



## **MEUNASAH, POWER AND SELF-CRITICS TOWARDS GOVERNMENT AND ACEH POLITICAL ELITE ON ACEH WOMEN POLITICAL STRUGGLE**

**Umaimah Wahid<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Post-Graduated Program-Communication Science, Budi Luhur University, Jakarta, Indonesia

### **ABSTRACT**

*Women struggle in Aceh often expresses admiration and it is as an inspiration for women's struggle. However, the glory of struggle on Acehese women fighters is not significant to Acehese women today. Women awareness is important and it refers to women's struggle at any level. The mastery of political space becomes important in the process of making decision. One of social and cultural strength means to raise awareness to build the glory of Acehese women in Aceh community is the utilization of meunasah. Meunasah is a place for a socio-cultural and civilization development of local community. Meunasah is the symbol of socio-culture and politics, it functions as an education source or as a center for Acehese people, especially at the first level in Aceh gampong. In Aceh political process, women are as integrated part in political process. Women in Aceh's struggle history are political actors performing political interaction actively even determining political process. Power is very important in women struggle process. Power provides strength moving the change, being courage in action and being able to control the change, and having self confidence in working and discussing the process with any parties involved in the change.*

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**Keywords:** Meunasah, Power, Self-critic, Women struggle-aceh political elite.

### **Contribution/Originality**

Acehese women have to do a self-criticism to themselves, the government elite and the political elite to have power to conduct political role. Critical paradigm and self-criticism logic are used with the main finding that Acehese women have to be dare to make change for themselves and society. This study has not been widely studied, but the current studies tend to focus on the form of description of Acehese women power history.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Politics is not a new thing for women in Aceh. Political and national matters activities are normal thing and no longer considered as taboo for women in the history of Aceh. Acehnese women's triumph in political activities has been proven and recorded with gold ink which is marked by several *sultanah* (queen) leading Aceh and Samudra Pasai Kingdom. Queens commanding Samudera Pasai Kingdom are Malikah Queen Nurillah (passed away in 1380 AD) and Queen Nahrasiyah (passed away in 1428), and queens commanding Aceh Sumatra kingdom are Safiatuddin Shah (1641-1675), Queen Naqiatuddin Nurul Alam Shah (1675-1678), Queen Zakiatuddin Inayat Shah (1677-1688) and Queen Kamalat Zainatuddin Shah (1688-1699) [1]. Aceh has not only women who are active in politics and government at the time of Aceh triumph but also female marine commander who was the first female commander in the world during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda, Admiral Malahayati. In addition, Aceh also has female war leaders in the struggle against the Dutch namely Tjoet Nyak Dien, Cut Meutia, Pocut Merah Intan, and Pocut Baren and educational leader, Tengku Fakinah [1].

The historical facts explain that Aceh is the area providing a public space for women openly and it does not discriminate against men and women. Acehnese women's greatness is inseparable from community development process at the first level of Aceh local government namely *gampong*. Acehnese people exceed social construction, culture, politics and religion in *gampong* every day. Every *gampong* throughout Aceh has *meunasah* as community development organization in various aspects of life, social, culture, religion, economic and politics. This means that all Acehnese people basically are involved in direct interaction with *meunasah*. Besides as learning and community center, *meunasah* is also as *gampong* government center.

History has recorded that during the time Aceh's human resources are constructed massively through *meunasah*. It is asserted that *meunasah* is as an integral part in Acehnese society and civilization development. Acehnese women condition today is not the ideal as the main Aceh human resources, but here is not to blame Acehnese women, but rather to question and criticize the reality extended in the heart of Aceh society during the time. Acehnese women are like losing their characters as a community, yet strong individuals are still growing to be part of Acehnese women movement. Therefore it is needed a break-in movement to change the logical thinking on Acehnese women themselves, political elite, scholars and community leaders to get out of pseudo reality related to Acehnese women development. On the basis of these ideas, the question that should be asked are: 1) why *meunasah* that is important for development of Acehnese women resource is not optimal and it is become part of the community development process by the government and political elite in Aceh? 2) Why should women have power to do self-criticism that can be delivered to the inheritance reality of Acehnese women values so that *meunasah* is no longer able to reveal female figures with Acehnese character?

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Meunasah as a Facility of Acehnese People Construction

*Meunasah* is available in every *gampong* in Aceh, even sometimes one *gampong* has more than one *meunasah*. Siswono mentioned that first all activities were carried out in *meunasah*:

prayers, discussions, *meureunoe*-learning, to arts was held in *meunasah*. *Meunasah* has many functions for the *gampong* community and the fact places *meunasah* as the center of Acehese people civilization. Soewarno [2]; Kurdi [3] explained that partner relationship between elite customary and religion elite in managing territorial units in Aceh is called as *gampong* (village). According to Kurdi, *teungku meunasah* is an officer taking care of everything related to religious matter in a village, while *keuchik* is an officer representing customs taking care of the customary law enforcement in carrying out government.

*Meunasah* is positioned like a university containing community reconstruction process progressing continuously. *Meunasah* is the arena for earning, routines, making the study or teaching, teaching children to read the Koran and *aqidah*, and discussion. The process is possible any time to create intellectual forces equally in Aceh. Tripa Sulaiman [4] *Meunasah* is as the source of Acehese people civilization development. The functions of *meunasah* as stated by Badruzzaman [5] are 1) the places for worshipping or congregational prayers, 2) proselytizing and discussion, 3) deliberation, 4) dispute resolution/peace, 5) development of artistic creations, 6) coaching and as the place for younger generation, 7) forum for sharpening skill/sport and 8). Center of capital city/*gampong* government.

## 2.2. The Powerfor Acehese Women Struggle

Injustice against women is integrated insocial-cultural system, religion and politics. The injustice symptoms can be seen clearly using inequality, injustice and gender disparities [6]. The strength of cultural effect in the process of reality construction is as the implication from domination and cultural partiality to women reality which is positioned as the subordination. Entrenched discrimination causes men to control public space and women privacy. Women often depend on the reality created by men.

Fairholm definedpower as "... an individual's ability to achieve its objectives when dealing with other people, even when faced with their refusal." Fairholm then specified a number of important initiatives in the use of power systematically with emphasizing that personal capacity making power users can perform the competition with others. According to the Oxford English Dictionary Helliwel and Hindes [7] the meaning of power is the control and power to rule against the other parties.

According to Squires [8] There are several power concepts in women empowerment namely:

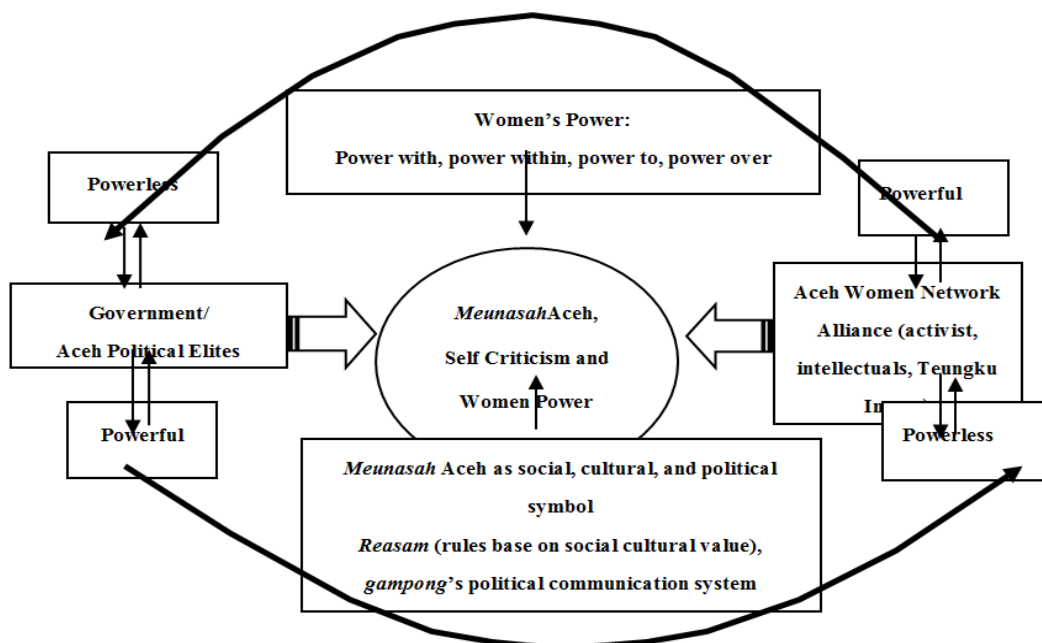
First, Power Over: the real/clear power, that is the power of a person or group to affect/get other group or people to do something wanted. Batliwata Squires [9] explained, if someone has the power then that person is having an existing power as the ability to control not only human body/physical, financial resources but also at ideology, so the group of *Power Over* is able to create rules. Second, Power from Within, the power in women is basically exist and it should be appeared as a strength of the women themselves. *Power from within* emerges from the effort of self-knowledge, to identify weaknesses and strengths so that women are able to determine their capacity in order to improve the internal strength and confidence. Townsend [10] Third, Power With, the power or capacity to evolve with the others. One can not develop simply by relying on themselves but they need others to support them. In *power with*, it is needed the ability to socialize with others

who will support their political performance. Townsend [11] Fourth, **Power to**, the power to do new things meaning *political power*. The power to affect others to be able to say and make decisions. The power to be able to do the work in their activities. This subjective awareness becomes individual strength to fight toward tyranny occurring both in the context of thinking and practical reality. [12]

### 2.3. The Government and Political Elites

The government is the party having power formally to perform community development, including the women development. Government policies and the political elite are needed in order to fight women becoming an integral part of the local political process. The government and political elite support will move the dynamics of women's development totally and continuously. Wahid [12] Government definition can be viewed from three aspects: the activities (dynamics), structural and functional, and duties and authority (function). In terms of dynamic, the government means any activities or organized efforts sourced on sovereignty and having the basis on state basis, for the people and region, and state tendency. In terms of structural functional, a set of state functions, the one with others are interconnected functionally, and perform its specific basis function for the achievement of state tendency. [13]

Aceh government system currently uses a special autonomous government system, namely a government system that has specificity based values and Aceh local wisdom. Aceh government performs special rights with the rules set forth in *Aceh Qanun* as special rules for Aceh province. Aceh is as one of the provinces in Indonesia having the privilege and the breadth to run the governance system at the *gampong* level. The provision is in accordance with Aceh Qanun No. 5 of 2003 and Aceh Government Law No. 5 of 2006 [14].



Picture: *Meunasah*, Self-Criticism and Women Power

Harold D. Lasswell stated that politics covers all political power holders in a political building. This elite consists of those who achieve a dominant position in political system and people life. They have power, wealth and honor. The role of political elite becomes important because political elite are those who make policy for development process, both physical and human resource development. [15]

### 3. METHODS

This research uses a critical paradigm. *Critical paradigm* attempts to explain, but the explanation is in different meaning, the explanation of conditions as false consciousness, for enlightenment purposes, human emancipation, for all social actors to be aware hidden coercion [15] In a critical perspective, the open changes to be done if women are active in politics, because politics determines a variety of policies. Women must be part of the political process, they will have a fighting chance to accept or reject the social inequality and political culture that they experienced over the years. Struggle is conducted for common interest. Political struggle conducted base on above mentioned considerations, the radical feminists stated by Hidayat [16] suggested that women have to be out of imaging domination done by men, and they have to create their own communication understanding so that women can have their own ideology understanding over the reality and affecting the social life about women reality.

Guba and Lincoln explained that the critical paradigm has ontologies which is based on historical realism, to follow transactional epistemology and dialogical and dialectical methodology [17]. The research is conducted using field research method because this research requires researcher directly involved with the research subjects. Field research prefer having face to face interaction with the community in natural environment. Field research is a form of research that aims to reveal the meaning given by public members on the behavior and reality around. Field research is used when the subject is still open the possibility of research exploratory widest. [18]

### 4. DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1. Self-Critics towards Government and Political Elite in Acehese Women's Empowerment

Acehnese women condition in public sphere, especially political experience inverted growth that is to reverse the patriarchy values. The submerged is very unfair if it is not considered as a problem mainly by the state, in this case Aceh government and by the women themselves. Government as the party having the authority to protect all citizens, including women in it should have a high sensitivity to women real condition through maximum effort to make variety of policies tending to and protecting women in real meaning. Those things require women awareness at the level of ideology and practical consciousness to rise struggling with women leaders values and spirit in the past based on the needs today.

Women awareness about marginal conditions today has to be a strong trigger to perform hegemony counter to the ruler so that it is possible for them to appear as parts of civilization process. Women are not supposed to give full credence to the other dominant groups, to men who have been proved as the cause of the emerge of the injustice to women. Let's start to rise with your own power using Aceh reconstruction momentum after the tsunami.

Seeing the Acehese women condition today that has not found a good formula to rise maximally as Aceh human resources, then it gives rise to a big question for women themselves, Acehese people generally, and especially for Aceh government and political elite. Why there is no serious and continuous planning in Acehese women development. It is required change movement that has to be made by Aceh government and political elite at every level of organization and administration. The government should seriously do programs and applications in the society in every Aceh *gampong*.

The strength of Acehese people during this period begins the construction process of *meunasah*. *Meunasah* is also used as a place to build people value and character, including young people, their independence is educated specifically. *Meunasah* is symbolic representations of people socio-culture directing all social activities, especially religious activities carried out in *meunasah*. In the process of social interaction in people group at Aceh, *meunasah* is used as place for *gampong* various programs socialization. The Aceh government should not only build and renovate *meunasah* in every *gampong*, but more essential do serious development and maximize the function and role of *meunasah* for empowering Acehese people.

The government and political elite and the general public must be able to return *meunasah* function as in the era of Aceh kingdom, with change adaptation and the present generation needs. *Meunasah* should be also friendly to women, it means that women also have to obtain the same opportunities and education with men. Acehese women must be forged into strong women, courageous, independent, intelligent, but still in the corridor of religious and Acehese values. Government and political elite must establish programs and education patterns for Acehese women involving all Acehese women stakeholders.

Women have equal political rights with men in building Aceh. Aceh government and political elite must create *teungku-teungku inong* (female scholar) as a source of religious and socio-cultural information to Acehese women. The women ability as commentary expert, jurisprudence and religious knowledge will open up a dialogue with men who currently deliver women interests dominantly. Women should be able to be part of policy process which takes place so it does not appear *qanun-qanun* or regulations that harm or harass Acehese women on behalf of religion.

Self-criticism with criticism of reason against the government's way of thinking, the political elite, and scholars about role of women in the community in Aceh. Aceh was not an area that prohibits the role of women in social and cultural life, religion and even politics. Aceh actually provides open space for women in social and cultural activities, religion and politics of. Acehese women have laid the foundation for the format of 'emancipation' women in public spaces and it does not matter actually supported by the scholars of his time, yet very ironic, post-independence until today no longer Acehese women figures who should be a 'role performance' Acehese women struggle.

The struggle then in the implementation requires a clear focus on what the common main issues or in other words what is the common enemy that must be driven energy to fight. According to investigators, the focus of women struggle in general as follow:

1. To raise awareness of women's importance in participation in all community aspects living in Aceh.

2. To advocate on issues and phenomena arising in the community.
3. To start and achieve Acehese women development goals, then women should have a strategy to achieve working such as : a) program and rationally planned to be implemented, b) socialization and massive campaigns in each *gampong* through *meunasah*, c) resources advocacy trained in each village, d) working together with *gampong* political elite, e) having the communication strategy-media/new media and social media, f) harnessing the power of social, culture and politics in Aceh, g) building a shared network among women, h) building a network with the government, the political elite, scholars/*tengku* and youth, i) building a women's development issues as common issues, j) creating institutions supporting the government to empower women, k) requiring the presence of women empowerment in all areas of the village, l) financing integral movements in the financial system / ABPD Aceh.

#### 4.2. Strength/Power for Acehese Women Change Struggle

Change is a necessity in the critical paradigm. A historical facts should be struggled through the Acehese women transformation process. Acehese women who have shown heroism and leadership recognized by the world should be transformed into the present so that women development is able to produce new Acehese women. Power is like 'blood' that drives the source of life in politics. In the book of Gender in Political Theory, [Squires \[19\]](#) stated that the importance of politics for women with a very famous phrase that "the personal is politics". Politics is the idea and at the same power. Politics belongs not only to a particular group, but also to all parties, including women. Without power it is almost impossible that process and political activity can be driven to women interests, children and other marginal groups that have been neglected by other groups in power and authority.

Power becomes important for women to be able to move Aceh civilization back. The Acehese women strength and courage are not actually in doubt, but the times are different and changing. Authority and their subjective powers will move the dynamics of change. Changing struggle conditions experienced by women is not easy, therefore, the struggle has to be started doing criticism to their selves or self-criticism. Reality Self-criticism is based on power from within, power with, and power to, and sometimes it requires strength power over, but it must be on the basis of benefit to all parties.

Women power gives strength to perform logical criticism or self-criticism against women themselves that will be able to move the change with having power as:

- 1) Power within, the power in the woman. Acehese women have to come up with the strength of the women themselves in order to determine the potential of self and understand the personal qualities. Power from within arises from self-introduction efforts, looking to identify weaknesses and strengths that women are able to determine the capacity of theirselves in an effort to improve the internal strength and confidence. This is fundamental if women want to develop themselves in order to have the ability to handle patriarchal system and their capital. Women should be able to read and analyze themselves. It is also part of a self-critical attitude.

- 2) Power With, power or capacity to evolve with the others. Acehese women should be willing to open up, to communicate with others because someone that is not set can be developed simply by relying on themselves but they need others to support them. In power with the necessary ability to socialize with others who will support their political performance. This power requires the involvement of other people who will enrich the power with power. Because in fact almost impossible that one does not need anyone else if active in politics. In this context, women need good communication skills and effective to establish and build relationships with various parties.
- 3) Power to, Political power will be obtained by women with self-critic movement as a counter of hegemony. In the process, women must build cooperation circuitry with many people who make support for women's political process because it puts women equal to the dominant group which has been dominating political process. Subjective consciousness is the strength of individual to take the fight to tyranny that lasted well into the context of thinking and practical reality. Women are earth force that has to move to affect reality and others for the change itself.
- 4). Power Over; This Power over allows women to take control the struggle and the society reality. Although power over tends to force, but in the women context, struggle and penetration are done with the strength of soft, gentle, or media power/social media. This means that women cannot walk alone, because basically all parties have their respective reality.

## 5. CONCLUSION

*Meunasah* is as a socio-cultural, economical, and political entity in *gampong* society. If Acehese people want to do the reconstruction and produce a new open civilization with the change of era, but they still have Acehese character value. Women do self-criticism to their current reality while to criticize Aceh government and they should dare to development political elite elite condition which the process is 'missing' from Acehese people development planning. Women to do self-criticism to their current reality while to criticize Aceh government and should dare political elite about Acehese women development condition which the process is 'missing' from Acehese people development planning. The government should promote a program of *Tengku Inong for villager empowerment*, so that women become part of village government structure. Women need courage and power to do and to become part of social, cultural, economic, religious and political reconstruction process. Women power/strength makes them able to perform the change movement for Acehese women and society

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