

Comparison of Resistance to Forced Marriage for Javanese Girls in the Film *Gadis Kretek* with the Film *Rara Mendut*

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Abstract. Social life can be understood as a set of human interactions with their surrounding environment. This dynamic is portrayed in the Indonesian films *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut*, which lend themselves to analysis using the theoretical framework of literary sociology. In this context, Ian Watt outlines three central dimensions of literary sociology: (a) the social context of the author, (b) literature as a reflection of social life, and (c) the social function of literature. This study focuses specifically on the second dimension—literature as a reflection of society—by analyzing the depiction of social life in *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut*. A sociological approach is employed to examine how these works of audiovisual literature relate to societal realities and social structures. The primary data sources are the films *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut*, while the data themselves consist of relevant linguistic and visual elements (words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and images) that reflect aspects of social life. Data collection is carried out using documentation and note-taking techniques, and the data analysis is conducted using a descriptive qualitative method. The findings show that *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut* each present different types of social issues. First, the social background of *Gadis Kretek* reflects Indonesian society in the mid-20th century, particularly within the male-dominated kretek cigarette industry that relegated women to the status of low-wage laborers. The film presents the dynamics of kretek business competition in Central Java during the post-independence period, emphasizing the socio-economic realities of that era. Second, the social setting of *Rara Mendut* portrays the Javanese society under the rule of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom, led by Sultan Agung. Rara Mendut is a beautiful young woman from a coastal village in Pati, Central Java, whose beauty becomes the subject of public attention and leads to her being pursued by aristocrats seeking to marry her, often for political and personal gain. Both films illustrate representations of resistance by Javanese women against forced marriage through the characters Dasiyah and Rara Mendut. These portrayals explore and elaborate on different forms of resistance to patriarchal authority and arranged unions. In *Gadis Kretek*, Dasiyah's resistance to an arranged marriage orchestrated by her parents reflects a broader defiance of patriarchal social structures. By refusing to submit to her family's wishes and remaining loyal to her beloved Soeraja, Dasiyah asserts herself as an autonomous subject. Her decision symbolizes resistance to cultural norms that treat women as tools within family-based socio-economic strategies and affirms the importance of personal agency in gender relations within Javanese society. In *Rara Mendut*, the protagonist resists forced marriage in the context of her status as a war captive, refusing to become a nobleman's concubine. Instead, she chooses an independent path by working as a kretek vendor, even though it requires her to pay high taxes and face systemic constraints. Her actions demonstrate a commitment to self-reliance and the assertion of personal dignity despite institutionalized gender oppression. When she learned that her lover, Pranacitra, had been killed in a conflict with the authorities, Rara Mendut was enraged and stabbed herself with a keris (a dagger) in

protest, ultimately leading to her death. Rara Mendut ultimately emerges as a symbolic figure of emotional resistance against a system that denies the existence and autonomy of women as independent subjects.

Keywords: *Gadis Kretek*, *Rara Mendut*, Ian Watt, literary sociology, forced marriage

1 Introduction

Film, as an audiovisual medium, is considered a form of literary work. Like other literary genres, film is inseparable from its connection to society. Wellek and Warren argue that literature is a social institution that employs language as its medium. Literature "presents life," and "life" largely consists of social reality, even though literary works also "imitate" nature and the subjective world of human experience [1]. Film, as a literary form, is experienced through two sensory modes—visual and auditory—but shares a fundamental similarity with literature in its use of language and its capacity to depict social realities. As Faruk [2] explains, literature is a human object, a human or cultural fact, as it is the product of human creation and inner experience.

The films *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut* reflect the authors' perspectives on social realities within Javanese society. *Gadis Kretek* tells the story of individuals bound by familial ties within the Idroes Moeria household, consisting of a father deeply invested in the kretek cigarette business, a mother devoted to Javanese traditions, two adolescent daughters, and the arrival of an outsider, Soeraja. The central theme revolves around the kretek industry's competitive landscape in the city of M, culminating in the events surrounding the 1965 G30S political upheaval, which ultimately disrupts the family's livelihood. More than just a family narrative, the film presents efforts by its characters to support one another in forming a meaningful environment under the notion of "family." The Idroes Moeria family, along with their attached social identities, attempts to challenge normative constructions of kinship systems. This makes *Gadis Kretek* a significant subject of study, as it conveys the message of how familial bonds can be compromised by socio-political turmoil.

Meanwhile, *Rara Mendut*, inspired by Javanese folklore, recounts the tale of a young woman whose extraordinary beauty captivates both Duke Pragola of Pati and Commander Tumenggung Wiraguna, a trusted general under Sultan Agung of the powerful Mataram Kingdom. Despite the patriarchal pressure exerted upon her, Rara Mendut is not portrayed as a submissive woman. She boldly rejects Wiraguna's advances and openly expresses her love for her chosen partner, Pranacitra. Enraged and jealous, Tumenggung Wiraguna imposes a tax on her, forcing Rara Mendut to devise a plan to earn money. Recognizing the influence of her beauty, she decides to sell kretek cigarettes—already lit and smoked by her—to eager male customers at premium prices. The film ultimately depicts Rara Mendut and Pranacitra dying together for the sake of their love.

This research aims to compare the social settings and forms of resistance by Javanese women to forced marriage, as portrayed in *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut*. At the same time, elements of Javanese cultural locality as part of the social background serve as a determinant in shaping the perceptions and actions of the characters—especially Dasiyah and Rara Mendut—as representations of female resistance. Drawing from Ian Watt's literary sociology, as cited by Damono, three key

dimensions are considered: (a) the author's social context, (b) literature as a reflection of social life, and (c) the social function of literature [3]. This study focuses on the second dimension, analyzing how both *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut* reflect the social conditions in which they were created—particularly through the lens of how Javanese women resist forced marriage.

2 Methods

This study employs a sociological approach, which is aimed at understanding literary works in relation to societal realities and social structures. The foundation of this approach lies in the premise that literature is inseparable from the social realities in which it is produced. The sociological approach is deemed appropriate for this research, as it facilitates the investigation of social life aspects reflected in the films *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut*.

The data sources in this study include the Indonesian film *Gadis Kretek* (Netflix: *Cigarette Girl*) [4] and the classic film *Rara Mendut* [5]. *Gadis Kretek* is a 2023 Indonesian web series produced by BASE Entertainment and Fourcolours Films. Directed by Kamila Andini and Ifa Isfansyah, and starring Dian Sastrowardoyo, Ario Bayu, Arya Saloka, and Putri Marino, the series was adapted from the novel of the same name and is available on Netflix. Meanwhile, *Rara Mendut* is a romantic tragedy drama film directed by Ami Prijono and released in 1983, featuring Meriam Bellina, Mathias Muchus, and W.D. Mochtar. The story is set in the 17th century Mataram Sultanate and is based on the serialized novel *Roro Mendut* by Y.B. Mangunwijaya, which itself draws from the classic Javanese love story found in the *Babad Tanah Jawi* [6].

The data analyzed in this study consist of textual elements (words, phrases, clauses, or sentences) that relate to the social life aspects presented in both films. The data collection techniques include documentation and note-taking. Documentation involves collecting significant information in the form of visual or textual excerpts relevant to the research problem. The first step involves systematically documenting visual scenes from both films. The second step consists of identifying and classifying verbal descriptions that illustrate social aspects, followed by the coding of data to ensure traceability and accuracy in the analysis process.

The data analysis technique used in this study is descriptive qualitative analysis through inferential categorization. This categorization is employed to describe how elements of social life are portrayed in the films, and is followed by an analytical interpretation using a sociological framework. The categorization allows for the classification of the collected data in accordance with the research objectives. The categorized data are then analyzed descriptively and interpreted based on the sociological perspective [7], [8], [9].

3 Result and Discussion

3.1. The Social Context of *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut*

The films *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut* both depict social issues, each reflecting different periods and societal structures [10], [11]. *Gadis Kretek* (*Cigarette Girl*), a historical Indonesian drama series, premiered on Netflix on November 2, 2023. Directed by Kamila Andini, this series is Netflix Indonesia's first original

production. The story is adapted from the novel by Ratih Kumala, which was inspired by true events surrounding the kretek cigarette industry in post-independence Indonesia. The narrative of *Gadis Kretek* unfolds across two timelines. In 2001, Soeraja (Ario Bayu), the owner of the Djagad Raya cigarette factory, lies on his deathbed and repeatedly calls out the name of a woman, Jeng Yah (Dasiyah). His youngest son, Lebas (Arya Saloka), along with his siblings Karim and Tegar, embarks on a quest to fulfill their father's dying wish to find Dasiyah. This journey unravels family secrets long buried in the past.

The past storyline centers on Dasiyah (played by Dian Sastrowardoyo), the daughter of kretek entrepreneur Idroes Moeria (Rukman Rosadi). Despite being born a woman, Dasiyah possesses exceptional skills in blending kretek tobacco and aspires to create the finest kretek sauce. However, her ambitions are hindered by rigid societal norms that confine women to domestic roles. Her life changes when she meets Soeraja, a young man working at her father's factory. The two fall in love and share a deep passion for kretek-making. Their relationship, however, faces a major obstacle when Dasiyah is forced into an arranged marriage by her parents.

Gadis Kretek explores themes of love, ambition, and the struggle of women in a male-dominated industry. The series sheds light on gender-based discrimination and highlights the challenges women face in asserting themselves in a patriarchal society. Through Dasiyah's character, the narrative underscores the vital role women played in the history and development of Indonesia's kretek industry.



Figure 1. Poster of *Gadis Kretek* (Netflix: *Cigarette Girl*).
(Base Entertainment dan Four Colours Films, and Netflix. 2023)

With its rich historical backdrop and strong characterization, *Gadis Kretek* offers a profound and thought-provoking viewing experience. The series not only entertains but also provides valuable insights into Indonesia's social and cultural history. The film's social setting reflects Indonesian society in the mid-20th century, particularly in the context of the kretek cigarette industry, which was largely dominated by men and relegated women to the position of low-wage laborers. This gendered reality is illustrated through a conversation between Idrus Moeria and his daughter Dasiyah, which captures prevailing social norms that restricted women's opportunities outside of domestic responsibilities:

Idrus Moeria: “Now he is the answer to our prayers. Raya can become our new foreman. If you marry, you’ll have to leave the factory. Who will help your father then? You’re a woman, aren’t you?”

Dasiyah : “That’s why everything is called the mystery of life. Because we never know when fate will side with us.”
(*Episode 1, Minute 15:15–16:30*)

The social background in *Gadis Kretek* highlights the competitive kretek business environment in Central Java, especially during the colonial and post-independence periods. It examines how kretek cigarettes, a uniquely Indonesian product, became part of national identity and shaped various layers of society. The characters—Idroes Moeria, Soedjagad, and Soeraja—are portrayed as emerging from peasant families and former manual laborers in the kretek industry, emphasizing social mobility and class struggle in post-colonial Indonesia.

Meanwhile, the film *Rara Mendut* (1983), directed by Ami Priyono and based on the serialized novel by Y.B. Mangunwijaya, draws from the legendary *Babad Tanah Jawi*. *Rara Mendut* is a classic folklore figure from Javanese tradition, often portrayed as a woman of extraordinary beauty. The film depicts her life during the reign of Sultan Agung in the Islamic Mataram Kingdom. Raised by a fisherman named Kakek Siwo in the coastal village of Telukcikal (now part of Pati, Central Java), Rara Mendut’s beauty soon attracted the attention of local nobility.

Her story unfolds as Adipati Pragola II, ruler of Pati, attempts to take her as a concubine. After she refuses his advances, the duke sends his guards to abduct her. Before the forced marriage could take place, tensions escalate between the Pati principality and the Mataram Kingdom. Accused of rebellion for failing to pay tribute, Adipati Pragola II is defeated and killed in battle. Rara Mendut is subsequently seized by Mataram soldiers led by Commander Tumenggung Wiraguna, who also desires her as a concubine. Rara Mendut, however, refuses his offer and boldly declares her love for Pranacitra in his presence.

Her defiance enrages Wiraguna, but she remains steadfast. Under strict surveillance, Rara Mendut requests permission to sell cigarettes in the market and endures increasingly oppressive taxation. Despite being a captive, she carves a space for autonomy and resistance through trade, turning her beauty into economic agency—a strategy that mirrors women’s creative survival within patriarchal systems.

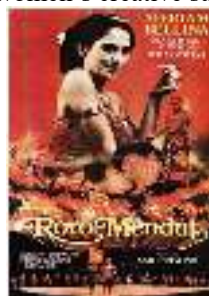


Figure 2. Poster of *Roro Mendut*.
(PT Elang Perkasa Film, PT Gramedia Film, and PT Sanggar Film. 1983).

Tumenggung Wiraguna agreed to allow Rara Mendut to trade cigarettes. Remarkably, her business thrived, and even used cigarette butts that Rara Mendut had smoked were eagerly bought by many. One day, while selling at the market, Rara Mendut met Pranacitra, who had come specifically searching for his beloved. Pranacitra sought a way to help Rara Mendut escape from Mataram. Upon arriving at the palace, Rara Mendut confided in Putri Arumardi, one of Wiraguna's concubines, hoping for assistance in leaving the palace. The following dialogue between Nyai Ajeng and Rara Mendut illustrates the societal view of women as objects to be possessed and forced into concubinage:

Nyai Ajeng : "You must serve Tumenggung Wiraguna."

Rara Mendut: "Serve how, Raden Ayu?"

Nyai Ajeng : "Of course, as a concubine."

(Minute 25:00–25:30)

Rara Mendut was well aware that Putri Arumardi disapproved of Wiraguna taking another concubine. Putri Arumardi and other concubines, including Nyai Ajeng, conspired to expel Rara Mendut from the palace. Together with Pranacitra, Rara Mendut attempted to return to her homeland in the Pati principality. Unfortunately, their escape plan was discovered by Wiraguna.

3.2. Female Javanese Resistance to Forced Marriage in *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut*

Gadis Kretek and *Rara Mendut* portray differing interpretations of marriage from the perspective of Javanese women. Both narratives emphasize the desire for autonomy in choosing a life partner based on love, in contrast to societal norms of arranged or forced marriages. Fundamentally, *Gadis Kretek* narrates the journey of a woman named Dasiyah who resists societal traditions that hinder her potential as a talented kretek cigarette sauce maker. Two major themes emerge in the film: gender discrimination and women's resistance, represented through the character of Dasiyah.



Figure 3. Dasiyah, a smart and talented woman, is being arranged to marry a man chosen by her parents. (Netflix: *Cigarette Girl*, Episode 1, 50:00)

The marginalization of women is vividly illustrated in the scene where Dasiyah is forbidden from entering the kretek sauce room solely because she is female. Women are excluded from the sauce room under the pretext that their presence would spoil the sauce's quality. This exemplifies a form of marginalization, representing the broader social exclusion of women from certain domains—specifically, Dasiyah is systematically barred from participating in the crucial process of sauce preparation. The subordination of women within the factory is further evidenced by the strict division of labor: women are relegated to the role of cigarette rollers, while men occupy the more prestigious position of kretek sauce mixers. This

clearly indicates a gendered hierarchy, with women assigned subordinate roles beneath men.

Negative stereotypes about women are pervasive throughout the film. Women are subjected not only to verbal abuse but also to physical violence. For example, Dasiyah is scolded with the remark, “What do women know about cigarettes? Your duty is only to clean the house and find a husband.” Physical violence intensifies when Dasiyah and other female workers are tortured and imprisoned by the military under accusations of affiliation with the Indonesian Communist Party.

The dialogue between Dasiyah and Soeraja captures the societal constraints that limit women’s agency, particularly in marriage decisions:

Soeraja: “I am not yet worthy, Jeng. When I meet your father, I want to have my own business first so that Mr. Idroes will believe I can take care of his daughter.”

Dasiyah: “But you are worthy, Mas.”
(Episode 3, 13:15–17:30)

Dasiyah’s resistance is also apparent when she is coerced into marrying a man chosen by her parents—someone she does not know. In *Gadis Kretek*, Dasiyah embodies the figure of the modern Javanese woman who bravely challenges the patriarchal system of arranged marriages prevalent in feudal society. As the daughter of a kretek entrepreneur, Dasiyah is positioned not as an autonomous individual but as a political instrument intended to strengthen family business alliances through marriage. She is betrothed to a man she does not love, primarily for economic considerations.

In one scene, her mother asserts, “This is for the family. Women’s duty is to obey and follow. Not everyone can marry for love.” This statement reflects traditional values that impose submission on women and require them to sacrifice personal desires for familial stability. Nonetheless, Dasiyah refuses to comply. Her refusal extends beyond rejecting her arranged fiancé to contesting the entire social structure that limits her freedom to choose. She demonstrates courage by canceling the arranged marriage and pursuing her love for Soeraja despite strong opposition.

In a confrontational moment with her father, Dasiyah proclaims, “I am not merchandise, Father. I do not want to be sold to expand your business.” This explicit verbal defiance critiques the commodification of women through arranged marriages within family and business institutions. Dasiyah’s decision to resist the arranged marriage is revolutionary in the context of Javanese culture, where women are traditionally expected to remain obedient and not oppose family decisions.

The film portrays Dasiyah’s resistance not merely as opposition to an unwanted marriage but as a broader challenge to a value system that subordinates women. In an emotionally charged scene, she tells her mother, “If love must be forced, that is not a home; it is a prison.” This declaration reinforces Dasiyah’s symbolic role as a woman fighting for autonomy in determining her own destiny. Through Dasiyah, *Gadis Kretek* offers a narrative of female resistance against customary power structures that restrict women’s freedoms and fundamental rights.

Dasiyah’s defiance reflects a resistance to patriarchal social structures that constrain women’s freedom to choose their life partners. Despite her traditional upbringing and her status as the daughter of a prominent kretek entrepreneur, she

rejects the arranged marriage designed to fortify family business alliances. Her rejection is not merely emotional but a conscious assertion of self-awareness and personal autonomy in marital decisions. By refusing to submit to parental will and maintaining her love for Soeraja, Dasiyah asserts the woman's position as a sovereign subject in life choices. This act embodies female resistance to cultural norms that treat women as instruments in socio-economic strategies and underscores the critical importance of agency within Javanese gender relations.



Figure 4. Rara Mendut committed suicide after Pranacitra was killed by Tumenggung Wiraguno's keris (Minute 1:37:32).

Rara Mendut is portrayed as an astute and resourceful woman who employs her sensuality not merely for attraction but as a strategic tool for resistance and survival. By infusing her cigarette sales with a distinctively sensual performance—rolling and sealing the cigarettes with her tongue, then taking a few puffs before handing them to the buyer—she transforms a simple product into a coveted item. This not only reflects her commercial ingenuity and unique marketing approach, but also functions as a coded signal intended for her lover, Pranacitra, to locate her.

A key dialogue between Nyai Ajeng and Rara Mendut reveals how the prevailing social structure limited women's autonomy in determining their marital futures:

Nyai Ajeng : “You must prepare yourself to become a concubine.”

Rara Mendut: “No. Absolutely not. I'll do anything else, just not that.”

Nyai Ajeng : “You are not pleased to receive this honor? Do you think Tumenggung Wiraguna is too old?”

(Minute 25:45–26:50)

News of Rara Mendut's cigarette sales soon spreads widely and becomes a subject of public fascination. Upon hearing this, Pranacitra immediately visits her at the market. The two lovers reunite in tears, mourning their fate as Rara Mendut opens her heart in sorrow. She recounts her encounter with Pranacitra to Princess Arumardi and Nyai Ajeng—wives of Tumenggung Wiraguna—who both disapprove of Wiraguna's desire to take yet another concubine. In solidarity, they devise a plan to help Rara Mendut escape the palace and flee with Pranacitra. However, their attempt is eventually discovered by Wiraguna.

The film *Rara Mendut*, adapted from a classical Javanese tale, centers on the resistance of women against arranged marriage and forced concubinage within the structure of Javanese feudal society. As the protagonist, Rara Mendut is depicted as a woman who possesses a strong sense of bodily autonomy and individual will—traits that were considered subversive in her cultural context. After being taken as a war captive by the Mataram Kingdom, she is offered to Tumenggung Wiraguna, a

nobleman, to become his concubine. In traditional Javanese society, a woman in such a position was expected to submit to the authority of powerful men without question.

However, Rara Mendut defies this expectation with striking clarity and resolve. In one powerful scene, she tells Tumenggung:

“Kulo dudu kembang kanggo panjenengan petik sak karepmu. Kulo uwis nduweni kersaning dewe.” (“I am not a flower you can pluck at will. I have my own desires.”)

Her defiance is not expressed through physical confrontation, but through symbolic rejection and a steadfast assertion of agency. She refuses to become a concubine despite constant pressure and coercion. Her loyalty to Pranacitra is not simply a romantic gesture, but a declaration of her right to self-determination. Additionally, she chooses to earn a living independently by selling *klembak menyan* (herbal cigarettes), an act that was unconventional for a woman—especially one associated with nobility.

Through these acts, Rara Mendut embodies a form of ideological resistance to patriarchal power. Her rejection of Tumenggung’s authority and her pursuit of self-sufficiency and love on her own terms are deeply political acts. The narrative challenges the cultural norms that silence women’s voices and deny them agency, presenting Rara Mendut not merely as a victim of feudal patriarchy but as an agent of her own liberation.

Rara Mendut’s resistance is not enacted through direct physical confrontation but through symbolic defiance and courageous life choices. She firmly rejects the role of Tumenggung Wiraguna’s concubine, despite persistent threats and coercion. Her decision to remain faithful to her beloved, Pranacitra, is not solely a romantic commitment, but a powerful assertion of her autonomy as a woman. Furthermore, she chooses to support herself economically by selling *klembak menyan* cigarettes—a bold and unconventional act for a woman of noble lineage in that era.

In one of her confrontations with Tumenggung, Rara Mendut articulates her stance with striking clarity:

“Ampun paksa kulo. Cinta boten saged dipundamel sekethi. Yen panjenengan butuh tresna, wenehana kamardikan.”

(“Do not force me. Love cannot be manufactured through coercion. If you seek love, offer freedom.”)

This statement encapsulates her ideological resistance to patriarchal power structures and repressive gender dynamics. It also emphasizes her refusal to submit to the role of passive recipient in the politics of power, sexuality, and status.

The narrative of *Rara Mendut* illustrates a distinctive form of Javanese female emancipation in the face of traditional customs, feudal authority, and patriarchal systems. Rara Mendut’s struggle is not only a rejection of forced marriage, but also a broader affirmation of women’s right to self-determination—in both life and love. Rather than yielding to the role of a “spoils of war,” she chooses a path fraught with hardship but imbued with dignity and self-liberation.

In a poignant scene near the end of the film, Rara Mendut declares:

“Urip tanpa kamardikan iku kaya nyawa tanpa napas. Aku milih urip sing bebas, sanajan kudu nandang lara.”

(“A life without freedom is like a soul without breath. I choose a free life, even if it means suffering.”)

This declaration is more than a personal expression of love or grief; it represents an existential struggle to claim herself as a sovereign subject. Her resistance transcends the confines of individual affection and becomes a political act—one that critiques and defies a system that objectifies and marginalizes women.

The film ultimately positions Rara Mendut as a symbolic figure of resistance—one who, despite her subordinate status as a war captive, asserts her bodily and emotional autonomy. Her refusal to become Wiraguna's concubine, her pursuit of independent labor through cigarette sales, and her unwavering loyalty to Pranacitra collectively form an affirmative act of reclaiming power within an oppressive feudal order. Even in the face of profound loss—learning of Pranacitra's death—her emotional devastation underscores the deeply personal cost of challenging systemic injustice. Through Rara Mendut's character, the film delivers a poignant message about the necessity of recognizing women's agency, dignity, and the right to choose their own destinies.

Finally, She was so angry that he stabbed his own heart with a keris in protest. Rara Mendut's sense of loss not only reflects a personal tragedy of love, but also underscores the broader theme of the high cost women often pay in their struggle for personal autonomy. In this context, her sorrow becomes a symbol of emotional resistance against a socio-political system that denies women's agency and existence as free, self-determining subjects.

4 Conclusion

Both *Gadis Kretek* and *Rara Mendut* serve as cinematic narratives that expose and critique different manifestations of social injustice, particularly those directed toward women, in distinct historical and cultural contexts. The first, *Gadis Kretek*, is set against the backdrop of mid-20th century Indonesian society, illustrating the male-dominated world of the kretek cigarette industry. Women in this setting are relegated to subordinate roles as manual laborers, while men occupy positions of authority and expertise. The film portrays the socioeconomic dynamics of post-independence Java, where women's contributions in industry remain marginalized and undervalued.

In contrast, *Rara Mendut* is situated in the feudal era of the Islamic Mataram Kingdom under Sultan Agung. The narrative centers around a young woman of extraordinary beauty from a coastal village in Pati, Central Java, whose story becomes entangled with the power dynamics of nobility and royal authority. As her beauty attracts attention from aristocrats seeking to marry her, Rara Mendut's fate becomes emblematic of how women's bodies are often treated as political and social capital in feudal society.

Together, these films illuminate different forms of resistance enacted by Javanese women against forced marriage within patriarchal structures. In *Gadis Kretek*, Dasiyah's defiance of an arranged marriage orchestrated by her family symbolizes resistance to the entrenched social order. Her insistence on choosing her own partner, Soeraja, demonstrates a refusal to be instrumentalized as part of a familial economic strategy. This act affirms her status as a sovereign subject and highlights the critical importance of agency within the gender relations of Javanese society.

Secondly, in *Rara Mendut*, the protagonist's resistance as a Javanese woman against forced marriage—particularly in the context of being treated as a war prize—is embodied in her refusal to become a concubine. Instead, Rara Mendut asserts her autonomy by choosing an independent path, earning a living through selling *kretek* cigarettes, despite being burdened with exorbitant taxation. When she learned that her lover, Pranacitra, had been killed in a conflict with the authorities, Rara Mendut was so enraged that she stabbed herself with a *keris* (a dagger) in protest, leading to her death. Rara Mendut became a symbol of emotional resistance to a system that denied women their existence and will as independent subjects.

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