

The Concept of Women's Happiness in *Serat Wulang Putri*

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Abstract-Written in the form of *tembang macapat*, the *Wulang Putri* text features life advices for women living inside the environment of Javanese *keraton* (royal palace) during the 19th century. During the period, women in Java struggled to maintain their existence in facing pressures and marginalization from the community. The study aimed to elaborate the concept of happiness in Javanese women as portrayed in *Serat Wulang Putri* texts, compilation of passages written by a Javanese women in about one century ago. Employing macro-literature approach, the study relied on genetic structuralism analysis to put emphasis on the intrinsic features, the author's social background, as well as the socio-historical reality during which the texts were written. The results show that the *Wulang Putri* text featured notions emphasizing ideal characteristics of a Javanese woman in responding to the social situation that disrespects women's rights. Composed by the King or his/her relatives, the texts placed women as the commodity of power; moreover, in the text written by a woman named Nyi Adisara, women's happiness was described in four characteristics: 1) *gunawan* (intelligence), 2) *wiryawan* (nobility), 3) *hartawan* (wealth), and 4) *berawan* (fertility).

Keywords: Serat Wulang Putri, *piwulang*, genetic structuralism

I. INTRODUCTION

Javanese traditional literature features classical poetry in the form of *tembang macapat* (poetry recited in the form of song); the poetry consists of several kinds e.g. *babad* (narrating history of a kingdom, urban legend, or important royal figures), *suluk* (narrating Islamic teachings and prayers in Javanese language), and *serat piwulang* (narrating notions of character education and moral lessons).

Unique to a *tembang macapat*'s structure is the specific rules, or metrum, that consist of certain repeated patterns, e.g. *pupuh* (song stanza or metric/rhythrical composition), *guru lagu* (vowels

or sounds in each line's last syllable), *guru gatra* (number of sentences or lines in a stanza), and *guru wilangan* (number of syllables in a sentence/line).

As depicted in its terminology, *serat piwulang* narrates stories or teachings of life. The term derives from Javanese words '*serat*' (book), and '*piwulang*' (teachings). Combining the two words, the text literally translates to "book containing teachings of life". Contextually, the *serat piwulang* discusses various topics, e.g. life values, education, governmental system, and topics about women.

The *Serat Wulang Putri* in particular discusses moral life teachings to Javanese women on good behavior and loyalty. *Wulang Putri* text lays its emphasis on the perspective of a woman on the idealization of life behavior and characteristics standard of women in the environment of Javanese royal members. The text surrounds itself within the notion of acceptance of fate that God has set for one (*lila legawa*); as women were treated unequally and were less powerful than men during the period when the texts were composed.

This study intends to identify and elaborate lessons and values within the *Serat Wulang Putri* text, as well as the portrayal of social reality during the period and its relevance to the current age. Further, the study is devoted to describing women's existence during the period.

Employing macro-literature approach, the study relied on genetic structuralism analysis to put emphasis on the intrinsic features, the author's social background, as well as the socio-historical reality during which the texts were written.

II. METHODS

This research relied on literature sociology approach, i.e. an approach that investigates the correlation between a particular literary work and the social reality beyond it (Wellek & Warren, 1995: 110). *Serat Wulang Putri* narrates *piwulang* (advices)

from a parent to his/her children; by focusing on sociological features of the literary work, a portrayal of the society's background of the literary work was generated.

The data were collected from literature study technique. The literature study process was conducted to acquire information on structure of *Wulang Putri* text, social structure of the community, and social perception on teachings as illustrated within the text. The aforementioned information was collected by observation, recording, and note-taking.

The first step was to apply simultaneous reading i.e. heuristic reading and hermeneutic reading to the text. A heuristic reading focuses on the linguistic aspects of the literary text, while hermeneutic technique emphasizes on literary aspects of the text.

Heuristic reading was employed to identify the structure of *Serat Wulang Putri* text, by involving referential literary text interpretation through linguistic signs. Further, the text was read by hermeneutic technique by interpreting the text based on its literary convention as well as the text's literary features.

The next step, literature study, involved analysis based on supporting references to validate the research's analysis as well as to design structure.

In this study, the technique was employed to identify the social structure of the community as portrayed in *Serat Wulang Putri* as well as the community's perception of the text. The data were analyzed by descriptive analysis method, as the method aims to describe acquired data based on the research objectives.

Literature sociology theory was applied to analyze the data. In applying the theory, the steps comprised: 1) identification of narrative units, 2) identification of *piwulang* (advices) within the text, 3) analysis based on literature sociology theory, and 4) juxtaposition between the text's contents and the social reality during the period through historical records in journals.

The text *Serat Wira Iswara* by Susuhunan Pakubuwana IX was treated as the main data to be interpreted with literary macro theory framework proposed by Tanaka in System Models for Literary Macro-Theory. In the book, Tanaka (1976: 9) introduces two major approaches in literature, micro and macro approach; this concept is considered relevant with Wellek & Warren's (1989) concept of intrinsic and extrinsic approach. Wellek & Warren argues that intrinsic approach focuses on a literary work as itself, while extrinsic approach emphasizes on external features of the literary work outside the text. Meanwhile, Tanaka opines that literary micro theory highlights that a literary work is independent on its own and not entailed to other external aspects;

on the other hand, macro approach focuses on the entailment between a literary work and its external aspects.

The data were collected from the text published by the Publication Project of Indonesian National and Regional Language and Literature, the Department of Education and Cultural Affairs (First Edition, 1979, 248 pages).

Aside from the main source, the study gathered data from relevant sources to the *Serat Piwulang* texts as supporting data source.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is found that the *Wulang Putri* text was written for the King's princesses as guidance in their daily life. The *Serat Wulang Putri* consisted of advices or rules by the King to the princesses or other young female royal members; it was either written directly by the King or written by the senior royal members under the instruction from the King. The texts were considered legitimization texts composed for the King's purposes. During the period, reconciliations between kingdoms were common, e.g. reconciliations regarding arranged marriages between the Yogyakarta sultanate and Surakarta sultanate or Pakualam palace. Despite having their own wife(s), princes in Javanese kingdoms often performed reconciliation to develop good relations with other kingdoms; this was conducted as a political action as well as the King's sacrifice for their daughter. One popular example is the arranged marriage between Raden Ajeng Kartini with the Regent of Rembang, a man who already married before.

The text was composed for the royal princesses so as to comfort them in accepting their own perceived hardships. During that time, the princesses disliked the concept of arranged marriage and considered it as their own hardships. This conflicted with the King's intention that arranged marriage is a noble act for his own daughters' goodness.

As recorded clearly in the text's *titimangsa* (timeline), the *Wulang Putri* text was written within Javanese society, particularly during the reign of Susuhunan Pakubuwana IX in Surakarta sultanate (1861-1893 AD). It was recorded in the text that the composition began in 1816 AJ (Javanese calendar unit) or 1887 AD, moreover, the text also mentioned Surakarta Hadiningrat palace as the place of composition.

The text was written during two *titimangsa* (timelines) as mentioned in the middle and the end part of the text. The first *titimangsa* is mentioned in the 23rd stanza, while the second is mentioned in the 64th stanza as follows:

<i>Titi palesthaning wuruk/mring putraning putra putri/ ri soma tanggal kapisan/ ruwah be dipun tengeri/osiking rat esthi nata = 1816 /nata nitik dyah utami</i>	The advices are completed/ to my daughters/ on the first Monday/ marked in Ruwah month of 1816 AJ/ the king seeks for his primary princess.
<i>Isnen pahing ping pancawlas/Ruwah be dipun tengeri/ebahing para wanodya/ esthining driya = 1816 mongseki/ sawelas sumpun akir/ kang riris maksih gunrubug/ langkir windu kuntara/pidalem ingkang analis/ pujanggestri kawula pun Adisara.</i>	On fifteenth Pahing Monday/ marked in Ruwah month/ in 1816/ at the last eleventh day/ the rain is rumbling/ during the wuku of langkir windu kuntara/ I, the writer/ Adisara, the female poet

(Stanza 23 and 64)

The previous *titimangsa* signifies that the *Wulang Putri* text was written within two periods; the stanzas 1-23 were completed at Monday 1st, Ruwah month, 1816 AJ/1887 AD; the stanzas 24-64 were completed at the fifteenth day of same month and year. During the period, the King Pakubuwana IX was in reign.

Inside the Surakarta royal palace, the *keputren* (the princess palace) is located behind the *dalem ageng*, the palace's main building. Zimmerman (in Soeratman 2000: 101) argues that *keputren* is the representation of "a state inside a state". He contends, based on the fact that in the *keputren* resided a woman named Sedhah Mirah and given the title R. Ayu Adipati, that there was a 'second person in power' besides the Queen. Zimmerman compares between Sedhah Mirah and the King's *pepatih dalem* (with the title R. Adipati) as the King's 'right hand'. This is in line with Winter's opinion that Nyai Sedhah Mirah outranked all regents in terms of power, as she was in authority of all the palace's domestic affairs (Soeratmam, 2000: 101).

As a discourse, the *Wulang Putri* text consists of advices in modern Javanese language that is framed in *tembang macapat*. In the text, Javanese address terminologies, e.g. *ngger*, *putriengsun*, *putraningsun putri* and *putraningwang* were frequently mentioned to refer to the person whom the author addressed. The *Wulang Putri* text was intended for individuals or groups of individuals whose social relations acted as children, while the author placed oneself as the parent.

The contents of *Wulang Putri* compiled by Nyi Adisara were different from similar texts during the period, since the messages were not intended to protect the interests of men, rather, they emphasized the education of women's character and independence in facing male repression and domination.

Notions of patience and acceptance as found in the text is in line with Mulder's opinion, i.e. the

concept of *nrima* (believing in one's fate and being thankful to God) (Mulder, 1996: 25, 30, 69). The concept was explicitly mentioned in the quoted texts as follows:

Sumurapa ing laku kawan prakawis/ dihin yen kataman/ ing coba kudu mangesthi/ budi temen lan tarima//

Kang kapindho dhuh anger lakuning ati/yen kataman rudah/ legawa lila den kesthi/ kaping tri lakuning jiwa//

Ing sarehning dumadine jiwa nini/ wus alus kalawan/ suksci sira kudu musthi/ kandel kumandeling suksma//

Kang kaping pat lakuning rahsa sarehning/ rahseku wus mulya/ kudu musthi awas eling/ marang kodrating hyang suksma//

Lawan maning sumurupa putra mami/ lakuning agesang/ iku satuhune mesthi/ kataman suka sungkawa//

Apa dene begja cilaka wus mesthi/ marmanya ing mangka/ sun gelar ing ngisor iki/ yeka ingkang ingaranan//

Gung agunge ing begja punika nini/ mung kawan prakara/ gunawan ingkang sawiji/ kasantikan tegesira//

Dwi wiryawan kaluhuran lire nini/ kaping tri hartawan/ sira den samya mangerti/ tegese pan kasugihan//

Kapat berawan maksude nini/ mapan sugih anak/ mungguh laku pat prakawis/ sayekti uwus tetela//

Dadi panggayuh geyonganingaurip/ sedyane manungsa/ kanggonan pat prakawis/orane iya sajuga//

Be aware of four actions/ Firstly, if facing condition/ of hardship, you must be patient/ while stay true to yourself and accept your fate//

Secondly, my princess, your heart's behavior/ in facing hardship/ be sincere in accepting/ Thirdly, your soul's action//

Within your soul, my princess/ (your soul) must be gentle/ and you be pure/ also be resilient//

Fourthly, your intention, because/ an intention should stay noble/ always aware and remember/ to stay to the Almighty's fate//

You should know, my princess/ your intention/ you must feel/ experience both happiness and sorrow//

As both fortune and misfortune is inevitable/ for that reason/ I will explain below/ what is called//

The best of the best fortunes, my princess/ are only four characters/ *gunawan* is the first/ represents intelligence//

Secondly, *wiryawan* represents nobility/ Thirdly, *hartawan/* as you all should be aware/ represents wealth//

Fourthly, *berawan*, it means, my princess/ is to have many offsprings/ if all four are completed/ then it must be real//

You have achieved all desires of life/ all human's hopes/ you should possess all four/ or at least one//

(Stanza 26 – 35)

In achieving nobility, a woman must be able to conquer all her earthly desires. Moreover, the text states that there are four things to be performed. Firstly, a noble woman should be able to endure trials, be patient (*lila-legawa*) in facing depression, and always remember and renew her faith towards God (*candel kumandeling suksma*). Secondly, one must surrender herself to God's fate (*eling*). Thirdly, a woman's soul must be pure and gentle. Fourthly, as the intention/feeling is a noble gift from God, therefore one must be of awareness and remembrance

to her fate given by The Almighty. Once all four are completed, one can achieve all happiness in life.

The text also explains four *kabegjan* (fortunes) gifted by God for women, i.e. 1) *gunawan* (intelligence), 2) *wiryawan* (nobility), 3) *hartawan* (wealth), 4) *berawan* (fertility). All women should perform their best efforts in order to achieve the four fortunes by also taking into account the characteristics i.e. humility, perseverance, acceptance (*legawa*), gentleness (*lembah manah*), as well as vigilant, meticulous, persistent, and careful (*tata, titi, teteg, ngati-ati*). A noble woman is obliged to surrender herself to God by conquering her lusts and avoid negative behaviors e.g. being wicked, short-tempered, envious, lazy, and weak (*rupak*).

This research identifies one interesting note about Nyi Adisara as the writer; she placed intelligence at the foremost position of the four traits that women must possess. In this case, this research considers that Nyi Adisara also possessed high intelligence in facing bitter reality as shown in her expertise in composing *tembang* and *piwulang* text.

In addition, it is also necessary to take into account about the misery caused by earthly lusts: 1), *rogarda*, or body sickness; 2), *sangsararda*, or self-misery; 3) *wirangarda*, or great shame; 4) *cuwarda*, or heart disappointment or distress, 5) *durgarda*, or bad thoughts (Stanzas 37-44). When exposed to the five misfortunes, a woman is to perform self-instruction and prayers to God.

The *Wulang Putri* text tried to convince the readers that women should not be viewed solely by their genetic and reproductive functions, but also as sentient beings whose same rights and responsibilities in life to God as men do. Struggle and suffering is inevitable, therefore, in responding to that, one must show religious and acceptance attitude of her fate as what God has decided.

Through the text, the author intended to explain that women are required to accept their fate and that the fate has been decided by God. Women must accept the differences between them and men, and that all events are unchangeable, supposed to happen, and must happen. Regarding fate, Mulder (1996: 19, 25, 26) explains that all events do not occur by coincidence, but because of necessity that is regulated by cosmic law. Human beings are obliged to perform their destined fate with full acceptance.

The Putri Wulang Fiber text implies a balance between the macrocosm and the microcosm in women. Through *tapabrata*, a woman can control herself as well as her inner realm so that God's mights will side with her. In Javanese view, an outward realm is not something real, rather, it is shallow and pseudo. Further, Javanese philosophy considers that the inner realm is a tangible reality that contains all the forces of the outward realm. Therefore, humans should be

conscious not to be deceived by the outward realm. This text contains messages to royal princesses to control their outward realm by controlling appetite and reducing sleep, abstaining from sex, concentration training, asceticism, and learning from spiritual teacher to sharpen the inner realm (Magnis-Suseno 1996: 118-125).

The fourth and fifth aspect of the guidance of *tapa brata* in the text involves reducing small talk, and performing actions that please others. This is in accordance with Magnis-Suseno, emphasizing that an attitude of calm, subtle, controlled, rational, and level-headed are required in responding to positive or negative feelings. For example, in dealing with feelings of grief over the death of parents or the loss of property (see Magnis-Suseno, 1996: 123) a Javanese woman must continue to show fortitude as if nothing bad happened at that time. To please others, Javanese women must hide their expressions of sadness with cheerful look and polite manner.

Women, as revealed in the *Wulang Putri* text, are required to show noble behavior that is reflected by polite manners along with a sense of control from one's negative emotions. On the other hand, this text reflects an explosion of inner conflict drawn into oneself. The expression by the author is a form of self-defeat against her husband as the external force. The self-submission behavior is quite common within Javanese society. Self-restraint and understanding of the 'bigger picture' is considered micro-expression of defeat and submission of Javanese nation against external forces, as the history has recorded from the periods of the Hinduism, rise of Islam, imperialism by VOC, until the colonisation by Dutch government that controlled the Javanese kings. Javanese people withdraw to their imaginary world, i.e. a world full of pseudo-reality that conflicts with the outside world conquering their own imagined reality; therefore, they tend to glorify their own spiritual superiority and cultural subtlety (Mulder, 1996: 149).

Mulder (1996: 72) considers *piwulang* texts as literary tradition that tends to be didactic and oralistic as a way to inform the principles of life that must be possessed by women, in this case, the queen or princesses. This research argues that this tradition reflects the society's own way to make peace with reality. In this case, the King's decision is considered God's decision, as the king is often visualized as God's representation in the world. Obeying the King is perceived as an act of submission to God. Therefore, women, either the queen herself, the princesses, or ordinary Javanese women, must follow every decision made by the King so as to achieve nobility and grace.

Henceforth, the idea of emancipation within Javanese society is dominated by masculinity. In terms of power relations, women are placed as 'supporters' of the King or men in common. They are

considered not equal to men, possessing only one-eighth of men's intelligence and capability. Javanese traditional society denies gender equality between women and men. In all occasions, women are expected to conduct acceptance, submission, and prayer for all the fate, in this case, the men's behavior towards them. As the incarnation of God in the world, the King's decisions are considered God's fate towards the women; therefore, one must not reject and confront the decisions. Instead, by showing acceptance and submission, it is expected that the God's power, or in this case, the King's power, will side with them. For Javanese women, self-introspection, careful manner, as well as conducting prayers and *tapa brata* are considered the *Dharma* or good deeds.

IV. CONCLUSION

The *Wulang Putri* text tried to convince the readers that women should not be viewed solely by their genetic and reproductive functions, but also as sentient being whose same rights and responsibilities in life to God as men do. Struggle and suffering is inevitable, therefore, in responding to that, one must show religious and acceptance attitude of her fate as what God has decided. Through the text, the author intended to explain that women are required to accept their fate and that the fate has been decided by God. Women must accept the differences between them and men, and that all events are unchangeable, supposed to happen, and must happen. The text also explains four *kabegjan* (fortunes) gifted by God for women, i.e. 1) *gunawan* (intelligence), 2) *wiryawan* (nobility), 3) *hartawan* (wealth), 4) *berawan* (fertility).

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