

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Discourses about women's movement, especially with reference to the feminists' thought of liberation from oppression are still controversial among society even less among Muslim. The rise of such Muslim feminists: Fatima Mernissi (Morocco, 1940-now), Amina Wadud-Muhsin (America, 1952-now), Nawal El Saadawi (Egypt, 1931-now), Riffat Hassan (Pakistan, 1943-now), Asghar Ali Engineer (India, 1939-now), and other thinkers, who claimed a number of various interpretations of Qur'an and prophetic tradition, are evidenced that the women's movement is still there and concrete.

It is something natural, when women argue their ideas to liberate their selves or to create a new atmosphere, when women treated equally like men did. It might be self-defense from the oppression they saw, from the limitation they had because they are the object itself. But how did men see this thing? Could it be the same as women thought, while they are not object of the oppression? This is one reason, why the writer chooses a man in this research.

This research, to a certain extent, is limited on Engineer, who plays a big role in Islamic society. As what is quoted by Taib that Asghar is one of the most accessible and widely read reformist thinkers of the contemporary Muslim world. His views on issues of reform in the Muslim world is important contribution towards the process of rethinking aspects of Muslim law, politics and culture that

had suffered an impasse and dogmatic rigidity under the treatment of fundamentalist reassertions as found in many Muslim revivalist movements throughout the world.¹

Engineer paid his great attention to the question of women, especially women's status that has acquired great importance throughout the world and among all communities. He noted his thought here,

“There are some obvious reasons. For thousands of years women were kept in total subjugation in all patriarchal societies, and it so happened that most societies were patriarchal. Thus, for centuries it was a ‘natural law’ that women were inferior to men and must submit to men's authority for the smooth running of family life.”²

But now, according to Asghar, many things changed especially the condition of society. Therefore, the verses also need to be changed. He explained it here,

“Slavery has been eliminated and is regarded as intolerable by all civilized societies, no one invoked the scripture to justify it and insist upon that ‘divine right’ vested in those who owned slaves. It had been a proof that the old social structures are crumbling fast and new social orders, rational and liberal, are emerging on the scene. In the new social structures, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the old attitudes towards women. The scriptures are therefore being re-read and re-interpreted, at least among progressive sections of these societies.”³

In the other meaning, he judged that theory of divine law is no longer applicable to the institution of slavery. Either thus, the scriptures will have to be abandoned and laws performed on a secular basis, or they will have to be re-read

¹ Mohamed Imran Mohamed Taib “*Religion, Liberation and Reforms*” an essay in Indian Journal of Secularism Vol.10 No.3 Oct-Dec 2006.

² Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam*. Second Impression (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p.1

³ *Ibid*, p.2

and re-interpreted to suit modern condition. Doesn't it mean that he is hesitant of Allah's absolute greatness?

For example, he picks the verse of Qur'an so comments on those verses according to his interpretation, such as the verse below:

الرِّجَالُ قَوَّامُونَ عَلَى النِّسَاءِ بِمَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بَعْضَهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ وَبِمَا أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ ۚ فَالصَّالِحَاتُ قَنِتَاتٌ حَافِظَاتٌ لِّلْغَيْبِ بِمَا حَفِظَ اللَّهُ ۗ وَاللَّتِي تَخَافُونَ نُشُوزَهُنَّ فَعِظُوهُنَّ ۖ وَأَهْجُرُوهُنَّ فِي الْمَضَاجِعِ وَأَضْرِبُوهُنَّ ۗ فَإِنِ اطَّعْنَكُمْ فَلَا تَبْغُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ سَبِيلًا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

Men are maintainers of women, with what Allah has made some of them to excel others and with what they spend out of their wealth. So the good women are obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded. And (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the beds and chastise them. So if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Surely Allah is ever exalted Great.⁴

He doesn't agree that the verse is oppressing women and put them in the lower degree of men, he rather thinks that the verse seems to be harsh on women but soon after, he sees on its proper context that in those times women were confined in their houses and men alone were their providers. The Qur'an takes this reality into account and on this ground accords men superiority over women. So he notes that the Qur'an was not glorify such a social structure nor declare it to be normative. As social structure should and does change in a social structure where women are maintenance, or co-partners with men (our social structure is tending towards this) in this respect, she should become equal or superior to men

⁴ An-Nisa 4:34, *Qur'an in Word*, with an English Translation by Yusuf Ali

and should begin to play dominant role in the family as men does.⁵ Actually, the expression ‘men is more respected than women are, so women were put in the below degree from men’ isn’t a true saying, for he commented on the verse above by an untrue interpretation. It must be said as derived from the true interpretation, thus: “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women,”⁶ the word *qawwam* in this verse, is an intensive form of *qa'im* that means ‘one who is responsible for or takes care of a thing or a person’.⁷

Again, there are many eloquent expressions of women’s equality with men, and the special relationship and bond between man and woman. For instance, Allah said:

“Surely for men who submit to Allah and for women who submit to Allah, for believing men and for believing women, for devout men and devout women, for truthful men and truthful women, for steadfast men and steadfast women, for humble men and humble women, for charitable men and charitable women, for fasting men and fasting women, for men who guard their chastity and women who guard their chastity, for men who remember Allah much and for women who remember Allah much, for all of them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a mighty reward”⁸ [Al Ahzab, 33:35]

In the other example, in the case of marriage, he confirmed the position of the men and women in marriage, that both of them, stand equal. Men do not have privilege over women, and vice versa, she has no privilege over men.

⁵ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Islam and Liberation Theology* (India: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1990), p.172

⁶ *An-Nisa* 4:34, *Qur'an in Word*, with an English Translation by Yusuf Ali

⁷ Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *Woman between Islam and Western Society* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2000), p.31

⁸ *Al-Ahzab* 33:35, *Qur'an in Word*, with an English Translation by Yusuf Ali

“A woman has the right to hold a contract as she liked, as long as she doesn’t violate the requirements of God (hududullah). She can be entered into an agreement with an acceptable reason, including the right to divorce (talaq tajwiz). In fact, he asserts that the Qur’an does not recognize the concept of guardian. A woman is free to marry without guardian, if she chooses. In the case of widows and divorce, the most orthodox judges also agreed that women do not need a guardian and are free to marry their selves.”⁹

Those thoughts leave some contradictive questions; the attack on Islam launched by secular feminists who declared that the Islamic system is a curse on the status of women under its law (or at least, that system requires distortion), thus portraying Islam as an oppressor rather than as a liberator, and urging women to release themselves from the shackles and constraints their religion by adopting Western secular alternatives.¹⁰ Is the understanding of women liberation here really a problem or a need, when one notices to the right interpretation of Qur’an and prophetic tradition? Whether women liberation compatible to Islam or not?

In other words, they (the feminists) say that Islam is not an absolute religion when they hesitate to its contents, besides they are still embracing this belief. How should it be clearly explained?

In this research, some answers will be afforded to solve those problems above, based on Islamic literature and of course, the right interpretation of Qur’an and prophetic tradition, which is taken from *Tafsir al Mishbah* written by M. Quraish Shihab (Indonesia, 1944-now). It is because, *Tafsir al Mishbah* seemed to be a representative interpretation to see women liberation from the sight of Islam for it was written in the same era as the thought of women liberation raised.

⁹ Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, *Woman between Islam*, p.173

¹⁰ Haifaa A. Jawad, *The Rights of Women in Islam*, 1998. (New York: St. Martin Press), p.viii

B. Research Questions

Based on the background of research, the research questions in this thesis can be formulated as:

1. What is the concept of women liberation according to Asghar Ali Engineer?
2. How does Islam respond the concept of women liberation according to Asghar Ali Engineer?

C. Purpose of Study

This study is purposed to know the matters below:

1. The concept of women liberation according to Asghar Ali Engineer.
2. Islam response on the concept of women liberation according to Asghar Ali Engineer.

D. Contribution of Research

The society this day is trapped in such confusion that a contemporary problem, especially which is related to women liberation, is spread widely throughout muslim society. Therefore, this research is requested to give valuable contribution so the society itself may use the interpretation that suit the problem they face in this modern era.

E. Literature Review

After researching previous works on Asghar's thought, the writer found some essays as follows:

1. *Islam dan Pembebasan (Studi Terhadap Pembaharuan Asghar Ali Engineer)*; written by Armawanto (UMS, 2006). This thesis is studying

Engineer's thought on Liberation in Islam. He concluded this kind of liberation as *tawhid*. For in this research *tawhid* is not merely explained as The Ones of God, but it is also meant as the human unity, which could be reached only if there is a classless society.

2. Written by Muhammad Agus Nuryanto on 2000 entitled "*Asghar Ali Engineer Views on Liberation Theology and Women's Issues in Islam: An Analysis*". This thesis, which is fulfilled for his last assignment in Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal Canada, analyzed liberation theology focusing on two issues; polygamy and the wearing of *jilbab*. In the conclusion, he stopped on the idea that Asghar is such a liberalist, critical and emancipative thinker, more than that, he successfully promoted Islam as a religion of justice.
3. The third research entitled "*Telaah Kritis tentang Teologi Pembebasan dalam Pemikiran Asghar Ali Engineer Perspektif Islamic Worldview*", a thesis written by Agus Irfan, S.H.I to meet the requirement of his Master degree at University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta. He concentrated this discussion on some specific topics, namely: *Kafir* Term discourse, Pluralism discourse and Gender Equality discourse. His final assumption mentioned that someone could not be said that he understood the essence of Islamic teaching, if he puts aside the concept of socio-economic justice, gender equality, race and freedom, and respect for human dignity.

Based on the reviews above, it is known that the work on this topic is not yet written. The difference between this research and the previous research is the

object that is used in the research. The writer in this research, will focus her study on Asghar's thought about women liberation.

F. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a theoretical perspective. It can be simply a theory, but it can also be more general; a basic approach to understanding something. Typically, a theoretical framework defines the kinds of variables that need to be searched. Alternatively, it is also known as conceptual framework that is used in research to outline possible courses of action or to present a preferred approach to an idea or thought.¹¹

The quotes, which are gained from some sources, about women liberation such:

1. According to the free dictionary¹², women liberation is a movement directed towards the removal of attitudes and practices that preserve inequalities based upon the assumption that men are superior to women. It is also called women's lib.
2. While according to digital encyclopedia¹³, women liberation is a movement for the political, social, and educational equality of women with men; the movement has occurred mainly in Europe and the United States. It has its roots in the humanism of the 18th cent. and in the Industrial Revolution. Feminist issues range from access to employment, education, child care, contraception, and abortion, to equality in the workplace,

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org> (accessed on September 12, 2013 on 11.45 a.m)

¹² <http://www.thefreedictionary.com> (accessed on July 23, 2013 on 8.13 a.m)

¹³ <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com> (accessed on July 23, 2013 on 8.21 a.m)

changing family roles, redress for sexual harassment in the workplace, and the need for equal political representation.

Women liberation or feminist movement have a description that is not so different from the known descriptions of feminism, it refers to a series of campaigns for reforms on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, voting rights, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.¹⁴

Will be used here, an Islamic scientific approach; research that focuses on efforts to attract value, and universal value based on the information contained in scripture and supported the events and the phenomenon that is happening.

G. Research Method

A research should be accounted its righteousness. Therefore, methods that will be used during the study is needed, so the data effectively obtained. The research method is the steps related to study that will be discussed. The description is as follows:

a. Type of the Research

The problem objects which will be studied in this research is Asghar Ali Engineer's thought on women liberation. Therefore, this research is conducted in a qualitative study,¹⁵ based on a pure library research. While library research is aimed to gain data collecting and information with the

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org> (accessed on September 12, 2013 on 11.58 a.m)

¹⁵ A research tries to conceive the complicated phenomenon by examining entirely the context, looking at the holistic views and enrich the deep understanding. Lexi J. Moeloeng, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya, 2007), p. 31-32.

help of all sorts of available material in the library space as books, magazines, documents, records, historical stories and so forth.

b. Approach of the Research

The approach that is used in this research is a historical approach, which is based on the argument that one type of research is the history of biography of a person's relationship with society, nature, character, or sometimes influence of their thoughts. Afterwards, the writer will analyze their intellectual and scientific works and biographies.

c. Data Source

This research is conducted in a qualitative study, based on a pure library research. That's why the sources data are all written sources. Meanwhile, the sources of data will be classified into primary data sources and secondary data sources.

The primary sources are the works authorized by Asghar Ali Engineer, pertaining to the issues discussed, as below:

1. *The Rights of Women in Islam*. 1996. Second Impression, Lahore: Vanguard Books LTD.

In this book, Engineer discusses several Qur'anic verses which accords gender equality. The implications of this view are two-fold; firstly, one must accept the dignity of both sexes in equal measures. Secondly, one must see both sexes enjoying equal rights in social, economic and political spheres.

2. *Islam and Liberation Theology*. 1990. First Edition. India: Sterling Publishers Private Limited.

While this book, which declared Islam as harbinger of change, not only theological but social and economic as well. Engineer confirmed in this book, that Islam had also shown great concern for women's rights.

The secondary sources are all literatures; books, articles either in journal, magazine, or internet that are relating to women's liberation.

d. Technique of Data Analyzing

In order to complete this research, will be used here a descriptive method to describe the collected data and afterwards she will analyze and criticize mainly on the source that will be collected. Data analysis method that is applied here namely content analysis. It is a qualitative research library, which try to analyze the contents of the messages contained in the written sources objectively and scientifically, to find the message's meaning and its significance.¹⁶

The deductive research model will be used for explaining the data and the inductive model will be used after that to conclude the description of the data into a conclusion.

H. Research Paper Organization

¹⁶ Commonly, content analysis methods are used in quantitative research. For it has a process of counting based on communication category and messages in words', themes' and interactions' forming. Thus, content analysis in quantitative research based on frequency. While in the qualitative research, content analysis is more concerned with the value searching of the messages that is being conveyed. See: Noeng Muhajir, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Yogyakarta: Rake Saasin, 1996), h. 49-50.

To study and explain this problem clearly and easily, it will be organized into five chapters, they are:

Chapter One: This chapter explains the introduction, which covers parties in the background of study, research questions, purpose of research, contribution of research, literature review, theoretical framework, research method and research paper organization.

Chapter Two: Here, the theoretical frameworks on women liberation concepts; which contain of feminism, rights of woman, a historical approach about women in Islam, and M. Quraish Shihab's idea on woman also the interpretation methods of the Qur'an will be specifically clarified.

Chapter Three: This third section of thesis will definitely explain about Asghar Ali Engineer's life and a glimpse of liberation concepts, which will be divided into two main parts; the first part discusses about Engineer's life, with sub-chapters as follow: Engineer's education and his social life, factors influenced Engineer's thought and of course, his work. While the second part explains the theological and ideological thought of Asghar Ali Engineer

Besides, there will be the explanation about his theological and ideological thought, which is divided into two parts: his methodology of Qur'an and his concept of women liberation. This second part contains; the equality of women, marital rights of women, the concept of jilbab and women as the head of state.

The last part of this chapter describes the interpretation of Qur'anic verses on the rights of women.

Chapter Four: This chapter is the most essential chapter between others, for the writer clarifies the Islamic response, using M. Quraish Shihab's interpretation namely *Tafsir al Mishbah*, of the whole Engineer's concept on women liberation, which those concepts has been explained in the previous chapter.

Chapter Five: This last chapter contains of conclusion, which covers the result of research and suggestion.