

THE IMAGE OF MADURESE WOMEN IN “TANDAK” SHORT STORY BY MAHWI AIR TAWAR

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Abstract: *Madurese belongs to some Indonesian ethnic groups that follow patriarchal system. The patriarchal hegemony is depicted in the short story entitled “Tandak” written by Mahwi Air Tawar. Therefore, the study aims to examine woman image in Madurese patriarchal system and symbolic resistance in the short story. The study uses descriptive research. The data sources are Tandak short story, books and related articles. The data are collected by close reading technique. The collected data are analyzed by applying feminist literary criticism that views woman as a reader. The results show that the physical images of women in the short story are Madurese ideal women. The personality of each woman is varied. However, by comparing woman image and man image it can be found that woman is inferior, weak, and marginalized whereas man is superior, strong, and dominant. There are some symbolic resistances, but man’s power still cannot be fully seized by woman.*

Keywords: *Madurese; patriarchy; symbolic resistance; woman image.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Madurese ethnic as well as other ethnic groups in Indonesia follow patriarchal system (Harits, 2011). Patriarchal system is a system of social structure that puts men in dominant position than women in all aspects of social, cultural and economic life (Walby, 1989). This system tends to oppress and exploit women. The oppression of women by men in Madurese daily life can be found in a short story entitled “Tandak” written by Mahwi Air Tawar.

The short story tells about a female *tandak* dancer who is threatened by a *blater*, Madurese male knight, to quit her profession. Madrusin, the *blater*, feels a strong pain because Mahwani, the female *tandak* dancer, has embarrassed him on the stage. Madrusin has a bet with Tanjib. He bets one hundred thousand rupiahs that Mahwani puts her scarf on him. Unfortunately Mahwani puts her scarf on Tanjib. Madrusin feels so embarrassed. It is no longer about losing his money but also his self-esteem.

Mahwani cannot do any resistance. She decides to stop dancing in order to keep her and her daughter safe. The short story illustrates the oppression of woman by man. Woman’s oppression in patriarchal society is an issue that is raised by feminist. Woman is often marginalized and treated badly. The discrimination is a portrait of gender inequality that can

harm woman. The spirit of feminism appears in Marfuah's action. She encourages her mother to fight back by continuing her profession as a *tandak* dancer.

Women's oppression and resistance to patriarchal domination in the short story lead the writer to examine the short story by utilizing feminist literary criticism. Feminist literary criticism is based on feminist view in seeking a justice for seeing women's existence in literary works written by women or men (Wiyatmi, 2012). Wiyatmi (2012) states that feminist literary criticism aim to analyze gender relations, situations in which women in male-dominated fields, women's oppression in patriarchal hegemony and women's resistance. This study will apply woman as reader view of the feminist literary criticism because the short story is written by a man.

There are some Indonesian literary studies using feminist criticism. One of them is an analysis of Djenar Maesa Ayu's novels conducted by Adji, Meilinawati, and Banita (Adji et al., 2009). Meanwhile, the use of feminist literary criticism can be found in Munthe's analysis of Naning Pranoto's *Sekuntum Ruh dalam Merah* novel (Munthe, 2014), Sudarwati's analysis of Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* novel (Sudarwati, 2011), and Wiyatmi's analysis of Indonesian novels between 1922-2004 (Wiyatmi, 2012). All of the studies use novel as the source of data. It certainly has a huge difference with this study that uses the short story as data source. In addition, none of the novels raise feminist issue in Madurese society. One study that analyzes woman's position in Madurese social life is conducted by Harits (2011). He analyzes three Madurese folktales in order to examine the social position and typology of women in Madura. However, the data source and the topic are still different from the present study.

Based on the above descriptions, the writer intends to examine the woman image in Madurese patriarchal society and symbolic resistance attached in Mahwi Air Tawar's "Tandak" short story by applying feminist literary criticism that views woman as a reader.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Feminist literary criticism is one of the literary criticisms that its birth was influenced by the feminist movement in the United States in the 1700s (Wiyatmi, 2012). According to Wiyatmi (2012), feminist literary criticism is based on feminist view in seeking justice for seeing women's existence in literary works written by women or men.

Feminist literary criticism was pioneered by Simone de Beauvoir through her book *Second Sex*, followed by Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, Betty Friedan's *the Feminine Mystique*, and Germaine Greer's *the Female Eunuch* (Humm in Wiyatmi, 2012). Feminist

literary criticism aims to analyze gender relations, situations in which women in male-dominated fields, women's oppression in patriarchal hegemony and women's resistance.

Showalter in Wiyatmi (2012) divides the feminist literary criticism model into two types. They are woman as a reader and woman as a writer. The feminist literary criticism which sees woman as a reader focuses on the study of woman images and stereotypes in literature, misconception and neglect of women in previous criticisms, and the gaps in the literary history written by men (Showalter in Wiyatmi, 2012).

Some of the key words in feminist literary criticism used in this study are as follows:

2.1 The Ideology of Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a social grouping system that emphasizes father's lineage or man lineage. Patriarchy can be described as a system of social structure that puts men in dominant position than women in all aspects of social, cultural and economic life so that men tend to oppress and exploit women (Walby, 1989). The patriarchal system applies not only in private domestic life but also in the public sphere. Wiyatmi (2012) states that the existence of patriarchal hegemony in the private and public sphere causes gender inequality. In the patriarchal system there is a subordination relationship between women and men. Men are superior, while women are inferior. Women will experience restrictions on activities in the public sphere because patriarchal ideology always marginalizes and subordinates women.

2.2 Symbolic Resistance

Short story as a literary work contains a reflection of social practice in society. One of them raises resistance to dominant values that have been deeply ingrained in societies such as patriarchal ideology. The resistance which is done through a literary work such as short story called a symbolic resistance (Wiyatmi, 2012). This is because the resistance done through the words and ideas expressed in a short story. In this study, *Tandak* short story that carries the spirit of feminism is considered as a tool of symbolic resistance to various gender inequalities existing in Madurese society due to patriarchal hegemony.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

In conducting the study, the writer used descriptive research. The primary data source was "Tandak" short story. The secondary sources were books and related articles. The data were collected by close reading technique. The writer applied feminist literary criticism in analyzing Madurese woman image and symbolic resistance in "Tandak" short story.

4. DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN THEMES

4.1. Woman Image

There are two female characters in Mahwi Air Tawar's "Tandak" short story, Mahwani and Marfuah. The portrayal of them covers both physical, psychological and social image as well as economic life. Mahwani is described as a slim woman and her soft voice sounds melodious, "... But because of her unique and melodious voice... Mahwani, a slim woman and tan fair skinned, was unmoved..." (Tawar, 2017:77-78). Slim body and tan fair-skinned like sapodilla fruit leather are ideal physical types for Madurese women. Both of them also become their standard of beauty.

Her psychological image in daily life is portrayed as a weak and coward female character, "... She was depressed because of the threat news that disseminated by Madrusin." (Tawar, 2017:77). The quote shows her psychological condition. She is under pressure because of Madrusin's threat to stop dancing on the stage. This is a form of women's oppression by men. In the face of the oppression, Mahwani is depicted to be silent and accepted the threat without any resistance:

"Mom is afraid, Mar. Madrusin... .. He affects people. He and his people forbid me to dance. ... I am dizzy! Let it be. To keep us safe, Marfuah, please follow what mom said. He is a knight... Mom is just afraid that Madrusin will influences society further." (Tawar, 2017:78-79)

Her words above shows how bad she fears to Madrusin especially to his ability to affect people. Therefore she decides to succumb to him for her and her daughter's safety. She worries a lot. If she does any resistance, the situation will get worse.

Mahwani knows her position in Madurese society which holds the patriarchal ideology. As a woman, she realizes that she is weak and inferior to men. She has no power. She also has no courage to resist. Her attitude is different from her daughter, Marfuah. Marfuah does the opposite thing. Here is the conversation between Mahwani and Marfuah who does not accept her mother decision to stop being a dancer:

"Mom doesn't want to be a tandak dancer anymore, do you? It's not fair!" growled Marfuah. "No! I will remain mom's successor. I don't care Madrusin will spread rumors and threatens. Even slander though."

"But we're just women."

"What's the difference, Mom? Is it only a man who has self-esteem? Women don't?"

"Never mind, Mar."(Tawar, 2017:82)

Mahwani's reply by saying "But we're just women" in the above conversation shows that she has been hegemonized by patriarchal ideology that marginalizes women. Mahwani has

internalized the idea. So, she as a woman considers her own weakness and has no power to resist.

In everyday life Mahwani is portrayed as a weak and coward woman, but on the stage she has power. It is based on the story in “Tandak” short story, “Madrusin’s eyes widened at Mahwani, as if forcing the dancer to put her scarf around his neck. ... Mahwani put her scarf to Tanjib’s” (Tawar, 2017: 81). On stage Mahwani has a full power to perform an action as she wishes. Although Madrusin is a *blater* who is feared by everyone, he cannot impose his will on Mahwani on the stage.

Mahwani’s socio-economic life is described as a widow who lives with her daughter. Before getting threats, she is a famous *tandak* dancer and usually invited in various kinds of events. But since she stops dancing, the income of her family also stops.

Marfuah’s figure is depicted to inherit her mother’s beauty and talent in dancing and singing. However, in psychological terms she has a different character from her mother. Marfuah has a strong soul and brave. She does not want to give up in any condition. She disagrees with her mother’s decision to quit her profession because of her fear of Madrusin and his people’s threat, “Marfuah is really disappointed with her mother’s statement that she did not expect.” (Tawar, 2017: 81). She also insists on being a *tandak* dancer regardless of the threat and slander that she might get, “Mom doesn’t want to be a *tandak* dancer anymore, do you? It’s not fair!” growled Marfuah. “No! I will remain mom's successor. I don’t care Madrusin will spread rumors and threatens. Even slander though.” (Tawar, 2017: 82)

Unlike her mother who is hegemonized by patriarchal ideology, Marfuah is aware of gender inequality. She questions the existence of women in society, “What’s the difference, Mom? Is it only a man who has self-esteem? Women don’t?” (Tawar, 2017: 82). Her question in the quotation shows her attitude that rejects the inequalities of rights between women and men. There are different views on men and women. The existence of men is accepted in society while women’s existence tends to be ignored.

In order to better understand the image of woman depicted in the patriarchal system in the “Tandak” short story, it is necessary to compare woman image with man image in the short story. Madrusin’s figure is described as influential man in society. He is a *blater* who has wealth and power. He is able to threat Mahwani and influences the villagers to express their dislike to her. Based on those descriptions, the male character in the short story is described in accordance with the patriarchal ideology that puts man as superior and dominant in society. Man is a subject who oppresses woman as an object.

4.2. Symbolic Resistance

Symbolic resistance is an idea that contains a resistance from female characters to patriarchal hegemony that is reflected in a literary work (Wiyatmi, 2012). A literary work will be considered to contain the spirit of feminism if it not only describes the oppression experienced by woman but also raises the symbolic resistance. The symbolic resistance in the “Tandak” short story written by Mahwi Air Tawar is reflected in Mahwani’s action to put her scarf on Tanjib. Although she is under the pressure of Madrusin’s keen gaze that is a sign of command or compulsion to put her scarf to him, she does not follow his command. She chooses Tanjib rather than Madrusin. Mahwani’s act of ignoring Madrusin is a resistance to the growing power relations in the patriarchal system. Woman who is portrayed as a submissive in Mahwani’s action shows that she has a rebel spirit and also has the power against a man.

Symbolic resistance also appears in Marfuah’s character. Mahwani’s daughter is not afraid of the threat and slander. She decides to keep practicing dancing and singing in order to become a *tandak* dancer like her mother, “No! I will remain mom's successor. I don’t care Madrusin will spread rumors and threatens. Even slander though.” (Tawar, 2017: 82)

Marfuah’s decision to continue her dream as a *tandak* dancer is a resistance that appears to break the power of patriarchy that had been shackled her mother. Threats and slanders are no longer a barrier. She does not see herself as a weak girl and must submit to a man.

On the other hand, she also demands gender equality in Madurese society. She rejects the view that often regards woman as the other. For her, men and women have the same rights and dignity that must be fought for. By asking the question “What’s the difference, Mom? Is it only a man who has self-esteem? Women don’t?” (Tawar, 2017: 82), Mahwani wants to tell her mother that women also have the same self-esteem like men. So, women do not deserve to feel low and weak.

At the end of the short story, it mentions Mahwani’s hope that there is someone who will come to help her so she will be able to dance on the stage again and her daughter will also able to become a dancer. In fact, the person is not a man but her daughter, Marfuah:

“... Mahwani, after telling her story to her only daughter who wants to continue her profession continues to cry, hoping that someone will be able to defend her daughter's dream and her own dream as a *tandak* dancer will come true.

Winds scrambled through the window grilles. Marfuah gets up slowly, then she asks her mother to dance together.” (Tawar, 2017: 83)

The ending implies the answer to her hope. “Marfuah gets up slowly, then she asks her mother to dance together” does not simply mean getting up from the seat and asking her mother to dance at home, but it can be interpreted as the beginning of Marfuah revival that drives her mother to dance again on stage. Like the spirit of feminism to encourage and support other women to fight against the hegemony of patriarchal, Marfuah also encourages her mother and supports her to fight against the threat of Madrusin by deciding to continue her profession as a *tandak* dancer.

In short, the results reveal the physical image of a woman in “Tandak” short story as Madurese ideal types of woman such as slim and tan fair-skinned. The contradiction appears in the personality of each female character. Mahwani is a weak and coward woman. Meanwhile, her daughter Marfuah is strong and brave. Woman identity in each place also influences her position and power in the society, for example, in daily life Mahwani is an inferior and she has no power. However, on the stage she is superior and she has the power to do her wishes. The comparison between a woman and a man in Madurese culture depicted in the short story shows that woman is inferior, weak, and marginalized whereas man is superior, strong, and dominant. Even though there are some symbolic resistances, but men’s power still cannot be fully seized by women. Hence, there is still gender inequality and women oppression in Madurese culture reflected in the short story.

5. CONCLUSION

“Tandak” short story raises the issue of women’s oppression in Madurese patriarchal system and women’s resistance against the patriarchy. This study utilizes feminist literary criticism that views woman as reader in order to reveal the woman image and symbolic resistance in the short story. The woman image is represented by two female characters, Mahwani and her daughter Marfuah. Mahwani is portrayed as an ideal woman in Madurese society. She is slim and tan fair-skinned. She is talented dancer. She also has melodious voice. In daily life she is depicted as a weak and coward woman. Her daughter, Marfuah, is described as a girl who has strong soul and brave. Her character is different from her mother. The comparison between Mahwani and Madrusin illustrates the image of women and men in Madurese patriarchal system. Women are perceived as inferior, weak, and marginalized whereas men are regarded as superior, strong, and dominant.

The symbolic opposition to the hegemony of the patriarchal ideology embodied in the short story shows that women also have power and are able to escape from men’s pressure. It is implied in Mahwani’s decision to choose Tanjib rather than Madrusin, Marfuah’s decision

to keep her dream as a *Tandak* dancer, and her asking to her mother to dance again. In addition, women who are aware of injustice and gender inequality must pursue their rights. This awareness eventually led to the courage of women to fight against gender inequality and oppression.

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