding of this group become anticipatory.

One of the important concepts in the Salafi movement is their ideology regarding the position of women. This concept attempts to restore the role of women to that of the early days of prophethood, which is highly symbolic. It involves bringing women back into the home, wearing burqas and robes, a very strict muhrim system, and complete obedience to husbands and total sacrifice for the family. Through *Tartib an-Nisa* or *Nashihati lin Nisa*, Educated women in society are encouraged to wear burqas and robes, withdraw from public life, quit their jobs, and even willingly enter into conflict with their families and parents in order to become obedient Salafi women (Patria, 2018).

One of the most important teachings in the Salafi group for women is the hijab. Salafi women interpret the Salafi group's hijab as the ideal type and form, even though Islam does not

specifically describe it. The hijab discourse is carried out by Salafi women without coercion, so that they always place themselves in the domestic sphere and restrict themselves in the public sphere. There are three forms of hijab effects that shape compliance. First, covering the face and wearing dark colors is a virtue. Second, *ikhtilat* is haram. Third, staying at home is sharia. The discourse on hijab, which is believed to be true, is a source of domestication for Salafi women (Fitrianita, 2019).

In Kisaran City, North Sumatra, this purification movement takes the form of local recitation gatherings at several points in Asahan, one of which is Kisaran City, currently known for the Kisaran Mengaji movement. The Kisaran Mengaji movement is a regular recitation program carried out by the Salafi community in Kisaran City. This community is becoming increasingly progressive, frequently holding scientific studies in various areas in the Asahan region, such as in the cities of Tanjung Balai, Air Joman, Aek Kuasan, and several other areas.

Based on the results of the researcher's observations in the Kisaran Mengaji Movement Community, the researcher found that some people who adhere to Salafi beliefs are different from other communities. The differences are seen in the clothing worn by both male and female members. The distinctive identity of male Salafi members includes wearing pants above the ankles, robes, and mostly sandals. Female Salafi members generally wear more modest Muslim clothing, veils, and strictly limit their interactions with the opposite sex.

Based on the above phenomena and issues, the author is interested in conducting research on how Salafi women in Kisaran City maintain their religious traditions in an increasingly modern era. This research is titled "The Kisaran Quran recitation movement among Salafi congregations: between religious tradition and modernity."

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a case study approach with qualitative research. Qualitative research is a research process to understand human or social phenomena by creating a comprehensive and complex picture that can be presented in words, reporting detailed views obtained from informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Walidin et al., 2015).

This qualitative research is descriptive in nature. Descriptive qualitative research is research that is recorded as descriptive based on existing phenomena, both phenomena created by humans and natural phenomena. Phenomena can take the form of activities, relationships, characteristics, changes, forms, relationships, similarities, and differences between phenomena and other phenomena (Sukmadinata, 2008).

Data collection techniques were carried out through non-participatory observation and in-depth interviews. Non-participatory observation is when the researcher is not directly involved in the activities of the people being observed (Sugiyono, 2019). Therefore, the researcher did not have to be a member of the Kisaran Mengaji Movement Community

and was only an independent observer. In-depth interviews are a process of direct questioning using interview guidelines, in which the interviewer and informant are involved in a relatively long social life (Bungin, 2009).

Data analysis techniques were carried out using Miles and Hiberman's interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1992). Furthermore, data validity testing in this study used the triangulation method. Triangulation is divided into four types: method triangulation, inter-researcher triangulation, data source triangulation, and theory triangulation (Denkin, 2007). However, this study only used data source triangulation and method triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Salafi Women View Religious Traditions

Based on in-depth interviews and non-participant observation of the Kisaran Mengaji Movement Community, several key findings were obtained regarding how Salafi women view and interpret religious traditions that are alive in the surrounding community. These findings can be summarized in the following table:

Tabel 1. Salafi Women View Religious Traditions	
No.	Research Findings
1	Religious Traditions Divided between "Sunnah" and "Bid'ah"

2	Negotiating between Salafi Commitment and Social Harmony
3	Strengthening Religious Identity and Gender Roles
4	Relationships with Non-Salafi Families and Communities

The first finding shows that female Salafi congregants in the Kisaran Mengaji Movement Community view local religious traditions through the lens of a strict categorization between practices considered to be in accordance with the Sunnah and practices deemed to be bid'ah. Traditions such as tahlilan for the dead, yasinan on Friday nights, Maulid Nabi celebrations, kenduri tolak bala (ceremonies to ward off evil), and certain grave pilgrimages are understood by most informants as practices for which "there is no example from the Prophet" and are therefore categorized as bid'ah that should be abandoned. Conversely, practices such as increasing the recitation of the Qur'an, attending tauhid studies, and studying the books of the salaf are seen as a form of "purification" of Islamic teachings. Some women admitted that before joining the Kisaran Mengaji Movement, they were actively involved in these traditions. However, after regularly attending lectures and hearing the ustaz's explanations about tawhid and sunnah, they began to question the legitimacy of the traditions that had been practiced for generations.

The second finding shows that although ideologically many local religious traditions are considered incompatible with the Sunnah, practices in the field reveal a fairly complex negotiation strategy. Salafi women do not

immediately sever social ties with family and neighbors who still practice these traditions. Some informants choose to no longer be the main organizers of traditional activities (for example, no longer hosting feasts or leading tahlil recitations), but still attend family events as a way of maintaining relationships. They explain that their presence is interpreted more as a sign of respect for the family than as approval of the content. From the interviews, the majority of informants choose to attend only the non-ritual parts, such as when eating together or simply greeting family members, but do not participate in recitations that are considered to have no basis in religious doctrine. This negotiation is also evident in the way they communicate. Instead of directly blaming or judging the traditions practiced by their families, several informants admitted that they preferred a strategy of slowly educating their parents, in-laws, or relatives, and only responding when asked.

The third finding shows that participation in the Kisaran Mengaji Movement contributes significantly to the formation of the religious identity of Salafi women. They feel that they have a new community that provides moral support, religious knowledge, and space for regular learning. Their identity as a community that follows the Salafi manhaj is reflected in changes in their outward appearance (e.g., wearing wide headscarves, niqabs for some informants, and loose clothing) and new habits, such as limiting interaction with non-mahram members of the opposite sex and prioritizing domestic activities. In terms of gender roles,

most women internalize the understanding that their main duties are to obey their husbands, take care of the household, and educate their children in true monotheism. Activities in the public sphere, including traditional religious social activities that mix men and women, have been reduced. However, some informants actually feel more empowered because they now have the knowledge to discuss religion, especially when explaining their choices to their families or communities.

The fourth finding relates to the dynamics of the relationship between Salafi women and social environments that still strongly uphold local traditions. The attitudes of families and communities are not uniform; some are accepting, some are neutral, and some show resistance. Some informants reported receiving negative labels, such as hardline, new Islam, or anti-custom, from neighbors and relatives. Others complained about receiving fewer invitations to traditional religious events because they were considered unwilling to participate in tahlilan (prayer gatherings). On the other hand, several informants mentioned that their steadfastness in worship and changes in their behavior (more patient, not gossiping, obedient in prayer) actually made their families begin to appreciate and even ask about the religious gatherings they attended.

The results of the study on Salafi women view the above religious traditions as being in line with QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:170 regarding the prohibition of blindly following the traditions of ancestors, as stated in the verse:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ
آبَاءَنَا أَوَلَوْ كَانَ آبَاؤُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

Artinya: “Apabila dikatakan kepada mereka, “Ikutilah apa yang telah diturunkan Allah,” mereka menjawab, “Tidak. Kami tetap mengikuti kebiasaan yang kami dapati pada nenek moyang kami.” Apakah (mereka akan mengikuti juga) walaupun nenek moyang mereka (itu) tidak mengerti apa pun dan tidak mendapat petunjuk?

In their efforts to comprehensively implement Islam, they refer to the practices of past generations (Salaf al-Salih). Although they refer to the past, Salafis negotiate with contemporary developments, including technological advances, which they utilize to spread their Salafi ideology. They achieve this process by effectively packaging ideological sermons with themes related to everyday life while referring to Salafi scholars and texts. Furthermore, they find their place among the community, especially the tech-savvy younger generation, through social media. Clear ideological shifts, changes in lifestyle practices, and appearances contribute to the formation of identity (Irwansyah & Muary, R., 2024).

Overall, the results of the study show that the way Salafi women view religious traditions is shaped by the intersection of religious purification doctrines, their experiences as women, and social pressures within their families and communities. Various local religious traditions such as tahlilan, Friday night yasinan, maulid, death feasts, and certain forms of grave pilgrimage are seen as practices that do not have a strong basis in the Qur'an and Sunnah, so they are often categorized as bid'ah

and should be abandoned. These findings are in line with recent studies on the Salafi community's attitude towards religious practices in Indonesia, which show that the framework of tauhid, sunnah, shirk, and bid'ah are the main lenses through which local traditions are assessed. However, this study also shows that Salafi women are not always outrightly rejecting. They engage in selection and negotiation. On the one hand, ibadah mahdhah (pure worship) must strictly follow the dalil (evidence) and cannot be mixed with tradition. On the other hand, the social aspects of tradition, such as dining together, visiting family, or attending funerals, are still maintained as long as they are not believed to be specific acts of worship that yield certain rewards (Maimanah et al., 2024).

Other research on the shifting roles of Salafi women in Indonesia also confirms that they are not merely passive, but actively seek equality and social roles within the boundaries they believe to be sharia. Salafi women use their identity of piety to build economic networks and independent businesses, while still referring to narratives of obedience and purification of teachings (Ismail, 2024).

Thus, this study shows that Salafi women are not merely objects of religious purification ideology, but also subjects with agency. They internalize teachings about bid'ah and sunnah, then use them to rearrange their position within the family and society, asserting their identity as righteous Muslim women, distinguishing themselves from general religious practices, but

still striving for social harmony as much as possible.

B. Salafi Women Adapt Religious Activities to the Flow of Modernity

Based on in-depth interviews and non-participant observation of the Kisaran Mengaji Movement Community, several key findings were obtained regarding how Salafi women adjust their religious activities to the tide of modernity. These findings can be summarized in the following table:

Table 2. Salafi Women Adjusting Religion to Modernity

No.	Research Findings
1	The Use of Digital Technology to Strengthen Religious Practices
2	Negotiating Time Between Domestic Demands, Work, and Study
3	The Formation of a "Religious-Modern" Lifestyle in Public Spaces and the Workplace
4	Childcare, Digital Literacy, and Control over the Flow of Modernity

The first finding shows that modernity in the form of digital technology is not necessarily seen as a threat, but rather as a new means of strengthening religious activities. The majority of informants use WhatsApp, Telegram, YouTube, Instagram, and online meeting applications to follow Salafi ustadz studies from various cities and even abroad, share lecture recordings, e-books, and fatwas, and coordinate internal community activities (study schedules, social gatherings, social services). Some members admitted that before joining this community, they primarily used their devices for entertainment. After joining, their smartphone screens are now more frequently filled with links to lectures and da'wah

channels. Nevertheless, they demonstrate a selective approach, only following accounts of scholars deemed to be of the same school of thought and reducing access to entertainment content deemed negligent.

The second finding shows that modernity is also present in the form of a fast-paced lifestyle and the many roles that women must play as housewives, workers, online entrepreneurs, and study group members. The results of the study show that Salafi female congregants negotiate their time in order to remain active in religious activities. Some of the strategies that emerged include: attending online study groups while taking care of household chores (cooking, ironing, looking after children), using the time at night after the children have gone to sleep to listen to recordings of study groups or read books on tauhid, and arranging a schedule between working outside the home/selling online and the weekly face-to-face study group schedule. Some informants admitted to feeling rushed and exhausted at times, but they believed that attending study groups and maintaining their worship routine actually helped them to be more organized and disciplined in managing their time.

The third finding is the emergence of a religious-modern lifestyle. Many Salafi women actively sell Muslim products (sharia-compliant clothing, khimar, religious books, herbs) through marketplaces and social media. They continue to wear sharia-compliant clothing when working or engaging in activities in public spaces, including when driving,

shopping at malls, or attending formal events. They use banking facilities and digital services (online transfers, e-wallets) while trying to avoid usury to the best of their knowledge. They interpret modernity not as a necessity to imitate Western lifestyles, but as the availability of new tools that can be filled with Islamic values. For some informants, the ability to do business online while maintaining sharia boundaries is a source of pride; they feel they can be economically independent without having to abandon their roles as wives and mothers.

The fourth finding shows that modernity is also strongly felt in the realm of parenting. The influx of gadgets, online games, and social media has made Salafi mothers feel the need to tighten their supervision of their children. Strategies that have emerged include: limiting access to gadgets, allowing cell phone use only at certain times, and directing children more toward memorizing the Qur'an or watching Islamic cartoons. Choosing schools with an Islamic atmosphere or considering homeschooling, so that children are not drawn into promiscuous social circles. Encouraging children to participate in community activities (khataman, memorization competitions, children's recitation) as an alternative form of entertainment. These women position themselves as the first filter against the influx of modernity into the home. They utilize modern facilities (prayer reminder applications, memorization channels, children's preaching videos), but at the same time block or restrict

content that is considered contrary to Salafi values.

The discussion of the findings of this study shows that Salafi women in the Kisaran Mengaji Movement do not deal with modernity in black and white terms, but rather through a complex process of selective adaptation. They live amid the penetration of digital technology, the market economy, and urban lifestyles, but strive to organize all of this in line with the Salafi framework that emphasizes the purification of faith and the strengthening of the Sunnah. This pattern is in line with various studies on Salafi women in Indonesia, which found that they are not merely confined to the domestic sphere, but are active actors in shaping their religious identity amid social change. Research (Jannah, 2013) shows how women in the Salafi movement at the Ibnu Sina Mosque build a distinctive collective identity through their style of dress, study networks, and patterns of social interaction. Another study (Khotijah & Madkur, 2018) also confirms that Salafi women continue to negotiate with the modern environment, whether in terms of education, work, or social relations, without feeling that they must completely withdraw from contemporary life.

The use of digital media by female members of the Kisaran Mengaji community is closely related to the phenomenon of digital piety, which has been widely discussed in previous literature. Digital platforms provide a new space for millennial Muslims to negotiate religious authority and express piety visually and narratively (Zaid et al., 2022). Findings

from the Kisaran Mengaji Movement Community reveal concrete manifestations of this discourse, with WhatsApp groups, YouTube channels, and digital study flyers being used to strengthen the routine of reciting the Quran, attending online studies, and organizing community activities. This aligns with research (Nugroho, 2024) on Salafi teenage girls who are actively involved in digital entrepreneurship while also using online platforms as a medium for reconstructing their pious identities.

The Salafi community grew in urban centers consisting of socially heterogeneous communities. However, they envisioned their group as a unified Islamic community with aspirations to reinforce Islamic values applied in the structure of the system and values within society in order to strengthen community identity. This required the existence of other groups that were considered different from them. In the Salafi context, this other group is other Muslim communities that are considered “less Islamic.” Salafism developed in response to a social system that was considered un-Islamic. This social system was mainly in the economic and political aspects. Therefore, although this movement claims to reject the use of violence in upholding Islamic values, it continues to voice its aspirations through preaching and education. Because the Salafi movement mainly developed in urban areas, it is not surprising that its followers are middle-class groups with higher technological literacy. Therefore, the da'wah and education they

develop are centered on social media (Muary et al., 2024).

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, what Salafi women in Kisaran do can be interpreted as a form of modern rationalization and reflexivity. This pattern is similar to the findings of studies on “*economic agency*” dan “*Salafi feminism*” which shows that some Salafi women have found economic independence through syar’i compliant businesses (fashion, herbal medicine, religious books) without abandoning their roles as obedient wives and mothers (Tobibatussaadah, 2021). In this context, Salafi congregations in Kisaran Mengaji impose restrictions on the use of gadgets, direct children to Quran memorization apps and Islamic cartoons, and encourage them to participate in community activities as an alternative form of entertainment.

Compared to other studies on Salafi women, the findings in the Kisaran Mengaji Movement confirm that they are not in a passive position. As Berger's social construction theory states, the da'wah community functions to maintain religious reality so that it remains credible amid social change (Sulaiman, 2016). In this case, the Kisaran Mengaji Movement becomes a space where the Salafi interpretation of modernity that technology, markets, and public spaces may be entered as long as they are directed toward obedience is reinforced through lectures, discussions, and daily practices. Therefore, modernity does not appear as a force that automatically erodes religiosity, but as a new arena in which Salafi women actually

affirm their identity as religious subjects who are reflective, selective, and creative in integrating religious activities with the demands of the times.

CONCLUSION

Salafi women in the Kisaran Mengaji Movement view local religious traditions through the lens of a strict categorization between practices considered to be in accordance with the Sunnah and practices deemed to be bid'ah. there is a negotiation between Salafi manhaj commitment and social harmony. Participation in the Mengaji Movement contributes to the formation of the religious identity of Salafi women congregants, as well as the dynamics of the relationship between Salafi women congregants and the social environment that still strongly holds on to local traditions.

Salafi women in the Kisaran Mengaji Movement adapt religious activities to the tide of modernity by utilizing digital technology to strengthen religious practices, negotiating time between domestic demands, work, and studies, forming a religious-modern lifestyle in public spaces and the workplace, parenting, digital literacy, and control over the tide of modernity.

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