

THE HEROIC WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN LITERATURE WORK OF FEMALE AUTHORS

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary Indonesian literature, especially novel genre, be marked by the appearance of strong women. The presence of these great women brings about a radical change in the image of women and gender relations, both with regard to woman private-domestic issues, as well as public issues, and the fading of feminine-masculine stereotypes. The strength of women is increasingly extreme in the novels of contemporary works of female authors. Through heuristic-hermeneutic readings of more than forty-five recent contemporary Indonesian literary novels featuring female characters, the images are obtained as follow. Women are highly educated, intelligent, intellectual, critical, creative, and innovative minded women capable of resisting, protesting, rebelling against unjust social norms. Women are also strong personality, solid, inscrutable warriors, tenacious and successful workers, and insurgents who dare to bear the risks and consequences of their struggle; so many personalities arise from a less harmonious childhood life, tend to be dark. Furthermore, women are independent or trying to be independent, daring to make decisions, although sometimes still with doubt or doubt because the norms of society have not received such behavior; the more radical is the independence and courage in behaving and having sex, both in terms of how to choose sexual partners—heterosexual, lesbian, or bisexual—as well as the way expressing sex behavior towards her partner, including infidelity. The image becomes an important factor in shaping the pattern of equal, free, and independent gender relations, not one-sided, degrading, and sexist relationships so there is no dominance and subordination.

Keywords: heroic, women image, gender relation, contemporary, Indonesian literature

INTRODUCTION

This topic implies the presence of images the strong and heroic or powerful women in contemporary Indonesian literature, a topic of discussion that emerged since the 1970s, not only as women as imaginary figures in literature, but also women as literary writers or author. These women are portrayed as great and heroic in Indonesian literature and interesting to observe as part of the strong mainstreaming of the current and ongoing feminism and gender equality movement in Indonesia. The presence of female figures in contemporary Indonesian literature can be referred to as a mirror of objective reality which also presents the same thing.

Abrams (1981) has explained that there is an unavoidable relationship between literature and the state of society and the forces that exist in its time (cf. Pradopo, 1993:254). Among the four approaches it offers, the mimetic approach provides direction for the relationship between literary work and social reality. Similar things can also be traced from the theoretic

writings of Teeuw (1983) and Wellek and Warren (1949), to English (2010) and Rubright (2014) and empirical studies Fisher and Silber (2003), Kerkering (2003), Carden (2010), Singley (2011), and Renen (2017), including Rosidi (1984) and Damono (1978).

The novel entitled *Saman* (1998) by Ayu Utami marks the presence of heroic women in the contemporary Indonesian literature. Besides displaying an intelligent storytelling style, this novel presents the courage of women; then followed by Dewi Lestari (Dee), Fira Basuki, Djenar Maesa Ayu, Oka Rusmini, Elisa Fitri Handayani, Herlinatiens, Abidah El Khalieqy, Naning Pranoto, Dewi Sartika, Nova Riyanti Yusuf, Oki Madasari, Asma Nadia, Ilana Tan, and others. Their presence is an indicator of the increasingly strong position of women authors in contemporary Indonesian literature, especially those that present women's issues. Their novels were greeted with hustle and bustle, upbeat (hard) so that many novels were reprinted several series in a short time and various novel surgical forums were also conducted.

Therefore, it is interesting to study the image of heroic woman character who are to be offered in the established social and cultural structures. There are two problems studied, the image of women and the form of gender relations that are being fought for. Women's images are related to how the desired woman looks, feminine or masculine; the form of gender relations is related to sex role relations between women and men who want to be developed.

CONCEPT AND THEORY

Literature and Social Phenomena

To study relationship between literary work and social phenomena, Harry Levin (1945) quoting Vicomte de Bonald can be used as a starting point. De Bonald writes (Levin, 1945, in Elizabeth and Burns, 1973:56; Wellek and Warren, 1968) that "literature is the expression of society, as speech is the expression of man". The expression cannot be reduced directly (Wellek, 1989), but it is still recognized that in literary works there are aspects related to social reality. As an expression of society, literature cannot be separated from society because literature is not born of a social vacuum (Hardjana, 1985) which is present through subjective interpretations and imagination of the author. So, literary works can present two things at once, social phenomena in society and at the same time the author's interpretation of social phenomena (Wellek and Warren, 1977).

Thus, Zeraffa (1972, in Elizabeth and Burns, 1973) in "The Novel as Literary Form and as Social Institution" is important to note. Zeraffa wrote "There is nonetheless one fact that no approach to the novel, and particularly the sociological approach, can afford to ignore without falsifying the works and its effect on its reader: the fact with consists in the nature of the art itself". The presence of literature in society, thus, has goals, roles, and functions (Soeratno, 1994:5). As stated by Sidney (in Abrams, 1981: 14-15), "literature ... is a means of getting and doing something done, and tends to judge its value according to its success in achieving the aim". The role of literature in society is important because it can move readers to behave and act as "suggested" by the text (Soeratno, 1994:5).

Woman Image in Indonesian Literature

In *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (1994), image is interpreted as appearance, picture, or images; literary image means the impression of a mental or visual image caused by words, phrases, or sentences which are the basic elements that are typical in literary works. According to I Made Tatib (1998:6), what is meant by the image of women is the depiction of a woman's figure, whether an ideal woman should be respected by society, or a woman whose reputation is bad, or because her behavior is not in accordance with religious

teachings, morality, and or decency. So, the image of women has two meanings: (1) image about women and (2) image belonging to women (Ayatrohaedi, 1992:1; Darsono, 1995: 1 and 1996:2).

Based on the thematic typology of poems in *Tonggak*, Linus Suryadi (1994) categorizes themes about women over nine categories: (1) women as contained in the Torah, (2) women with honored and worshiped positions, as Dewi, (3) as a wife or married couple, (4) as a mother, (5) as a worker, (6) as a bitch, (7) as a lover, (8) as a sexual partner, and (9) as manifestation of independence, can be in the form of rebellion, struggle for rights, collection of authority. In psychological theory there are 4 types of personality based on the type of role or sex-role: masculine, feminine, androgyn, and undeferentiated (Kuwato, 1994).

Gender Relation

Unlike sex, which is a gift from God and human nature, gender is a social construction, human construction, and becomes part of culture. The construction of the values or ideology of a community group creates boundaries for human status and roles based on sex. Mosse (1996:3) illustrates that fundamentally gender differs from biological sex. Biological sex is a gift; we are born as a man or a woman. However, the path that makes us masculine or feminine is a combination of basic biological building blocks and biological interpretations by culture. Therefore, every community has 'scripts' for its members to follow, like they learn to play a feminine and masculine role. In other words, gender is a set of roles, like costumes and masks in theater, convey to others that we are feminine or masculine (Mosse, 1996:3). Gender is a trait attached to men or women that is constructed socially and culturally, whether feminine or masculine.

The social construction that creates roles for each biological sex in many societies has created gender inequality. Women are often placed in marginal and subordinate positions. Coupled with the strong ideology of familialism that arises and is preserved through a complex historical process, women are constructed as the second sex (Kusujiarti, 1997).

This differentiation of status and role results in women being shackled in domestic with various tasks and responsibilities attached to it, such as caring for children or taking care of kitchen needs that are not paid or are not economically valued. Thus, women do not generate economic income for the family. Child care work and household management are constructed as jobs that are not economically active so they are not paid. In other words, social construction has not included this care work into the definition of economic work (Folbre, 1994: 37) and politically so that society ignores the cost of this treatment (Young et al, 1981; Kabeer, 1994 in Sweetman, 1996:2). This is what gave birth to the sexual division of labor, men in the public sphere and women in the domestic sphere were considered to be detrimental to women (Budiman, 1985).

Involvement of women into the public sector, even if it causes a burden, can reduce women's economic dependence on men. Women's income is indeed only considered as extra income (Darsono, 1999), but this economic contribution will determine the pattern of gender relations in the family and society. Rogers (1978:155) says that what is contributed by each husband or wife to their marriage will have a major influence on the distribution of power in the family. The status and role that exists in women ultimately affects the pattern of relations that occur between women and men, both in the domestic and public spheres.

The rise of women who marked by the involvement of women in the public sector is a symptom of positive community development. The potential power of women who have been buried been raised to the surface. Many development results have been achieved by women,

but a number of negative impacts and effects have also emerged (Soeratno, 1994), for example, the emergence of the other man or the other women. The life of Kartono and Tini's family in the *Belunggu* roman of Armijn Pane (1961) which gave rise to the Rohayah as the other women could be an example.

RESEACH METHOD

The productivity of female authors to create novel, is indeed high. This is evidenced by the many novels written by these women authors. Beginning with *Saman* (1989) by Ayu Utami who relatively good and expressive work, followed by *Larung* (2001), *Bilangan Fu* (2008), *Pengakuan Eks Parasit Lajang* (2017), other novels with similar characters appear, *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Geni Jora* by Abidah El Khalieqy, *Tarian Bumi*, *Sagra*, *Kenanga*, and *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini, *Bella Donna Nova: Perempuan dari Ipanema*, *Miss Lu*, *Wajah Sebuah Vagina* by Naning Pranoto, *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* and *de Javu* by Herlinatiens, *Nayla* by Djenar Maesa Ayu, *Dadaisme* by Dewi Sartika, and *Imipramine* by Nova Riyanti Yusuf, *Jendela*, *Pintu*, *Atap*, and *Miss B* by Fira Basuki, *Supernova* series by Dee (Dewi Lestari), *Sakinah Bersamamu*, *Think Dinar!*, *New Catatan Hati Seorang Istri*, and *Assalamualaikum Beijing* by Asma Nadia. (Note, previous "epoch" novels that presented women were also interesting, for example *Sitti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli, *Layar Terkembang* by Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana, *Pada Sebuah Kapal* by N.H. Dini, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* trilogy by Ahmad Tohari, *Burung-Burung Manyar* and *Burung-Burung Rantau* by YB Manguwijaya).

As a methodological consideration, to study or examine these novels, the following important steps are taken. First, reading and enjoying the novel can be categorized into two stages/steps: (a) skimming and scanning reading to find out the topic or theme offered by each novel (not exactly correct). This reading will produce a general impression of the theme that can be captured, (b) in-depth and critical readings carried out when reviewing and analyzing read novels. In the second reading process, the novels are read repeatedly in accordance with the needs of analysis while being labeled. Second, the meaning or interpretation of the text on the basis of understanding obtained at the reading stage of understanding and critical reading. As a text that holds various meanings, literary works need to be interpreted by the reader. In this paper, of course the intended reader is the ideal reader as intended by Gunther (1973, in Soeratno, 1990), not just an implicit reader and a real reader.

The process of meaning continues throughout the process of reading the novel itself. This meaning can be in the form of a full and comprehensive meaning, it can also mean more specifically the parts that describe the image of women and the pattern of gender relations in the novel. In the perspective of sociology of literature, this meaning takes place back and forth between the overall meaning and the part and between the meaning of parts and the whole, as suggested by Genetic Structuralism (Goldmann, in Faruk, 1994).

FINDING

Independent and Courageous Women

Generally, the image of women contained in the novels by women's authors is relatively similar, one stereotype, but not same and uniform. Women are imagined as being independent or trying to become independent, both economically and socially, dare to make decisions for themselves even though various habits, assumptions, and social norms cannot yet accept it. This can be traced in the *Saman* and *Pengakuan Eks Parasit Lajang* by Ayu Utami, *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Geni Jora* by Abidah El Khalieqy, *Tarian Bumi*, *Kenanga* and *Tempurung*, novels by Oka Rusmini, *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* and *de Javu*

by Herlinatiens, and *Assalamualaikum Beijing* by Asma Nadia. The same is true of *Bella Donna Nova's* work by Naning Pranoto, *Nayla* by Djenar Maesa Ayu, *Cala Ibi* by Nukila Amal, and Maya Wulan's *Swastika* novel.

In *Saman* novel, the female characters, Shakuntala, Yasmin, and Cok, and Laila portray courage and independence. The Shakuntala figure, for example, dared to make a decision to have sex with a Caucasian, *bule* man who was described by his parents as a giant, "raksasa". Because the "raksasa" were prohibited from approaching, then Shakuntala was the one who dared to come (actively) the giant man. In the end, Shakuntala managed to come to the land of "raksasa", the United States of America, on the grounds (one of them) to study art. The following quotations can be references to such Shakuntala imagery, as found in *Saman*.

Namaku Shakuntala. Ayah dan kakak perempuanku menyebutku sundal (Utami, 2003:115).

Sebab aku telah tidur dengan beberapa lelaki dan beberapa perempuan. Meski tidak menarik bayaran. Kakak dan ayahku tidak menghormatiku. Aku tidak menghormati mereka (Utami, 2003:115).

Aku keturunan peri. Aku tinggal di sebuah keputrian di mana semua anak menari. Di sekeliling kompleks itu terbentang bukit-bukit yang ditinggali raksasa: buta cakil, buta rambut geni, buta ijo, buta terong, buta wortel, buta lobak. Buta-buta galak (Utami, 2003: 120).

Karena raksasa akan dibunuh seperti wirok jika memasuki keputrian yang terletak di belakang kesatrian, akulah yang mengunjunginya di bawah pohon-pohon kepuh. Belit-membelit seperti Nagagini dengan seekor ular domestik (Utami, 2003:120).

My name is Shakuntala. My father and sister called me a bitch (Utami, 2003:115). Because I have slept with several men and some women. Although it doesn't attract payment. My brother and father don't respect me. I do not respect them (Utami, 2003:115).

I'm of fairy descent. I live in a castle where all the children dance. Around the compound lies the hills where the giants live: blind cakil, blind geni hair, green blind, eggplant blind, carrot blind, turnip blind. *Fierce blindness* (Utami, 2003:120).

Because the giant will be killed like a wirok if you enter the castle located behind the knight, I'm the one who visits it under the kepuh trees. Crinkling like Nagagini with a domestic snake (Utami, 2003:120).

Through figures of Annisa In *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and Kejora in *Geni Jora* by Abidah El Khalieqy, the image of a brave and independent woman is very clear. Annisa and Kejora in the two novels were women born in the *pesantren* family environment. They live in a religious atmosphere. As is generally the case in Islamic boarding schools, women are imagined as "the second sex" which is subordinate. Women are more shackled, their movements are restricted, and in many cases women are considered weak so they must be guided, directed, and protected by men. In other words, the *pesantren's* setting presents a strong impression of the unfair treatment received by women among them. Annisa and Kejora give different images, do not want to be shackled, forced, and fooled. Climbing trees, riding horses, going out at night is a bit of the image displayed to show that women can do stereotyped things for men.

.... Setiap kali setelah latihan tilawah bersama Mbak May, ketika Rizal dan Wildan sedang menikmati mimpi di siang bolong, aku pergi mengendap ke kamar lek

Khudori dan mengajaknya untuk latihan naik kuda. Dia bukannya tidak tahu kemarahan Bapak untuk keinginanku yang satu ini, tetapi aku selalu berhasil membujuknya. Dengan merujuk kisah perempuan kembang peradaban yang selalu diceritakannya, aku berhasil naik kuda sampai ke perbatasan desa Kajoran. Lalu berhenti dan memancing ikan di sungai (PBS, 2001:24—25).

... Every time after *tilawah* training with Mbak May, when Rizal and Wildan were enjoying a dream in broad daylight, I went to settle into Lek Khudori's room and invited him to practice riding a horse. He didn't not know about my father anger for this one thing I wanted, but I always managed to persuade him. By referring to the story of the female flower of civilization that she has always told, I managed to ride a horse to the border of the village of Kajoran. Then stop and fish in the river (PBS, 2001:24-25).

Important questions about women also appear in *Geni Jora*.

Siapakah perempuan? Barisan kedua yang menyimpan aroma melati kelas satu? Semesta alam terpesona ingin meraihnya, memiliki dan mencium wanginya. Tetapi kelas dua? Siapakah yang menentukan kelas-kelas? Sehingga laki-laki adalah kelas pertama? Sementara Rabi'ah al Adawiyya laksana roket melesat mengatasi rangking dan kelas. Sebenarnya, kelas berapakah Hitler? George W. Bush? Mana lebih tinggi rankingnya, Ariel Sharon atau Fatima Mernissi? Bukankah selain Abu Jahal, Fir'aun, Musilamah al Kadzdab, Adam Wizehobart terdapat juga Maryam al Bathul, Balqis, Aisya, dan Fatimah az Zahra? (GJ, 2004:60).

Who are women? The second line that holds the aroma of jasmine first class? Enchanted universe wants to reach it, own and smell the fragrance. But second class? Who determines the classes? So that men are first class? While Rabi'ah al Adawiyya like a rocket shot over the ranks and class. Actually, what class is Hitler? George W. Bush? Which rank is higher, Ariel Sharon or Fatima Mernissi? Is not besides Abu Jahal, Pharaoh, Musilamah al Kadzdab, Adam Wizehobart there are also Maryam al Bathul, Balqis, Aisya, and Fatimah az Zahra? (GJ,2004:60).

Other novels also show this. *Nayla* presents Nayla's brave, strong and independent character. *Swastika* novel features a Swastika character, a woman who is also brave and independent. Likewise, *Kenanga* novel by Oka Rosmini who uses the settings of Balinese society presents a female figure, named Kenanga, as the main character. The description of Kenanga presented by the author presents her image as a wealthy Brahmana caste girl who is modern, highly educated (up to Master), and has a profession/career (as a lecturer), highly intelligent, high intellectual ability, assertiveness, opinion strong, and independent. With all these images, Kenanga becomes a woman who is indeed brave and independent. For the size of modern humans, Kenanga is a perfect female figure. Intimacy with men is a central theme in this novel.

Female Sexual Behavior

What stands out from women's efforts to form an independent and courageous image is women's behavior in terms of sex. In most novels, it appears that sexual behavior is one of the important and basic behaviors that characterize the existence and empowerment of women. Thus, the efforts made by these women to lead to independence are through the independence of women in terms of behavior/sexual relations.

This freedom of sexual behavior can be seen from the courage and independence of how to choose a partner and the courage and independence of how to express sexual behavior. What is meant by courage and independence in choosing a partner is the courage and independence

of women in terms of choosing sex partners, without wanting to compromise with willingness and coercion from the outside (parents, society, social norms). This includes the courage of women to choose sex partners who are then stigmatized as lesbians, choose men who are not accepted by the social environment (for example choosing Caucasians “raksasa”), or determine sex partners who are both male and female (which is then stigmatized with bisex). While what is meant by expressing sexual behavior is how women behave when having sex. If the social norms and environment require that the woman is passive, waiting, gentle, must satisfy men, or other necessities, then the women in the novels studied are portrayed as brave and independent to choose the desired sexual behavior, even though the behavior was not received by the community.

Image of women who are brave and independent in terms of how to choose sex partners and how to express sexual behavior can be found in almost all novels. The female characters displayed, with full desire and awareness, choose (not chosen) their sex partners. Sex partners chosen by female figures in the novels can be of: (1) different sexes (male, heterosexual) including *bule* called “raksasa”, (2) same sex (fellow women, lesbians), (3) male and female (bisexual). The choice of sex partners at the same time determines how to express their sexual behavior.

Kunti in the novel *Bella Donna Nova* chose a male partner to accompany her life, her husband. Kunti consciously chooses her life partner (husband) and she is loyal to her husband. Of course, Kunti still works and has a career, without her husband being prevented. Likewise is Annisa in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and Kejora in *Geni Jora*. The two women also chose to partner with a man he loved and they were loyal to their partner. Instead, the women also demanded that their men be loyal, not polygamy.

Besides choosing sex partners who are of different sex or heterosexual as most women, women are also imagined as women who dare to choose sex partners of the same sex, fellow women or lesbians, although sometimes doubts arise in themselves. The decision to choose this same-sex partner is indeed not without challenges. It is precisely the challenge of the surrounding community, especially the parents, brothers, and other close people, very hard. However, the female characters in the novels are ready to accept all the titles that will be attached to them, such as lesbians, bitches, or others.

Figure Rie in *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* by Herlinatiens, Swastika character in Maya Wulan's *Swastika* novel are two examples that present the figure of lesbian women, although the two novels have different colors. Rie's character in the novel *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* really decides to love a woman. Therefore, Rie refused to be married to a man. She ran away from home and chased his girlfriend. While Swastika in the *Swastika* novel is in doubt, between loving men or loving fellow women, being horned or becoming winged. In her heart, she felt like loving a woman, but she tried to reject it. To dispel her feelings of love for her, Swastika decided to change women with different shapes and styles. The goal, once again, is to drive away her love for women, even though she enjoys having sex with men.

Another image that appears in terms of how to choose this sex partner is the image of women who with full confidence choose to have sex with men and women at the same time. These women, in addition to enjoying sexual behavior with men, also enjoy sexual behavior with fellow women. Those who are called bisexuals determine such sex choices with full awareness, on their own impulse, and indeed that is the choice they make. *Saman* novel presents the character of Shakuntala, *Nayla* novel, making Nayla's character a double sex act (although he prefers lesbian), and the *Swastika* novel brings out a bisexual Swastika.

Various reasons make them choose the double sex relationship. Figure Nayla, in Djena Maesa Ayu's *Nayla* novel, since she was nine years old raped by her mother's boyfriend; then he has sex with changing men; finally he fell in love with his female friend, July. Figure Swastika, in the *Swastika* novel by Maya Wulan, is fed up with various women's obligations imposed by her religious family. An unexpected birth and a compelling father, making her a rebellious woman, she likes to fight and oppose. Her father is the main "enemy" that must be resisted. Likewise is Shakuntala in *Saman* novel. Because she was always forced by her father, restrained by abnormal rules according to hers, Shakuntala became a woman who opposed and rebelled against all that. Her father is her enemy. The rebellion continued into their sexual behavior. They also continue to "experiment" about sex, including who they have to have sex with, both men and women.

What also stands out from the image of women about sex is infidelity that occurs among women. Women have dared to commit adultery, both frankly and secretly, both by women who have not (or are not) married or by women who are already married or at least have a male lover. Kenanga in the *Kenanga* novel secretly has a love affair with her own sister's husband. Yasmin in *Saman* novel has an affair with Saman, even though she is married. The mother figure in *Nayla* novel even alternates with many men. Thus, infidelity which has been dominated or constructed to be done by men, in novels written by women, is actually done by women.

Educated and Personality Women

The female figures presented in all novels are generally highly educated, so the image of being a smart, intelligent, forward-thinking woman is very prominent. There is no type of stupid woman in these women's novels. Kenanga figures are educated up to Master; Kunti, even though she departed from the area to Jakarta armed with a junior high school, she successfully graduated from high school and studied in Publicity; Annisa also attended college, majoring in Philosophy (even after being divorced from her first husband) and being an activist. Likewise, Kejora is highly educated, smart and a woman activist; Laila, Yasmin, Shakuntala also portrayed a person who was highly educated, smart and activist; Nayla, though through a difficult life process, finally became a figure of a smart and brave woman. The same is true of the Swastika who is studying at UGM Yogyakarta.

Higher education is able to form a smart, intellectual, critical, creative and innovative mindset. All of that affects a person (woman) not to accept social constructions that marginalize and marginalize them. The smart and educated women finally resisted, protested, rebelled against those unfair (and gender-biases) social norms. They do not want to be marginalized, but instead demand to be the center of domination, or at least be equal to men as partners.

Education is able to form a personality. Life experiences also shape personality. Therefore, with high education and a long real life experience (especially a bitter, miserable, poor, downturned, suffering, forced, raped, tortured, shackled freedom) experience makes the women in the novels studied have strong, sturdy personality, fighters who are not easily discouraged, resilient and successful workers, and rebels who dare to bear the risks and consequences of their struggle. All novels feature women with strong personalities while still being able to act as real women. This is what Toto Kuwato (1994) calls an adrogyn personality, a strong feminine personality and (also) strong masculine.

Gender Relation

The image of women described above is able to form a more equal, not subordinate pattern of gender relations between men and women. Women who are highly educated, have strong

personalities, and women who are brave and independent, also in terms of courage and independence for sexual behavior, are able to become important factors in forming patterns of gender relations. This image is a strong bargaining position. At least, women are able to take positions freely and independently when all socio-cultural elements compel them to follow norms that are gender-biased. Although it cannot be formulated in a universal conclusion, there is generally an equal form of gender relations between men and women that is able to place women in an equal position. Of course there are various forms of equality here and there, including the strength of their bargaining position when decision making will be made.

Social conditions in general do put women in subordinate positions. Women as wives who are related to their husbands, women as children who are between brothers (children) men and their fathers, women in the work environment, and other statuses and roles involving men, women are always nominated or not, considered the second sex. Norms, culture, lifestyle, religion, and other rules also tend to shackle and limit women's movement. Families, communities, and even the state also take part in subordinating women. This general description of women's novels by authors shows such socio-cultural conditions.

One of them is the *Kenanga* novel by Oka Rusmini. This novel tells the story of Balinese people who hold strong Balinese traditions. Among these traditions is the pattern of marriage between the existing castes, *Kasta Brahmana*, *Kasta Ksatria*, *Kasta Waysa*, and *Kasta Sudra*. The pattern of marriage is more siding and beneficial to the position of men and burdensome to women. Women are in a difficult position when dealing with the rules of marriage between the castes.

Kenanga is a woman who directly experiences the joys of living in such a tradition. Born in a family of Brahmin castes (the highest caste) put *Kenanga* in an honorable position. Adequate economic conditions, living in large *griya*, and various privileges make *Kenanga* a very valuable woman. Likewise the women of Brahmin descent who hold another *Ida Ayu* title. However, such an honorable position is lost when they are faced with the tradition of marriage that their parents adhere to.

The tradition of marriage among them is indeed burdensome to woman's position. Brahmin woman must marry brahmin man. If not, for example brahmin woman marrying sudra man, the woman will "go down caste" to become a Shudra woman, with the first ceremony to release the Brahmin caste. Therefore, "hunting" brahmana man is a custom for these brahmin girls. If they don't get brahmin men, they prefer not to get married, or be ready to become the second, third, or whatever wife.

This is different from the position of man. Brahmin man is expected (just to be expected, not required) to marry a brahmin woman too. For the sake of true brahmin descendants. However, this brahmin man was allowed to marry a Shudra girl. If this happens, then the Shudra girl married to the Brahmin man will "be lifted up" to the Brahmin caste called *Jero*. Thus, men are more free to choose their soul mate.

Such norms and traditions gave rise to intrigues among brahmin girls to get brahmin men. The intrigue, strategy, and methods of getting Brahmin men are not infrequently placing women as "merchandise" on sale. Brahmin girls are willing to "sell themselves" in the presence of brahmin men so that self-esteem, independence, and all the attributes that exist in women seem to have been swallowed up by the tradition of getting the Brahmin man.

Other novels, with their respective characteristics, display similar conditions. *Shakuntala* in *Saman* was also surrounded by many rules. Family becomes an institution that enforces all the norms and rules. As a result, the family becomes an unpleasant place for girls. Parents,

especially fathers, are enemies that must be resisted. Annisa in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and Kejora in *Geni Jora* was also raised in a family full of norms and rules imposed on them. In their families, men are independent rulers with all their behavior, while women are weak creatures who have limited space to move in the domestic sphere. Women must obey, yield, and obey all family rules that are controlled by men. Thus, gender relations in their families do not place women in an equal position, but women are subordinated to men.

Relatively the same thing is found in *Swastika*, *Nayla*, and *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* novel. Women like Swastika, Nayla, and Rie lived and were raised in family rules that did not allow them to gain freedom and independence. It is not only freedom to get out of the shackles of norms that grip them, but also freedom and freedom to recognize and be themselves, especially freedom and freedom in matters of sex. The various shackles attached to these women were unable to resist the desire of women to be independent and free. Their willingness to be independent and free is so passionate. They are aware that women should not be treated like that. Their awareness to advance and reach freedom soared. Then, what did the women do? Fighting rules, rebelling against colonization of norms and traditions, and struggling must advance themselves. They struggle to achieve equality and equality with men.

In short, what women writers display in contemporary Indonesian literary novels is a form of gender relations that emphasizes equality and equality of degrees, not one-sided relations or relationships that demean or exalt others. There is no more domination, no more subordination. Women and men are equal beings. Women do not need to be bound by various rules. Women must be free and independent, free to be herself, to reach his hopes, and to realize her dreams come true.

CONCLUSION

The appearance of heroic women in dealing with social, cultural, economic, gender inequality, and even education and sex issues, is a universal description of the image of women and gender relations developed by female authors in contemporary Indonesian literature. By continuing to display the characteristics and privileges of each work, including the way of delivering and cultivating the themes carried out, there is a universal similarity in putting forward the heroics of women in their novels.

The image of women featured by authors has similar stereotypes: women who are independent or trying to become economically and socially independent and women who dare to make decisions for themselves, even though various customs, assumptions, and norms of society cannot accept such women's independence and courage. This image is seen in all novels. Nevertheless, the image of an independent and courageous woman is sometimes still accompanied by doubts because the norms in the community have not been able to accept and even reject such women's behavior.

Independence and courage that are attached to the image of women are supported by the ability of women to pursue higher education and educated, not stereotypes of innocent women who do not attend school. Being educated, the image of being a smart, intelligent, forward-thinking woman is very prominent. It seems that the authors did deliberately present such women as an attempt to erode the false assumptions that place women as uneducated, unintellectual, ignorant, and backward. It is this higher education that is capable of giving birth to smart, intellectual, critical, creative, and innovative mindsets in women so that they do not accept social constructs that marginalize and ultimately dare to fight, protest, rebel against unfair social norms.

Education is also able to form a strong personality. Coupled with long life experiences, especially those that are bitter, miserable, poor, downtrodden, suffering, forced, raped, tortured, shackled by their freedom, making women in contemporary Indonesian literary novels have strong, sturdy, warrior personalities, not easily discouraged, resilient and successful workers, and rebels who dare to take risks. This androgynous woman is present in all novels.

What stands out from women's efforts to form an independent and courageous image is women's behavior in sex. Sex behavior is one of the important and basic behaviors that characterize the existence and empowerment of women. This appears in two ways, courage and independence in choosing a partner and courage and independence in expressing sex. The female characters displayed, with full desire and awareness, choose (not chosen) their sex partners, can be of (1) different sexes (male, heterosexual), (2) same sex (fellow women, lesbian), and (3) also be male and female (bisexual). The choice of sex partners at the same time determines how to express their sexual behavior.

The affair that is carried out by women is also a phenomenon that is going forward. Women are encouraged to commit adultery, both frankly and secretly, both by women who have not (or are not) married or by women who are married (at least have a male lover). Thus, infidelity which has been dominated or constructed to be done by men, in novels written by women, is actually done by women.

The overall image of the woman is able to be an important factor in forming a more equal pattern of gender relations because it is able to become a bargaining position. At least, women are able to take positions freely and independently when all elements of socio-culture compel them to follow norms that are gender-biased, even though they cannot be formulated in a universal conclusion. Although it has not become literary canon, the presence of literary novels by women's authors has colored the face of contemporary Indonesian literature. There are those who seem exploitative, there are those whose expressions are vulgar and even seem petty, there are also those who work well and have high literary value. This is the heroic women who adorn the innovations of contemporary Indonesian literature. Without intending to judge, this is the impression that comes from deep-critical, appreciative, appreciative readings or exploratory readings that can be done. Of course, this interpretation is relatively subjective.

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