

Imas : Girl's Power

Ms. Sholihatun KIPTIYAH (Indonesia)

Her name is Siti Masruroh, or is simply called Imas or Uroh. I would rather call her Imas. Imas is a 19-year-old girl coming from a Ketanggungan, a small village in Brebes, a county located in Central Java. She has been in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia for about 5 years, since her graduation from a junior high school.

When she first came to Jakarta, she worked as a housekeeper of wealthy family in North Jakarta. She was there for about a year, then she moved to Warung Kifana, a small food stall nearby my place. I made friends with her when I started eating at her work place. I got to know about her life and her family. She is the oldest of the four children, of whom all are girls. Her mother sells snacks by bike. Her father works as a kind of junk collector. When she was on the second grade of a junior high school, her father got a bank loan, but was unable to pay the loan easily. As a result, Imas started working while schooling to pay for school's supplies and stuffs. Imas worked in the field as a labourer, or sold snacks at school during the break time. Imas also could not go to high school.

When Imas started working at Warung Kifana, she got more time to relax between serving customers. She also enjoyed chatting with many customers, listening to their conversations, which is enriching her knowledge. One day, a customer told her to go for high school diploma through a vocational program. Imas arranged her work schedule in order to attend the school. She now holds the certificate that is equivalent to high school graduate.

Imas said that her dream was to be better than her parents. She wanted to pursue her dream and enjoy her youth. In her village, many girls get married so young, at 17 or 18 years old. Imas prefers to delay getting married a little. Besides enjoying her youth, she is determined to send her younger sister to high school. Her younger sister is now at junior high school and same as Imas, also earns money by selling snacks at school. Every month, Imas sends some money from her salary, to help her mother pay some bills. Besides working at the restaurant, Imas, on her day off, also works as a cleaner in an apartment complex near the restaurant. She has about 3 clients there.

The village where Imas came from is quite traditional although it is not located in a remote area. The people there still consider women as "second class" human being. Many girls only graduate from elementary school, and go to big cities to work as maids or baby sitters. Some of them went abroad to become migrant workers, especially maids. The mindset exists in her village that girls should not get higher education, because eventually they will only become housewives. In fact, few girls get higher education.

Imas tries to visit her hometown every four months. Whenever she comes home, her parents ask about her plan to get married, her neighbors also irritate her about her single status despite her age before twenty years old. When Imas was seventeen years old, her family arranged a marriage for her, but she refused. She is determined to enjoy her journey and her youth before getting married.

It is obvious that Imas is not an extraordinary woman. But her determination is already influencing her younger sister who is currently at junior high school. Her sister will go to high school and also make a journey of life before settling down.

I might say that Imas story is not a common story. But it is happening. Many underage children, work to earn money and are unable to pursue higher education. In the case of Imas, she is lucky that she is in the environment, in Jakarta, where people support her determination. Living in Jakarta with minimum wage, Imas manages to make her life enjoyable. She has the girl's power, the power to be better.

Although Imas is not a community leader, she already shows an example to be followed by her sister. I say, therefore, that Imas is a leader, on her own world.



Imas, wearing hijab, working on night shift in the restaurant.