

Independence Of Female Character In Serayawati P. Tisna's *Wajah-Wajah Perempuan*: A Feminist Criticism

Sumartini¹, Dyah Prabaningrum²

{¹sumartini@mail.unnes.ac.id,²dyahprabaningrum@mail.unnes.ac.id}

^{1,2}Indonesian Language and Literature Department, Languages and Arts Faculty, Universitas Negeri Semarang

Abstract Independent woman becomes one of the topics carried in literary works. One of the literary works that illustrates the topic is a novel entitled *Wajah-Wajah Perempuan* written by Serayawati. This paper aims to describe the forms of independence of female character and the factors that encourage a woman to be independent. Research method used in this study is descriptive qualitative method. The result of this study is that the female character, Siska, is an independent woman. Her independence begins to emerge when her husband no longer cares about her and his family. Siska's independence begins by doing a business, working as a secretary, managing her colleague's hotel, and managing her own dormitory. The things that encourage this woman to be independent is husband abandoning his wife and the negative responses from her parent in-laws.

Keywords: independence, female character, feminist criticism

1. Introduction

At the present time, a discussion about women is not something new, but rather it is something that is increased. Many issues can be used as topics when discussing women's issues, for instance their rights, their existence, and their independence. These topics are widely studied in various fields of science such as social sciences and literature.

Women are no longer considered second-class beings. Nowadays, there are many women who show their existence and independence. In various institutions, both public and private, many women have equal positions with men. In a sense, women can also occupy certain positions according to their abilities. In university, women can occupy some positions such as coordinator of study program, head of department, and even dean. In many government institutions, there are so many strategic positions that are controlled by women. Women can serve as regent, mayor, minister, and so on. The existence achieved by women is inseparable from the independence that women have. In terms of independence, women can actually be considered more independent than men. In daily life, there is a great deal of evidence that women who act as mothers, as well as father figures, manage to educate their children and support their families. This fact proves that women can live independently. This is in line with the idea of feminist movement which breaks down the idea that women are second-class beings or weak beings who depend on men.

The feminist movement initially arising in the West also influenced literature. Woman's independence is one of the topics emerged in literary works. One of the literary works that highlights this issue is a novel written by Serayawati entitled *Wajah-Wajah Perempuan*. The story in this novel is about Siska who is miserably treated by her husband who has an affair with a wealthy woman. In the beginning, Siska and Jack's household is fine. However, when Siska gets pregnant of the third child, their household begins to be problematic by the appearance of Jack's affair. Thenceforth, Jack does not constantly support his wife and his children anymore. To make a living for herself and her children, Siska does not want to depend on her husband. She works part-time as a clothing reseller, and as a secretary at Mrs. Siregar's work place. At the end, Siska manages Mrs. Siregar hotel and manages her own student dormit [1]. According to the researcher, *Wajah-Wajah Perempuan* is important to study because it raises the issues that exist in society. Moreover, according to researcher's knowledge, this novel has never been investigated. Therefore, it is important to conduct a study of this novel so that the meaning can be fully understood by the reader. In this study. The researcher used feminist perspective to examine the novel. The focuses of this discussion are (1) the forms of independence of the female character in the novel, and (2) the things that encourage the female character to become independent.

Feminism is a social movement that emerged from the assumption and awareness which states that women are basically oppressed and exploited, and there must be an effort to end the oppression and exploitation. As stated by Fakhri [2] feminism is not an attempt to fight against men or an effort against social institutions, not also an effort against women's nature. In line with Fakhri, Djajanegara [3] explained that the point of feminist struggle is to increase the women's position and degree so that it becomes equal to men's. Therefore, feminism is not an attempt to overpower or even dominate men.

In literature, feminism deals with feminist literary criticism. This criticism is a critique which is based on the thoughts, feelings, and responses that come out of readers who 'read as women'[4]. It means that feminist literary criticism is not interpreted as criticism of women or women critics. According to Millet in Sugihastuti [5], feminist literary criticism does not only limit the work of female writers but it can also be the work of male writers as long as there are female characters in it.

2. Research Method

The research method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. It means, the researcher reveals a variety of information qualitatively with a thorough and nuanced description, to describe carefully the qualities of a thing (individual or group) and the state of a phenomena. The steps include data collection, analysis and data interpretation [6]. Qualitative description focuses on the designation of meaning based on each context.

The analysis was carried out using the theory of existentialist feminism. The theoretical concept is that "man" is called as "the Self" while "woman" is called as "the Other" [7].

3. Results And Discussion

Independence can be defined as things or circumstances which can stand alone without depending on others [8]. Following are the forms of female character's independence in the novel *Wajah-Wajah Perempuan* and the things that encourage the female character for being independence.

The forms of Independence

1) Working

Siska's independence starts to emerge when the family's financial state begins to fall down. Since her second child pregnancy, Jack's attitude and behavior towards Siska has gradually changed. This is caused by the presence of Jack's affair and unstable financial condition. Jack, who works out of town and continuously changes jobs, feels the burden of life. His responsibilities as husband and as head of family are not fully carried out. To overcome their financial difficulties, Siska does a part-time selling (helping her friend selling nightdresses). Siska thinks that she should be able to make extra money to ease the burden on her husband. This effort is done by Siska without Jack's knowing.

Jack doesn't care more about his wife and children. It makes Siska more determined to be more independent, not rely on her husband. She is thinking harder in order to save her family's financial condition so that she and her children are not neglected. To support herself and her children, Siska works as a secretary of Mrs. Siregar, who has a project to publish books. She works passionately and keeps doing her responsibilities as a mother as well as a father figure.

Siska's independent attitude continues until the children have started to grow up and require a lot of money. Siska is trusted by Mrs. Siregar to manage her hotel in Bandung. Siska tries to set aside some part of her salary to be saved and finally she can have a student dormitory which she then manages herself. From the result of this effort Siska manages to send her children to school. In fact, her first child manages to achieve a bachelor degree with a very satisfying predicate.

2) Educating and raising the children without the help of a husband

Besides trying to be financially independent, Siska also does all the household works without the help of a maid. Cooking, taking care of children, washing, cleaning the house, everything is done by herself. It is all done by herself to reduce the expenses and accustom their children to be independent since young age. Siska does everything happily, even though all she does is underestimated by her husband and is always considered wrong by her mother-in-law.

Siska's independent attitude is inseparable from her efforts to maintain both her self-existence and family existence. This is not much different from the struggle carried out by Srintil, the female character in Ahmad Tohari's *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*. The female character in the novel has struggled hard to maintain their existence. Despite getting obstacles, Srintil is able to fight for her existence seen from her role as a social creature and also individual beings. However, in the end the female character in this novel failed to maintain her existence due to losing her mind [9]. While the character of Siska is able to become a strong person and succeeds in bringing her children to achieve academic achievements.

The things that encourage the female character to become independent

1) Being cheated on by husband

The first factor that makes Siska independent is her husband's attitude towards her. When their financial condition begins to fall down, Jack starts having an affair with his rich high school friend. Jack argues that his friend will help to improve their financial condition. In

addition, Jack also often accuses Siska of taking advantage of him. Yet without Jack's knowing, Siska has been trying to make extra income by selling nightdresses.

2) Being abused by husband

Jack's attitude and behavior change when he reunites with his high school friend who is willing to help his family's financial difficulties. Jack often hurts Siska both physically and mentally. He hurts her physically when they fight, for instance Jack often pushes and beats Siska. Mentally, Jack also often accuses Siska as a wife who has no money and always spends her husband's money.

Psychic and physical pressure from Jack actually makes Siska become a tough woman and also independent. In meeting this financial needs, Siska does not want to depend on her husband. This correlates with the research of Schoen, R., Astone, N. M., Kim, Y. J., Rothert, K., & Standish, N. J. [10]. Seen from the aspect of economic opportunity it is proven that the participation of women who work does not intrinsically weaken marriages, but instead gives resources to women that they can use to leave unsatisfactory marriages.

Sayer, L. C., & Bianchi, S. M. [11] conducted a study on the independence of women in making a living whether it affected the divorce rate or not. Their results show that the causes of divorce are lack of commitment by a spouse and lack of marital satisfaction. Thus, women's independent attitude is not economically a major factor in divorce. The results of their study have a relationship with what is experienced by Siska character. She separated from her husband, not because she becomes an independent woman, but because there is no commitment from Jack to support their family

Meanwhile, Bandiera O, Burgess R, Gulesci S, Rasul I, Sulaiman M [12] conducted research on the empowerment of adolescent women in the second youngest country in the world, Uganda. Their results show that women's economic and social empowerment can begin with a combination of vocational skills and life skills, and not always hampered by insurmountable obstacles arising from binding social norms. This is correlated with Siska character in the novel. Before getting married, she already had skills in certain fields and she worked in a drinking water company. She decided to stop working because she followed her husband who worked out of town far from where Siska worked.

4. Conclusion

From the discussions that have been carried out, it can be concluded that the character of Siska is able to become an independent and existent woman as well as being 'herself not dependent on men (husband)'. This is because she has the skills she acquired before marriage so that when she has to support herself and her family, she can use and develop the potential she possesses.

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