

## **GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN NUSANTARA FOLKLORE JANUARY EDITION**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The aim of this current study is to describe (1) the construction of gender stereotyping in the characters of Nusantara folklore and (2) the gender relation of characters in Nusantara folklore. Sociological literary approach is employed because it seeks to find male and female relation reflected in the text through social dimensions. Qualitative approach is also used to obtain findings through analysis and description of the phenomena, as well as through exploration of contextual meaning. Through descriptive method, this study aims to disseminate gender construction issues reflected in literary works, specifically Nusantara folklore. The research uses data in the form of quotations of narration sequences which reflect gender relation. The primary source of data is a collection of Nusantara folklore published by Adicita Karya Nusa, 2 September 2015 Edition on January. The data collection employs documentation study conducted through critical and creative reading. The data analysis technique is conducted in two ways (a) understanding the meaning of the text thoroughly and (b) extracting morals of the story. The findings have revealed that (1) the construction of gender labeling in the characters manifests into stereotypes against male and female within the story, in which female characters tend to be represented as weak, and (2) the gender relation is reflected through the leadership of female character with dominant feminine traits, as opposed to male leadership, in which due to traditionally associated with power, his actions contradicts his defined characteristics. This current study is expected to (a) contribute to the enrichment of feminism study in literature, (b) expand the application of gender relation theory in literary works, and (c) develop critical thinking on gender

construction in literary studies from the perspective of culture. This current study seeks to gradually reconstruct gender labeling in order to maintain human being dignity, and also to adapt with changes in dimension relation for a better civilization.

**KEYWORDS:** gender construction, Nusantara folklore, gender stereotypes.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Nusantara folklore is a part of oral tradition of which existence has been upheld by the society. The presence of folklore is closely related to the local wisdom which is nurtured within the society. It is common for folklore to be inspired by events which characterize the local customs and traditions. The story becomes a part of the life of the writer. Literary work is the author's medium for ideological expressions which in turn allows myriads of interpretations to be made by readers, and it often enchants them to follow the ideology embedded in the literary work (Sugiarti, & Andalas, E.F., 2018). The process of the reproduction of literary work is not isolated from cultural, political, and social context of a community and eventually it shapes the perspective of the writer, reader, and society (Arimbi, 2009). In this current study, literary work becomes a space in which gender construction through the perspective of Indonesian community takes place. Division of roles, which associates characters to their roles as female and male and dictates them on how to be a man or woman, is a manifestation of gender ideology which exists in Indonesian community. The ideologies are illustrated in the form of fictions which will be accepted by readers.

Local assets can be attained from folklore. Furthermore, a story illustrates an interesting account of an event and moral lessons which are invaluable for readers. Folklore is a subconscious creation of collaboration of certain cultural nuances.

Therefore, folklore does not have author and is a product belonging to the society (Ahimsa Putra, 2015: ix).

Folklore is an oral tradition which narrates life events, from heroic to mundane everyday story. The story provides ethic, moral, spiritual, and local wisdom which reflects the culture of people from which the story originates. Folklore appears from people for people; it grows with and belongs to people, uniting people together to become a cultural unity. The gender construction of Nusantara folklore needs to be analyzed, considering that it is often read to children in order to educate them to adopt the way of thinking reflected in the story. In addition to this, there are stigmas that are associated with man and women, from which, upon learning about them, children can learn to understand the concept of gender roles.

Similar research has been conducted by Sugiarti (2007) on a relevant novel entitled "An Analysis of Deconstruction of Power in the novel *Dari Fontenay ke Magallianes* (DFM) by Nh. Dini through Cultural Perspective". The research finds that the interpretation of power culture illustrated in Nh. Dini's DFM has experienced a gradual deconstruction process. Power used to be the domain of male; while female used to be the object of power. Through the deconstruction, the novel offers a new definition of power which can be possessed by both male and female. As a result of change and development of era, as well as post-colonial development, new waves of thoughts appear and challenge the dominant traditional values.

In the novel, it appears that male and female domains have been gradually deconstructed. Everything that is experienced by both male and female are openly questioned. Folklore obviously has different construction patterns which develop through the story. Therefore, this research needs to be conducted in order to investigate deeper how gender relation is shaped through story.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS:**

### **Structuralism Theory**

Structural analysis seeks to reveal and describe as carefully, as thoroughly, as detailed, and as deep as possible the interrelationship

and intertwining of all elements and aspects of literary work that together produce a total meaning (Teeuw, 2003: 135). Autonomous verbal structures unite in the totality of the meaning of the text so that the analysis of the structure expresses the overall meaning in an integrated manner. Hence, the new elements will have meaning only in their totality. There is a correlation between characters, plot, and settings that make up a literary work. Changes in the genre of literature cause changes in the accompanying elements, for example changes from poetry to fiction or vice versa.

In the analysis of the structure, the researcher seeks to understand that literary work is a world built with words. Literary work has intrinsic elements built into the work itself. The meaning of a literary work can be obtained if the researcher thoroughly understands the building elements of literary creativity. The whole building elements of literary creation is supported by the reality of society which is not a solitary, but a chain of various complex events.

To find 'social facts', an individual strives to find and classify certain actions in order to offer comprehensive insights. Social facts as a whole [total social faith] is "an activity that has an impact not only on societal, but also in the economic, legal, political, and religious fields" (Sedgewick, 2002: 95) "The various strands of social and psychological life are woven together through what is called [Mauss] 'total social facts.' Total social facts, to an extent, provide information and regulate institutions and various practices that seem quite different." (Edgar, 2002: 157). Accordingly, it can be said that understanding social facts in a literary work cannot be isolated from the social reality within the society. Both are interrelated and have different responses because they exist in a world of reality and a world of imagination.

### **Gender Perspective in Literature**

Literary work as an ideological space for the author allows plethora of interpretations for readers while enchanting them to unconsciously follow the stream of ideology embedded in the literary work. This is due to the reproduction of literary work which is not isolated from the cultural, political, and social

context of the community and eventually it will develop the perspective of the writer, readers, and community (Arimbi, 2015). In this study, literary work becomes a representation space of gender construction from the perspective of Indonesian society. Different divisions of role which are associated to the characters, specifically concerning on representation of (how to be) male or female, are a type of representation of gender ideology that is developed within the Indonesian society. There are different types of ideology which are imbued in the fictional spaces within literature which is then appreciated by the readers.

Woman in literary work is represented within the framework of equivalent relation with a set of marginalization and subordination system of values, such as sentimentality, emotions, and spirituality (Sugihastuti, 2002: 67). In this case, literature positions woman as a subject of emotions who has spiritual sensibility. In literature, there is a hidden power of reproduction of gender. This is in line with the argument that each individual is expected to express gendered feeling when socializing. When individuals violate certain norm, value, or feeling, they will face the consequence arising from the society. Furthermore, gendering male and female is a matter of symbolized status. Male is identified as masculine individual; while female is identified as feminine individual. Female is perceived as a beautiful, gentle, and delicate being. Meanwhile, male is perceived as dignified, strong, and aggressive. Male is considered to be smarter, stronger, and braver than female in many aspects. These cultural perceptions grant male individual more significant role than female individual, resulting in male having higher social status than female (Handayani, Sugiarti, 2017: 28).

Additionally, the prevalent patriarchal culture nurtured within the society allows male to be considered as more superior than female in all aspects of life. This results in the limitation of freedom for women (Karim, 2014: 58). To respond to patriarchal culture, movements to liberate women from all types of discrimination and injustice are organized around the world. The subjugation happens because patriarchal culture is maintained

within the society. Suwastini (2013:199) suggests that feminist movements fight against patriarchal system which puts women as inferior to men and subjugate them.

Gender ideology in literature scrutinizes the tendency of domination by men against women, which has become a part of the culture for ages. This is due to the fact that gender ideology is related with social system and culture which places men above women. The reality represented in literary work generally is loaded with personifications and humanistic concepts of life and living.

#### **METHOD:**

Sociological literary approach is employed because this current study uses social dimensions in analyzing male and female relation reflected through the text. This study is emphasized on individuals, their behaviors within the social context of community which is always abiding the local culture. This is a qualitative study which is aimed to obtain findings through observation of phenomena, give description, and obtain deep meaning. Descriptive method aims to solve problems related with gender construction reflected in literary work, specifically from Nusantara folklore. The data are in the form of quotations of dialogues from the story which express issues of gender relation. The primary data source is a collection of folklore entitled *Cerita Rakyat Nusantara* published by Adicita Karya Nusa, 2 September 2015 Edition on January. The data collection technique is documentation study, which is focused on the Nusantara folklore as the source of data. The data analysis techniques are performed by the following steps (1) understanding the meaning of the text intensively and (2) observing and exploring the morals of the story.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

The discussion is highlighting the construction of gender labeling and gender relation which are explored from the Nusantara folklore. This is to find out how sociocultural construction related with the gender issues is shaped through the narration of the story. Overall, the findings are elaborated as follows.

## **Gender Labeling Construction of Characters in Nusantara Folklore**

Gender is perceived as an attribute which signifies the difference of male and female individuals. The difference is grounded on cultural, social, economic, and educational factors. Male and female, although having the same physiology of brain, are considered different. Wandu (2015:243) argues that gender is an interpretation attempt of a culture in understanding the difference of sexes, which are related with attributes, behaviors, habits, expectations, roles, and functions which are attributed to each sex.

Unok is described as a man with tall and strong posture and often times is considered as intimidating, despite having soft and polite manners. Unok always prayed in Mecca, until one day he announced that he had received premonition from God and told the people of an impending calamity that would destroy the village.

"One day, God will send calamity to the land of Gayo, a tremendous flood that will drown and wreak havoc possessions and the lives of the people of this land" (Unok, 2015:5).

Unok wanted to cut down some trees to obtain woods to make an ark for the villagers. Unok is described as a man possessing great power that he could rip off a big tree from earth in just one stomp of a foot.

"By using his power, Unok can rip off a massive tree with just one stomp of a foot..." (Unok, 2015:5)

Another male character with a bold personality and one who cares about his family is Kelana.

"I have to fight against that tyrant of a King. I, too, need to free my father and mother and also the people of Purnama who are innocent." (The Tale of Kelana the Sacred, 2015:9)

These sequences of event suggest that man is described as a being with tall stature, possessing wisdom because he can do something that nobody else can do. Furthermore, man is illustrated as a brave person when he has to fight against ruling evils. This is in line with the stereotype against male and also indicates that stereotype is a type of labeling on certain group and generally results in inequality, making it a negative labeling. This is due to the fact that labeling against men

expects them to be strong, rational, masculine, and mighty (handayani; Sugiharti, 2017:17).

Hang Tuah is a man who possess bravery and various tricks to deceive his enemies.

"When Hang Tuah and his four friends succeeded in defeating four troublemakers who attacked Master Treasury..." (Hang Tuah The Malay Knight, 2015: 11)

The young King, however, is a man who would do everything to get what he wanted. He wanted to know the person who weaved the silk clothe he purchased the other time. His high curiosity made him use all his power to threaten Mande Rubiah to confess and bring a maiden named Gadih Ranti to come to the palace.

"The young King used his trick to capture Mande Rubiah with a charge of lying to the King. He did this to find out about the girl who lived with him" (Gadiah Ranti, 2015:20).

This quotation portrays that men with their power would do anything to fulfill their wishes. The young King deceived Mande Rubiah in order to fulfill his wish. This proves that men have the power in labeling against them; while women are placed in a position where they are subjugated or weakened.

## **Gender Relation Reflected by the Characters in Nusantara Folklore**

In social construct, there are rules and values which are attributed to male and female which cannot be exchanged and have to be acknowledged. Wandu (2015: 250) asserts that the values passed from one generation to another generation are attributed to masculinity which dictate men to train themselves to be what is expected of them. Men are not allowed to be whiny, graceful, and other attributions associated to femininity which are not written, but have to be followed, nevertheless.

The Tale of Kelana the Sacred tells a story about a kingdom named Purnama. The male character described in the story is Commander Badau, who is a tyrant, drunk, and ignorant of his dominion, and also makes his people suffer due to his wickedness.

"Ever since Badau ruled the kingdom, the people suffered. Crimes went rampant. Markets became desolated because traders

were afraid that their merchandise would be seized by the King's soldiers" (The Tale of Kelana the Sacred, 2015: 8)

The quotation above explains that men generally hold the role to rule and become rulers. Barker (in Wandu, 2015: 249) suggests that the general values which are put forth in masculine culture for men is strength, power, action, control, independence, self-contentment, and work.

In the story of The History of Hama, there is a description of a man who does not have self control and egocentric.

"... Batara Batur hurriedly came out bringing his weapon. When he saw that there were many animals destroying his plants, Batara Batur became livid. Then, he killed all of those animals.." (The History of Hama, 2015: 53)

In the quotation above, it is shown that Batara Batur is a man of low self control and is an egotistic because he killed animals who ruined his plants. However, the illustration of a man appears in a story entitled Batara Batur.

Generally, women are depicted as gentle, caring, beautiful, and polite. Budianta (in Uniwati, 2014: 91) argues that women behave gently and speak softly not because these characteristics are hardwired in them, but because they are the norms and customs that are upheld within the community. In the story about Princess Gilang Rukmini, she is described as a spoiled woman.

"The King and the Queen loved their daughter dearly. They would give her everything she asked for. Her upbringing turned the Princess to be a spoiled young woman. If her demands were not granted, she would become angry. She would even speak crudely..." (The Legend of The Colourful Lake, 2015:34)

Moreover, the description of women who do not appreciate others also appear in the quoted narration below.

"The Princess accepted the necklace, and then she glanced at it, saying "I don't want to wear that. It's ugly!" she yelled as she threw the necklace away.." (The Legend of The Colourful Lake, 2015:35)

From the quotations above, it can be concluded that the Princess is a representation of a cruel and wicked woman. Her lavish

lifestyle turned her to become an arrogant young woman who does not respect others. In this case, the Princess is a representation that is not in line with the societal norms and culture upheld.

The Legend of Batu Berambai tells a story of a strong woman who preserve her chastity until her death.

"...Rather than bearing shame, death is much better" (The Legend of Batu Berambai, 2015:78)

The quotation above shows that Princess Renong Bulan is a representation of a woman who preserves her chastity.

A widowed woman was granted with a son whose form is of a frog and wanted to marry her son, Bujang Katak, to the King's daughter. The son possessed good heart that he wanted to help his elderly mother, but he was also an egoistic human.

"The widower appeared before the King who was gathering with his family. The widower timidly expressed her intention. Upon hearing her proposal, the King became angered. However, he still showed his kind heart by asking the opinions of his seven daughters. All of his daughters rejected the proposal. Before the youngest Princess expressed her thought, the King ordered the guard to send out the widower." (The Widower and Bujang Katak, 2015: 24)

The egoistic and stubborn traits of Bujang Katak as a man are portrayed when he forced his mother to go the palace and made her mother mocked by the royal family. Bujang Katak should have been a gallant and caring individual, particularly to his mother. Conversely, he embarrassed his mother on public.

Calon Arang is a tale of a woman who performed witchcraft. The story accounts her courage in a fight against men.

"Upon witnessing his retreating troops, Narottama came in for help. Calon Arang did the same. She ran after and attacked Narottama. Narottama swung his sword and wounded Calon Arang. Magically, every time the sword slashed her in the neck, her head and her body came back intact, which eventually forced Narottama to withdraw his troops." (Calon Arang, 2015: 42)

In the quotation above, Calon Arang is depicted as a powerful and courageous woman. The predominant conception in the society assumes power and courage as the attributes of men. Calon Arang begs to differ. Her brilliance, valor, and power cause men to retreat and surrender. This discussion about woman behavior, as quoted above, shows that women do not always abide with the social norm construction prevalent in their culture; they are not always gentle, caring, and nurturing. Nurhayati (2016: 44) suggests that the nature of women does not revolve around carrying and feeding their children, taking care of their husbands, and performing their household duties. It implies that the fate of women is associated with their nature traits, which are caring, nurturing, patient, selfless, and willing to share. Such conception does not always find resonance with all women, especially in this era where women have more liberty and can perform tasks done by men. Similar to Calon Arang who courageously fights men for the sake of her own desires, both men and women naturally have egoistic trait within them.

#### CONCLUSION:

The construction of gender labeling emphasizes on the stereotypes that are developed as a result of sociocultural construction in the gendering of male and female. Eventually, men are considered superior than women. Gender relation as depicted by the characters in Nusantara folklore shows the tendency of representing female leadership as being dominated by feminine traits; while male leadership has always been characterized by power and thus their behaviors sometimes cannot reflect their defined roles. This study aims to reconstruct gender labeling in order to maintain human being dignity and also to adapt with changes in the dimension relation for a better civilization.

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