

The Woman's Struggles in Searching for Gender Equality Depicted in the Novel "Bekisar Merah" by Achmad Tohari

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ABSTRACT

Currently, women on the island of Java have experienced extraordinary developments in social life so that they feel extraordinary freedom and are even considered excessive (overcapacity), giving rise to their own unrest in the gender struggle. Therefore, this research aims to discuss the representation of Javanese women and the struggle for gender equality in a patriarchal system in the novel "Bekisar Merah" by Ahmad Tohari. This research uses a descriptive method and uses a qualitative approach carried out by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2018) in analyzing the data. The main data in this article are sentences, phrases and paragraphs of the novel. The research results show that in seeking gender equality, Lasi faces struggles in maintaining marital bonds, consistently maintaining identity and self-esteem, being free from sexual temptation, and the struggle to find true love in the real world. This research reveals that loyalty and integrity towards family is a priority in the struggle for gender equality. This research implies that to achieve gender equality requires steadfastness in good principles and values.

Keywords: Javanese Women, Self-Esteem, Gender, Sex, Equality

INTRODUCTION

In Javanese society, social construction is known as patriarchy. This refers to the perception of Javanese society which adheres to a system of life that men are more dominant than women. In the patriarchal conception, men are seen as superior and special in the domestic and public spheres and have the social sanctity to exercise power over women. Society prioritizes the needs and aspirations of men and attempts to subjugate women to the traditional culture they have long adhered to. However, as time goes by, women slowly have left this social constraint. This is characterized by the condition that women are no longer inferior to men. They have fought hard to ensure their existence is recognized proportionally. This means that, indeed, they are physiologically weaker than men. However, the elements of their social construction have changed along with the emergence of their role in the social environment. For instance, although having distinct duties and functions inside the family, men and women play the same roles in it.

In the family, for example, women and men have the same roles even though they have different functions and roles in it. Socially, they tend to have the same role based on different tasks and functions. In terms of social construction, Javanese society has shifted a lot by providing enormous opportunities for women in the struggle for gender equality. The interesting matter is what and how the struggle for gender equality is in Javanese society which continues to promote gender equality with prototypes and forms that are different from gender equality in general. This topic will be discussed in this article.

Many researches have been conducted on gender equality in patriarchal societies before. Afidah, et.al (2020) researched the characteristics of Javanese women. The results of his research show that Javanese women have beautiful faces, attractive appearance, and smile a lot. Psychologically, they are characterized by being patient, loyal, always thinking positively, being thorough and persistent, and accepting what is. The Javanese women are always simple, strong and never give up, motivated, intelligent, and obedient. Meanwhile, Nurcahyanti (2021)

researched Javanese women in their performance. This research found that Javanese women have character, strength, roles, attitudes and systems that reinterpret the ethos reflected in batik cloth. Then, Mustofa (2019) analyzed the representation of Javanese women's resistance to patriarchal culture through films. This research showed that Javanese women are fighting against gender equality to achieve and seek personal existence. Fitriani, Nur, et al. (2019) examined the image of Javanese women in the novel *Hati Sinden* by Dwi Rahyuningsih: A Study of liberal feminism. This research discussed the position of women who are always in a lower position than men in patriarchal culture and patriarchal views of women. Sugiarti (2019) researched "Patriarchal Culture in East Javanese Folklore". He found that in a society with a patriarchal culture, it was considered normal for men to be more dominant than women, and is appropriate to apply this in various aspects of life. In general, the relationship between men and women was still not balanced. Rosdiani, Sari, et al. (2021) examined social reality in the novel "Crying Woman". The results of the research showed that patriarchal culture which places women as weaker than men causes a lot of oppression of women, whether physical, sexual, or verbal.

Several previous studies have discussed Javanese women from various cultural and social perspectives. However, research currently being conducted specifically discusses Javanese women and gender equality in the novel "Bekisar Merah" by Achmad Tohari. This research was conducted with the emergence of a new phenomenon in Javanese women in this era. Javanese women have experienced extraordinary development and growth in all things, for example, education, career, socio-cultural politics and other things. Sometimes what happens is that there is an excessive surge so that women experience over-opposition towards men and gender struggles exceed their proper proportion. This needs to be returned to the true nature of Javanese women and efforts in real gender struggle.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Javanese Women

As a woman, the stigma that is often attached to her is that women must look beautiful, be gentle, women must be at home taking care of the household, women must be good wives and mothers, women must be good at cooking, women must be obedient and must not speak harshly or glorify others. exalt in front of men and the views attached to them and so on. A view that can define women today. Hasanah (2020) revealed that Javanese women are also depicted as weak and must obey what men tell them or expect from them (Fitriana, 2019). The characteristic of this sovereign woman is the motto of the Great Indonesian Sovereign Woman (Hasanah, 2020). Oktasari (2020) revealed the representation of female characters in the novel, the image of women in the novel "Perempuan Kembang Jepun" by Lan Fang. He found that the image of women depicted in the research depicts the figure of a modern woman, namely independent, educated, broad-minded, and has an outlook on life.

Sasmita (2021) states that Javanese women have the characteristics of polite, simple, and obedient but opinionated. Meanwhile, Suryadi (2020) explains that Javanese women have unique strengths in the structure of Javanese society. Its uniqueness lies in the sector of maintaining household survival. The front sector has diplomatic power. The central sector has the power to balance the household. The rear sector has the power to maintain the family economy. On the front sector, Javanese women have a character that reflects flexible and gentle behaviour, also reflects the ability to maintain ethics, be polite, and solve problems by avoiding conflict. This character is suitable as a diplomat character. He added that Javanese culture is very noble in describing the character of Javanese women, both behaviour and physical appearance. Physically, Javanese women are depicted as follows, as padmini figures, citrini figures, sankini figures, and hastini figures. Padmini's figure is a portrait of a woman with perfect physical beauty. Citrini's figure is a beautiful and artistic woman. The figure of Sankini is a symbol of a woman with a tall, thin physical posture. The figure of Hastini is a portrait of a Javanese woman who is short, fat and likes to eat (Suryadi, 2020).

Patriarchy

One of the characteristics of a patriarchal society is that men are the centre of everything, while women are at a disadvantage (Du, 2021). Factors influencing the nature of patriarchal. In these complex and changing times, with an unstable political and economic situation, patriarchal norms in society have a negative and coercive

impact on human nature (Isgandarova, 2021). Gosh. et.al (2020) stated that gender interacts with job demands to influence work engagement, so this relationship is stronger for men than women. Moderated mediation analysis shows that men experience work engagement and through work engagement, they increase job satisfaction from challenging job demands, whereas these benefits are not obtained by women, and when this occurs, the benefits are much smaller than for men. Ramesh and Pathil (2021) conducted research on the Social Status of Indian Women from Different Periods in a Patriarchal Society. They stated that in every era, the status of women has always been in second place compared to men and in a patriarchal society. At the same time, the social, economic, educational, marital, cultural and religious status of women in our society is lower than that of men.

According to Sakina (2017), patriarchal culture places men in a position dominated by strong qualities, and women in a position that is weak and hurt both mentally and physically. In the same vein, Anoegrajekti (2010) states that patriarchy places men in the family as the rulers who determine everything. This is confirmed by Rahmawati (2107) who states that relationships are inherent relationships between men and women which are constructed by society, both socially and culturally, which differ from time to time and from place to place, and these conditions occur periodically and perpetuated in social relations, so that the characteristics between women and men are considered normal. Furthermore, Ratmayani, et al (2018) revealed that gender relations discuss the issue of differences in the positions of women and men in the distribution of resources and responsibilities, benefits, rights, power, and leadership, so that the use of gender relations is used as an analysis that does not focus on women. According to Hanum (2018), and Karim, (2014) patriarchy is a socio-cultural construction that always places men in a more special position than women. Therefore, men are considered superior and stronger than women because they are considered inferior. In society, patriarchal culture is considered a normal thing to be applied in various aspects of life. In general, the relationship between men and women has not yet been demonstrated.

Gender Equality

The word gender comes from English which means sex, gender is also a fundamental concept offered by feminism to analyze society. In English, gender is defined as indicating the nature and classification of two biological sexes, namely male and female. Some feminists, such as Simone, Beauvoir, Crist Weedon and Barbara Lloyd agree that in this realm there is a natural line, where men and women each have characteristics that are permanently inherent, and natural and cannot be exchanged for each other. Different from sex, gender is a concept regarding the classification of male (masculine) and female (feminine) characteristics that are formed in social culture. Demartoto (2022) states that sex is a biological category; Gender and sexual orientation are social and psychological categories. Sexuality is related to the genitals and secondary sex organs. Each category is a sustainability spectrum or continuum (horizontal direction) where matrix-like subcategories are located.

Kartini and Maulana (2019) said that changing times have resulted in several shifts in every line of life, from science and technology to self-awareness and thinking. The increasingly advanced development of the world opens up opportunities for everyone to take part openly in various fields of life. No doubt this cannot be separated from the role and figure of women whose current work cannot be ignored. Many fields that were originally controlled by Adam have now been shifted to be occupied by Eve. The role of women here is equal to that of men.

Furthermore, gender and sex can be seen from two different things. Current social construction relies on patriarchal ideology. In patriarchy, men are seen as superior and special in the domestic and public spheres and have the social sanctity to exercise power over women. Society prioritizes the needs and aspirations of men and attempts to fulfil them by subjecting women to traditional cultural practices Azmi (2022)

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach and descriptive design. By referring to the behavior of the main character in the book Lasi, this research aims to analyze social events and phenomena. The figure of a Javanese woman who is beautiful, kind, strong and confident is depicted by this figure. Along with her desire to gain equal rights as a respectable, independent woman. The fact that the data in this research approach is in the form of phrases, sentences and paragraphs in the form of discourse and not statistics is another qualitative characteristic.

Humans are not considered as physical creatures, but as social creatures, according to Rukin (2019) who states that qualitative research takes the form of many social phenomena and social truths.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2018) state that analysis consists of three activities that occur simultaneously, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. data reduction, data display, and conclusion/verification. Additional cycles of data reduction emerge as data collection progresses (writing summaries, coding, determining themes, creating groups, creating partitions, and writing memos. Researchers can organize data and eliminate information that is not related to using data reduction to arrive at final, testable conclusions. Data Views are structured, concise collections of information that enable action and conclusion. For them, more effective data visualization—which includes various types of matrices, graphs, networks, and charts—is key success of qualitative analysis.

They are created to combine structured information into a coherent, easy-to-retrieve form. By doing this, an analyst can have a clear picture of what happened and decide whether to make the right conclusions or stick with the analysis suggested by the presentation. Inference/Verification Inference, according to Miles & Huberman (2018) only covers half of the Gemini setup. As the analyst works, his conclusions are also confirmed. Amid data collection, researchers draw quick conclusions. Of course, it is impossible to conclude haphazardly; evidence must be double-checked for accuracy. The result is not only achieved during the data collection process; This also needs to be confirmed so that it can be properly accounted for.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Self-esteem is the perception of one's value in one's social environment. A Javanese woman's sense of identity in her family and social life is a major component of her self-esteem. In this work. Lasi represents the identity and self-esteem of a Javanese woman.

The Javanese woman's struggles depicted in this novel in the following descriptions:

Lasi's Struggle with Her Family.

As is known, Lasi is a very natural village woman. She has a normal life despite being a village boy. she is like most village girls in Karangsonga. When she married a village youth named Darsa, she is very happy. She hopes to live with Darsa forever and has children like other women. When Lasi really loves and cares for her husband, it turns out that trials and storms arise in her household. It turns out that her husband is playing with women and is unable to maintain Lasi's loyalty to him. Her husband, Darsa, impregnated a village girl, Sipah. Knowing that Darsa is cheating on Sipah, Lasi cannot accept her husband's betrayal. Her heart was shattered, her life had no direction and his life became very difficult. In response to the actions of the husband that she loved so much, Lasi chose to leave her village. She didn't have a definite destination. Because her heart was devastated by her husband's betrayal, Lasi chose to go and follow her heart. What is important for her is to get away from her husband and Karangsonga.

The following quote explains this:

“Sapon menoleh ke kanannya dan sesaat ia melihat mataLasi berkaca-kaca. Lasi memang menangis. Sekarang diamulai menyadari apa yang dia lakukan; lari dariKarangsoga, bumi yang melahirkan dan ditinggaliselama dua puluh empat tahun (Sapon looked to the rightand for a moment he saw that Lasi's eyes were filled withtears. Lasi as indeed crying. Now he began to realize whathe was doing; ran away from arangsoga, the earth thatgave birth to him and lived on him for twenty-four years (P.61)”.

The quote above tells the story of Darsa, Lasi's husband, impregnating Sipah, the daughter of a woman who works as amasseuse. This incident occurred when Darsa, who was being cared for by Mrs. Sipah, the masseuse. To prove that Darsahad truly recovered from her illness, the masseuse ordered

Darsa to try his manhood on her son, Sipah. After trying, Sipah became pregnant. As a consequence, Darsa is obliged and must marry Sipah. Coincidentally, at that time Lasi and Darsa did not have children. So, this is

where the struggle to achieve gender equality begins. As a normal woman, Lasi does not accept Darsa's actions. Therefore, as a loyal, beautiful and charming woman, Lasi decided to leave her husband's house as a sign that she could not be needed arbitrarily in any name. Especially in the name of love. Lasi chooses to run away and leave Darsa, her legitimate husband, as a demonstration that she is a woman whose feelings also need to be respected, loved and protected.

The following quote shows Lasi's departure:

"Tidak kasihan sama Emak? Dia terlihat begitumenderita." Hening Lasi menunduk dan mengusap mata. Jadisudah tidak bisa ditawar lagi, kamu tidak mau pulang?" Lasi mengangguk. Kanjat menyandar ke belakang. Wajahnya buntu. (Don't you feel sorry for Mom? " Lasi's head looked down and rubbed his eyes. So it's no longer negotiable, you don't want to go home?" Lasi nodded. Kanjat leaned back. His face was dead (p. 129).

Lasi's statement above illustrates that her decision to leave the household was a form of resistance to the husband she has always love. By impregnating Sipah, Lasi becomes completely uninterested in Darsa. This is because Darsa has a depraved nature, namely betraying the wife who really loves him. Then, the act of impregnating Sipah is a form of immoral behavior that a husband should not do to his family. So in Lasi's view, the husband and his family deserved to be left behind. Why is it worth it? Because a wife is not a tool and a game, but a human being who is worthy of respect and Up-holding.

Lasi's Struggle Against Handarbeni.

After Lasi leaves her husband, Darsa, and her village, Karangsonga, Lasi lives in Jakarta.

In this big city, it is very easy for Lasi to find a replacement for Darsa. Later, Lasi married Handarbeni. He is the chairman and director of a company. Handarbeni is old and he is over 60 years old. However, he really likes beautiful women. Finally, he marries Lasi. After becoming Handarbeni's wife, Lasi wallows in wealth because her current husband spoiled Lasi with wealth. Even Lasi, a villager, becomes a very rich man. However, being rich is not pleasant. Lasi suffers because her husband is unable to fulfill her sexual desires. This is where the gender struggle begins. Considering that Handarbeni is unable to provide sexual satisfaction to Lasi, he offered for Lasi to seek sexual satisfaction with another man. He even offered to look for it. what was important to Handarbeni was that Lasi did not leave and divorce her. With the words of her husband whom she respected so much, Lasi's heart was broken. he thinks that men do whatever they want. selfish man. For that Lasi refused. Lasi's rejection is a gender struggle in the sense that the family must be defended. So Lasi rejects her husband's crazy wishes.

"Las, aku memang sudah tua. Aku tak lagi bisa memberi dengan cukup. Maka, bila kamu mau, kamu aku izinkan meminta kepada lelaki lain . Dan syaratnya hanya satu kamu jaga mulut dan tetap ting gal di sini menjadi istriku . Bila perlu , aku sendiri yang akan mencarikan N lelaki itu untukmu ." Oalah, Las, kubilang juga apa. Pak Han lelaki yang luar biasa baik, bukan? Oalah, Lasi, mujur amat nasibmu! ("Las, I'm old. I can no longer give enough. So, if you want, I'll let you ask another man. And the only condition is that you watch your mouth and stay here as my wife. If necessary, I I will find N the man myself." Oh, Las, I'll tell you what. Mr. Han is an extraordinarily good man, isn't he? Oh, Lasi, your luck is so lucky! "(Pg. 192).

The statement above describes how Lasi struggled to deal with the extremely immoral actions of her husband. How come a husband, who is supposed to protect his wife, has the heart to tell his wife to seek satisfaction outside and in other people? This is a teaching that should not be said by a husband to his wife. That's very unethical. Then, to deal with this, Lasi told Mrs. Lanting about Handarbeni's wishes. However, She does not get answers and encouragement towards goodness. In fact, She gets bad advice from Mrs. Lanting. Therefore, Lasi thinks and calculats the way to escape from Handarbeni.

Lasi's Struggle to Get True Love from a Man.

From several bad incidents that happen to Lasi, starting with Darsa, Handarbeni, and Pak Bambang, Lasi decides to marry the village youth that she loves from the bottom of her heart.

Lasi's decision to marry Kanjat is very right and appropriate because she can truly get true love from the person who loved her since her childhood. By marrying Kanjat, Handarbeni's problems and Pak Bambang's temptations will automatically be reduced. Through the village elders, Lasi and Kanjat are married with the intention of avoiding negative actions and assumptions towards both of them.

Pay attention to the quote below:

“yang kumaksud, Kanjat dan Lasi menikah secara syariat, atau secara siri. Atau apalah namanya sebelumkeduanya berangkat. Ini penting demi menjaga martabat dan kehormatan mereka, juga kita semua.” (“What I mean is, Kanjat and Lasi were married according to sharia, or in a serial manner. Or whatever it was called before the two of them left. This is important to maintain their dignity and honour, as well as all of us.” (p. 307)).

Because Lasi feels her self-esteem has been insulted by her husband, Lasi becomes angry, sad, and helpless. As a result, she decides to leave her husband, Handarbeni and she leaves him forever. Lasi and Kanjat plan to go all the way to the house of Ngalwi, his older brother who lives in Sulawesi as a transmigrant. So, to avoid unwanted slander, Kanjat and Lasi finally get- married before they both leave for Sulawesi to get away from her husband, Handarbeni.

Lasi's Struggle Against the Love Affair from Pak Bambang.

As it is known that Lasi has faced the temptation of love from a man several times. Next, Bu Lanting presents her to Pak Bambang, a government official at that time. Pak Bambang is known as a strong man. Therefore, not a single request is rejected by his colleagues, including businessmen, officials, governors, regents, and others. What Pak Bambang asks for will be obtained easily. In seeing the beauty of Lasi, who has a beautiful face, beautiful and slender posture, has a face like a Japanese artist. So Mrs. Lanting, who is close to Pak. Bambang, is trying to get Lasi closer to him to that she can get a commission and a lot of wealth from Pak Bambang by making Lasi as a bait. Lasi is used as bait for him. Ofcourse Pak Bambang welcomes her happily and proudly. Pak Bambang just wants to have an experience by making intercourse and sex with Lasi who has a charming and beautiful body. Meanwhile, Mrs. Lanting hopes for a commission from Mr. Bambang after presenting Lasi to him. When Lasi and Pak Bambang have the opportunity to be in Singapore, She is not captivated by the advances of Pak Bambang's and Mrs Lanting's tricks. She remained firm in the sanctity of her marital ties with Handarbeni. For her, the marriage bond shall not be tainted by infidelity. It is a principle of life for her. Pay attention to the following quotes:

“Dikehendaki lelaki ketika sedang berdua dengan perempuan di sebuah ruang yang sangat pribadi. Lasi bukan tidak menangkap pesan yang tak itu dan reaksinya adalah wajah yang beku dan tatapan mata yang dingin. Melalui bahasa wajah itu Lasi ingin menanggapi harapan yang dilontarkan Bambang.” Jangan. Aku tidak sama dengan Bu Lanting.” terucap (What men want when they are alone with women in a very private room. It wasn't that Lasi didn't catch the message that wasn't there. And his reaction was a frozen face and cold eyes. Through the facial language, Lasi wanted to respond to Bambang's hopes. "No. I'm not the same as Mrs. Lanting," said (P.267)).

The quote above shows that Lasi really adheres to her principle that a valid marriage bond shall not be tainted by infidelity. Even though Mrs. Lanting has made many efforts to bring her and Pak Bambang tries hard to close to her, they ultimately failed. This can be interpreted as how Lasi's attitude, as Handarbeni's wife, remains unaffected by worldly temptations such as wealth, gold and other luxuries easily awarded and promised by Mrs. Lanting and Pak Bambang.

If viewed from the aspect of gender equality, Lasi is used as an object to achieve different goals. From Mrs. Lanting's side, she is used as an object to extract money and wealth from Pak Bambang by using various reasons and ways. Such on the other hand, in Pak Bambang's point of view, Lasi is a woman who can be loved and touched freely sexually by everyone and can be played with. That's why Lasi is trying hard not to be affected at all. Marriage must be cared for and guarded. Marriage must not be betrayed. Marriage is sacred, not just a place for sexual release. If men can treat women unfairly at will, for Lasi it's the opposite. Every woman must be

treated fairly. She must be equal to men in her function, namely maintaining the self-respect and dignity of women by not being able to be bought and sold.

The quote above describes Lasi's religious identity and nature. Lasi's identity emerged after experiencing the bitterness of living with two different husbands and an atmosphere that tempted her to make mistakes. But She avoided it. She must maintain his chastity. She had a desire for it after she became pregnant with Kanjat's legitimate child. She prayed to the Almighty to give her the strength to maintain her purity for the future of the child she was carrying.

Lasi's Struggle to Purify her Soul Again.

After going through several struggles related to social interactions, Lasi finally tries to purify herself again by getting closer to the God Almighty. To achieve these things that most people usually study, Lasi also practices it. She does this solely to surrender to the Almighty Allah. This is the culmination of Lasi's struggles in seeking and achieving the struggle for gender equality. She surrenders completely to God.

Pay attention to the following quote:

Lalu entahlah, Lasi ingin bersyukur karena yakin Gusti Allah telah berkenan menitipkan amanat kepadanya . Amanat itu membuat Lasi, sebagai menuju perempuan, merasa lebih punya makna. Maka ia bangkit dan keluar kamar pembantu yang ternyata sudah lama bangun. Lasi minta dipinjami perlengkapan sembahyang. Gusti, berkati dan rahmati kandunganku. Aku tahu, aku ingin dan aku harus memeliharanya. Tetapi bagaimana caranya karena sekarang aku berada dalam keadaan seperti ini? (Then I don't know, Lasi wanted to be grateful because he was sure that God was willing to entrust him with a mandate. The message made Lasi, as a woman, feel more meaningful. So he got up and went out of the maid's room who apparently had woken up a long time ago. Lasi asked to borrow prayer equipment. Lord, bless and bless my womb. I know, I want and I have to maintain it. But how do I now that I am in this state? Protect your womb and keep it pure! Whatever might happen to you, keep it and keep it pure! (P. 324).

Some of the statements above reveal that Lasi gets what she is fighting for, namely gender equality which makes her more meaningful. After that, she remembers God. This means that Lasi has been freed from the shackles of Darsa, her first husband, Mr. Handarbeni, her second husband, and Pak Bambang and Mrs. Lanting who treated her as a slave. Lasi is now becomes the wife of Kanjat, a man who truly loves her. Lasi is pregnant with her legal husband, Kanjat.

This struggle is what Lasi has been looking for all this time. She is treated humanely, appropriately, and in accordance with her feminine nature, namely being loved, cherished, and hoped for with heart and love.

CONCLUSION

The present study concludes that women face challenges related to gender equality. The novel "Bekisar Merah" by Achmad Tohari portrays the struggles of Javanese women, who represent all women in Indonesia, as they fight for their roles as wives and women in the home, as well as how to break free from the constraints of male dominance through a difficult journey. Gender equality in the family is the primary battle, and it affects self-esteem, which is crucial.

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