



# The Oppressed Class in Lekra Poems

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**Abstract.** This study aims to examine the representation of the oppressed class in the poetry of Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Institute of People's Culture, 1950–1965) through diction analysis created by poets. Qualitative descriptive approach was chosen as the basis of solving the problem. The data was taken from the anthology of Red Falls which contains one hundred poetry titles. The data were collected by literature study method. Data analysis was carried out in a qualitative descriptive manner. The theory used is the sociology of literature and the theory of Marxism D.N. Aidit. The oppressed class is represented by various variants of diction in the form of phrases. The word “people” is the core of the diction consisting of “farmers” and “laborers”. “The people” according to the Marxist theory of D.N. Aidit is an oppressed class consisting of “peasants” and “workers”. The meaning of diction includes: respecting, strengthening, and ideological conception of the people. The conceptual meaning in diction shows that the poets deepen the concept of the oppressed class. Therefore, Lekra's poems are conceptual and not propaganda.

**Keywords:** Diction · Lekra poetry · Oppressed Class · Marxis

## 1 Background

Lekra (Institute of People's Culture, 1950–1965), as a supporter of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) produced a large number of literary works, especially short stories and poetry. The works are distributed through party magazines or newspapers. D.N. Aidit, for example, is not only known as a world Communist figure but also a poet [1]. This indicates that poetry occupies a special place. Poetry is almost never absent in any socio-political changes that occur. Poetry is a reflection of the social reality of a society, as well as containing the poet's cognitive experience of the social situation he experiences [2].

In addition to poetry and short stories, Lekra writers also produce several drama scripts. The novel genre did not appear in that period because it took a long time to write and was not suitable for short reading in the ideological struggle that gave birth to the work of socialist realism [3].

One of the political party newspapers that contains a lot of short stories and poetry is Harian Rakjat. During the New Order all PKI newspapers were forbidden to read. After the Reformation, access was a little more open. Because of this, two anthologies

of poetry and short stories from Harijan Rakjat have been published, each with the title Gugur Merah and Report from Below.

What is studied in this article is the anthology of Red Falls [4]. This anthology contains 450 poetry titles written by 111 poets. The focus of this research study is the representation of the oppressed class in poetry through the creation of diction used by poets. The oppressed class is the suffering class or the working class exploited by the employer or landlord class.

The theory used to solve the research problem is the Marxist theory developed [5] and the theory of the sociology of literature. Marxist theory is derived from the *Manifest der Kommunistischen* theory of communism, an analytical approach to class struggle. This theory was born to correct capitalism which extorts and exploits the labour and farm workers. Marxism recommends that social change must be started from taking over the means of production controlled by capitalists (landlords). This is done by the proletariat (oppressed class) so that all means of production and asset must be seized by the state for the sake of equal people's prosperity. Marxism is based on the theory of Dialectical Materialism and Historical Materialism so that myth, superstition, and religion are rejected because they are irrational and unreal.

According to [6] there are four approaches, namely: expressive, mimetic, pragmatic and objective. The expressive approach is an approach that is based on the author. In this case, the ideas, thoughts and point of view of the author are the main focus. In the mimetic approach, the universe and the social environment become the main focus. Literary work is an expression of what is happening in the universe. The pragmatic approach is based on a community as readers. The reader is the target to convey the values of norms and morals. The objective approach is an approach that focuses on structural elements (intrinsic and extrinsic). The relationship between literature and the reader is that the literary reader becomes the recipient of moral values, while the relationship between literature and the author is the author as a distributor of aesthetic elements, norms and also social criticism.

The problems discussed are (1) what diction is chosen to represent the oppressed class; and (2) how is the relevance of the meaning of the diction for the oppressed class and the struggle of Indonesian Communist Party?

This study describes and analyses the dictions that represent the oppressed class and describes the relevance of these meanings for the oppressed and the struggle of the Indonesian Communist Party. The problem under investigation was how the Lekra poets presented the oppressed class in their poems.

Previous research on Lekra as a cultural institution with a populist commitment has been carried out by many researchers from abroad and from Indonesia [1, 11]. In his dissertation, [1] also discussed 450 titles of Lekra poetry. In particular, research on Lekra's poems has been carried out by Artika [1, 2, 13] which discussed the poems [11] studied the poem entitled "*Potret Seorang Komunis*" (Portrait of a Communist) by Sabar Anantaguna, who is a great writer from Lekra. Special Edition of Tempo Magazine (2009) published a review of Njoto's poetry in titled "*Puisi Pamflet Sang Ideolog*" (Poetry Pamphlet of the Ideologist). These studies show that many researchers and journalists, long after the silence of Lekra's voice, were interested in studying the poems left by the Lekra poets.

The data were collected from a hundred of poems published in the *Gugur Merah*. The data collected were 27 dictions (in the form of phrases). This data was collected by reading carefully and thoroughly the entire poem and quoting the diction that represents the oppressed class. All data were identified, described, classified, compared, and connected to other data. The conclusions of this study were drawn qualitatively [9, 10, 12].

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to describe the ways of the poets describing the life and struggle of the oppressed class (farm workers) in the poetry. The data sources are Lekra's selected poems that met the thematic criteria, namely poems that talked about the oppressed classes such as the peasants and workers. The data were collected by reading and quoting parts of poetry that represented the oppressed class. This data was collected in unique data units because it was different from other data units. The data units were then described, identified, compared, classified, and reduced; to draw conclusions inductively.

## 2 Findings and Discussion

### 2.1 Dictions that Represent the Downtrodden Class

From 27 dictions in the form of phrases, three main words were found which were very important because they often appeared, namely people, workers, and farmers. This finding is in line with the research of [7]. These core words were found in phrases such as the *working people, the workers are coal, the creators of history, the people, the working man, the eternal hero, the socialist, the world proletariat, the landless peasant, the robbed peasant, the strong people, the working hand, the pillar of life, truth is the people - justice is the people - power is the people, the children, the children of work, the workers and farmers, the land heroes, the mothers and fathers of the revolution, the farmers, the black hands, the tidal waves, the hungry people, the ocean, the storm and the sea, the foot of the proletariat, and the history maker*.

These phrases showed the poet's creativity in creating diction to represent the downtrodden class. From these dictions, it can be seen that the downtrodden class in Indonesia, according to the Marxist theory of D.N. Aidit, is the *people* of Indonesia, referring to the workers and farmers. They were the class whose fate was defended or fought for by Indonesian Communist Party (read: PKI) based on Marxism-Communism. They were placed in the theory of class struggle, which is one of the core teachings of Marxism.

The diction variants, which consist of the words such as people, workers, and farmers, reflected the poet's attitude towards the downtrodden class. Poets defended them through poetry. The dictions showed respect for the class. The respect for the downtrodden class was paired with the respect for the people because of the strengths stored.

The power of the downtrodden class was represented through several dictions such as the strong people, the pillars of life, power is the people, the black hands, the tidal waves, the oceans, the storms and seas, workers are coal, and the working people. Many poets took the power of nature to represent the power of the people, such as waves, storms, and the sea.

The respect for the downtrodden class was expressed by a number of dictions in the form of phrases such as the land heroes, the fathers of revolution, and the immortal heroes.

The downtrodden people were also declared to be the history creators: the people who created history and the people who made history. This is in line with Marxist teachings [6]. The poets asserted that the farmers were suffered because of the landless peasants and the robbed peasants. It was the landlords who robbed the peasants. The landlord was the sucker class.

The oppressed class: the people (consisting of peasants and workers) are the class exploited by their opposite class (employers and landlords). Poems that represent the oppressed class are used to raise class consciousness and continue to the class struggle so that the poets create dictions that build the strength and glory of the oppressed class.

## 2.2 The Relevance of Meaning for the Struggle of PKI

Diction in literary works, especially poetry occupies a very important position because it is used by poets to convey a meaning. Diction in poetry is not to convey information or data. The Lekra poets created diction to convey number of meanings: (1) respecting, (2) strengthening, and (3) conceptual. These three meanings lead to the people as an oppressed class consisting of the peasants and workers.

The meaning of respect for the people is achieved through the creation of the diction of eternal heroes, heroes of the land, and fathers of revolution. The meaning of strengthening is achieved through the creation of diction: coal workers, landless peasants, robbed farmers, mighty people, working hands, black hands, the hungry, the storm and the sea.

Lekra's poems are not only in the form of movements but also poems that are conceptual in Marxist ideology. Therefore, poets create conceptual dictions, such as working people, history-makers, history-makers, working people, socialists, the world proletariat, the pillars of life, power is the people-justice is the people-truth is the people.

The meaning of diction shows that the Lekra poet always tries to represent the conception of the oppressed. From this aspect, Lekra's poems are conceptual works of literature. This finding is very different from the findings of previous research which is under the umbrella of a general view that Lekra's poems are merely propaganda literature. The Lekra poets are not doing propaganda. They work in the position of reproducing the conception of the oppressed class. This formulation is in line with the quote below.

Reading the works of Lekra writers is to see them from the human side which is closely related to their point of view, style of language, and the way in which they express themselves. Not all of them are all bombastic, even they are still free and comfortable to express the mood of creation at that time [8].

. This is why most Lekra poets do not want to be called part of the organ of Marxist ideology under the PKI. They are not propagating through poetry but they are struggling with conceptions of the people, the oppressed, which sociologically are the peasants and workers. In the 1950–1965 era, these conceptions existed in the area of the PKI struggle with the ideology of Marxism-Communism.

## 3 Conclusion

The Lekra poets represented the oppressed class through the diction they created. These dictions were very special. The core words or keywords of the dictions were the word

*people* (which refers to (1) laborers and (2) farmers or peasants. These two keywords were related to the concept of the oppressed class that became the struggle of the PKI, namely the workers and *tani*). These key words were then developed into a number of variants in the form of phrases. These phrases are grouped into (1) “respect” to the oppressed class; (2) “strength” possessed by the oppressed class; and (3) “conception” of the oppressed class. These phrases were directed at the people as the oppressed class in Indonesia which was the basis for the mass struggle of the PKI. The variant of the dictions turned out to be more dominated by the “conception” of the oppressed class rather than “respect” for the oppressed class and the “power” owned by the oppressed class. The emergence of a diction variants which were dominated by the “conception” of the oppressed class indicated a struggle over the conception of the oppressed class in Indonesia during the age of the administration of President Soekarno’s Guided Democracy.

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