

TOHARI'S WOMEN THE DEPICTION OF BANYUMAS WOMEN IN AHMAD TOHARI'S LITERARY WORKS

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Abstract: As part of Javanese culture, Banyumas actually has its particular Javanese social and cultural characteristics. The social structure and culture, especially related to the position and the definition of women, are reflected in Ahmad Tohari's literary works. In some of his literary works such as *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk (The Dancer)* and *Bekisar Merah (The Red Bekisar)* Tohari even portrays Banyumas women as the main characters of the novel. Both in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* and *Bekisar Merah*, the women characters depicted in figure of strong and powerful women. Meanwhile, *Lingkar Tanah Air* and *Kubah* portrait women characters almost in the opposite figure of piety and submissive women. Thus, this paper would analyze the depiction of Banyumas women in Tohari's four novels to provide specific descriptions of Banyumas women archetype from the perspectives of religious life, the role in a family, and the role as a woman in a society.

Keywords: Banyumas women, Ahmad Tohari, women depiction, women archetype, Indonesian literature

INTRODUCTION

There have been various kind of studies about Javanese culture and Indonesian literary works. However, the studies mainly focus on the idea of Javanese in general that build the idea of Javanese culture, especially women archetype, as particular one kind of Javanese idea. As part of Javanese culture, Banyumas is geographically located in Central Java, in fact has its own specific Javanese culture, value, even accents. Thus, this study focuses on the idea of Banyumas culture reflected in three novels written by Ahmad Tohari, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk – The Dancer* (1982), *Bekisar Merah – The Red Bekisar* (1993), and *Kubah – The Dome* (1980). In *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Tohari reveals a story about a *Ronggeng dancer*, named Srintil, who lives in a small village in Banyumas. As a *ronggeng*, Srintil has to play a role as a *ronggeng*, a sacred dancer, and leave the social idea about *how women should be*. Meanwhile, in *Bekisar Merah* Tohari talks about Lasiyah who has to struggle living in a small village as a hybrid woman among the native Banyumas people. Different from the other two novels, *Kubah* has Karman, an Indonesian Communist Party activist as the main character. However, a female character called Marni who is married to Karman, appears to be an important part of the story.

As in all three novels, Banyumas culture appears to be the cultural background of the plot and women characters also play important roles, this study aims to identify the depiction of Banyumas women in Ahmad Tohari's literary works. This study is conducted to analyze the archetype of Banyumas women depicted in Tohari's literary works. There are three kinds of women archetypes strongly reflected in the novels; the archetype of a mother, the archetype of a maiden, and the archetype of a wife in Banyumas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory about archetype was first introduced by Carl Gustav Jung in 1961. In his "Archetype and Collective Unconsciousness (1961) Jung suggests the idea of 'collective unconsciousness' that he (1962) calls the "inherited in the structure of brain" (Huck, 2004, p.236). According to the theory of archetype, there is a universal image of people or other certain thing that reflects in the way they perform an action. In one side, the collective unconsciousness builds the universal image in literary works. Thus, from literary works certain idea of archetype, in this case women archetype in Banyumas, can be analyzed. For instance, the idea of archetype and collective unconsciousness can be applied not only in the field psychology, but also literary studies. As products of society (Eagleton, 2006, p. 3), literary works depict the whole social process and for some extents, literary works are also a reflection of certain social process. Therefore, the characters in literary works are also the depictions of people in the real society.

In his study, Jung identifies that literary works especially folklore and mythology show similar 'blueprint' for the characters. In this case, this paper focuses on women characters that are commonly reflected in literary works, including novels, showing how the society constructs the idea of mothers and maidens (Jung, 1969, cited in Garry and El-Shami, 2005, p.xvi). According to Jung, in most times, mothers

in literary works are associated to women who bear and take care of children with specific characteristics, such as nurturing, caring, and soothing. At the same times, maidens are also characterized as the beautiful and desirable women who are also submissive and piety.

Although the archetypes reflected in literary works are considered to be the common 'blueprint', they are also constructed. Simone de Beauvoir (Rivkin, 2004, p. 900) claims that “one is not born, but rather, *becomes* a woman. It is in line with Judith Butler idea about gender roles where she believes that “gender is entirely imitative” (Butler, in Rivkin, 2004, p. 900). As gender roles are imitative or in other words socially constructed, the archetype of women is built within social relations that leads into identity. Therefore, the archetype of women, even Javanese women, cannot be simply identified as a single definition of certain women archetype.

The society is simply divided into two essential structures; 'superstructure' and 'base' (Eagleton). The two structures have complex two – way relations in which they affect and rebuild one another. For instance, culture would generally affect how people live, including the gender roles. Therefore, the idea of women archetype, although it seems universally similar, is typically different from one culture to another culture. Based on this idea, this paper would analyze the depiction of Banyumas women in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, *Bekisar Merah*, and *Kubah* in two archetypal areas; as mothers and maidens.

METHOD

The study is conducted with qualitative study by analyzing the content of the novels. With several steps, the data are analyzed to gain the description of women archetype in Banyumas. First, the literary works are selected. As this study focuses on Banyumas women, *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, *Bekisar Merah*, and *Kubah* are chosen. All of the novels are written by Ahmad Tohari who has been known as a Banyumas author who writes with great social interest within Banyumas culture. The three novels are also selected due to the different ideas of women character. In *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, Srintil, the women character, is depicted to be a woman who is mystically “destined” to be a woman who cannot perform the idea of an ideal woman because she is constructed to be “another figure” in the society (Tohari, 2011). In fact, Srintil seems to desire to be a maiden. In contrast, *Bekisar Merah* depicts Lasiyah character who is seen as a beautiful and desirable woman (Tohari, 2011). However, Lasiyah also seems to desire to be the other archetype which is the mother. In the last literary work, *Kubah*, the archetype of an ideal mother is depicted in Marni (Tohari, 2012, p. 15). Ironically, the society still sees Marni not as an ideal mother since she decides not to marry any other man after Karman, her husband, disappear due to the political tension (p. 97). In addition, to avoid the issues of cultural translations, this study uses the non-English translated versions of the novels.

Second, the women characters are classified based on the two different archetype proposed by Jung. Then, finally the classified women characters are described and analyzed thorough the perspective of gender roles and cultural background. The analysis would draw descriptions of Banyumas women archetype since all the women characters are Banyumas women. Furthermore, the local content and cultural background as one of factors that constructs the women archetype in the studied literary works. Thus, the archetypes of Banyumas women are divided into the archetype of *mothers*, *maidens*, *wives*, and *old wise women*.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based Jung's archetypal theory, the archetype of women in Tohari's novels are divided into the archetype of mothers, maidens, and old wise women. Each archetype brings strong cultural notions and values. In other words, the figuration of each archetype, for example mothers, is strongly constructed by 'superstructure' especially culture exist in the society. The study finds that the figuration of each woman character in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, *Bekisar Merah*, and *Kubah* hardly perform the ideal standard of particular archetype. In fact, the women characters are described to be trapped within the idea of ideal women figures and the conflicts of social and gender roles.

The ideal women

As Butler suggest in her writing entitled “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” (Butler, 1988/2004, p. 901), sex and gender are actually two different things. When sex is considered to be a natural or biological condition in which somebody was born, gender is “a historical idea” rather than “a natural species”. In gender, the facticity of human body is not denied, but it bears cultural meaning.

Therefore, there is certain relation between genders that creates standards of the ideal genders. In this case, this paper focuses on the idea of ideal women.

As a historical idea, the idea of woman is reproduced through time. The society builds standards and values to define how women should act and behave within cultural values. The idea of ideal women then is dramatized and reproduced within the society. It finally leads to the situation where to be born as females require us to be women with particular standard and value. The idea of ideal women according to Beauvoir (Butler, 1988/2004, p.904) makes the natural body of biological females suffer certain cultural construction such as the conventions of how females should act with their body, and the body itself is culturally perceived.

The gender idea of ideal women is manifested in cultures and social system. Although at the same times, culture and social system also rebuild and reshape the figuration of ideal women. As an active reflection of particular society, literature depict the whole process of certain phenomena (Eagleton), including gender construction. Therefore, literary works with women character also reflect the social process of women figuration that produces archetype. Although the social process Eagleton proposes has always been associated to a mass social process, the similar relation is also applied for individual. In *psychoanalytic-Marxism*, Wolfenstein emphasize that the psychology process and social mass process are actually affected to each other and produce a great mass repression (1993, p. 105).

The archetype of mothers

In this case, Tohari's three novels also project the idea of ideal women, especially in Banyumas. At least, there are three archetypes that clearly described in each novel. The archetype of mothers in Banyumas portraits a nurturing and the idea of perfect and content women. The figure of mothers depicted in the three novels are actually similar. In each novel, Tohari describes what mothers in Banyumas culture should be. For instance, in *Kubah*, Haji Bakir's wife is an example of an ideal mother (Tohari, 2012, p. 63). She is nurturing and caring, not only to Rifah, her daughter, but also to Karman and his sister the poor orphans. When Rifah told her mother that Karman wants some rice in exchange of his bamboo windmill, Haji Bakir's wife invites not only Karman but also his sister to come over lunch.

She says, "Why did it take me too long to realize that there were two poor orphans I had to take care of?" (p.64). It shows that Haji Bakir's wife is not only piety, but also caring. She practices her religious belief and devotes herself to take care of children. In fact, she also thinks about educating Karman as she thinks that she should help him and his sister without making him depend on other people (p.65). She teaches Karman how to live and how to get what he needs by working hard. At the same times, she also asks Karman to work for her family, respect her husband, and practice religious rituals (p.66).

Even in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (Tohari, 2011), Rasus, a boy who lives in small village called Dukuh Paruk who has never left his home and met her mother, also has significant idea of mother figures. He has always been thinking that his mother is a beautiful woman with devoted heart to him and his father even his father leaves them (p. 50, 87). It is extremely difficult for Rasus to imagine that her mother might not look beautiful, with smooth glowing skin and great breasts, or care of him. Although, there is no woman in his village looks like a mother in his imagination (p.87).

Different from Rasus' mother figure in his imagination, the mother figure in *Bekisar* is indeed described as a devoted mother of Lasiyah, the main women character (Tohari, 2011). Lasiyah is a girl who is considered to be different from other girls in Karangsoaga, a small village (p.26). She is a daughter of a local woman called Mbok Wiryaji, but she looks like a Chinese or even Japanese. Mbok Wiryaji seems to understand that Lasiyah is always being mocked. Her friends keep saying that Mbok Wiryaji had to be raped by a Japanese and abandoned in the past (p.27). The situation is similar to the mother figure in the story of "The Uglu Duckling" who has a distinguished child (Estes, 1992, p. 174 – 175). Mbok Wiryaji tries not to lie to Lasiyah that her husband is not Lasiyah's father, but she keeps it a secret that she was rapped once by a Japanses soldier (p.28). She devotes herself to protect her daughter feeling and convinces her that her father did not raped her. They once got married, but her father had to go to war, so it is impossible for her to be an unwanted baby.

Based on figurations of mothers in the three novels, the idea of ideal mothers in Tohari's literary works can be concluded into several depictions. First, a good mother is religious and caring. So, the mothers should be able to not only take care of her children, but also perform religious practice and ritual. Second, they have to be in a good family to play roles as ideal mothers. Ironically, when they have to be a single mother for various kind of reasons, the society would accuse them as bad women. Third, the

importance of marital status is associated to the culture in which a woman normally called by her husband's name.

The archetype of maidens

The second archetype which is found in Tohari's literary works is the idea of ideal maidens. According to Jung (1999) maidens in a story is commonly described as pure and desirable young women. It can be easily found in *Kubah* when Tohari describes Tini, Karman and Marni's daughter (Tohari, 2012, p. 39 – 40). Tohari describes Tini as a beautiful maiden who has beautiful jaws, cheek bones, small pointed nose, and firm eye brows like her mother. More than that, her body curve also looks perfectly beautiful since she has the right size and beautiful legs as she wrapped her body with a piece of *batik* after washing her body in a pond around the river (p.41). Although there is a little scar on her nose, nobody would notice it as the scar is too small to notice (p.40).

It is not only the physical appearance that plays an important role to build a perfect figure of a maiden, but also her characteristics. Tohari describes Tini as a calm and quiet young woman, but a little impulsive sometimes (p.40). It is also found that family and social status are the other important things for the maidens. Tohari explains that sometimes Tini feels a little inferior since she knows that her mother's husband is not her father. It becomes a little harder for him to accept that her father is an activist of Indonesia Communism Party (PKI) who has been sent to the exile (p.42). Her mother even doubts that Jabir, the grandson of Haji Bakir, is in love with Tini (p. 42 – 43).

The other maiden appears as the main character in *Bekisar Merah*. Lasiyah is also another figure of maidens in Tohari's literary works who is described as beautiful young woman. Lasiyah is distinguished as a beautiful person since she looks like a hybrid Javanese-Japanese young woman (Tohari, 2011, p. 31). Her physical appearance actually makes her the most desirable woman in the village. However, the rumor that says Lasiyah is an abandoned baby makes her beauty even another reason for people to mock her (p.29 – 30). When she reaches the age of twenties and other women in her age are married, there is nobody to propose her. Most men in the village think that Lasiyah is too beautiful to be taken as a wife and other men might keep their eyes on her (p.32). Ironically, the men in the village cannot stop talking about her until Darsa a young man who helps her uncle extract coconut flowers to get *nirai* takes her as a wife (p.32).

The archetype of maidens is depicted in more complex way in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (Tohari, 2011). The main character in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* is a *ronggeng* or a dancer in a small village called Dukuh Paruk. According to the novel, not all maidens can be a *ronggeng*. The maiden who can be a *ronggeng* is chosen by a spirit called *indang* who send her a revelation to dance (p.13). In this case Srintil, the main character of the novel, is the young woman who is destined to be a *ronggeng*. As a young maiden, Srintil has a gift to sing and to dance. Besides, as a teenage girl she is also beautiful and desirable (p.12 – 13). After Srintil becomes a *ronggeng*, Srintil has to lose her life. She is owned by the whole village (p.38). Even, her virginity is sold in an auction called *bukak klambu* ritual (p.55). The other women in the village will not even bother if their husbands sleep with Srintil as they believe that their husbands are special when they are able to have sex with a *ronggeng* (p.39). Being a *ronggeng* also means that Srintil has to forget the idea of having a family. Thus, when she falls in love with Rasmus the husband and wife Ki Kartareja and Nyai Kartareja prevents Srintil from seeing Rasmus and even use black magic to put on a spell to stop Srintil's feeling for Rasmus. Even so, Srintil still imagines a life where she becomes somebody's wife and has children (p.89). The archetype of mothers here is described as if it is the natural thing of being a woman.

In contrast, there is also a minor character named Siti that appears to be another maiden who is completely different from Srintil, the *ronggeng*. Siti is a girl who comes to the market wearing scarfs over her head (p.84). When Srintil accepts what the men in the village do to her body, Siti is really angry when Rasmus touches her cheeks (p.85). Just like the other maidens, Siti is also depicted as a beautiful young woman with bright and glowing skin. She is also desirable, since Rasmus touches her Siti because of her shy behaviour and her beautiful face.

Based on the figuration of each maiden in the three novels, the archetype of Banyumas maidens in Tohari works bears several ideas. First, maidens are always described as beautiful young women who are desirable. Although, physical appearance is described as the greatest sexual attraction, the way they behave is also another reason why the maidens are desirable. Their acts are constructed by the position of the maidens in the society. Second, no matter how beautiful and desirable the maidens are, they would always be seen through their social status, especially their parents' social status and marital status. It is very clear, that a young woman with no father is seen in very negative point of view.

The archetype of wives

The last women archetype which is clearly portrayed in Tohari's literary works is the archetype of wives. In *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (Tohari, 2012) there are two kind of wives with opposite characteristics; Sakarya's wife and Kartareja's wife. Although they have opposite characteristics, they both are appeared with no names as they are called by their husbands' name. Sakarya's wife is described as a grandmother who devotes her life to take care of Srintil, her granddaughter, after her parents died (p.30). Although they live in very poor situation, Sakarya's wife tries to take care of Srintil as well as she can. At the same time, Nyai Sakarya is also a woman who obeys her husband and teach Srintil a lot of values of life. Different from Nyai Sakarya, Nyai Kartareja bears almost the opposite characteristics. Although Nyai Kartareja still act like she obeys her husband, she is actually more dominant than Nyai Sakarya. Nyai Kartareja is a depiction of a cunning and materialistic woman (p. 55 & 73). She proposes the idea to trick Dower and Sulam at the middle of *bukak klambu* ritual so she can take more advantages of the two young men without discussing the idea to her husband.

In *Kubah* (Tohari, 2012) Tohari suggests another figure of an ideal wife. There are two wives depicted in *Kubah*, Marni and Haji Bakir's wife. As a wife of Indonesia Communism Party whose husband is sent to the exile in Buru Island, Marni has to work really hard to survive as there is no financial support for her and her daughter (p.13). The pressure gets worse when people start talking about her as she decides not to marry any other man. Some other women even feel worried if Marni entices their husband for she is beautiful enough to do it. Until one day, Marni makes a decision to accept Parta's proposal after waiting for her husband for five years (p. 12 – 13). Sadly, Marni does not feel happy with her decision to marry Parta (p.43). It seems that she is married to Parta since she has no other choice to survive. Different from Marni, Haji Bakir's wife is depicted as an ideal figure of wife who is piety and obedient. The situation is also affected by social and economic condition since Haji Bakir is a religious and wealthy person.

The last novel, *Bekisar Merah* shows the more complex situation of a wife (Tohari, 2011). Lasiyah, the main character, is also a wife of Darsa, a young man who helps her uncle extract coconut flowers. As a wife, Lasiyah stays at home taking care of the house and making brown sugar with extracted *nira* from coconut flowers (p.15). However, their marriage changes after an accident where Darsa falls from a coconut tree (p.17). Tohari describes that the reason why Dasar falling from the coconut tree is because he kept thinking about his beautiful wife when he climbs the tree (p.13). As a patient and obedient wife, Lasiyah takes care of Darsa until Darsa has an affair with Sipah, a daughter of Bunek the masseuse who massages Darsa (p.58). The situation leads Lasiyah to run out of their house, ironically, she is trapped in poor situation that forces her to work as a prostitute. By the end of the story, Lasiyah is proposed by Kanjat, another man from Karangsoaga, who works as a lecturer (p.302) and they have a baby.

Based on the figuration of wives in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, *Kubah*, and *Bekisar Merah*, the ideal wives in Tohari's literary works can be defined as the wives who is obedient to their husband. Although it is difficult, the wives should be able to obey and respect their husband. Since the identity of wives is defined by the status of their husband, it would always be a problem when the women have no husband. At the same times, the archetype of wives is divided into two extreme idea; the good and the bad one.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The study shows that women archetype depicted in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, *Bekisar Merah*, and *Kubah* is really complex. At least, there are women archetypes found in Tohari's literary works; the archetype of mothers and the archetype of maidens. Banyumas maidens depicted in literary works are described as beautiful and desirable young women. The beauty and the desire are projected in two ways. First, it is projected through physical appearance. This perspective confirms that one female body is suffered within cultural and gender roles. The idea of beautiful body is reproduced through time and affected by cultural environment. In general, the glowing and bright complexion, curved waist, small and pointed nose, and plumped breasts are the standards of beauty projected in the novels. Thus, distinguish physical appearance can lead maidens to suffer double discrimination. Second, maidens are always seen as part of certain community. In other words, the identity of maiden characters, which is shaped by family, marital status, and social status of people around them, determine their acts and how men around them treat them. It is always difficult for a maiden who has no clear status of family, especially father.

Meanwhile, the archetype of mothers depicted in all three novels projects certain women characteristics. For instance, mothers are always depicted as caring and nurturing characters. The idea of perfect mothers is also associated to piety and submissive women. Besides obeying their husband, ideal mothers have also able to control their feeling and emotion to protect their children. As the most complex

situation, the archetype of mothers also carries the idea of good wives. Although, being a mother means to perform two kinds of positions, as mothers and wives, at the same time, being mothers are always described as the highest achievement of women. It seems like, the perfect women have to marry and becomes mothers.

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