

Forms of Gender Equality on Female Characters in Singkar Novels

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the representation of gender equality through the characterization of female characters in the novel Singkar by Siti Aminah. Using a descriptive approach and feminist analysis framework, this research explores the forms of gender equality displayed by female characters and their relationship with the construction of their characters in the novel. The research data in the form of the entire text of the novel Singkar was analyzed through read-and-record techniques and descriptive analysis. Semantic validity and intrarettor reliability were used to ensure data validity. The results showed five forms of gender equality expressed by female characters in the novel: 1) autonomy in making decisions, 2) ability to overcome problems, 3) courage to take responsibility, 4) participation in earning a living, and 5) resilience as a single parent. This finding confirms that the characterization of female characters in Singkar is the basis for actions that reflect gender equality.

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are the work of an author. An author is a member of society. In this case, it has an imaginative nature whose contents describe the facts of life and also the reality of life. Literature is directly related to reality and then interprets, explains, or reacts to it (Ulwatunnisa, 2023). Through literary works, an author reflects the problems that occur in society or social problems. In the scope of modern culture, the issue of gender equality is a popular topic. Ghuzairoh (2015) states that in each cultural sphere there are different gender arrangements. Therefore, in viewing gender in a society requires a cultural perspective so that there is no confusion in understanding it. In some patriarchal cultures such as the Javanese, women also take on public roles automatically, for example, wives in farming families. A wife in a farming family does not only take care of the affairs in the house (domestic area), but also works outside the home (public area) by helping her husband take care of the fields or rice fields. For example, working as a strawberry farmer makes women farmers in Sembalun Bumbung Village have a dual role, namely as housewives while helping their husbands work on strawberry farms (Wijayanti & Nursalim, 2023). Such activities, according to Yuwono (2017), show the strength of a woman. Yuwono also stated that this is something that has been going on for a long time. One of the Javanese novels that reflects the forms of gender equality in Javanese society is *Singkar*. The novel is the work of Siti Aminah. *Singkar* tells the story of Nani's efforts to maintain her love relationship with Nusa, which is opposed by Narumi, Nani's mother. Narumi has set Nani up with Kurniawan. However, Nani refuses her mother's wishes. She argues that this is no longer the age of arranged marriages. Everyone has rights that must be respected. The female characters in *Singkar* display actions that refer to forms of gender equality. There are seven female characters in this novel who all display forms of gender equality, namely Nani, Narumi, Sartinah, Sipon, Inten, Alsa, and Mbak Marni. One of the forms of gender equality displayed by female characters in *Singkar*, for example in the character Nani, is when she takes the initiative to negotiate with the character Nusa. Nani shows that women, especially in this case Javanese women, can equalize their position with men. Women are not weak beings who must obey men, as is the stereotype of women in Javanese society. There are two reasons for conducting this research. The first reason is that the author of *Singkar* is a woman. Mills (via Mijianti et al., 2022) argues that there is a close relationship between an author's obsessions and the characters featured in his or her work. This is also the case with female authors in Javanese literature. Women authors in Javanese literature try to present their responses and demands to the conditions of Javanese culture, which in fact considers Javanese women only as *kanca wingking*. This term is interpreted as the wife's role is only a complement to the husband (Wulandari, 2018). The author's obsession is presented through the characters. The characters in his work are presented to display the author's expectations. In this case, this research is motivated by wanting to know how the female author's obsession regarding equality between herself and men is realized through the female characters in her work.

The second reason is that this research is based on the desire to show what forms of gender equality are displayed by female characters in stories written by female authors. If the first reason is more inclined towards the characterization of female characters, then the second reason is more inclined towards the exposure of the female author's obsession with female characters in the literary works she produced.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Gender equality is a concept that refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for individuals of all genders. It strives to remove discrimination based on gender and to create an environment where both men and women have equal access to resources and decision-making. Within the field of literature, gender equality is often analyzed through the portrayal of male and female characters, particularly regarding their roles, agency, and empowerment.

Feminist Literary Theory

Feminist literary theory is central to understanding the portrayal of gender equality in literature. It critiques the ways in which literature reflects, reinforces, or challenges societal norms regarding gender roles. Feminist critics often examine how female characters are portrayed—whether they are stereotyped or empowered, passive or active, and whether they have autonomy over their lives and decisions. This approach enables a close reading of the Singkar novels with a focus on how the female characters are represented in relation to power dynamics, equality, and autonomy.

Gender Equality in Indonesian Literature

Indonesian literature has historically reflected the complexities of gender relations in a patriarchal society. However, contemporary literature, including novels like Singkar, often explores evolving gender dynamics. Understanding the context of gender roles in Indonesia—particularly the intersections of traditional cultural expectations and modern ideals of equality—can provide a backdrop to the portrayal of female characters in Singkar.

Intersectionality and Gender Equality

Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, can also play a critical role in the analysis of gender equality. It emphasizes that gender equality cannot be fully understood without considering other intersecting social categories, such as class, race, religion, or ethnicity. In the case of Singkar, the experiences of the female characters may be shaped by the intersections of gender with cultural and societal norms in Indonesia, further complicating their struggle for equality.

Previous Research on Gender in Literature

Previous studies have often focused on how traditional gender roles are portrayed in literature, especially within patriarchal societies. The exploration

of themes such as motherhood, marriage, and professional life for female characters often reveals whether the literature reinforces or challenges traditional gender norms. By reviewing previous research on gender portrayal in Indonesian literature, one can contextualize the analysis of gender equality in the Singkar novels.

Achsani (2019) states that an author creates a work based on things he experiences. In this case, literary works can be said to be sourced from reality. This opinion is strengthened by Siswanto's statement (via Salamah, 2024) that literary works are exemplary of reality. If intrinsic elements refer to the structure of the story, then extrinsic elements refer to various values outside of literature, but indirectly affect the building or organism system of literary works (Nurgiyantoro, 2018). Extrinsic values in novels refer to social reality. This reality is not pure reality, but only a reflection. In this reflection, reality is carried out by the characters. The story will not be able to run without characters. Regarding characters, Stanton (via Fadhila et al., 2024) states that there are two contexts regarding characters. The first context is the character as the perpetrator of the story. The second context is the character as a mixture of desires, interests, emotions, and moral principles of individuals. In addition to characters, there is also characterization. Jones (via Nurgiyantoro, 2018) explains that characterization is a clear description of a person featured in the story. Because novels have the same characteristics as everyday life, what the characters experience is nothing but a reflection of social life. In everyday life, there is a distinction between men and women based on gender. This is also the case with characters in novels. The characterization of male and female characters also assumes gender differences between men and women in society.

Utaminingsih (2023) explains that gender refers more to the socio-cultural attributions attached to certain genders. With the connection with socio-cultural matters, in terms of characterization of female and male characters in novels, the setting of the story is also something that needs to be considered. Nurgiyantoro (2018) divides the setting into three elements, namely place setting, time setting, and social setting.

Among the three types of setting, social setting is very closely related to gender in novels. What male and female characters experience in relation to gender is determined by the gender setting of the social setting in which the story takes place. In a novel set in Malay society, the characterizations used for the male and female characters in the literary work are certainly different from the characterizations used for the male and female characters of a novel set in Javanese society.

Since the introduction of Western culture through colonization, Javanese literature has begun to use modern themes. Widati Pradopo et al. argued that the problems in Javanese literature with modern themes leaned towards freedom, rationality, and justice which then broke the chain with tradition (Prasetyo, 2018). In this period of Javanese literature, women, especially the *priyayi* class, are no longer seen as inferior and passive. They are portrayed as women who are free to make their own choices.

Another form of gender equality is also reflected in the female characters who work as farmers, traders, laborers, and actual housewives. They, except for housewives, perform gender equality by working in the domestic and public sectors based on family economic needs that are not sufficient if only supported by one person, namely the head of the family. Therefore, Javanese novels since their emergence have indeed reflected the existence of forms of gender equality. In relation to the above, the study of forms of gender equality in Javanese novels, which also use Javanese cultural settings, requires an appropriate research approach. The right research approach for this study is feminism.

Feminism simply means that in looking at literature there needs to be a special awareness, namely the awareness that there is a gender that has a lot to do with culture, literature, and our lives (Sugihastuti and Suharto, 2015). The feminist approach used in research on novels set in Javanese culture is ecofeminism. Warren (via Fahimah, 2017) states that ecofeminism is a view of feminism that does not only focus on women and nature. Ecofeminism seeks to understand the position of women as a whole and leads to global development.

Novels are a social reflection. Similarly, Javanese novels reflect the life of Javanese society. Female characters who carry out roles in the public sphere as career women in Javanese novels reflect career women in Javanese society. Career women in Javanese society make efforts to be independent by working in public areas. However, with her obsession to be independent by joining a career, it does not make women forget their role in the domestic area such as taking care of children and serving their husbands. This is in accordance with the vision of social feminism, which is a balance between awareness of feminist efforts and social integrity.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research is qualitative research method. The source of research data in this study is the novel *Singkar* by Siti Aminah. The data used in this research is the entire text of the novel *Singkar* related to the form of gender equality. As for how to collect the data using reading and recording techniques. The tools used in terms of data collection, namely data cards with researchers as data interpreters.

The technique used in analyzing data is descriptive data analysis technique. The first use of descriptive data analysis is that researchers collect data first. The data that has been collected is then reduced. After the collected data is reduced, the next is data presentation. To test the validity of the data, semantic validity and intrarettor reliability were used.

RESULTS

There are (7) female characters in *Singkar* displaying a form of gender equality. However, in this case only four characters were selected for later study, namely Nani, Narumi, Sartinah, and Sipon. The selection of these four characters is because they have a male comparator. The existence of a comparable male character here is important because it shows factual evidence of gender equality.

The results of the research are then presented in the form of a table. The table is as follows.

Table 1. Forms of gender equality for female characters in the novel Singkar

Forms of Gender Equality	Female Characters	Figure Male Comparison	Indicator
Autonomy in making decisions	Nani	Kurniawan	Nani refuses to be Kurniawan's girlfriend, showing that women are not weak and submissive creatures that must always obey men.
Ability to overcome problems	Nani	Nusa	Nani took the initiative to confer with Nusa about the continuation of their relationship, showing that women are as capable of leadership as men.
Courage to take responsibility	Nani	Sulaiman & Titok	Nani waited in her house, which was empty at the time because all her family had fled to the village, showing that women are not weaker beings because they are able to carry out responsibilities that should be reserved for men.
Participation in earning a living	Sipon	Polan	Sipon sells coconuts from Polan's work as a laborer, showing that women can be equal partners with men in the public sphere.
	Narumi	Sulaiman	Narumi helps count the merchandise in and out, showing that women can be equal partners with men in the public sphere.
Resilience as a single parent	Sartinah	Samhadi	Sartinah devoted her full attention to her children after her divorce from Samhadi, showing that women are not weak creatures that must always

Forms of Gender Equality	Female Characters	Figure Male Comparison	Indicator
			be protected by men.
			Sartinah works as a snake fruit farmer to support her children after divorcing Samhadi, showing that women can be independent and do not have to depend on men.

DISCUSSION

The character of Nani is found to be calculating and assertive. The form of gender equality that she displays is making choices without waiting for men's approval, skillful in managing problems, courageous in taking responsibility. Her firmness in making choices without waiting for men's approval is related to the character given to her.

Choosing without waiting for male approval directly refers to one of Nani's characters, which is assertive. This character is shown by Nani when she rejects Kurniawan's love for the umpteenth time. She shows that women can also choose their own life choices. It also states that Nani has full power over herself.

With full power over her own life, it states that a person has full power over herself, without being interfered with by others. It is this assertiveness that underlies the emergence of a form of gender equality that dares to choose without waiting for other people's approval to appear in Nani's character. Because Nani is assertive, even towards her own life, she is assertive in her choices without waiting for others' approval.

Another character found in Nani is calculating. This character is shown through the speech of another character, Nusa. In this speech, it is stated that Nani always calculates everything she does. In making choices, one is faced with the problem of determining what is good and what is bad, and what is necessary and what is not. In that case, a person will certainly calculate something he chooses. Full of calculation in this case, means that a woman will calculate carefully, thus when choosing she is able to firmly choose without waiting for male approval.

The second link is skillful in managing problems with assertive and calculating characters. Nani's assertive character appears when Nani contacts Nusa first to negotiate about the problem she is facing with Nusa. Nani's assertiveness shows that she wants the problems she faces with Nusa to be resolved immediately. This assertiveness also shows the existence of skills in managing problems, namely Nani can act decisively to do what needs to be done so that the problem is resolved quickly.

Skills in managing problems also require a wise attitude so that all parties involved do not feel disadvantaged. This wise attitude will come from the right calculations. Nani is a character with a calculating character in action. What he did when negotiating with Nusa was all done so that he and Nusa would not be equally disappointed. This calculation in her actions gives rise to a form of gender equality in the form of skillfully managing problems, namely when Nani negotiates with Nusa about their love relationship.

The last link to Nani's character is the link between the courage to take responsibility and the assertive and calculating character. Nani's assertive character, as explained earlier, is related to being assertive about herself. The character is also related to her courage in behavior. This assertiveness in behavior refers to a form of gender equality in the form of daring to take responsibility, namely by continuing to look after the house when the other residents left to evacuate.

Nani's courage to act is also inseparable from her calculating attitude. Nani dared to be firm because she had calculated beforehand, namely she did not know where to look for her displaced family, and she tried to protect her house from crime. It is with this calculation that she dares to act, which refers to her character, which is firm.

Narumi is a character who has the character of feeling the most powerful, and difficult to give in. She displays a form of gender equality, by helping to earn a living for the family. In the novel, we are told that she helps Sulaiman, her husband, by taking notes and counting the merchandise in and out. This character influences her actions in terms of earning a living for the family.

Narumi's character of feeling the most powerful is one of the reasons for her to help her husband work. Since childhood, she has been accustomed to doing heavy work, namely taking care of her four younger siblings, to help her mother who acts as a single parent. Narumi was thus accustomed to leading or mastering a lot of work. So, when she got married the disposition to feel fully in charge continued to develop in her. As shown when Narumi gave Nani pocket money.

The existence of the character of feeling the most powerful then gives rise to the second character, which is difficult to give in. As shown when Narumi did not want to be blamed by Sulaiman. The combination of the character of feeling that she has full power and the difficulty of giving in makes Narumi work to earn a living for the family. This is done because by helping to earn a living for the family, she still has power and is not able to be controlled or defeated.

Sartinah has a self-sacrificing and compassionate character. She displays a form of gender equality, which is tough as a single parent. There is a close connection between the form of gender equality she displays, and the character given to her. Her self-sacrificing character appears, for example, when she covers up the family disgrace, namely Samhadi's affair with Sriyati. This illustrates how dear Sartinah is to her children. In other words, Sartinah is willing to endure heartache for the happiness of her children.

Sartinah's self-sacrifice gives rise to the second character trait, which is compassion. The affection here is mainly shown to her five children. The

existence of a loving character in her five children, accompanied by a self-sacrificing character as well, solidifies Sartinah's role as a single parent. These two characters underlie her tenacity in earning a living independently, without a husband, for her five children.

Sipon is a character who has a hard character and thinks more about herself. The form of gender equality that she displays is participating in earning a living for the family and being tough as a single parent. Her character appears, one of which is when she pressures Narumi to follow her orders to marry Sulaiman.

The tough character appears because of how hard the life lived by Sipon is. When Polan was still alive, Sipon helped him earn an extra living by selling coconuts that Polan downloaded. Their main occupation was salak farming, with the salak yields being unsatisfactory, i.e. small, and sour. The hardship of Sipon's life is what makes the seeds of a hard character appear in her.

The heavy burden placed on this character intensified when Sipon died. Inevitably she had to become a single parent with such poverty that forced her to marry Narumi to Sulaiman, a merchant from the city. After Narumi married Sulaiman, Sipon still had to take care of her four children alone. This is where Sipon's resilience as a single parent can be seen.

On the other hand, this role as a single parent is also a burden that affects other characters, namely thinking more about themselves. She becomes more concerned about what is necessary and important for her. This character is shown by Sipon when she chooses not to join the conversation with the neighbors after knowing that her children, grandchildren, and siblings all survived the earthquake.

Singkar is a Javanese novel that uses a Javanese background. In this case, it can be concluded that the culture in Singkar is Javanese. Meanwhile, in relation to gender, Javanese culture uses a patriarchal model. Conceptually, the patriarchal cultural model places men in a superior position and women in an inferior position.

This concept of gender is what Siti Aminah wants to rectify through her work. According to her, women are also capable of being equal to men. So, to realize her obsession into her work, Siti Aminah created female characters as messengers or messengers. The female characters in the novel Singkar are placed in such a way by Siti Aminah in order to perform actions that reflect a form of gender equality.

In the character of Nani, who is the main character of Singkar, there is a firm and calculating character. Character is a character's attitude, interests, emotions, and moral principles (Stanton via Nurgiyantoro, 2018: 165). A character's character will lead to his or her actions in the story. So, the character of Nani was created by Siti Aminah in the form of assertive and calculating to lead to actions that display forms of gender equality, namely choosing without waiting for male approval, skillfully managing problems, and daring to take responsibility.

The forms of gender equality displayed through Nani's character show resistance to the Javanese cultural perspective that women must be obedient and must always be protected by men. Choosing without waiting for men's approval is Siti

Aminah's attempt through the character Nani to oppose the notion that women must always obey men; must always be under the protection of men.

Meanwhile, being skillful in managing problems, and daring to take responsibility can be interpreted as the author's efforts to oppose the assumption that women are always dependent on men. The author tries to present a form of gender equality where women can act on their own initiative. In other words, the author tries to dismiss the view of *swarga nunut neraka katut* labeled on women, especially Javanese women.

Siti Aminah's obsession with gender equality is also shown through the character Narumi. Narumi is shown as a character who has the character of feeling the most powerful and difficult to give in. Giving these characters is intended to display actions that refer to forms of gender equality in the form of helping to earn a living for the family.

Siti Aminah's obsession with Narumi's character is her opposition to the notion that the wife's fate depends on the husband. Through the form of gender equality displayed through Narumi's character, Siti Aminah expressed her view that women are also not merely a means of reproduction. That women are able to work in the public domain and are not weak creatures.

Siti Aminah's obsession through the character Narumi, is also realized again or perhaps strengthened, through the character Sartinah. Through giving a loving and self-sacrificing character, Siti Aminah displays Sartinah's actions that refer to a form of gender equality in the form of being tough as a single parent. Through the character of Sartinah, Siti Aminah wants to state that besides not being a weak creature, women are also able to determine their own destiny. Women do not need to depend on help from men. She can be independent.

Furthermore, Siti Aminah's view that women are not weak creatures is also conveyed through the character Sipon. Sipon in the novel is described as a character who has a hard character and thinks more about personal interests. These two characters refer to the actions of Sipon's character who displays forms of gender equality in the form of helping to make a living for the family, and being tough as a single parent.

The author's view realized through the character Sipon in this case is the same as the author's view realized through the characters Narumi, and Sartinah. Through the character Sipon, Siti Aminah wants to state that women are able to work in the public sphere, and with this ability women are able to be independent and not depend on men.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Siti Aminah's novel *Singkar* is a critical reflection on the patriarchal construction in Javanese society through the idea of gender equality. Female characters such as Nani, Narumi, Sartinah, and Sipon, are portrayed as being able to take on non-traditional roles and contribute equally in various aspects of life.

Nani, for example, demonstrates women's resilience in difficult situations, while Sipon highlights women's economic contribution to the family. The novel challenges traditional views that demean women and offers an alternative perspective on their roles and standing. As such, *Singkar* is not only a social

critique, but also an invitation to consider gender equality as a necessity in society.

FURTHER STUDY

Further research can delve deeper into gender representation in this novel, either through comparative studies with other works, critical discourse analysis, reader reception studies, cross-cultural comparisons, literary psychology analysis, male character studies, as well as historical and social context analysis.

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