



The Study of Javanese Women in The Primbon Books

Supana Supana^{1*}, Sumarlam Sumarlam², Waki Waki³, Yohanes Suwanto⁴,
Sutarjo Sutarjo⁵

^{1,2,3,4,5} Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Indonesia

*Supana_77@staff.uns.ac.id; Sumarlam@staff.uns.ac.id; waki
t.a.rais_1460@staff.uns.ac.id; yswan@staff.uns.ac.id;
sutajojwawa_1160@staff.uns.ac.id

Abstract. A substantial amount of aspects of the life of women are exposed in the life of Javanese people, particularly in song lyrics, literary works and other ancient writings. This demonstrates the importance of understanding the female character. The books of Primbon contain guidelines for several aspects of communal life explaining how to properly implement these in daily activities. An important aspect is the search for a spouse. The Primbon books provide instructions and guidelines for eligible bachelors on differentiating between good women and bad women, based on physical appearance, date of birth and body language. This study concerns itself with exposing the character of Javanese women in the form of a qualitative-descriptive study. The data sources used are the books of Primbon. These books thoroughly examine several perspectives about women and different characters traits, both their noble characteristics as well as their bad characteristics. Javanese women are portrayed in these books as loyal to their husbands, compliant, devout, accepting of polygamy, providing sexual gratification and satisfying other needs. Besides their main responsibility for raising and educating children and domestic chores, Javanese women are expected to provide a living in order to enlighten the financial burden of the husband. Within the Primbon books Javanese women are portrayed as predominantly active domestically rather than involved socially.

Keywords: women, Java, Primbon, domestic, public

1 Introduction

Women play a central role in increasing the life quality of humans in general. The proverb 'Heaven lays at the feet of the mother' indicates that success of a child or person is mostly determined by the mother who guides and fosters. The roles of the women in life are recorded in many traditional sayings, which portray different aspects of female life. These sayings were formed in trough a comprehensive experience therefore their truth was trusted upon and made an aspiration or directions in the life in the community. The position and the role of women are discussed in the Primbon books, old Javanese books which contain directions for different aspects of life.

Within these books many perspectives on women can be found addressing their characters, both the favorable characteristics as well as the unfavorable characteristics.

Primbon is a handbook which contains knowledge of magic and prediction of the future, supplementary to beliefs, concepts, perspectives on and the values of the Javanese culture and traditions (Koentjaraningrat, 1984:320). Moreover, the values and the norms discussed in the Primbon books are the highly esteemed in Javanese society. The conception of the ideal woman in the Primbon books also shaped the stereotype of the Javanese woman. Within the Primbon books many perspectives can be found on women, defining those who demonstrate good behaviour and able domestically and socially, all related to physical appearance, name, birthdate, specific character traits, and so forth.

2 Method

The form of the research is qualitative as recommended by Nunan (1992), Meriam (1988), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Patton (1990), Staruss & Crobin (2003), Charmaz (2000), and Sutopo (2002). The strategy that being used in this research is a single case study which leads to a single characteristic of research activities (Yin (1987), Sutopo (2002)). The resource data used on this research are the documents that already have been compiled as the Primbon books. The technique of data research collecting was carried out with the principle of content analysis in mind. The analysis of the data within the research is done with triangulation, namely data reduction, data presentation and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1992).

3 Findings And Assessment

Women in Javanese community have an important meaning. This is demonstrated in the books which discuss women and their specific characteristics. It explains which women demonstrate good character and which women demonstrate specific characteristics pointing to a bad character and accompanying behaviour. According to the Primbon books these characteristics can be deduced from the physical traits of the women and from the date of birth. From these pointers can be determined which women will have a good character of bad character. This is likewise for the physical traits referring to a combination of desirable and undesirable personality.

The behavior of a woman is reflected in their physical appearance and her date of birth, thereby stereotyping and labeling women. The stereotypical female in Java hereafter discussed are among others: the stereotypical woman as in relation to her husband, the Javanese woman within a professional environment, the woman managing finances and possessions, women fostering children, women as spiritual beings and women in social environments.

3.1 Women in relation to their husband.

a. Loyalty to the husband.

Loyalty of a wife to her husband is considered of great importance which is an absolute necessary character trait for the Javanese woman. Loyalty is described as genuinely loving the husband and not feeling seduced by other men or marrying more than one time.

b. Pious and devoted to the husband.

The women who are devout to their husband have physical traits such as yellowish skin, a pitiful and touching face and dry, crusty lips. Women having these traits are not only devout to their husbands but are also unpretentious and homely. Women who are pious and devoted naturally obey their husband, do no question their commands and respect their husbands.

c. Devout and affectionate to their husband.

A woman who loves her husband deeply can be identified by specific physical traits such as a red skin and affectionate eyes. Love is an important aspect in the household and marriage. If there is affection between husband and wife it will be filled with happiness and harmony. Love functions as glue or adhesive within family life. A husband and a wife who have not been nurtured with affection have more potential for disunity. Because of this important role of affection in a marriage women who love their husbands are held in high esteem.

d. Compliant (Nrima).

Compliant, (Javanese; nrima) indicates acceptance of anything that has been given by their husband, including the earning from the husband, whether it is a fair amount or not much, a wife will accept it with pleasure, never complains or asks for too much.

e. Pleasing the husband.

The traits of women that often considered desirable is a wife who can please their husband, comfort him and makes him cheerful. In order to make the husband happy, a woman needs a deep understanding of what her husband likes. A good wife is able to understand what he likes even though he never expressed himself openly about it. To have the ability to understand the body language of the husband, takes specific skills.

f. Helping husband.

Woman that can help the husband domestically are also considered as good. Helping the husband can be widely interpreted, but it mainly refers to earning a living in addition to her main responsibility which is taking care of the household.

g. Ability to be in a polygamous marriage.

Generally, women are not inclined to be voluntary part of a polygamous marriage and tend to file for a divorce as soon as they discovered that the husband fell in love with other woman. Therefore, a woman who accepts to be a part of a polygamous household is considered as having their own excellence.

3.2 Women who have ability to become a competent worker

Good women are the one who has good fortune. On this case it implies that a woman also being required to work. Women are also considered good when they can be trusted to be efficient with the assets that have been entrusted to them and to make sure if the wealth is lawful (*halal*) or not. These women are not willing to accept material wealth that has not been acquired in a lawful (*halal*) way.

3.3 Managing assets

Women who excel at managing assets are women who are abstemious, meaning they effective in using assets and therefore can satisfy all needs economically. On the contrary, women who are lavishly and demonstrate consumptive behavior are considered undesirable. Preferable behavior when it comes to managing assets are cautiousness, meaning to be careful in defining priorities in daily needs and deciding which spending is most important and therefore should take precedence and which needs are considered less important. In this way caution with assets can be used in the right way.

3.4 Skilled in raising children

Women can't be isolated from their task in raising children. Children that grow up well can't be separated from the role of a mother. On the other hand, children that do not grow up well and have a shorter lifespan find themselves in that position because they were not nurtured well by their mother.

3.5 Virtuous

A virtuous behavior and noble manners are among others simplicity and patience. On the contrary, women who are considered as not being virtuous tend to be hot-tempered. Women who are considered well have a generous heart in what they do, such as helping other people and doing good deeds.

3.6 Socializing

Women who are good at socializing have many friends. Generally they make friends by being able to socialize with all members of the community, and from different layers of the community. They do not limit themselves to a certain group.

The view of good women and bad women in the Primbon books take on the form of stereotypes. Generally a stereotype is a way of labeling or assigning specific characteristics to a certain group (Mansour, Fasih, 2001). The character of the Javanese women is based on characteristics mentioned in the Primbon manuscripts point out that women have a dominant role in the domestic environment. The public environment in which the women are found is quite limited in the Primbon books. However, assigning women as primarily responsible domestically does not necessarily mean that they are defined by their domestic life. The practice of relating the behaviors of the women to physical traits is used for the interest of men. By reading the Primbon books the men are able to determine the character of a woman based on her physical traits. For example, if she is loyal, she can contribute to the household financially, if she can be taken as a second wife etc. The Primbon books provide instructions for men who are choosing a woman to become their life-partner. This also demonstrates how men are dominant over women. One factor that contributes how women are regarded as inferior to men is:

Indonesia's underlying patriarchal culture that places men at the center of power in the family, community, government, and religion. Indonesia's patriarchal culture expects women to follow kodrat. To honor kodrat, women must prioritize domestic chores, such as raising children, cooking, washing, and cleaning the house (Rini Sudarmanti, 2015)

As a couple, according to the Primbon books, the household consists of a man and a woman and the woman is primarily responsible for supporting her husband. She should always try to make her husband happy, respected, lighten his burden, don't make his life difficult etc. It is the role of the wife to make sure the husband will be respected, content and not despised and she does this by being loyal (*setya ing laki*). A wife should give all her love to her husband and not have any lust to make love to another man besides her own husband, or aspire to re-marry. The loyalty is of extreme importance to the husband, because the wife is considered disloyal shall bring sorrow and harm to her husband (*tega ing laki*).

The role of the wife in lighten the burden of the husband is also part of a good woman, namely the one who is dutiful to the husband (*bekti ing laki*). A wife who is helpful will always be compliant and obeying and never object or argue with him. This also demonstrates that a wife should not force her opinion to her husband. When it comes to decision-making, a wife should always adhere to the decisions of the husband. A wife who objects (*wani ing laki*) is considered inappropriate.

The behaviors that has to be owned by women who are considered appropriate do not fail to demonstrate the inferior position of women who are accepting (Javanese ; *nrima*). It is considered inappropriate if a wife to ask more of the husband than she is

given. Ideally she should receive whatever the husband generously gives to her and be satisfied with it. Being unsatisfied with her husband is an emotion that is not to be tolerated.

Another personality trait which will bring profit and luck to the husband is to understand the needs of the husband. To be able to understand these needs, a wife should know the character of her husband well to be able to act the way her husband desires. A husband usually is fond of certain things and dislikes other. For example, a husband may have culinary preferences, fashion preferences etc. On the other hand he might detest certain food or clothing etc. To understand the habits of the husband makes a wife able to win him over.

The position of wife in the household is reflected in satisfactory coitus, because a good wife can pleasure her husband through sexual intercourse, which is considered an obligation for the wife.

The role of a wife is also domestically defined by nurturing the children. Raising children is greatly affected by the behavior and deeds of the mother. In the Primbon it is stated that a mother who is not generous of heart to her children, will be vile to her children and is therefore considered to be unfit as a mother. This points out that the role of a wife in raising children is considered of utmost importance. A good mother should be affectionate to her children and fulfill their every need.

Besides taking caring of her husband and raising children, a wife also plays a part in financially providing for the family and the household (bisa ngrewangi laki). In line with the duties of the husband as a wage earner, in order to meet the needs of the household then the meaning of helping the husband to the wife is to assist in order to earn a living, and for this matter it usually done outside the house. Therefore in addition to doing work in the home, a wife is also expected to do work outside the home to get additional earning, so it can help to ease the burden of the husband.

Domestic role that stands out for a woman experienced a significant change in time. The research of Chaniago (2015) demonstrates that the perception of the woman has changed; she doesn't merely play a role in the domestic field like taking care of the household or children, but now has gained a central position in the public or the communal society.

4 Conclusion

The woman has a status and an important role especially domestically and socially. Javanese woman has a role on their own in order to build a solid and harmonious household. Women can make family life happy, but likewise they could bring suffering to their husband and children.

Women are predominantly active domestically rather than active in a public platform. The main role of the woman is to make their husband happy by being loyal and faithful, devout, compliant, accepting any provision from her husband happily, loving their husband from the bottom of the heart, does not object to polygamy and is able to satisfy his needs. A woman as a mother also has a role to raise and educate

their children to become illustrious adults and with a noble manner. Finally, a good wife plays a part to help her husband with his duty to fulfill their needs financially.

The society role of a woman has not been explained clearly in the Primbon books, but it implicates that a woman should have a wide network including people of various levels of society.

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