

# **Dangdut and Mysticism Culture in Indramayu Prostitution As Represented in *Telembuk*, a Novel by Kedung Darma**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This article explores dangdut and mystical culture in prostitution which is represented in *Telembuk*, a novel with Indramayu prostitution background. Indramayu is one of the cities with the highest number of sex workers in Indonesia. Poverty, low education, lack of roles of parents and society in children's education, hopelessness in life and conflict with partners are some of the factors that cause women to fall into the world of prostitution. Commercial sex workers are oppressed not only by men (pimps, bosses, or lovers), but also women (sex mentors). What is unique in the life of prostitution in Indramayu is that commercial sex workers use magic and dangdut to commerce themselves. Commercial sex workers use mystical rituals as taught by shamans (who are also their sex mentors). The profession as a dangdut singer is a cover for commercial sex workers. Prostitution and dangdut activities are usually done at night. In this case, dangdut and mystical beliefs also strengthen the capitalist power of the body of commercial sex workers in Indramayu. The position of commercial sex workers in Indramayu is biased: on the one hand they are hated by society, on the other hand they are used as entertainers.

**Keywords:** *Dangdut, Mysticism; Prostitution; Indramayu; Novel*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The practice of modern prostitution in Indonesia can be traced back from the history of the Javanese kingdoms. Women in those days were complementary to the feudal system of government. This practice grew stronger as the West dominated the archipelago. Prostitution created to meet the sexual needs of Europeans who were far from their wives or relatives at that time [1].

Almost all places in the area of Indonesia have areas known for localization or prostitution. Call it for example, Kali Jodo (Jakarta), Dolly (Surabaya), Sintai (Batam), Kampung Baru

(Palembang), Karang Joang (Balikpapan), etc. In 2012, the Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia recorded approximately 161 localizations in Indonesia [2].

In the National Coordination Meeting of Prostitution Handling and Localization Closing Supporting, which was held in Jakarta last April, we can read the result that Indonesia is the most localized country, with localization inhabitant reach the number of 40 thousand [3]. This shows that prostitution is still a serious problem for Indonesians. One of the areas in Indonesia that has problems with prostitution is Indramayu. There are approximately 1600 commercial sex workers in this area. 50% of them are even infected with HIV/AIDS [4].

## 2. THEORY

Literature reflects the problems in society. The problematic of prostitution can be found in *Telembuk*, [5]. This article will discuss how the world of prostitution, the causal factors, and all the provisions of the world of prostitution in the novel *Telembuk* by using sociological approach of literary works.

The sociology of literary works on the various social problems implicit in literary works [6] In the context of the sociology of literary works, literature is regarded as a reflection of what is happening in society as well as a fictional and imaginative work [7]. It is, therefore, important in this study to look closely at the author's intentions to display 'reality' in his work. The novel analyzed by using the sociological theory of literary works. Data obtained by reading and writing techniques. Data analyzed by using qualitative descriptive technique. Validity tested by using semantic validity, while its reliability uses intrarater and interrater.

## 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Commercial sex workers in Indramayu are represented through Diva, Wartiah, and Suti figures. The Diva figure whose real name is Safitri. In Indramayu languages, safitri means a women with a pure heart. She is a picture of women from the lower class economic community who are trapped in the world of prostitution. [8] interpret prostitution as work carried out by women with low skills to get high salaries.

Diva works as a prostitute to help her parents. However, like other commercial sex workers, this Diva character conceals her original profession as a prostitute. The economic motive that causes poor people to slip in the world of prostitution as represented in the *Telembuk* novel[9]. Jatmikowati stated that weak economic conditions were the background of most prostitutes in Indonesia.

Apart from economic reasons, the figures of Wartiah, Suti, and Diva became prostitutes for psychological reasons. They were betrayed by the men they loved. This psychological problems [10]. Suyanto states that emotional vulnerability and frustration because of love failure are some reasons why a woman can be trapped in the world of prostitution.

Wartiah's figure in the *Telembuk* novel was disappointed because her husband having an affair. While Suti, Wartiah's younger sister, followed in the footsteps of her sister becoming a prostitute (for no apparent reason). This novel presents a reality that is quite slapping the reader. Wartiah and Suti's parents from the upper economic community but their children choose to go into the world of prostitution. In this case, the phenomenon of prostitutes in the Indramayu community is something normal and may have been going on for generations. The

representation in the novel about the profession as a prostitute which has been going on for generations has been strengthened by the explanation of Abdul Khalim, Head of the Child Welfare and Elderly Office of Social, Employment and Transmigration, Indramayu Regency (<https://news.okezone.com/read/2016/02/17/525/1314566/50-percent-psk-indramayu-terjangkit-hiv>).

Women who are trapped as commercial sex workers do not mean they have no desire to quit their profession. The Diva figure in the Telembuk novel also has the desire to stop her profession as a telembuk or prostitute by finding a man who is willing to accept his profession. In Indramayu languages, telembuk means a mature prostitutes while slindet means younger prostitutes. [11] said, marriage or finding a partner is usually taken by a commercial sex worker as an effort to stop prostitution.

However, the hopes of the Diva figures to Carta and Mang Alek --two men who according Diva could be her spouse-- just ran aground. Both men actually uses the Diva for their benefit. Diva figure as prostitutes is exploited economically and sexually by their partners. Exploitation of commercial sex workers by men who is found in various places of prostitution. Call it for example in Batang, as reported by Rusniawati et al [12]. The Batang area in East Java also has several prostitution sites such as Bong China, Boyongsari, Jrakah Payung, Luwes Surodadi, Wuni, Tenggulangharjo, and Subah. In a prostitution, commercial sex workers often used and exploited their sexuality for business purposes by the people closest to them (family, agents, partners), making it increasingly difficult for women to get out of the trap of prostitution.

The representation of the world of prostitution clearly illustrated in the Telembuk novel is an attempt by the novelist, Kedung Darma, to reenact the picture of reality around him. Kedung Darma is a writer who was born and raised in Indramayu. In an interview with Kedung Darma, the author stated that:

I am just trying to be honest to convey what is around me, what is in Indramayu, without intending to judge those who undergo this profession (prostitutes). My task is to record that reality, convey it to the reader, and invite readers to reflect on this humanitarian issue together. Because, basically, the problem of prostitution is a humanitarian problem.  
(interview with Kedung Darma, 26/03/2018)

This article finds that there are differences in the model of prostitution in the Telembuk (Indonesian) novel with novels in Thailand[13]. The Telembuk novel more clearly uncover the prostitution while novels in Thailand tend to cover up the problem of prostitution. The Thai novels discusses the glamorous life of prostitutes and to demonize women.

Prostitution is a form of exploitation of women. Diva figures who work as telembuk in this novel also experience successive exploitation, both by men and women. The male figures who exploited here were Mang Dasa, Carta, and Mang Alek. The character Mang Dasa in the Telembuk novel works as the Langlang Buana Organ boss who has many dangdut artists. Mang Dasa is described as a boss who likes to fuck his singers. Almost all of these dangdut singers work as telembuk.

In addition to Mang Dasa, other male figures described as repressing Diva are Mang Carta and Mang Alek. Both of these men are actually loved by Diva. However, Diva is exploited for money by both of them. Because she was disappointed with the two men, Diva was more determined to aspire to become a successful commercial sexual worker.

In addition to men, there is also female leader who exploit prostitutes. This figure is represented by Mak Dayem. This Mak Dayem figure reminded Dolly Khavit, a Dutch colonialist who became the founder of prostitution in Dolly, the largest brothel in Southeast Asia located in Surabaya. In its history, Dolly Khavit started the business of prostitution to kill her sadness because she was left behind by her husband[14]. Mak Dayem teaches how to become a professional prostitute. At the request of Mang Alek, Mak Dayem taught mysticism to Diva to become a best-selling prostitute and was prided by many masher men who became her customers.

In the patriarchal structure of society, prostitutes have never held an honorable position. Even if she gets a high position in her field, but not for the society. Prostitutes are even considered as people who are nasty and damned. This view is reflected through Mukimin character.

"The path of the devil is numerous and looks very seductive. The temptations are innumerable, Ladies and Gentlemen. One of them is that dangdutan across the road. I am now asking to you all, Ladies and Gentlemen: Do you want to go to heaven?" The ladies audiences responded with enthusiasm. "How about you Sirs?" The gentlemen are equally enthusiastic.

"This is the benefit of coming to a sermon event like what we have tonight, that is to know how to go to heaven. On the contrary, in dangdutan, it is how to go to hell. They only let their stupidity nurtured! Nurtured (dipelihara)... whose peli (penis) Ladies?" The audiences is in silent. "The peli (penis) of hell inhabitants. What does it mean?" They answered in unison: Hell!!!!!! [5]

Mukimin or Ustadz Muhammin is a child from Haji Nasir, a teacher of Quran recitation in Cikedung. Mukimin has an older brother named Ustadz Mushtafa. Both Mushtafa and Mukimin are said to have fallen in love with Safitri or Diva. Mukimin is an ustadz child who often watches dangdut performances from telempek (prostitutes). Mukimin is a picture of a hypocritical society, which condemns prostitution or adultery but also enjoys its practice. At the end of the story, Mukimin was forced to marry Sini, for impregnating her before marriage [5]

The prostitution described by the author in Telempek is an unique phenomenon. The world of prostitution in Indramayu is described as close to the world of dangdut and mysticism. Some prostitution places in Indonesia use music as a means of attracting visitors. Prostitution places in Bandungan, Central Java, for example. Sex tourism in Bandungan uses music. Some prostitutes are openly carrying out their profession. The other prostitutes disguise themselves as karaoke guides [15] Similar conditions are also described in the world of prostitution in Indramayu through the Telempek novel.

Tarling culture (short for gitar or guitar and seruling or flute, two instruments used to accompany singing) initially had a moral-religious value. The term tarling refers to Yen wis mlatar gage eling (if many sinned, immediately repent). There is a shift not only in the type of music used, but also in value. Along with the development of dangdut music, tarling blends with other musical instruments, such as pianos, drums, etc. People no longer know tarling as a type of music that has a moral message, but solely as entertainment. In the context of Telempek, tarling and dangdut are used to attract the interest of men in the world of prostitution.

Like prostitution in Kalijodo [16], prostitution in Indramayu also runs at night. According to Tadie and Permanadeli, night life is a symbol of liberation from the values and norms of

society and the beginning of economic life in the world of prostitution. Dangdut, as delivered [17], among others serves to entertain and increase the enthusiasm of the audience. In the *Telembuk* novel, before prostitutes carry out their profession, it usually begins with dangdut music entertainment with its erotics way to provoke the desire of men.

In Indramayu and almost all regions in Indonesia are still many beliefs in mysticism. The belief in mysticism and supernatural power forces is utilized in the world of prostitution for the benefit of capitalism [18]. In order to be increasingly in demand for dangdut singing and sexual services, Diva uses the science of spells taught by Mak Dayem, her sex mentor.

Girang ning mang batur isun  
Sari cendana lambe isun  
Pemanis pengucap isun  
Teka welas asih ning badane isun  
Gede cilik tuwa enom lanang wadon  
Rayat pangkat welas asih kabeh

Mak Dayem blew Diva's forehead with full affection. "Remember, Diva! Never forget to The Almighty. Remember this mantra. Recite it every seventh night and do not do intercourse on the day of your birth."

Diva was taken by surprise when Mak Dayem slipped jasmine flower petals into her vagina. And rubbed her body, squeezing her breasts, her ass, with seven kinds of flower. "Eat this flower every day until the seventh day. You can eat any flower first as long it is complete seven flower for seven day. Remember that!" [5]

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The world of prostitution described in the *Telembuk* novel is a world of prostitution that is closely related to the world of dangdut entertainment, poor and ignorant lower class class society, and the mystical world. Prostitution is always faced with moral and religious laws in society. The world of prostitution has a power hierarchy. The bottom layer is a prostitute. Prostitutes experience successive domination of a hypocritical patriarchal system. The world of prostitution is full of economic exploitation practices.

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