

# The Oppression of Women through Marriage in the Novel Sang Tandak by Yit Prayitno

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**Abstract.** The novel Sang Tandak is the material object of this research. This novel by Yit Prayitno indirectly contains women who experience sexuality restrictions through marriage. Women's space is deliberately limited and even constructed not to resist male domination. Feminists see literature as an effective tool to socialize patriarchal ideology and provide interpretations of literary works by readers, which have been done from a male perspective. Therefore, reading as a woman model is needed to deconstruct androcentric readings of male and female relations, especially in marriage. Through this approach, readers will also find a concrete portrayal of women's conditions under the existing reality. They will read, interpret, and understand the women's body. Ultimately, women who read can liberate themselves from the confinement of frames that restrict creativity and overhaul the existing patriarchal system.

Keywords: patriarchy, feminism, women, marriage, and oppression

## 1. Introduction

Currently, the development of literary works in Indonesia shows an interesting and diverse portrayal. Many women's issues are discussed in these works, including gender bias, existence, oppression, and others. Women and their problems that continue to resonate throughout the ages are most easily traced through artifacts. One such artifact is a novel that focuses on women.

Sang Tandak by Yit Prayitno [1] is a novel set in the colonial period in the 1800s and tells many things about women. One of them is the issue that reveals the depiction or social criticism of women who work as *tandak* or dancers. Through this novel, it is also narrated that marriage is also part of the oppression of women. Their space is deliberately limited and even manipulated to prevent them from resisting male domination. These women eventually become an oppressed group that is unable to raise their voices. This condition causes women to be subordinated so that they have relatively low functions, roles, and positions stereotypically.

The presence of female characters in the novel Sang Tandak is an imaginative construction by the author. To explore the presence of female characters and their problems in the short story properly and thoroughly, an analysis that is neutral to gender bias is needed. In other words, the analysis of women's issues must be done from a women's perspective. Hellwig calls this "reading as a woman" [2]. This opinion is allign

with Showalter's [3] opinion about the need to take the point of view of "woman as reader". Thus, reading as a woman or woman as a reader will analyze women constructed by authors in texts or novels more directed.

## **2. Theory and Method**

Research method can be defined as a way of working to understand the research object. Because literary works are aesthetic facts that have their distinct characteristics, the methods used to approach them are different. Methods in literary research have their scientific measures determined by their characteristics as a system [4].

The research on the novel *Sang Tandak* is related to reading the text from a woman's perspective. This kind of text research is women's perspective research based on women's issues. The research method is qualitative. Emphasizing the researcher's subjective experience as a woman to understand women's issues that arise in the text being analyzed [5].

Concerning the above, the most appropriate theory used in this research is feminist theory. The applications of this theory have essential roles related to women's efforts to gain authority over themselves through a literary perspective. In this research, the author conducted an interpretative reading of the novel *Sang Tandak*. Then, she continued by accumulating data in the form of texts related to the feminist perspective. Finally, the author analyzes the data texts based on feminist theories and approaches.

## **3. Discussion**

### **3.1. Marriage as a Tool of Oppression**

In the novel *Sang Tandak*, women experience restrictions on their sexuality through marriage. It happens because, after the marriage, they no longer have rights over their bodies. A woman's body belongs to the man who married her. Based on de Beauvoir's opinion that marriage is a form of oppression against women, the social relationship between subject and object is inevitable. De Beauvoir sees that this originally gender-free hierarchy in actual practice has become a hierarchy filled with gendering.

The subject position was then claimed as owned by men. Men are the Self, an absolute subject. Men are the First Sex who occupy the central position. On the other hand, women, against their will, are positioned as objects so that men can become subjects. Women are the Other. Her existence is not essential. She is only subordinate to men. Women are the Second Sex whose existence is possible because of the existence of men and, therefore, women are positioned in a peripheral position [6].

Here's the thing. It's best that, after Tjioko's party at Koedoes, Den Ayu doesn't make another appearance as a *tandak*. No matter where or when. I know that being a *tandak* may have become a part of your life. However, if Den Ayu earns money from *nandak*, I declare that I am willing to compensate you, because Den Ayu has stopped *nandak*. [7]

The quote above shows the arrogance of men who consider themselves subjects while women are objects in marriage. Men act as rulers and show authority as the party capable of power. Women are objects that are legally owned because of the bond of marriage. They never assume that women are conscious individuals. In addition, men have power over the public sphere. They seem able to fulfill the needs of the women they control economically, psychologically, and biologically.

In a patriarchal society, the economic sector is an area controlled by men. The role of men in the family is very dominant, as seen in financial management activities that tend to be controlled by them. This condition creates the view that husbands as breadwinners have a higher or superior position in their families. They can self-actualize outside the home and work to perpetuate economic dominance. In contrast, wives who only stay at home are very dependent on their husbands. In other words, to fulfill these needs, women cannot do it alone and are very dependent on men. Thus, women in their social relations feel unappreciated, oppressed, and marginalized. This relationship is exploitative. Men find it easier to control women in every way.

In the novel *Sang Tandak*, women occupy the domestic sphere and are responsible for all household affairs. At first glance, this view seems quite positive, with men recognizing that women are experts in domestic affairs, but on closer examination, the meaning is quite the opposite. Being in the domestic sphere means that women only understand household affairs, do not understand other issues, and do not have the opportunity to broaden their horizons and knowledge. Women are in a narrow world. There is not much to do except work related to the kitchen, the well, cooking skills, and taking care of children.

Women's consciousness is dulled by the internalization of false consciousness created by men, for example, about women's noble work as wives and mothers who serve their husbands without expecting remuneration. This false consciousness seems to elevate the dignity of women, even though it is all for the benefit of men. Women are ensnared from all directions, tending to be marginalized so that it is hard to alleviate themselves from oppression. Even within the home as the smallest institution, women remain the subordinated party.

Once married, women are expected to adhere to their husbands' authority, which restricts their autonomy and independence. This signifies that the husband holds authority over his wife's rights and body. The husband assumes the role of the primary decision-maker in the household, whereas the wife is relegated to a subordinate position as the implementer of those decisions. The regulations and laws created and decisions

made by men serve to reinforce their authority and benefit them. Conversely, women accept these rules as obligations that must be fulfilled as a demonstration of loyalty and devotion to men. Men are the enforcers of patriarchal structures within the domestic sphere, where their position is unquestionable and beyond reproach.

### 3.2. False Monogamous Marriage

Marriage results in gender inequality because it limits sexuality, especially female sexuality (Hartman, 1986;14). The term 'monogamy' in monogamous heterosexual marriages only applies to the wife. Monogamy is believed to be the healthiest and noblest form of marriage because there is only one husband and one wife in a sexual relationship, but this is not the case. Monogamous marriage is only valid in law, but not in reality.

"They said that because of my close relationship with you, the Dutch East Indies government is having trouble taking care of its interests in Koedoes. The most powerful nobles there are interfering. He said he would stop making trouble for the Dutch East Indies if I were no longer close to you."  
[8]

The quote above proves that it is normal for men of any social class or profession to have affairs. They wrongly believe that marital loyalty only applies to the wife, not the husband. Conversely, infidelity arises because the wife is unable to satisfy or please the husband. It is a society that blames women for affairs.

The prevalent view is that a husband's freedom of sexuality is ordinary. The unequal rights and obligations between husbands and wives in monogamous marriages create unequal gender power relations. The husband is in a dominant position, while the wife is subordinate. As the "ruler," Regent Koedoes is free to behave "polygamistically" while his wife, Gemi, must maintain her "monogamist" loyalty.

The public includes both men and women. It is important to note that the collective perpetrators of patriarchy are not limited to men. In the novel *Sang Tandak*, women can unwittingly become perpetrators of patriarchy, as described in the following quote:

"Den Mas, how long or how many more nights will I stay in this luxurious room?"  
"It depends on Den Ayu's wishes."  
"As long as *garwo padmi* (official wife) Den Mas is not here?" "Why does Den Ayu have to talk like that?"  
"I have to be realistic, Den Mas. I'm just a *garwo ampil* (concubine), Den Mas." [9]

ATR's determination to become the concubine of Regent Koedoes is indisputable evidence of her internalization of patriarchal ideology. She utterly failed to recognize the restrictions on women's sexuality in marriage. As a result, she views

the freedom of male sexuality and the restrictions on female sexuality in a monogamous heterosexual marriage as an inherent and normal aspect of society. As the third person, ATR unquestionably reinforces the domination of Regent Koedoes.

#### 4. Conclusion

The preceding discussion makes it clear that literary works are the result of the author's reflection on the surrounding environment through the process of observation and experience. She presents concrete images of women's conditions in line with the existing reality and offers messages and ideas that challenge the patriarchal system still prevalent in Indonesia today. Readers must be able to place themselves as women to understand the author's messages and ideas. Women readers can successfully read texts as women if they can build self-identity from their experiences. By doing so, readers will erase the gender hierarchy that marginalizes them.

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