

## Images of Javanese women in patriarchal culture represented by Aisyah, (a character in Umar Kayam's Para Priyayi)

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**Abstract:** This study uses a gender perspective, a concept used to review the role between men and women constructed by culture. Culture that has been inherent in the society that is patriarchal culture resulted in the role of women always reside in the domestic territory. The patriarchal culture can be found in Javanese culture. This research uses descriptive analysis method. From the analysis, this research shows 1) the description of the role acted by Aishah figure as Javanese woman always in domestic area, 2) perspective of Aisyah figure as a wife in environment that embraces patriarchy culture shows his acceptance of 3 basic duties of Javanese women namely; *Masak* (Cooking), *Macak* (Dressing Up), and *Manak* (Giving a birth).

### 1. Introduction

Literary work is a creative process of an author, which produces an idea, concepts and ideas that take the theme exists among society. This creative process makes the public (reader) feel that the literary works created by the author, describe his own life, although the picture of life is based on the imagination made by the author. Literary works convey "understanding" of life in its own way [1]. Literary work represents wide range of discourse, from personal behave to cultural problem.

One of the discourses represented by literary works is the emergence of patriarchal culture. This patriarchal culture is a form of discrimination that women accept on the basis of customs and religion [2]. This culture says that women should be controlled by men. In doing something, women have to ask permission first for men, so they can run their activities or work. A system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions [3].

"our civilization, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy" [4]. Patriarchy is present in various countries around the globe and it has been perpetuated through various institutions. The given system can appear in many forms, one of which is culture. Culture can be a male authoritative institution against women. One of the culture that embraces patriarchy is Javanese culture. In the context of Javanese culture, patriarchal culture shapes women to be obedient and devoted to their husbands.

Talking about women's portraits, especially Javanese women, it is closely related to the myriad of manners that accompany it. The view that women should be a devoted, faithful, and gentle has been embedded in social life in Java. This view is reinforced by the *priyayi* culture adopted by most Javanese families of the upper class (*keraton*), especially the people residing in the area around the palace. Culture and values within a society that have been shaped in such manner create the roles division between men and women in which the public role is played by men while the domestic role is handled by women.

The public role played by a male produces a material or position that earns him a superiority. While the role of women who do not earn money or position place them in an inferior position.

The superior and inferior classification is what causes some men to underestimate the status of women as housewives. Women's tasks that are limited to domestic areas are often underestimated. It is this viewpoint that causes the status of the housewife to be increasingly underestimated. The cultural heritage maintained in the community, often positioning women as complementary, makes women afraid to speak out the rights women deserve. Such superficial thoughts led to patriarchy flourishing in Java. Representing the public's assumption that the nature of women must honor husband. To marry a husband is a duty to a wife, but it is wrong when the wife's compliance is overwhelmed by oppression and violence from her husband.

In literary work, it is possible that a writing takes the background of Javanese culture and utilize above Javanese women's phenomenon to represent the female Javanese characters in his work. One example of literary works that use the background of Javanese culture is the work of Umar Kayam *Para Priyayi*. It is important to see the story through the perspective of a wife as part of the characterizations depicted. A wife that is faithful and constantly accompanying her husband. Women who start her life in *Priyayi* households. Through her point of view, the researcher will describe how Kayam portrays the ideal woman of Java undergoing her role as a wife. Therefore this research will discuss; 1). The role of Aisyah as a Javanese woman in Umar Kayam's novel *Para Priyayi*, 2) Perspective of Aisyah as a wife is under the patriarchal culture system.

In line with the above problem formulation, the purpose of this study are; 1). Knowing the role played by Aisyah as a Javanese woman in Umar Kayam's *Para Priyayi*, 2) to know Aisyah's perspective as a wife who is in an environment that embraces patriarchal culture.

Theoretically this research will contribute in to the science of literature especially in analyzing the literary works using the perspective of gender and patriarchal culture. Not only that, practically this research will broaden reader's insight in understanding gender and patriarchal culture, especially in Javanese cultural background.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Gender

Gender is a term in social science used by Ann Oakley to analyze and understand the issue of discrimination against women. The term gender is also used to describe how men and women differ socially. "The society is not satisfied with the natural difference of sex, but adds cultural differences of gender" [5]. Therefore, gender is interpreted as a concept of social relationships that separate men. and women in their functions and roles. The differences in function and role between men and women are not determined by biological or natural distinctions but on the basis of their position and function and role in different areas of life [6]. Similar to the statement above, it is stated that, "gender is a term that has psychological or cultural rather than biological connotations". [7] In addition, Oakley explains: "Sex' is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. 'Gender' however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine'" [8].

Thus, the division of roles between men and women that occurred during this is a cultural construction. A construction that is traditionally handed down from generation to generation. This tradition has been inherent in society that results in outward acceptance. Similiar to the opinian above, [9] says that:

"Sociocultural gender is not a matter of the sexual division of people into female and male as such, what people typically mean by "natural' gender, but of the significance attached to that division, the institutions and ideologies, the prescribed and claimed identities, and the array of social practices that sustain those institutions, ideologies, and identities."

The gender concept is utilized to break away from the traditional view of the division of roles by sex. The gender concept reconstructs the position and role between men and women in social practice, thus opening up balanced opportunities regardless of gender, male and female differences.

## 2.2 Patriarchy and Javanese Culture

Patriarchy comes from the word patriarchate which means placing the male role as the sole ruler of all things. So, it can be stated that patriarchal culture is a culture built on the basis of hierarchy of domination and subordination that requires men and men's view to be a norm [10]. In [11] term, it is “a social system where males hold the authorial power of the family” (2015: 1). In addition, Makama [12] considers that patriarchy: “It is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females.” Further more, [13] in his article discussed how patriarchy affects the role of women. According to him since world war era men has shown his authority over power by joining in combat, it continues in society until current time. Although no longer fighting, men consistently show their strength through aggressive activities such as hunting. Conversely, women will be required to play their part in childbirth and take care of them. Therefore, according to Archana, parents possess an important role in determining the role that will be carried by his child. If the family perpetuates a patriarchal culture, then surely women will be required to submit to men. This reflects how marriage institutions assist to preserve patriarchal culture.

Not only in the institution of marriage, but [3] also explains that patriarchy is a system of male authority that oppresses women through social, economic, and political institutions. It reflects the preference to men. Having become a culture, patriarchal society gives priority to men which impact on women's progress [14]. In the top of that [15] view stated “Women are not allowed to assert their presence; they are cornered, pitied and looked down upon by their male counterparts.”

Therefore, as a culture, patriarchy establishes the opinion that men are always superior to women. The longstanding and continuous patriarchal culture has resulted in the division of the roles of women and men in many areas of life to be unjust and unbalanced.

This phenomenon can be observed in Javanese culture. In the Javanese culture, many terms affirm the inferiority of women before men, for example in the Javanese term wife as *Kanca Wingking* means friend behind. A term that indicates that women are only in charge of managing household affairs, especially child care, cooking, and washing [16].

The role of wife in Javanese culture by it is explained that the philosophy of Javanese women and their duties in the household are three namely; *Masak*, *Macak* and *Manak*. *Masak* is related to the kitchen affairs, doing housework. *Macak* is ornamented that is meant to dress up or look beautiful in front of the husband. While *Manak* is giving birth to offspring [17]. Of the three Javanese women's philosophies, can be seen clearly how the position of women placed all day centered at home. The concept defines the position of women whose lives are centered at home and husband.

Both statements above affirm the role and position of women who are limited in the domestic sector. In the Javanese culture the role is a form of a submission toward man (father or husband).

## 3. Research Method

This research is a qualitative research on Umar Kayam's novel *Para Priyayi*. Descriptive method of analysis will be used in this study, which according to [18] is a method of data collection by finding related supporting factors to the research with the aim of connecting these factors with research results.

This study uses a gender perspective to review the roles between men and women. To that end, this study looks at the role acted by one of the female characters (Aisyah) in the novel. The data in this study were obtained from Umar Kayam's novel *Para Priyayi* in the form of text such as; words, sentences and paragraphs related to the object of research.

#### 4. Research Instrument

Through this research, the writer used note taking as the instrument. It was the essential tool in conducting a research. Boch and Piolat [19] states “Confronted with a diverse range of information-transmission situations, note-takers are striving to avoid forgetting something. Note taking is an essential tool in many information-transmission situations”. Note taking is needed as part of writing a research paper because of its function as notes record and gather the information from the sources used in writing the paper.

#### 5. Findings and Discussions

In the novel *Para Priyayi*, portraits of women working in public sphere seem hard to find. Kayam describes the Javanese woman who acts as the wife of a Priyayi by representing it through Aisha's character (*Dik Ngaisah*). In accordance with the background described which is the Javanese culture, this novel contains the philosophy of Javanese women to describe the daily life of *Ngaisah Dik* in novel *Para Priyayi; Masak, Macak and Manak*. Cook is related to the kitchen affairs, doing housework. Macak is ornamented that is meant to dress up or look beautiful in front of the husband. While Manak is giving birth to offspring. In the novel, *Dik Ngaisah* does his duty as a wife.

##### 5.1 Doing housework and husband's needs

*Dik Ngaisah* is described as a wife who was ready to accompany a husband to start building a family labeled Priyayi. Through the commentary of the figure Sastrodarsono who is her husband, confirmed that the wife of a priyayi should be prepared and educated to be agile in taking care of household and husband needs. Even in the case of having a servant, a wife remains demanded to take care of or lead the maids in the kitchen. Here is the quote:

“*Dik Ngaisah*, Alhamdulillah adalah istri seperti yang saya harapkan semula. Ia adalah perempuan yang agaknya memang sudah disiapkan orangtuanya untuk menjadi istri yang mumpuni, lengkap akan kecakapan dan keprigelannya. Di dapur ia tidak hanya tahu memasak, tetapi juga memimpin para pembantu di dapur” [20].

“*Dik Ngaisah*, Alhamdulillah is the wife as I expected. He is a woman who seems to have been prepared by his parents to be a qualified wife, complete with skills and *keprigelannya*. In the kitchen, she not only knew cooking, but also led the maids in the kitchen” [20].

As a wife, *Dik Ngaisah* represents an acceptance in serving the daily needs of a husband by taking care of household chores. This can be seen through the following quotation:

“Bukankah itu pembagian kerja saja antara saya dan bapak mereka? Bapak sudah membanting tulang mencari nafkah, saya yang ada digaris belakang mengurus semuanya agar ada dalam keadaan beres. Kalau sampai tidak beres, bapake tole bingung dan marah-marah, bisa kacau dia bekerja[20].

“Is not that a division of labor between me and their father? Daddy has toil for a living, I have a back line to take care of everything to be in a state of course. If it goes wrong, bapake tole is confused and angry, it can mess up he works“ [20].

Through above quotation, it can be inferred that *Dik Ngaisah* as a wife already understand his role. He accepted his work taking care of household needs as well as the needs of her husband. *Ngaisah* thinks of it as a proper division of tasks. Taking care of the back line indicates the kitchen needs to be well managed to meet the expectations of the husband.

As a woman *Dik Ngaisah* is described that she has been accustomed to always be ready to be at home. While a husband has the freedom to socialize with neighbors and the surrounding community in Wanagalih through the morning stroll routine. It is unnecessary to take a wife in the routine. It can be

concluded that a woman's routine is always preparing for the needs of husbands in any situation including breakfast in the morning. This can be seen in the following quotation:

“...sebentar lagi jam 5 pagi. Dan itu berarti jam kebiasaan saya untuk bangun menyiapkan kopi, makanan kecil pagi, air hangat, dan sarapan pagi, sementara bapaknya tole jalan-jalan pagi ke alun-alun [20].

“... It's going to be 5 am. And that means my habitual hour to wake up preparing coffee, morning snacks, warm water, and breakfast, while Tole's (name of their son) father does morning walk to the square” [20].

In addition to the image that has become the habit of a wife in doing his duty, Kayam also includes sincerity in serving the husband. The following quotation emphasizes that in doing the job there is no burden of feeling let alone become a compulsion. Precisely, this is a satisfaction to do the job of taking care of husbands.

“... saya mesti turun mengawasi bukankah semua itu untuk kesenangan suami dan saya sendiri?”  
“... I should go down to watch that, is not all for the pleasure of my husband and myself?” [20]

In the context above, Dik Ngaisah who has a housekeeper still supervise his assistant in preparing the needs of his husband such as coffee, warm water and small meals in the morning. The work has been done by Dik Ngaisah for many years and has never been bored to keep an eye on his maid. He worried that if not supervised the results will not be satisfactory.

In addition to serving the husband, the tradition of preparing food for the guests is also done by the wife. It became the habit of Ngaisah. As a good wife, she greets guests but not by welcoming at the door, yet she prepares the dishes to impress the guests. Here is the quote:

“Istri saya jauh hari sudah repot membenahi rumah dan halaman. Juga pada waktu tamu saya itu datang, istri saya sudah siap sedia menyediakan macam-macam penganan dan santapan yang tentu saja dia harapkan akan dapat mengesankan para tamu” [20]

“My wife is already busy to fix the house and the yard. Also when my visitor arrived, my wife was ready to provide all kinds of snacks and meals that she hoped would impress the guests” [20].

So it is clear how all household affairs related to the kitchen has always been the work of a wife, not a husband. Thus, Dik Ngaisah is a portrait of a woman who is obedient to her husband, for doing all the housework without complaining about the division of tasks. The division of tasks that are culturally meant women already understand their duties and are educated to be ready for the role.

### 5.2 Dress up or decorate for a husband

The second task a wife has to do is beautify herself. Beautify yourself not only in the sense of wearing lipstick and talcum but also means caring for the body. Likewise, with *Dik Ngaisah* who always painstaking in caring for the body. He felt that it was natural to take care of the body to please the husband.

“... kadang-kadang ada juga istri yang tidak cukup pintar menjaga kewanitaannya ... Maksud saya tidak telaten menjaga tubuhnya, baunya, keluwesan dan *kegandesan* sikapnya dan tindak tanduknya. Suami akan selalu senang dan kersan dengan istri yang telaten menjaga semua itu... seringkali adalah suami yang menetapkan bagaimana mestinya kewanitaan kami itu” [20].

"... sometimes there is also a wife who is not smart enough to keep her feminine ... I mean careless to her body, its smell, manner, stance of attitude and its behavior. The husband will always be happy and at ease with his patient wife to keep with those attitudes ... the husband often the one who establishes how our feminine should [20].

In the above quote the male dominance of the female body is seen clearly. How women should take care of the body is not for their own sake, but for the sake of the husband. A wife should look beautiful for the husband's pleasure. In other words, the female body is completely regulated by men.

### 5. 3 Giving a birth

In the novel *Para Priyayi*, Dik Ngaisah fulfills his duties as a Javanese woman who has to bear offspring. In the following passage, it is explained that He had given birth to two sons and one daughter whom they craved would be the successor of the *Priyayi* family.

“Anak-anak kami lahir dalam jarak dua tahun antara yang seseorang dengan yang lain. Noegroho lahir dua bulan sesudah kami pindah di Wanagalih [20].

“Our children are born within two years between one child to another. Noegroho was born two months after we moved to Wanagalih” [20].

Their first child is Noegroho. The firstborn son after they live at the house which is located in Wanagalih. Two years after it was born Hardojo ago Seomini as the youngest child. *Dik* Ngaisah perfect his role as a woman.

By looking at the portrait of Javanese women who play the role of a *Priyayi's* wife, it is clear that women are still within the cultural boundaries that restrain women's space. Women are still in the realm of the back line. Kayam shows an ideal woman who is devoted to her husband without any protests or dissatisfaction with the treatment. Described that the division of tasks or roles that exist, is an absolute thing to do and not a thing that needs to be protested.

In Ngaisah's description above, it cannot be classified into oppression. Ngaisah represents a woman who is aware of her role and accepts her nature as a woman. Regardless of their potential, the culture prevailed at that time seemed to lead women to accept their natures whose space is limited only at home unless there is a need with a husband. Kayam presents a receptive, sincere and happy woman side to devote herself to her husband and does not demand to have freedom or perhaps more precisely. Ngaisah does not feel constrained by all her routines centered solely at home.

## 6. Conclusions

By looking at the image of Javanese women in the novel *Para Priyayi*, it is seen how the representation of an ideal Javanese woman. This has been proven through the portrait of the wife of Sastrodarsono (*Dik* Ngaisah) who is very faithful to accompany her husband. Sincerely, she accepted her role as a woman and fulfilled the philosophy of the Javanese women's duties: Cook, Macak, and Manak. It shows how the representation of Ngaisah as a Javanese woman does not see the limits of women in the public sphere as a problem. Ngaisah submissive and obedient to her husband, Make the view of the husband as a reference and see it as something that is natural. In the context of patriarchal culture, women are created to always obey and serve their husbands.

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