

# Subordination of Javanese Women

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**Abstract** – An important issue that is often discussed is about gender equality. In relation to the issue of gender equality, in society there are many things that can be categorized as a form of gender inequality, namely differences in views about the roles and positions of men and women. It is often found that the role and position of women are considered to be under men. Women are male subordinates. This paper discusses how the views on the role and position of women in Javanese culture. The data used in this study are expressions in Javanese language, Javanese customs, and Javanese literature. This paper also alludes to literature with the consideration that literature reflect society. In other words, to know people's views about something can be seen from the literature. Based on these data, the important thing that was discovered was that in Javanese society there was a view that considered women to be in the subordination of men.

**Key words:** Javanese culture, women, gender, literature, subordination.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Interesting things or topics that are often the subject of discussion, whether in the form of discussions, seminars, writings, or research are related to the problem of the views on the roles and positions of men and women. One question that is often asked is whether it is true that in society there is gender inequality, where men are considered to occupy a higher role and position than women. In other words, is it true that women occupy male subordinate positions.

Regarding the meaning of gender equality, we can refer to Lampiran Instruksi Presiden (the Annex to the Presidential Instruction) Republik Indonesia Nomor 9 Tahun 2000, which was passed by Abdurrahman Wahid on December 19, 2000 concerning Gender Mainstreaming in National Development. The annex states that what is meant by gender equality is the equality of conditions for men and women to obtain their opportunities and rights as human beings, in order to be able to play a role and participate in national political, economic, socio-cultural, defense and security activities and similarities in enjoying the results of the development.

Based on observations, there are things that can show that it seems that in Javanese culture there are gender inequalities. To discuss about gender inequalities, this paper based on several data sources, namely based on expressions in Javanese, customs in Javanese culture, and Javanese literary works. The following will be discussed expressions, customs, and Javanese literary works which contain views on gender inequality.

## II. REPRESENTATION OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE JAVANESE LANGUAGE AND JAVANESE CUSTOMS

In Javanese culture there are expressions addressed to women or wives which can be interpreted as containing views on gender inequality. These phrases include *kèsrimpêt bêbêt kêtlikung bêngkung* ('entangled in a belt tied to a belt'), *swarga nunut nêraka katut* ('paradise riding hell carried away'), and *kanca wingking* ('friend in the back'). In the first expression, women are seen as human beings who are not free to move and engage in activities. Women's movements are limited by something which in this expression is likened to cloth, as is commonly used in traditional Javanese women's clothing. The use of a very tight cloth greatly inhibits the movement of the foot in step. The limitations of this step can be interpreted that women also experience limitations in movement and activities. The second phrase simply means that women / wives will go to heaven or go to hell depending on men / husbands. When a woman / wife goes to heaven, it is considered that the woman / wife only hitches a man / husband. Likewise when men / husbands go to hell, women / wives will be carried away into hell too. Women are considered not to have the power or ability to determine or attempt to enter heaven or hell. In the third expression, women are considered only to be able to work or take care of matters relating to household affairs, such as cooking, washing, and caring for children. Related to this, there is also a presumption that women can only do *4M*, that is *macak* (decorate), *mangsak* (cooking), *mlumah* (palms facing up), and *manak* (childbirth).

In the family and social environment, men are considered to have a higher position than women. Men occupy the function as head of the household. In connection with this function, men have the right to take more portions in making decisions related to issues related to household and social. For example, in family gatherings or meetings between villagers, usually more men speak and give their opinions, sometimes even men do that. In the distribution of joint assets (*gana-gini*) in marriages and inheritance distribution, men also get more portions when compared to what is received by women. About this, Hildred Geertz (1985: 80)

said, even though it only applies in a limited circle, in the distribution of joint assets (*gana-gini*) when divorce occurs between husband and wife, men / husbands get two parts and women / wives get one part. About the division of property of *gana-gini*, this is also conveyed by Koentjaraningrat (1984: 151) which states that in Javanese society the system of distributing property like this is called the term *sepikul-segendhong*. The point is that men get *sepikul* (two parts) while women get *segendhong* (one part). However, for property that is privately owned before marriage, which is called *bandha bektan*, when the divorce occurs, the property remains private property, not shared like this property.

In addition to the division of inheritance with the *sepikul-segendhong* concept, Koentjaraningrat also mentioned the customs in Javanese society which can be categorized as containing gender bias problems. Koentjaraningrat (1984: 120 & 134) states that as a sign of entering adolescence, special ceremonies are held for boys while girls are passed without any ceremony. Adolescence for a Javanese boy is marked by a circumcision ceremony performed when he is 10 and 14 years old. Adolescence for a girl begins when she gets her first period. In addition, gender inequality also appears in the Javanese traditional wedding ceremony. In one of the traditional Javanese bride ceremonial sequences, the bride washed the groom's feet. Conversely, the groom does not wash the bride's feet.

Regarding education, Koentjaraningrat (1984: 119) said that parents in Javanese society still consider school education not important for women, because later they will marry. Girls are more emphasized to learn to do household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning the house, sewing clothes, weaving lurik, and making batik. This does not happen for boys. In addition to gender bias in the field of education, according to Junaidi Abdul Munif in an article entitled "Searching for Roots of Patriarchism" (Suara Merdeka, March 24, 2010), in Javanese culture called women as *wadon*. The word *wadon* comes from Sanskrit, which means 'servant, servant of man'. Other names are *wanita*, acronyms of *wani ditata*, which means that women must be able and willing to be regulated, in this case, of course by men / husbands. In other words, women must obey men / husbands.

Still about the negative view of women, Wajong (1974: 29) also adds on the issue of subordination of Javanese women. Wajong says that in Javanese society, when a woman and man are engaged, then the men will give a gift called *paningset*, as a sign of bonding. Usually embroidered jewelry or clothing fabric *sapengadeg*, which is a complete clothing material from the tip of the foot up to the top, including cloth and *kebaya* (Javanese women's traditional blouse). Giving *paningset* is defined as a tool to buy or commonly called a *tukon*, because as if the woman was bought by the male family.

### III. REPRESENTATION OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN LITERATURE

Apart from being found in Javanese expressions and Javanese customs, we can know about gender inequality in Javanese culture from literary works. This is based on the consideration that literature are considered a reflection of people's lives in real life. Literature is a representation of people's lives. Damono (1984: 1) states that literature presents a picture of life, and life itself is a social reality that encompasses inter-community life, between communities and individuals, between human beings themselves, and events that occur in one's inner being. In line with this opinion, Budianta (2003: 171) said that ethnic stereotypes about Javanese, Chinese, Dayaks, Irianese, spread in various cultural products, such as advertisements, films, including in literature.

The important thing that can be concluded about literature based on these two opinions is: first, in the literary work there is a description of life; and second, literary work is a medium for someone's expression of something. Based on these conclusions, it can be said that literary work is a medium that can be used as a means / material / object in order to examine and understand the social phenomena that occur in a society. In other words, the view of the role and position of Javanese women can be known through the object of research in the form of Javanese literature. Javanese literary work is a cultural representation of Javanese society.

As an illustration related to the discussion of gender inequality towards Javanese women as represented in literature, the following will be presented several studies that discuss this problems, with the addition of important notes. The study discusses old Javanese literature, modern Javanese literature, and literature in Indonesian with a Javanese cultural background.

The first research was the research on *Serat Wulang Estri* which was studied by Soedarsono & Murniatmo (1986: 10-11). *Serat Wulang Estri* is written by Ingkang Sinuwun Kangjeng Susuhunan Pakoe Boewono IV (1788-1820), written in 1814 AD. In his research, Soedarsono & Murniatmo stated that in *Serat Wulang Estri* women must serve their husbands, be loyal, and adapt to their husbands' profession. Women's obedience is emphasized. Husband in this case is like a king. To refer to women, the term *wadon* is used in *Serat Wulang Estri*. When we look at the *Baoesastra Djawa* Dictionary (1939: 652), the word *wadon* is a variety of Javanese *ngoko* from the word *estri*. The word *wadon* comes from Sanskrit and is formed from the root word *wadu*. According to Padmosoekotjo (1967), the word *wadu* plus the suffix *-an* experienced a morphological process into a *wadon*. *Wadu* means 'servant' and 'estri'. Based on this meaning, the word *wadon* can mean that women are servants. In this case what is meant is that women are servant or subordinates of male / husband. This is in line with what was conveyed by Wahjono (2004: 78), which states that the *wulang's* literature of the era of the Surakarta palace, especially those aimed at women, have themes of integration and dedication to their husbands.

The important results of research conducted by Soedarsono & Murniatmo regarding the views on women in *Serat Wulang Estri* are as follows. First, women are considered the rights of their husbands. Therefore, the husband has power over women / wives. The husband has the right to regulate all the behavior and behavior of women / wives. Husbands also have the right to punish women / wives if they make a mistake. Second, the good women are women who serve their husbands. Women / wives must surrender all their souls to their husbands. Even if women / wives are hurt (squeezed or sliced), women / wives cannot refuse, must accept husband's treatment. Third, in marital relations, women / wives must submit and obey their husbands. The woman / wife must follow and carry out all the wishes of the husband. Women / wives must serve their husbands as well as possible. Fourth, women / wives must serve men / husbands. Women / wives must be afraid of their husbands. Women / wives must obey their husbands. Women / wives cannot refuse or refute any wishes of the husband.

The second study is the writings of Astuti Hendrato (1991: 176-182) which discusses *Serat Centhini*. In one of the chapters, *Serat Centhini* contains Nyi Artati's advice to her son named Rancangkapti about how to behave towards men or husbands. The advice uses the symbol of the five human fingers, namely *jempol* (thumb), *panuduh* (index finger), *panunggul* (middle finger), *manis* (ring finger), and *jenthik* (little finger). This is found in *Serat Centhini*, Volume I *pupuh* 81, metrum *pangkur*, *pada/bait* 17 to 26. The purpose of the symbol of the five fingers is as follows. *Jempol* (thumb), namely that the wife must prioritize the will of the husband. With all the soul of his body and inwardly he must prioritize and follow all the wishes of the husband. *Panuduh* (index finger), namely that the wife must not dare or oppose the husband's instructions. All orders of the husband must be carried out. *Panunggul* (middle finger), namely that the wife must surrender her husband, even though the husband's giving is little or nothing. *Manis* (ring finger) is that the wife must always be sweet, both in the face and words, for all the wishes of the husband. The eyes are made to shine, even though they are sad in the heart. When in front of the husband, all the sadness must be hidden or thrown away, not to be seen by the husband. *Jenthik* (little finger) means that the wife must be skilled and deft in serving all the wishes of the husband.

The third research is a study that discusses modern Javanese literary works by Sri Widati Pradopo (et al), entitled *The Author of Women in Modern Javanese Literature* (1986). In this study, Sri Widati Pradopo (et al) examined modern Javanese literature written by female authors from before the independence war until 1980. According to this study, 278 found Javanese female authors during this period. The study concluded several important things, namely: 1). About Javanese literary works written by Javanese female authors before the war until 1942, from the analyzed data, there were 20 literary works written by 14 Javanese female authors, most of whom still featured traditional themes. The Javanese female author of this period did not talk about themes that deviated from traditions that had taken root in society, especially values related to ethics. They mostly still offer traditional value systems in response to various problems faced in life. The Javanese female author of this period raised many themes related to domestic life, especially regarding marriage, namely the problem of wife's loyalty to her husband. The most dominant traditional themes in pre-war literary work, because more than 80% of the literary data discussed discussed themes related to the attitudes of traditional Javanese society, especially in domestic life; 2). Literature written by Javanese female authors in the period 1943-1965 tend to be the same as those adopted by Javanese female authors before 1942. Of the 90 samples of literary work discussed, 67 literary works use traditional themes, while the rest use modern themes. This shows that female authors in this period have author's tendencies and tastes that still lead to conventional ways of thinking; and 3). The theme that appeared in Javanese literary works written by Javanese female authors from 1966 to 1980 also tended to be the same as the previous two periods, namely taking the traditional theme. Modern themes which are individual answers to life's challenges do not appear much in Javanese literary works written by Javanese female authors of this period. Based on these three important things it can be concluded that literary works prior to the independence war until 1980 raised traditional themes. In traditional themes that talk about domestic life, especially regarding marriage where wives must be loyal to their husbands, gender inequality is contained. This inequality can be seen from the discussion of loyalty which only focuses the wife's loyalty to her husband. Will be a form of gender equality if the husband's loyalty to his wife is also discussed.

The fourth study is a study of literary works written in Indonesian which alludes to the views on the role and position of Javanese women. Some of these studies are as carried out by Maria A. Sardjono and Tineke Hellwig. In his writings entitled *Paham Jawa* (Javanese Understanding), Maria A. Sardjono (1991: 42-45) discusses ten novels in Indonesian but set or tells the story of Javanese culture. The ten Javanese novels are *Pengakuan Pariyem* (Linus Suryadi), *Canting* (Arswendo Atmowiloto), *Kawannya Juminten Martubi* (Arswendo Atmowiloto), *Ibu Sinder* (Pandir/R.M. Slamet Danudirdjo), *Trilogi: Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, *Lintang Kemukus Dini Hari*, *Jentera Bianglala* (Ahmad Tohari), *Sri Sumarah dan Bawuk* (Umar Kayam), *Roro Mendut* (Y.B. Mangunwijaya), *Roro Mendut* (Ayip Rosidi), *Kisi-Kisi Hati* (Lastari Fardani Sukartono), and *Di Bumi Aku Bersua Di Langit Aku Bertemu* (Titis Basino P.I.). Based on his study of ten novels set in Javanese culture, Maria A. Sardjono stated that it contained a picture of gender bias in Javanese literature. Maria A. Sardjono also stated that Javanese men of any kind and received any formal education seemed to almost all show similar characteristics in certain respects, for example regarding their views on the existence of a wife. Most of them consider his wife not to be in the same level as him. At least, looking at his wife as a place where a husband gets service and convenience and pleasure. It is as if the function of a wife is to serve and give pleasure to life for her husband and which must be accepted by the wife as something that should be so. Almost all authors place women in an unequal position with men but give respectable traits or traits to them with a range of goodness, including loyalty, obedience, patience, ability to hide inner turmoil and such. Maria A. Sardjono also added that the level of dependence of women (wives) on men (husbands) in society is very high.

Research on how the depiction of female characters in Indonesian literature was also carried out by Tineke Hellwig in 1994, and published in the form of a book entitled *In The Shadow of Change: Women in Indonesian Literature* (translated into Indonesian under the title *In the Sadhow of Change: Women's Image in Indonesian Literature in 2003*). This research was conducted from 1984 to 1989, presenting a number of readings and interpretations of Indonesian prose works (especially novels) published between 1937 and 1987. In line with the results of research conducted by Maria A. Sardjono, Hellwig (2003: 1 ) also concluded that Indonesian literature was dominated by a patriarchal system, which placed men as holders of hegemony. Examples of these literary works are the novels of *Siti Nurbaya* (Marah Rusli), *Belenggu* (Army Pane), *Bumi Manusia* (Pramoedya Ananta Toer), *Ladang Perminus* (Ramadhan KH), *Trilogi: Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk, Lintang Kemukus Dini Hari, Jantera Bianglala* (Ahmad Tohari), *Pengakuan Pariyem* (Linus Suryadi), and *Saman* (Ayu Utami).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that from a number of expressions in Javanese language, the customs in Javanese culture, as well as Javanese literature, represent the views which contain problems about gender inequality. This gender inequality is shown by the views that position of women/wives are under men/husbands. Women/wives are subordinates of men/husbands.

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