
CULTURAL CRITICISM OF BALINESE WOMEN UPON BALINESE TRADITION: A STUDY OF FEMINIST LITERATURE

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Abstract

Cultural discourse in Balinese people relates to social discourse which lives in line with current development within an ethnic entity. This writing aims at giving articulation in form of comprehension upon the existence of Balinese women in criticizing something felt as cultural unfairness which marginalizes themselves as individual and women. The study is in form of feminist literature which focuses on woman representation in the world of literature. The existence of feminist theory is intended to elevate the marginalization of woman literary works or marginalization of woman in literature. There are three focuses, namely: 1) giving text of woman author work, 2) discussing woman character in literary work, and 3) studying the response of woman reader upon the literature.

The cultural criticism conducted by Balinese women in the novels of Balinese writer such as AA PanjiTisna, Oka Rusmini, Putu Wijaya concerns about the existence of cultural rebellion which is related to monolithic opinion by emphasizing on patrilineal society system, tradition and religious system of Balinese people framed by Hindu belief. In religious system of Balinese people there is a belief of destiny as a life that should be accepted as the consequences of *karma* (act). Bad actions done by the characters in the novel is a representation of the writer. This writing also discusses about the criticism of a hegemony which is positioning the women in a domestic rule without any power to fight back.

It also reveals the resistance of woman character about social stratification problem (caste) which has been mislabeled from color system. The writer also shows other *sudra*: a community represented as icon of uneducated, poor people who has profession as servant, who does not know about manners and not authoritative. It is also found a problem of gender inequality in form of thought and attitude such as refusing to be submissive as a woman, be rational, aware of equality of rights, fully initiative to position them in society proportionally.

Key words: cultural criticism, Balinese women, feminist literature.

INTRODUCTION

Feminist study has been done by some researchers previously such as Rubai (2004), Putra (2003), Kurnia (2002), Bodden (2003), Kleden (2004), Allen (2004) upon the literary works of Balinese writers. All of previous researches about the works of Panji Tisna, Putu Wijaya, and Oka Rusmini have individually enriched our understanding about the form and theme of their works. However, as explained from the research conducted before, none of them discussing collectively the works of those three writers from perspective of criticism upon Balinese tradition. This article tries to discuss the works of those three Balinese novelist collectively by focusing on their cultural criticism through woman character in novel upon Balinese tradition.

LITERATURE AND BALINESE CULTURE

The existence of Indonesian literature in the frame of Balinese culture can be seen as one of media involved in the process to development of a culture, which is Balinese culture. Aspect of spiritual, moral and humanity are the central point for dynamic process of change in the form of the struggling of values in literature which further reaches the three dimensional form of culture, namely: idea, behavior, and physic. The dynamic is mainly in the form of idea to find the best formula how the real life exposed through the behavior is always in the level of moral quality which is positioning human meaning in the life of Balinese people.

Saryono (2006: 73) argues that there is a representation of culture construction within literature discourse. A representation of culture construction is inseparable with empiric-cultural condition (the form) of Indonesia. In the context of Saryono's point of view, this construction contains dynamic to form from some activities, movement (physically or in the level of idea, spirit) which collaborates to the reach of a culture construction. Addressing the Saryono's point of view, absolutely the consequences of an

effort to the culture construction, there are many responses done by the members of this construction community, for example there is a no-compromised response in form of resistance, or compromised response, acceptance of the culture construction.

In the real world beyond the literature text, cultural struggling has been done by some women since 1930s by founding organization of Poetri Bali Sadar. Quoting the magazine of *Djatajoe*, Putra (2003: 25) said that there are five main purposes of Poetri Bali Sadar. First, strengthening the harmony of Balinese girls in general. Second, helping each other if there is a member needs a help. Third, expanding the knowledge of the members by conducting the reading or demanding lesson subjects in a certain school. Fourth, funding the children's school fee of the Balinese women. Fifth, teaching reading, writing and calculating to the Balinese girls who were not allowed to school because of ages issue. Other issue fought culturally in elevating women's dignity was anti-polygamy movement.

The people and Balinese culture generally describe the characteristics of small tradition, big tradition (Hindu), and modern tradition. (Swellengrebel, 1960:29-31; Mc.Kean 1973: 21-24). Parallel with the category which is dimensionless, the people and Balinese culture is basically developing through three integrative level, namely: community integration, regional integration, and national-international integration. The existence of Balinese culture is also determined by the support of social system or well-established societal. (Mantra, 1992:11). The societal system is in form of traditional institutions such as indigenous village, *dadia*, and other organizations such as *subak* and other *sekaa*.

In its development, Balinese people are in the middle of tradition and modernity. Art aspect, for example, is in the struggle of tradition and modernity. Traditional art associated with ancient art which is the heritage of local people tends to be static and has standard structure. Many people even believe that traditional art is "anti" modernity. Modern art is considered generally as new art, "import" culture, be more advanced, changing vastly and a creation of current people which hints the expression of individual freedom.

FEMINIST LITERATURE

Feminist literature focuses on women representation in literature world. The existence of feminist theory is intended to elevate the marginalization of woman literary works or marginalization of woman in literature. There are three focuses, namely: 1) giving text of woman author work, 2) discussing woman character in literary work, and 3) studying the response of woman reader upon the literature. In this study, feminist theory is used to study woman character in literary works.

In the beginning feminist theory was not fully accepted in Indonesia because it was considered as import thing which is less relevant by the Indonesian culture. (Awuy,1995: 84). Further in the theoretical discussion about woman, feminism whether in the form of term or concept has been definitely present as principal reference. Feminism becomes theoretical and philosophical discourse which is present with strong allure and indeed worth to be discussed.

Tong (2006: 11) describes that although most of the feminist schools tend to reaction view of self, eco-feminist proposes the widest and most demanding conception of self-relation to others. According to eco-feminist, we do not only relate to one another, but also with the non-human world: animals even plants.

Women's movement and disciplines about women studies which take to the development of feminist theories start to influence the point of view of sociologist to analyze women's position in society. Feminists theories are vary and have changed dramatically since its beginning. (Ollenburger and Moore, 2002: 20).

The theory development of feminist according to Ollenburger and Moore (2002: 20) is that in 1960s emphasized on the purposes of feminist politic which focused on determining the women to be equal to the men after decades of being ignored, excluded and belittled by patriarchy disciplines. Women tried to be research object. Traditional theories were frequently modified by feminists to describe woman oppression. Gross and Pateman (1986: 43) proposed that by centering on inclusion of women equality to the past theoretical, the equality of women and men was depressed. From the study of feminist theory which was analyzed, tested and questioned, Gross (1986: 194) concluded that in the end, feminist theory emphasizes on social institutions and social action, by giving alternative frameworks.

Approaches of woman study which are covered by some sociologist, according to Ollenburger and Moore (2002: 21) includes liberal feminist tradition, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism and for not too wide newer concepts about cultural feminism and post-structural feminism. Those theories have similarity in focus about oppression of women in society.

CULTURAL CRITICISM OF BALINESE WOMEN UPON TRADITION

In the novel of Panji Tisna, *Ni Rawit Ceti Penjual Orang* which hereinafter is referred to *NRCPO* (1935) describes portrait of Balinese women such as Ida Ayu Kendran, Ni Anis who play protagonist character and Ni Rawit plays antagonist character. In novel *Sukreni Gadis Bali*, which hereinafter is referred to *SGB* (1936) describes portrait of protagonist woman Luh Sukreni and antagonist character of I Negari and Men Negara. Novel *Putri*, which hereinafter is referred to *P I*, first book, and *P II* second book (2004) of Putu Wijaya describes the character of Putri as the main character who plays protagonist character. In novel *Tarian Bumi*, which hereinafter is referred to *TB* (2000) and *K* (2003), by Oka Rusmini describes a portrait of some women. The character of Telaga (in *TB*) is the main character that plays protagonist role. Meanwhile, in novel *Kenanga*, which hereinafter is referred to *K*, describes protagonist character: a portrait of beautiful *brahmana*, educated undergraduate, a lecturer of university named Ida Ayu Kenanga. The woman characters in the novel of those three writers Panji Tisna, Putu Wijaya, and Oka Rusmini shows the real condition of woman manifested in the form of: marginalized, subordinated, oppression in the form of labeling, double-burden, single parent, the victim of violence, and in the process of cooptation.

Cultural fight done by Balinese women in novel *NRCPO* is about the existence of cultural rebellion related to monolithic by emphasizing on patrilineal society system, tradition and religious system of Balinese people framed by Hindu belief. In religious system of Balinese people there is a belief of destiny as a life that should be accepted as the consequences of *karma* (act). Bad actions done by Ni Rawit who manage a strategy to satisfy her ambition to get rich by marrying Ida Ayu Kendran with Ida Wayan Ompog and kidnapped Ni Anis to be sold as a slave, finally ended with bad consequences to the destiny of Ni Rawit, in which she died drowning in the sea when there was a fire between Dutch ship against French ship which loading slaves. In *SGB* cultural struggling done by the woman character, Sukreni is about a wise response of a problem faced by her. "Silent" struggling is a description accepting attitude of something as a part of destiny from *Hyang Widi* (the Almighty God). The suffering of Sukreni becomes the symbol of powerlessness of Balinese women in patrilineal system which positioning women in subordinated position and the men in superior position.

Woman character in novel *PI, II*, Putri does a cultural struggling by doing re-interpretation and response to the tradition. Putri fights the tradition which is not substantial but more non-practical ceremony. Putri also proposes reformation thought of how to behave daily in the middle of Hindu-based cultural interaction, the struggling of Putri about the caste problem which has been mislabeled from color system. The woman character in novel *P I, P II* emphasizes on the principle of *Karma Phala* which is reflected thematically in the story of the novel.

The character of Telaga in *TB* struggles in form of thought of reinterpretation upon tradition and concrete response in her life. Concrete response by Telaga is walk out from her original community *geriya* and enters the community of *sudra* in the bond of marriage with man outside of her community. Kenanga is a character in novel *K*, who is a beautiful *brahmana*, educated undergraduate scholar, willing to sacrifice for others. As the consequences of her sacrifice to her little sister, Ida Ayu Cempaka, Telaga should suffer of giving birth of a child from raping done by Bhuana. In *K*, Oka Rusmini describes the dark side of *geriya* life and describes the phenomena against by her that is the tendency of old generation of *sudra* community to get higher social level through marriage with noble men.

The intertextuality relation of the novel from those writers: Panji Tisna, Putu Wijaya, and Oka Rusmini, can be found in some ways. The women characters in those texts of the three writers show strong interrelation in doing reinterpretation upon the tradition and struggling to the ideal direction which does not repress the development of the supporting community. The women characters in the texts do the same reinterpretation upon community rules which is considered as the symbol of establishment, from the manners formulation, morality such as in *puri* and *geriya*. There is significant relation in emphasizing the principle of *karma phala* which is the spirit underlying every behavior of Balinese people in real life. The struggling of gender equality is the effort of woman character so holistically the text puts itself in the position of giving reinterpretation and reaction upon the existing social phenomena. The born of other *sudras* shows the disagreement of three writers upon social stratification which is represented through woman character in Balinese society which is not underlined on performance substance, but merely on the lineage and marriage. In the novel it is reflected the attitude of woman character which shows resistance attitude upon patriarchy hegemony as the result of reinterpretation upon tradition and modernity.

The woman character reaction upon the discourse of social, politic, and gender equality can be summarized as follows. Woman characters in novel *NRCPO* and *SGB* are not repressive and tolerant. It

means that the cultural struggle is not directive and reactive. The resignation of Ida Ayu Kendran in facing the cunning game of Ni Rawit and the character of Sukreni who suffers from the raping by character of I Gusti Made Tusan is shown not as a harassment of woman's destiny but more on the substance of a witness about persecuted women which further arising others' sympathy (of reader). It is also the belief of Panji Tisna on principle of *karma phala* strengthens his attitude not to be frontal in showing the resistance of his woman character.

In novel *PI*, *PII* the character of Putri is very reactive in responding social issue. Vividly and tend to be extreme she against the tradition and proposes her mind about a new tradition, and also a struggling of hegemony created as the consequences of social stratification system. The principle of *karma phala* is reflected by Putu Wijaya in creating the life journey of his characters. In political level, there is a thought of Independent Bali and in term of gender equality there is a maximal struggle which is done by Putri.

The reaction of woman character in novel *TB* and *K*, sometimes shows the obscurity of reading tradition. First, there is a doubt and belief that *nyerod* has a tragic consequence in form of negative risks which will happen to the people of *nyerod*, such as not respecting the ancestors because of doing improper act so there will be consequence of danger and other misfortunes. Second, it seems that there is a firm attitude of the woman character to against (as done by the writers in real life, marriage with *sudra* man). Seems that there is an effort of the woman character to against the status difference which underestimates *sudra* community. In this novel, thematically Oka Rusmini shows other *sudra* character, who is educated, prestigious, visionary, dynamic, rational and not a servant. In term of gender equality, there is a maximal struggle on women characters in novels of Oka Rusmini, such as characters of Kenanga, Telaga, Intan.

CLOSING

Cultural criticism done by Balinese women upon tradition in novel contains the existence of cultural rebellion which is related to monolithic opinion by emphasizing on patrilineal society system, tradition and religious system of Balinese people framed by Hindus belief. In religious system of Balinese people there is a belief of destiny as a life that should be accepted as the consequences of *karma* (act). There is also a criticism on series of ceremonies in Balinese tradition which is not based on substance, yet more on ceremonial.

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