





Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Concept Of Justice In Addressing Gender Equality Issues

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This research discusses the concept of justice according to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas as an alternative solution to the problem of contemporary gender equality. The aim is to describe the meaning of justice ('adl) according to Al-Attas and examine its relevance in responding to demands for absolute equality between men and women. The method used is a literature study with a qualitative approach and content analysis of Al-Attas' works related to the concept of justice and human nature. The results show that justice, in Al-Attas' view, is a harmonious condition when everything is in its place and function in accordance with the nature and purpose of creation. In the context of gender, justice does not mean uniformity of roles, but rather fair placement based on the rights, responsibilities, and natures of each. The novelty of this research lies in offering a paradigm of fitrah-based justice as a critique of the Western concept of gender equality. The implication is that this approach can prevent misunderstanding of gender differences while emphasising the importance of the Islamic worldview in building fair and harmonious gender relations.

Penelitian ini membahas konsep keadilan menurut Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas sebagai alternatif solusi terhadap problematika kesetaraan gender kontemporer. Tujuannya adalah mendeskripsikan makna keadilan ('adl) menurut Al-Attas dan mengkaji relevansinya dalam merespons tuntutan persamaan mutlak antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif dan analisis isi terhadap karya-karya Al-Attas yang berkaitan dengan konsep keadilan dan fitrah manusia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keadilan, dalam pandangan Al-Attas, adalah kondisi harmonis ketika segala sesuatu berada pada tempat dan fungsinya sesuai dengan fitrah dan tujuan penciptaan. Dalam konteks gender, keadilan bukan berarti penyeragaman peran, melainkan penempatan yang adil berdasarkan hak, tanggung jawab, dan kodrat masing-masing. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada tawaran paradigma keadilan berbasis fitrah sebagai kritik terhadap konsep kesetaraan gender Barat. Implikasinya, pendekatan ini dapat mencegah kesalahpahaman terhadap perbedaan gender sekaligus menegaskan pentingnya worldview Islam dalam membangun relasi gender yang adil dan harmonis.

A. INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender equality in feminism is one of the topics that continues to evolve and be studied. The emergence of the term gender equality is a form of resistance against discrimination against women, such as subordination, oppression, and suppression of basic rights (Rufaida & Sufyanto, 2024). In European history during the Dark Ages, women were often portrayed negatively, even seen as the source of sin. From this oppression arose demands for equal rights with men, which eventually gave rise to the concept of gender equality (Putri et al., 2024).

However, in its development, the concept of gender equality has undergone shifts and expansions in meaning that often go beyond the basic rights of women. Even today, feminists themselves have not agreed on what kind of equality and freedom women desire (Bachtiar, 2017).

Some contemporary feminist movements, particularly in the West, no longer merely advocate for women's social and political rights but also promote ideas demanding absolute equality in roles between men and women in all aspects of life, without considering the inherent natural and functional differences between the two (Hamidah, 2020). This is evident in movements such as childfree, rejection of the institution of marriage, and the normalization of non-traditional sexual orientations, all of which stem from a radical interpretation of the concept of gender equality.

Over the past decade, the issue of gender equality has become a global discourse that continues to develop and expand into the realms of public policy, education, and religious discourse (Wahyudi, 2025). In Indonesia, the 2022 report from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the gender development index has improved (Gender Development Index, 2025), but this has not been accompanied by the realization of substantive justice. For example, women's participation in education and the labor force has increased (Rhahim et al., 2023), but women still face inequalities in access to leadership, double burdens in the domestic sphere, and vulnerability to structural discrimination (Purnamasari, 2025). This gap indicates that an equality-based approach that emphasizes absolute equality between men and women does not fully address the root causes of injustice.

One of the underlying causes is an epistemological crisis in understanding the concept of justice and the natural role of humanity, particularly within the framework of a secular Western worldview that tends to disregard religious claims (Fadhlurrahman et al., 2024). Therefore, a critical examination of the paradigm of

justice is needed, one that is not only oriented toward equality but also considers human nature as the foundation of justice (Kusumah et al., 2024). This study is specifically limited to analyzing the concept of justice in the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and its relevance in responding to contemporary gender equality issues.

There are a number of studies that have discussed similar themes, both in the context of Islamic justice, criticism of feminism, and analysis of the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. Three of them are described below to show their relevance and differences from this study.

The study by (Raldo, 2022) entitled "Contemporary Issues in Equality" discusses gender equality issues in the context of international law and institutions. Its similarity to this study lies in its focus on gender inequality. However, that study is descriptive and does not explore philosophical dimensions or human nature. Meanwhile, this study emphasizes the concept of justice based on human nature in the thought of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas as an alternative approach. Its novelty lies in offering a holistic Islamic justice paradigm to critique Western approaches to equality.

Another study by Yuwanda (2019) titled "The Concept of Justice According to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas" examines the concept of justice philosophically in Al-Attas's thought. This study aligns with this study in terms of its subject matter, namely Al-Attas's thoughts on justice. However, Yuwanda's research remains general in nature and does not link it to contemporary gender equality issues. Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in the application of Al-Attas' concept of justice as a framework for critiquing Western concepts of gender equality, as well as an approach to justice based on fitrah in the context of male-female relations.

Finally, research by (Muammar & Muhtar, 2019) entitled "The Concept of Gender Equality According to Islamic and Western Perspectives" compares Islamic and Western views on the concept of gender equality. The similarity with this study is that both criticize Western views that tend to equalize gender roles. However, the focus of that study is more on general ideological comparisons, not on an in-depth exploration of the concept of justice based on human nature, as in Al-Attas's thought. The novelty of this study lies in its specific exploration of the concepts of 'adl and fitrah according to Al-Attas as the foundation for formulating gender justice within the Islamic worldview framework.

The urgency of this study lies in the increasing prevalence of gender equality discourse, which is often colored by Western secular perspectives, leading to confusion in understanding the essence of gender justice according to Islam. Without an epistemological framework that aligns with the Islamic worldview, the concept of gender equality is prone to being misunderstood as the standardization of male and female roles, rather than true justice that places both in accordance with their natural creation (Hadi, 2023). Therefore, a concept of justice is needed that can correct this paradigm and provide a strong philosophical foundation for Muslims in addressing contemporary issues surrounding gender.

One contemporary Muslim thinker who offers a concept of justice based on the Islamic worldview is Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. In this context, it is important to present a concept of justice that can address gender equality issues while remaining grounded in the Islamic worldview. Therefore, this paper will examine how Syed M. Naquib al-Attas' concept of justice can provide solutions to the problems of gender equality that are developing in society. This study aims to explore and analyze Al-Attas' concept of justice ('adl) and assess its relevance in addressing contemporary gender equality challenges from an Islamic perspective.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative design with a descriptive-analytical approach. The method applied is library research, because all data is obtained from written sources. The main instrument of this research is the researcher himself, assisted by a recording sheet and content classification. Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation of the works of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas as primary sources, as well as books, journals, and previous research as secondary sources. The data analysis technique used content analysis, by identifying, categorizing, and evaluating key concepts related to justice and gender. Data validity was maintained through critical reading, selection of credible academic sources, and literature triangulation between various relevant references.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Problem of Gender Equality

When viewed in its early history, the feminism movement in the West was a reaction to the Church's abuse of women (Azizan, 2022). This experience of

oppression and injustice encouraged feminists to foster women's growth to fight anything that degrades women (Hidayah, 2023), including Biblical texts that are considered patriarchal and support the existence of gender-biased social structures in Western society. They demanded to be equal to men and have their rights rehabilitated. Thus, the term gender equality movement was also born (Salsabila, 2023).

Modern feminism then gave birth to various new terms such as gender inequality, gender bias, patriarchal hegemony, sexism, and misogyny (Aizid, 2024). All of them are framed in one view that absolute equality regardless of gender is the only way to eliminate inequality. This concept has been reinforced globally by international institutions, such as the UNDP, since the 1990s through the idea of perfect equality, promoting 50:50 quantitative equality between men and women in all fields, such as education, economics, health, and politics (United Nations Development Program, 1995). This indirectly demands uniformity in roles, capacities, needs, and even preferences between men and women.

However, in its development, the concept of equality has shifted to become abstract and biased, with no agreement and no purpose (Bachtiar, 2017). Even the feminism movement in the West is now stigmatized due to the radicalization of the movement by unscrupulous feminists who not only demand women's basic rights (Zarkasyi, 2023), but are also anti-male, scorn women, condemn the patriarchal system, legalize abortion, celebrate lesbianism, sexual revolution, even for them being a wife is the same as being held hostage and living with their husbands is considered the same as living with the enemy (Perdana & Fauziah, 2025).

This phenomenon certainly triggered sharp criticism from various circles, such as Pat Robertson, a former American president, who considered feminism to have encouraged women to leave their families and become lesbians (Mikkelson, 2019). In addition, there is also Arianna Stassinopoulus, an old feminist, in her book The Female Woman, responding to the radicalization of the feminism movement by providing biological science data stating that there are natural differences between men and women so that demands for total equality are empty myths (Huffington, 1975).

The feminist movement in the West is also often criticized for eroding the role of men, encouraging same-sex relationships, and turning women into individuals who are too ambitious in their careers to lose their role in the family (Ahmad Saeed &

Munir Leghari, 2019). Whether recognized or not, the emancipation movement in the West has damaged social structures and weakened family values.

Developed countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Japan and Finland are now facing serious demographic crises due to low birth rates and aging populations (Clark, 2025); (Japan Daily, 2025); (Statistics Netherlens, 2023); (Hemingway & Conboye, 2025). The European Union as a whole is also facing similar trends. Based on the latest projections, the EU's population is expected to shrink drastically, losing around 27.3 million people by 2100. This decline signifies major challenges in economic, social and public policy aspects, particularly in employment and pension systems. Therefore, countries are starting to look for innovative solutions to stabilize their demographic structure, including through family and gender policy reforms (Bello, 2023).

The feminist movement in the West has had a negative impact on social order and family values, and has contributed to the demographic crisis in developed countries such as Germany, Japan and Singapore. The increase in women delaying or refusing pregnancy, including through abortion, is expected to jeopardize the future of the nation. According to a report by Stern Magazine (no. 27, June 28, 2005 edition), Germany is even predicted to become Land ohne Kinder (Country without Children) due to the low birth rate and dominated by the elderly generation (Hepni, 2021).

Now, in the realm of family life, some women feel pressured by the role of wife, the assumption is that women are only used as a means of satisfying lust. In fact, the obligation to care for and raise children is considered a form of oppression. This view has led to the emergence of the childfree movement, a couple's decision not to have children (Syarif & Furqan, 2023). As a result, the institution of marriage began to be abandoned. Sexual desires are channeled through the services of paid men, or even through same-sex relationships (lesbians).

The role of mothers as madrasatul ūlā (the first education for children) has lost its meaning. The foundation of the family, which should support the education of future generations, is weakened because women are reluctant to compromise with their husbands. As a result, the divorce rate continues to rise. Many women prefer to pursue careers, so their natural role in the family is forgotten (Lazim, 2022).

From all the conditions described above, it shows that the narrative of gender equality that is not based on the right values and understanding actually creates new problems in the social structure. Instead of creating justice, equality that is imposed

without considering the nature and natural roles of men and women actually results in role disorientation, household conflicts, and the fragility of family foundations. Thus, gender equality needs to be critically reviewed so as not to erode the true values of the family and the role of women who are actually of great value.

2. Al-Attas' Concept of Justice

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas defines justice/'adl as "the harmonious condition of things being in their right or proper places" (Al-Attas, 1999). In this case, what is meant by 'place' is the condition of balance and harmony in human relations with themselves, not merely with regard to their position in interactions with other parties. This means that man's relationship with other creatures is reflected in how he relates to himself (Al-Attas, 1978).

In his other book, Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin, Al-Attas explains that justice is where something is right in its place. The opposite of justice is zulm, not putting something in its place (Al-Attas, 1995). Thus, it is able to create an atmosphere of harmony or equality (Al-Attas, 2001). In this sense, justice is not merely equality or absolute equality, but a state in which everything is in its appropriate situation, condition, function, and purpose.

For Al-Attas, justice is human-centered, because justice is a quality of human action that is born from moral excellence and arises from wisdom based on faith in God, which then applies its value to the life of society and the state (Al-Attas, 2001).

In On Justice and the Nature of Man: A Commentary on Surah Al-Nisa (4): 58 and Surah Al-Mu'minun (23): 12-14), Al-Attas explains that justice will return man to his fitrah (Al-Attas, 2015). Fitrah in this case is related to the initial agreement (mithāq) between man and God before he was born into the world (Al-Attas, 2001). At this level, justice ('adl) towards oneself means maintaining self-harmony in accordance with fitrah, so that humans can achieve their original purity that will lead them to perfection and true happiness. Conversely, anyone who shirks the covenant has wronged himself (Al-Attas, 2001).

The concept of justice according to al-Attas is in accordance with the adage a'ti kulla dhī ḥaqqin ḥaqqahu (give to everyone who is entitled to their rights). From the explanation above, it can be concluded that upholding justice means giving something according to its rights and nature. Thus, when everything is in its proper position, the

main purpose of justice is achieved, namely ennobling humans and returning them to their original nature (Yuwanda, 2019).

It can be concluded that according to Al-Attas, justice ('adl) is a harmonious condition in which everything is in its right place, including the balance between objects and living beings, as well as human relations with themselves. Justice is born from moral excellence and wisdom based on faith in God, then applied in the life of society and the state.

3. Al Attas' Concept of Justice in Answering the Problems of Gender Equality

The mistake of gender equality adherents lies in their understanding of the meaning of equality. They assume that justice or equality must be equal. In the context of gender, they demand that men and women have equal rights 50:50 in all areas of life (Ningrum, 2024). In fact, when viewed from the consequences of the implementation of this understanding, there are many imbalances that arise both in the family, social and psychological realms. Equality understood as absolute equality has led to the rejection of the biological and psychological nature of men and women.

Islam teaches justice that is different from the view of radical feminism. Islam firmly upholds justice between men and women by considering the natural natures of each. Therefore, in some cases, gender differences cannot be used as an excuse to legitimize social inequality (Begum et al., 2024). This principle is affirmed through the maqāṣid syarī'ah which guarantees the protection of the rights of each individual in a proportional manner (Rismilda, 2023). Therefore, Islam recognizes differences between men and women in certain matters as part of proportional justice.

In line with Islam, the concept of justice in al-Attas' view means a'ți $kulla\ dh\bar{i}$ $haqqin\ haqqahu$ (give to everyone who is entitled to his right) and waḍ' al-shay' fī maḥallihi (put something in its place) (Al-Attas, 1999). This means that fairness in Islam is not equal and 50:50 must be equalized, but rather giving rights to the rightful and putting things in their place.

If applied to the concept of Gender, then fairness means attention to individual rights and giving those rights to each owner or by giving rights according to what they should receive (Taqiyuddin, 2019). Men with the rights of men, women with the rights of women. It does not mean that women want to take away men's rights, and vice versa. Because, men and women have fundamental biological and psychological differences.

M. Quraish Shihab gives many examples of the biological and psychological differences between men and women. For example, he explains that men generally prefer physical activity, challenge, and confrontation, while women prefer peace, intimacy, and emotional calm. According to him, this difference is part of the divine design that reflects the complementary nature of gender roles in human life (M. Quraish Shihab, 2010).

This is in line with what is found in the Qur'an. The Qur'an emphasizes that there are fundamental differences between men and women as part of the nature of human creation (Nadilla Dwi Putri et al., 2024). These differences are not only biological, but also relate to complementary roles, responsibilities and social functions. Although in essence, men and women are one, min nafsi wahidah. Because the origin is one and then split in two, according to Buya Hamka, it is clear that one still needs the other. Life is incomplete if the two have not been reunited or "united" (Hamka, 2020).

Justice in Islam is not only material and empirical, but also includes metaphysical aspects, benefits, and protection of rights. Islam teaches that men and women are created to complement, respect, and love each other, and have harmony in their roles (Jamal et al., 2022). Men are given the primary responsibility as qawwām (leader, responsible) in the family, as mentioned in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 34, which implies responsibility for maintenance, protection, and moral leadership. Meanwhile, women have a central role in giving birth, educating, and fostering generations, which does not mean being limited to the domestic sphere, but rather becoming the foundation of civilization (Hidayah, 2024).

However, Islam also opens space for women to play a role in the public sphere according to their capacity and expertise, as there are examples of Sahabiyah during the time of the apostle who helped build education since the early days of the development of Islam (Bahij, 2025) or assisted in hadith narration (Aslamiah, 2019). Thus, the difference in roles is not a form of discrimination, but rather a fair distribution of responsibilities based on fitrah, so that both support each other in building a civilized family and society.

In the Qur'an, specifically Surah An-Najm [53]:45, it states: "And He (Allah) created in pairs, male and female." This verse confirms that gender differences are part of the nature of creation, not something that is shaped by culture or social environment. Shaykh Al-'Uthaymeen when interpreting this verse explains that the

division of roles between men and women is not merely the result of social construction, but also based on the wisdom and fitrah that has been determined by Allah SWT. The universe was created with different orders and purposes for each type, variety, and individual, including the differences between men and women (Al-'Uthaymīn, 2015).

Similarly, Imam Ash-Sha'rawi in his tafsir when explaining Surah An-Nisa verse 32 says that "human beings are divided into two types: men who are manifested in men, and women who are manifested in women, and between them there is a common element as fellow human beings, then there are also differences between them according to their respective types. So if you wanted to put one kind in the place of another, you would not be able to do so" (Ash-Shā'rāwī, 1991).

This shows that there is no absolute equality between men and women, but each has its own advantages and characteristics. Women excel in some aspects, and men excel in others (Al-'Uthaymīn, 2015).

The call for "equality", according to Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, is a demand of the postmo era, which is often full of momentary interests and fickle thinking. This understanding wrongly concludes that equality is justice; the work of equalizing women with men is good while differentiating is evil. Even equating men with women is a fatamorganized utopia; promising but not guaranteeing, defending but controlling (Zarkasyi, 2023).

Islam has regulated the relationship between men and women with the principle of balanced justice, placing men as qawwam over women based on the responsibility of maintenance and protection, without marginalizing the role of women in the public sphere (Sidiq & Erihadiana, 2022). Equality in Islam is not absolute equality, but rather the placement of roles according to fitrah and sharia, as affirmed in Q.S. An-Nisa [4]: 34, that women have a noble position and a special role in maintaining the honor of themselves and their families (Riru Rahimah, Sri Lutfiatul Ulfa and Fajar Syarif, 2021).

According to Al-Attas, justice ('adl) means putting something in its right place, which requires knowledge of nature and guidance of the mind and heart according to the Qur'an and Hadith (Al-Attas, 2015). True justice is born from the right worldview. Conversely, the wrong worldview gives birth to injustice due to ignorance (jahl) and deviation (zulm) from fitrah (Yuwanda, 2019).

In the context of gender, al-Attas' concept of justice indirectly criticizes the notion of gender equality that forces absolute equality between men and women. For Al-Attas, this kind of equality violates fitrah, because justice does not mean equalizing everything, but placing men and women according to their respective rights, roles, and natures. If differences in nature are ignored in favor of equality, it becomes a new form of injustice that violates the purpose of creation and prevents humans from returning to their nature and perfection.

Thus, the implication of Al-Attas' concept of justice for gender equality is the need for a fitrah-based justice paradigm in understanding the relationship between men and women. This approach leads society to not only demand formalistic equality of rights, but also emphasizes the fulfillment of rights and responsibilities in accordance with their respective natures, so as to create a social life that is harmonious, just, and in line with the purpose of human creation.

D. CONCLUSION

The concept of justice based on absolute equality is unable to answer fairly the gender problem because it ignores the nature and essential differences between men and women. This research shows that the concept of justice according to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, which is based on fitrah and the Islamic worldview, can be a philosophical solution to the bias and reduction of the meaning of justice in the discourse of gender equality. The research objective to explore the relevance of Al-Attas' thoughts on this issue has been answered through analyzing the concepts of 'adl, fitrah, and adab as the basis of holistic justice. The implication of this finding is the importance of repositioning the paradigm of justice in the formulation of gender policies in educational, social and governmental institutions so as not to be trapped in uniform and confrontational Western standards of equality. Gender justice needs to be approached with the principle of putting things in their place, not by erasing natural differences. For future research, further exploration of the practical application of this fitrah-based justice concept in education, family, or Islamic law policies is recommended, as well as conducting comparative studies with other Muslim figures in order to obtain a richer and more contextual perspective.

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