Feminization of Nature: The Portrayal of Woman and Nature in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*

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ABSTRACT

In Indonesian prose, nature is frequently described as the life support of human beings. The studies about the role of nature in Indonesian prose are still anthropocentric. This paper analyses the position of nature in parallel to woman as the feminine side of culture against male domination using the ecofeminist approach. This paper analyzes *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* by Ahmad Tohari which describes nature as an explorative aspect and culture as a more treasured value than nature. Furthermore, this novel is used to perceive that the work of Asian writers is worth studying as well as to show that the work provides characteristics of the region. By adding another perspective using ecofeminism, this study is expected to contribute in the studies of Asian Literature, especially in Indonesian literature. In addition, this study contributes in the reading of nature exploitation in literary work and discourse about ecofeminism.

Keywords: *Asian Literature nature, culture, ecofeminism, feminization*

INTRODUCTION

In a patriarchal society, there is a value-hierarchical way of thinking which positions higher values on those with privilege and prestige. Besides this, there is a dualism in value that places two different things as oppositional and exclusive leading to cause the classification in which one is higher than another, one is above another, e.g. male over female, culture over nature, mind over body or reason over emotion. Therefore, the logic of domination forms the mindset that the subordinate can be exploited for the domination's interest. In this case, the parallelization can be seen in those which are treated as subordinate such as female and nature.

According to Karen J. Warren[1], the patriarchal system that insinuates hierarchal, dualistic and oppressive mindset to the society has dangerously affected women and nature. The notion of feminized nature and naturalized women are created by seeing some attempts of naturalization and feminization. Women are naturalized by referring them with the use of animal terms e.g bitch, chick etc. and nature is feminized when it is referred to as 'feminine', 'she' and 'mother of universe'. Besides, there are many terms to show the use of nature that are the same as those used by males to exploit females such as mastered, raped, mined etc.

[1] Tong, R. P. (2009). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction*. Colorado: Westview Press.

Indonesian prose, especially novels, is still limited in discussing nature as the part that is problematized or discussing issues about environmental damage. Moreover, the investigation using the ecocritical approach, or more specifically ecofeminism is hardly found. Dewi has claimed that the investigation related to environment and ecology in literature is still limited in number due to the equally limited number of literary works with ecological perspectives[2]. In many literary works, using nature, as the problematic matters, or topics raising issues involving nature as the main conflict, is not as easy as finding literary works raising topics about human as the center of attention. Therefore, many studies about nature and literature are mostly human-centered.

The description of nature in the novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* by Ahmad Tohari shows some samples of exploitation as portrayed by some characters such as Srintil, the Dancer; Rasus, a soldier, a friend of Srintil who also loves her; Ki and Nyai Kertareja, the Ronggeng shamans; Sakarya, Srintil's grandfather and Bakar, an educated man who comes to Dukuh Paruk to gain benefit from the poverty and backwardness of the village and its villagers for political interest[3].

Specifically, Srintil is one of the main characters exploited in the novel that can be seen from its parallelization with nature. Srintil must sacrifice many things to preserve her village in which the tradition and culture are still highly considered by the villagers of Dukuh Paruk. In this novel, the role of nature and the women character is harmed by logic of domination in a patriarchal system. Both women and nature end up losing.

Therefore, by analyzing the novel by Ahmad Tohari which usually uses nature as the setting of place, this paper aims to highlight whether there is any parallelization between nature and women as the feminine side or sub-ordinary in a patriarchal society. Besides, the analysis perceives how the logic of domination over women and nature affects them through the light of an ecofeminist perspective. The investigation may lead to other studies dealing with not merely ecocriticism but also ecofeminism in Indonesian literature, hence enriching the studies of Asian literature as well.

FEMINIZATION OF NATURE

Ecofeminists understand the role of women aligned with nature in some perspectives, for instance, the role of nurturing, reproducing, and caring. There are some ideas related to the feminization of nature. Some brings the concepts of biological aspects related to the nature of women and the nature of nature itself. Others perceive the connection from the ontological aspects. Basically, the drawn conclusion is similar: women and nature actually deserve equity and equality. Domination and subservience are not supposed to exist. Ecofeminist movements fight against male domination and patriarchy for the equality of women and nature.

The first idea about feminization of nature is the nature of giving life and nurture. Both women and nature have already determined to have nurturing ethics. According to Soper, nature is the "womb of all human production"[4]. The natural activity such as giving birth, caring, and nurturing are the duties of females. Therefore, the role of women and nature is parallel. Nature produces and reproduces sources to

[2] Dewi, N. (2016). Green literature: Ecology and social movement in Indonesia. *5th International Conference on Language, Literature, Culture and Education 2016*, 29-37. Ed. Lokman Abd Wahid. Singapore: Infobase Creation Sdn Bhd.

[3] Referring to political situation occurred in 1960 – 1965, where the setting of the novel took place.

[4] Soper, K. (2000). Naturalized woman & feminized nature in Laurence Cope's The Green Studies Reader: From romanticism to ecocriticism. London: Routledge Print.

human beings just like women who are biologically reproductive. In addition, the term which refers that nature is feminine, for instance, is that the Latin word for Earth is Terra that is gendered as feminine.

The second idea is according to Karen J. Warren, who talks about the exploitation not only in action but also in words. The exploitation of nature is evident in the use of the words *raped*, *mined*, *controlled*, *penetrated*, and etc. Those are words used to describe actions toward women and thus, according to her, "Whatever man may do to nature, he may also do to woman"[5]. Similarly to Soper, Warren also emphasized that nature is referred to as 'she' and is often cherished as the mother of life. The man can be the lord of nature and it suggests the logic of exploitation for his own interest.

Next idea as proposed by Susan Griffin who has a different perspective in perceiving the feminization of nature. She does not emphasize the biological connection between women and nature, yet, she believes in the links between ideas of men in perceiving nature and women. She is able to see that the domestication done by men towards nature is similar to the domestication towards women. Setting out from that, Griffin understands that both nature and women have values that cannot be castrated to its function and usefulness to culture and men[6]. Here, the notion of feminization of nature is still reflected although Griffin conveyed it implicitly.

NATURE IN *RONGGENG DUKUH PARUK*

In the novel, nature is portrayed as the source and support for Dukuh Paruk villagers who are mostly farmers. They rely on nature and use the signs from nature for life, for instance, the harvesting time or the ripening time of the crops. The villagers believe in the wisdom and command of nature. In the beginning of the story, it was told that the drought had happened for months, however, some plants are able to live such as purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) and sunshine tree *(Erythrina variegata).*

> Pohon dadap memilih cara yang hampir sama bagi penyebaran jenisnya. Biji dadap yang telah tua menggunakan kulit polongnya untuk terbang sebagai baling-baling. Bila angin berembus, tampak seperti ratusan kupu terbang menuruti arah angin meninggalkan pohon dadap. Kalau tidak terganggu oleh anak-anak Dukuh Paruk, biji dadap itu akan tumbuh di tempat yang jauh dari induknya. Begitu perintah alam.
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> Dari tempatnya yang tinggi kedua burung bangau itu melihat Dukuh Paruk sebagai sebuah gerumbul kecil di tengah padang yang amat luas. Dengan daerah pemukiman terdekat, Dukuh Paruk hanya dihubungkan oleh jaringan pematang sawah, hampir dua kilometer panjangnya. Dukuh Paruk, kecil dan menyendiri.
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> Dukuh Paruk yang menciptakan kehidupannya sendiri[7].

The notion of reading the signs of nature has rooted within the villagers. Although Tohari did not write in direct speech, he

[5] Tong, R. P. (2009). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction*. Colorado: Westview Press. p.238

[6] See Tong 249-251 and Griffin, S. (1980). *Woman and nature: The roaring inside her*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

[7] Tohari, A. (2012). *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (9th ed). Jakarta: Gramedia. The translation is provided to assist Non-Indonesian speakers in understanding the quotation as follows:
Dadap trees chose the same way for the deployment of its kind. The old Dadap seeds used leather pods to fly as a propeller. When the wind blew, they looked like hundreds of butterflies that flew away from dadap trees, following the wind direction. If not disturbed by children of Dukuh Paruk, the seeds would grow in places far from its parent. Once the order of nature.
From the height, the two herons saw the village as a small density in a vast meadow. With the nearest residential area, Dukuh Paruk was only connected by rice fields, almost two kilometers in length. Dukuh Paruk, small and aloof with its own life.

shows the belief in different ways, for examples;

> Segumpal cahaya kemerahan datang dari langit menuju Dukuh Paruk. Sampai di atas pedukuhan cahaya itu pecah, menyebar ke segala arah. Seandainya ada manusia Dukuh Paruk yang melihatnya, dia akan berteriak sekeras-kerasnya. "Antu tawa. Antu tawa. Awas ada antu tawa! Tutup semua tempayan! Tutup semua makanan!"
>
> Namun semua orang tetap tidur nyenyak. Cahaya alam yang dipercaya sebagai pembawa petaka datang tanpa seorang pun melawannya dengan tolak bala. Kecuali kambing-kambing yang mengembik di kandang. Kecuali keributan kecil di kurungan ayam. Dan burung hantu yang mendadak berbunyi bersahutan. Dari rimbun beringin di atas makam Ki Secamenggala itu burung-burung hantu meneriakkan gema berwibawa[8].

Tohari describes the villagers' belief using the description of events. He also depicts the wisdom of nature by, for example, describing the dung beetle, which is able to arrive to its nest even though it walks backwards[9].

The villagers' dependence towards nature leads to any actions in the village should be communicated with nature itself. After the death of eighteen people because of the poison of *tempe bongkrek*, an elder, Sakarya, tried to connect his mind to a spiritual power such as the spirit of Ki Secamenggala or whoever, who has power over them[10]. It is because the villagers believe in animism and dynamism rather than monotheism.

The villagers with their simple-mind also believe that nature has the 'nature' of giving life. It is shown in the text that they have basic instinct to reproduce especially for women. They are unhappy if their goats cannot reproduce or are infertile. They also bear duty to continue the heritage of Ki Secamenggala by having children for generations and preserve the tradition of Dukuh Paruk[11]. Therefore, they are also afraid of punishment given by nature if the tradition of the heritage of the ancestors is not well kept. The example is, when the tomb of Ki Secamenggala was found destroyed, it had disturbed the villagers sensitively, especially, Sakarya as the elder with reputation in the village[12].

WOMEN IN *RONGGENG DUKUH PARUK*

The character of Srintil is told as a dancer or *Ronggeng.* She must go through several steps before she becomes a real dancer. One of the steps is *Bukak Klambu* in which her virginity is sold to the highest bidder. After the ritual, Srintil becomes a real *Ronggeng* and by that she is able to earn money not only by dancing but also by sleeping with men for money. The obligation of Srintil in becoming a *Ronggeng* is legal according to Dukuh Paruk's culture. In fact, the role of *Ronggeng* in Dukuh Puruk shows the value of the village itself.

[8] Tohari 22. The translation is provided to assist Non-Indonesian speakers in understanding the quotation as follows:
A plume of reddish light came from the sky towards Dukuh Paruk. Up above the hamlet of light rushes, sprea in all directions. If there was a man of Dukuh Paruk who saw her, there would be a panic scream "Antu tawa. Antu tawa. Look out there Antu tawa! Close all a crock! Closed all the food!"
But everyone still slept soundly. Natural light was believed to be the bearer of disaster with no one to fight with talisman or reinforcements. Except goats bleating in the cage. Except for a small commotion in the chicken cage. And the owl that suddenly rang shouted. From the lush banyan on the tomb of Ki Secamenggala the owls chanting echoed confidently.

[9] Ibid p. 23

[10] Ibid p. 30

[11] Ibid p. 90

[12] Ibid p. 235

Ronggeng is an icon of culture for Dukuh Paruk villagers. As Srintil's grandfather, Sakarya, thinks that it is not Dukuh Paruk, if there is no *Ronggeng*[13]. It is also emphasized in the text as follows:

> Tak seorang pun menyalahkan pikiran Sakarya. Dukuh Paruk hanya lengkap bila di sana ada keramat Ki Secamenggala, ada seloroh cabul, ada sumpah serapah dan ada *Ronggeng* bersama perangkat calungnya.[14]

Believing that she has to preserve tradition and culture, Srintil, regardless of her wealth and, later on, the prosperity she will own, must sacrifice many things related to her nature as a woman such as her virginity, youth, love, and motherhood. As a woman, Srintil has been underprivileged by not being able to be pregnant or become a mother.

> Aku menduga keras Srintil mulai dihantui kesadaran bahwa Nyai Kartareja telah memijit hingga mati indung telurnya, peranakannya. Suami-istri dukun ronggeng itu merasa perlu berbuat demikian sebab hukum Dukuh Paruk mengatakan karir seorang ronggeng terhenti sejak kehamilannya yang pertama."[15]

Ronggeng is not only a dancer or art worker. A *Ronggeng* whose job, among others, is sleeping with men who are able to pay can also be regarded as a prostitute. Srintil cannot be free from that predicate either.

> … Dan kamu bertingkah menolak sebuah kalung seratus gram? Merasa sudah kaya? Bila kamu tidak suka kalung itu mestinya bisa kauambil untukku. Dan kau layani Pak Marsusi karena semua orang toh tahu kau seorang ronggeng dan sundal.[16]

From the predicate, the shifting of position from someone who was highly cherished and idolized to someone who does not have any dignity can be seen, and Srintil must accept the insult of being prostitute, despite her sacrifices and giving to the villagers and the *Ronggeng* shamans.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND NATURE IN *RONGGENG DUKUH PARUK*

Poverty becomes the social background of this novel. Some of the main characters such as Srintil and Rasus are described as orphans. Both of them have experienced changes in life. Srintil gains richness and is able to change her life after becoming a *Ronggeng.* Rasus is able to change his life after joining the Indonesian army. However, the main portrayal is on Srintil as a *Ronggeng*. In the novel, the existence of *Ronggeng* is very important because it is related to the cultural conservation and identity of the village itself.

The belief and relation between the villagers and their ancestors, particularly, Ki Secamenggala is deeply rooted. Therefore, the existence of *Ronggeng* in Dukuh Paruk is part of their devotion to the ancestor[17].

[13] Ibid p. 15

[14] Ibid. The translation is provided to assist Non-Indonesian speakers in understanding the quotation as follows:
For a Paruk villager, such thoughts were natural. Indeed, with the shrine of Ki Secamenggala, some dirty jokes, a few curses, and a Ronggeng accompanied by her calung ensemble of bamboo xylophones, Dukuh Paruh could be considered as complete combination.

[15] Ibid p. 90. The translation is provided to assist Non-Indonesian speakers in understanding the quotation as follows:
I (Rasus) definitely thought that Srintil was aware of her ovary that has been deactivated by Nyai Kertareja. The couple of Ronggeng shaman thought that it is necessary because Dukuh Paruk's law had decided that since her first pregnancy, a Ronggeng should stop dancing

[16] Ibid p. 152 The translation is provided to assist Non-Indonesian speakers in understanding the quotation as follows:
…And you just refused one hundred gram of gold necklace? Do you think you already rich? If you don't like the necklace you can take it for me. And you should go with Pak Marsusi because everyone knows that you are a Ronggeng and a prostitute.

[17] Same idea as Khristianto in "Between Ronggeng and Geisha: Comparative Structuralism of Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk." *The 1st Literary Studies Conference: Configuring And Reconfiguring English Literature In Southeast Asia (SEA)*. (Yogyakarta: Sanata Dharma University, 2013)

In appointing a Ronggeng, it cannot be trained. It is a gift from, what the villagers call as *indang*. The spirit of *indang* will make a girl become a real *Ronggeng* with ability and beauty that can attract men.

Men, in the form of various cultural restrictions, impose male domination on women in order to control them. Based on the traditional belief that men are in control of every aspect of a woman's life, women's femininity is viewed as weakness and is exploited by men[18]. In the novel, the impact of patriarchal domination can be seen clearly, for instance, the *bukak klambu* which is the ritual of losing virginity before being a real Ronggeng. Its relation with patriarchal oppression is that the woman's virginity should be given to the highest bidder. Srintil does not have the right and power to refuse since she is willing to be a *Ronggeng* and she must obey the tradition of devoting to Ki Secamenggala. Although, she initially disagrees with the decision made by Ki and Nyi Kertareja, both of them used a trick to make Srintil willing to submit to their decision[19].

In the novel, the patriarchal domination has rooted in the society and it is preserved by the existence of *Ronggeng.* The dancer seems to be happy with the money and prosperity, yet, it is *happiness in disguise*[20] because Srintil is not aware that she is exploited by male domination[21]. The power over nature of culture is also shown in the part when the *Ronggeng* group involved in politics is recruited by Bakar. It shows that human beings use superiority for their own interests. As the result, the subordinate, in this case the Dukuh Paruk society and the group are victimized without being aware due to poverty and uneducated background.

From an ecofeminist perspective, the patriarchal oppression in the novel is clear in which the position of culture is more privileged than nature. It deals with the essence of women to be a mother. In the text, Srintil's ovary was sterilized by Nyai Kartareja because it is a belief ruled in the village that a Ronggeng will stop dancing soon after her first pregnancy. In addition, the violation towards nature is also shown in the part that Dukuh Paruk was destroyed and extinct as the result of an uneducated society and poverty which had led them to be victimized by the chaos of the political situation in Indonesia in 1965.[22]

Nature, regardless of its ability and sacrifice in giving life, is also incorrectly accused. It has been exploited to support human beings yet when the disaster comes because of human's action, nature will be the one accused. In traditional society, natural disasters are often considered as the anger of nature towards human. Therefore, the tradition respects nature out of fear. It is similar with Srintil who was called 'prostitute' after she refused to go with Marsusi. Nyai Kertareja said the curse without considering what Srintil had given to her and her husband.

The portrayal of woman and nature (Srintil and Dukuh Paruk) in the novel shows that the patriarchal system oppresses the feminine sides. The feminization of nature or its parallel position with women can be seen from the exploitation and victimiza-

[18] The issue of patriarchal oppression can also be compared with analysis by Siti Masitah Binti Md. "A Feminist Analysis of Patriarchal Oppression of Women in the Novel, 'Memoir of A Geisha'." *E-Proceeding of the International Conference on Social Science Research*. Kuala Lumpur: ICSSR 2015, 2015. 925-929. Web. 7 May 2016. <http://WorldConferences.net >.

[19] Rahayu, M., & Aisyah, L. I. S. (2014). Power relation in memoirs of geisha and the dancer." *REGISTER,* 7(2), 151-178. Retrieved on 7 May 2016 from http://journalregister.iainsalatiga.ac.id/index.php/register/article/view/213

[20] The term 'happiness in disguise' means that Srintil is happy with the money she earns yet she does not realize that she is exploited by Dukuh Paruk, the villagers and the *Ronggeng* shamans.

[21] Sudarwati. (2011). Ideologi patriarki pada novel Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk. *Parafrase,* 11(2), 31-26. Retrieved on 18 May 2016 from http://jurnal.untag-sby.ac.id/index.php/parafrasa/article/view/197

[22] Tohari, A. (2012). *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* (9th ed). Jakarta: Gramedia. p. 243

tion towards Srintil and Dukuh Paruk itself. Srintil fell for the dream of being a *Ronggeng* and rich, to the men, villagers, the group and the shamans. Dukuh Paruk was lead to its extinction because of the political matters in which a particular party, to maintain their interest, sacrifices Dukuh Paruk's existence[23], not only the villagers but also the culture and the tradition.

CONCLUSION

From some ideas related to the feminization of nature, the conclusion is that women and nature actually deserve equity and equality. Domination and subservience is not supposed to exist. Ecofeminist movements fight for the equality of women and nature against male domination and patriarchy. In *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, the feminization of nature can be seen from the way nature is treated by the patriarchal system. It can also be seen that there is a parallelization between nature and women as the part which is feminized by the dominating party. In the novel, both nature and woman are portrayed from the perspective of weakness and femininity that can be exploited by patriarchal domination. Therefore, the notion of feminization of nature is clearly reflected by perceiving the portrayal of woman and nature in sacrificing themselves to preserve, maintain and support the interest, necessity and desire of the domination.

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[23] See the emphasis of the idea of Nancy I. Cooper, in, "Tohari's Trilogy: Passages of Power and Time in Java." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35.3 (2004): 531-556. Online, Internet. 9 May 2016. Available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20072612>

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