

A Discourse of the Female Body in an Ancient Sundanese Literary Work of *Lutung Kasarung*: An Eco-Feminist Approach

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ABSTRACT: *This research investigates Sundanese narrative poems in "Lutung Kasarung" (LK) with an eco-feminist theory. This research draws upon an analytical descriptive method of literary research with a data collection method and a feminist text analysis. The data sources were two texts of narrative poems of LK which had been converted into a story by Ahmad Bakri (1976) and documents from an oral story which had been rewritten by C.M. Pleyte (1910). This study reveals that: (1) there was an event that underlied the representation of the female body, there was a discourse that explored the female body, and the characters presented were related and formed an event in the social reality of the Kingdom of Pasirbatang; (2) a denial of Carolyn Merchant's theory, particularly in the context of women and ecology as well as as of women and reproduction. The denial was represented by the character of Purba Rarang; and (3) there was injustice towards female characters, although it was hidden beneath the writer's worship to women.*

KEY WORDS: *Eco-feminist, a discourse of the female body, poem of "Lutung Kasarung", and Sundanese society.*

INTRODUCTION

The narrative poem (*cerita pantun*) is a form of Sundanese ancient literary work (Wibisana *et al.*, 2000). The most popular narrative poem among Sundanese society is *Lutung Kasarung* (LK). In this story, the central protagonist characters is Purba Sari, the youngest daughter of the Pasirbatang King, named Anu Girang; whereas the central antagonist

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character is Purba Rarang, a very important character that turns out to balance the power of the main character who was believed to hold ideal truths.

Female characters in these narrative poems became the main character, supporting characters, additional characters, and the center of the plotting. There was a problem, though, with an apparently exploitation of the female body of the female characters. These acts of exploitation can be interpreted in terms of their relations with nature that shows a degree of involvement on the part of women and the whole ecosystem. This involvement shows the importance of female characters in the interactive system between man and nature. Thus these narrative poems were then examined with an eco-feminist perspective.

This research has revealed: (1) the representation of the body of female characters in the narrative poems of *LK* in the social discourse of the people of the Kingdom of Pasirbatang; (2) the interpretation of the discourse of female characters in *LK* in terms of the relations between man and nature which are framed with Carolyn Merchant's four aspects: ecology, production, reproduction, and consciousness; and (3) injustice towards female characters despite the hidden wrap of glorification of them.

The purposes of this research are both theoretical and practical.¹ The theoretical dimension of the research is to make use of the feminist theory to respond to the problems brought up by describing and interpreting the relations between nature and female characters in the narrative poems of *LK*. The practical purpose of the research is to view nature and women in a fair manner to improve the quality of human life in the present and future.

With the research purposes, some benefits could be gained: (1) to yield knowledge and experience, particularly for women and for society in general, as for the discourse of the female body explored in such a way in ancient Sundanese literature; (2) to produce knowledge and experience for students and academics in interpreting Sundanese literary texts with the current perspective without ignoring the function of the text at its time; (3) to make a contribution to the development of women studies, both in the theoretical and practical dimensions; and (4) to make a contribution to the development of literary studies and human studies in the discussion and validation of the feminist theory as a new theory that is both insightful and dynamic.

¹This working paper is based on the 2008 Women's Study Research funded by Ditjen Dikti Depdiknas RI (*Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, Departemen Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia* or Directorate General of Higher Education, Ministry of National Education, the Republic of Indonesia).

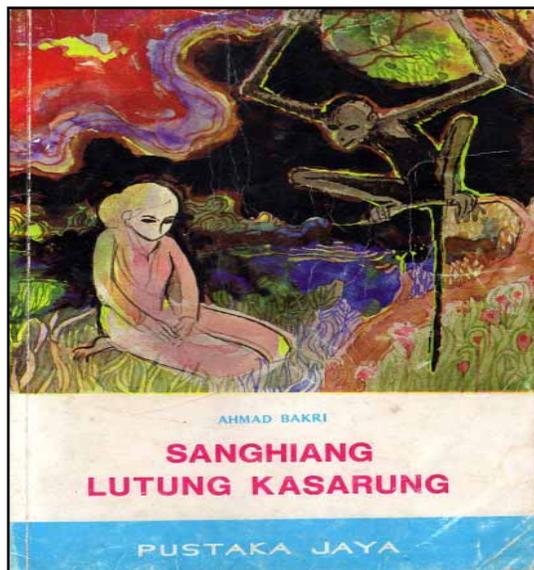
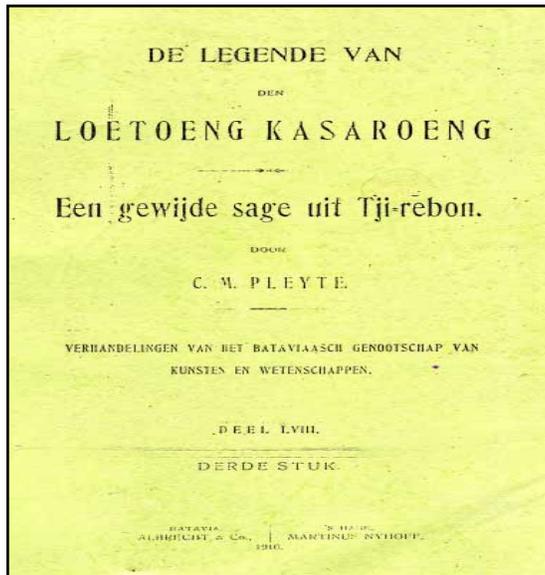
The research applies an analytical descriptive method with literary research. The analytical descriptive method, according to Bogdan and Taylor, is fully based on qualitative research, a research procedure based on descriptive data and produces descriptive data in the form of written words or spoken words that are written (cited by Moleong, 1995). A scientific method that is used in literary research is different from that used in other research in general. The steps that are generally used in the research are transferability methods (Chamamah Soeratno, 1994). It means that readers convert: transfer some possible texts and translate them to become interpretations that give meanings. This statement is in line with Ingarden that gives an important role to readers that have a duty to discover vague elements that function to form work as a unity (cited by Chamamah, 1994).

The research techniques used were a data collection technique and a feminist text analysis technique (Sukesni, 2001). The data collection techniques were data recorded activities based on material objects as the main source of data, namely the narrative poems entitled *Lutung Kasarung (LK)*. The data recording was geared to the content of the texts directly or indirectly that connected to text describing the body of the female characters. The feminist text analysis technique, at least, contains two important things that need to be comprehended before being discussed. Those things are: (1) this analysis is a process or an effort to interpret texts, to break codes and symbols resulting uncertain and non-standard things that are open to differences; and (2) the analysis has to express of the female political position in an effort to uncover patriarchal domination (Andriyani & Prabasmoro, 2000).

The text analyzed was assumed to contain a feminist perspective as stated by Sadli and Porter: (1) there is a tendency to the female side; (2) gender is an analysis tool; and (3) the research method that contains a feminist perspective (cited by Surtiati Hidayat, 2001). The text of the narrative poems entitled *LK* fulfilled those conditions.

The data source consisted of two narrative poems in *LK*. The first was transcribed by C.M. Pleyte (1910) entitled *De Legende van den Loetoeng Kasaroeng* and was published in Batavia (now Jakarta) by Albrecht & Co. and S. Hage Martinus Nyhoff. The second was transformed into a narrative text (legend) by Ahmad Bakri (1976) entitled *Sanghiang Lutung Kasarung* published in Jakarta by Pustaka Jaya.

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The instruments of the research were data cards that were used to trace data easier. In the card there were: (1) numbers, (2) story events, (3) discourse data on the body of the characters, and (4) names of characters. See, for example, as follows:

1. No:
2. Story event:
- 3 Data/discourse of the body:
4. Character's name:

LITERATURE REVIEW

On the Narrative Poem. This type of literary work had existed during the period of the Pajajaran Kingdom. This is evident in the manuscript of *Siksa Kandang Karesian*, whose date was 1518 or 1440 *Saka* or AJ (Anno Javanese). In the manuscript, four narrative poems were presented by a poetry teacher, namely: *Langgalarang*, *Banyakcatra*, *Siliwangi*, and *Haturwangi*.

Lutung Kasarung is one of the most popular narrative poems among Sundanese society. A great number of interpretations have been produced as for the meaning of these narrative poems. In addition, transformations of these narrative poems into other genres have been produced such as legend, drama, poetry, film, and short stories.

In the academic sphere, in the 21st century, Sobar Hartini (2002) examined the legend of *Lutung Kasarung* with Levi-Strauss' structuralist theory on "poetic wisdom" that was investigated through the relations of ecology-feminism. By comparing the text of the narrative poems of *LK* transcribed by C.M. Pleyte and that of the legend of *Purba Sari Ayu Wangi* by Ayip Rosidi, Sobar Hartini concluded that: (1) *LK* failed to present the "poetic wisdom" that is typically feminine. In addition, according to Sobar Hartini; (2) the feminine aspect of *Purbasari* took her to transcend with nature; (3) the spiritual degree of *Purbasari* was higher than that of *Lutung Kasarung*; (4) the feminine aspect had a respected place in the entirety of the story; and (5) ecological wisdom emerged in this female character (Hartini, 2002).

One of the examinations of the narrative poems of *LK* that was considered to be current was a hermeneutic work conducted by Jacob Sumardjo (2003) with a diachronic and synchronic approach. Diachronically, Jacob Sumardjo attempted to interpret the thinking framework of Sundanese people in the poetic period and to comprehend their transformational journey; while synchronically, it was the old values that were still alive up to the present.

In his conclusion, Jacob Sumardjo (2003:173) stated that the narrative poems of *LK* is contrary to the Sundanese cosmology in general, that is

women as the image of the Upper World and men as the image of the Lower World. These narrative poems, in fact, depicted the Upper World with a male basis (*Guru Minda Kahiang* / *Lutung Kasarung*) that married the Human World with a female basis (*Purba Sari*).

On the Women in Ancient Sundanese Literature. Women as characters, in the ancient Sundanese world, had a primary level. Due to this primary position, male characters only emerge as a complementary component to support the honor and glory of female characters (Isnendes, 2004). Women are praised and believed to give energy, mothers of gods that give life and create, and the symbol of caring and loving in the universe. Women with such depiction are reflected in literary works, particularly in narrative poems that later became the hypogram of both classical and modern literary works.

The female characters in ancient Sundanese literary works are represented by *Sunan Ambu* (the master of life that is always present in every narrative poem), the *Pohaci* (lady-in-waitings who served *Sunan Ambu*), *Purba Sari* and *Purba Rarang* (the main character in the narrative poems of *Lutung Kasarung*), *Dayang Sumbi* (the main character in the legend of *Sangkuriang* or *Tangkuban Parahu*), or *Dewi Asri* (the main supporting character in the narrative poems of *Mundinglaya di Kusumah*).

In the context of the current trend of feminism, particularly that which rests upon eco-feminism, it is certain that ancient Sundanese works contain feminist values. By focusing on women as the center, female characters turn out to dominate life and exist in life. Women have become their own entity, and have even surpassed men.

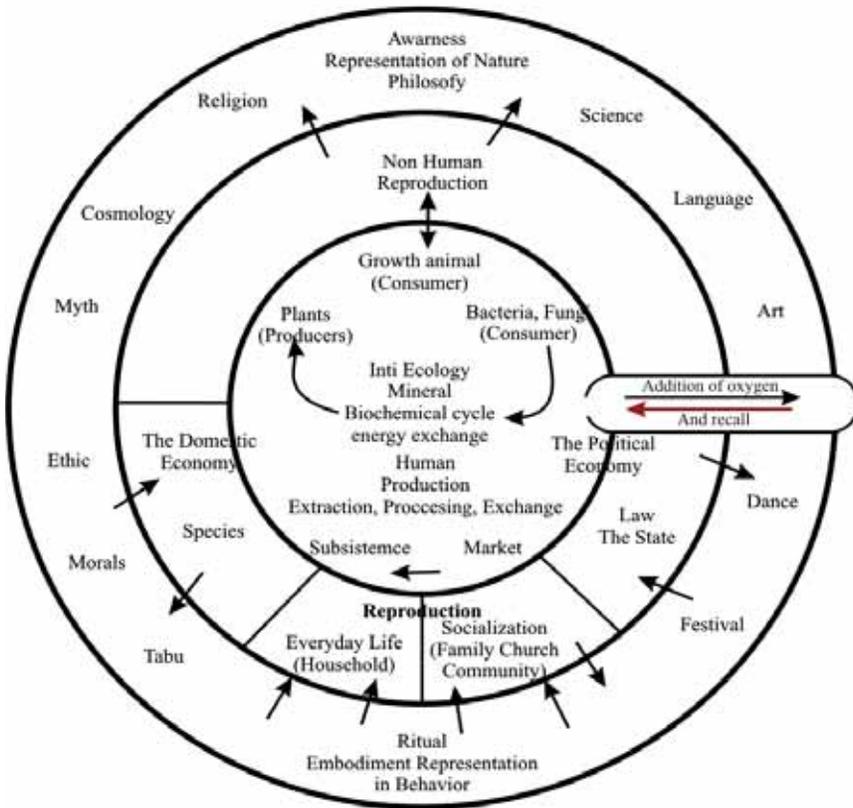
On the Eco-Feminism. The interconnection between praising and insulting of women is in fact interesting to explore with a women's perspective that is related to ecology (nature and environment) or eco-feminism. The term of "eco-feminism" has been formed by the words *ecology* dan *feminism*. According to Swallow, ecology is a study of interconnections between human life and the environment (cited by Humm, 2002:123). Because women are most of the time related to nature, conceptually, symbolically, and linguistically there is a relation between the feminist issue and ecology.

An eco-feminist, Karen J. Warren, argues that a society is established by values, beliefs, education, and behavior that uses a patriarchal framework, where there is a justification of the domination and subordination relationship; injustice that is created by men for women. Karen J. Warren is confident that the type of male thinking emphasizes hierarchy, duality, logic, and domination (cited by Arivia, 2003). For example, the structure

of arguments that justifies subordination belongs to male thinking which has threatened the safety of nature and anature; or when women are denaturalized and nature defeminized, for which Jacob Sumardjo uses the terms "hierarchy" and "duality" (Abu Syuqqah, 1999; Arivia, 2003; and Sumardjo, 2003).

Another eco-feminist, Carolyn Merchant, emphasized four important aspects that are interrelated, namely: (1) ecology, (2) production, (3) reproduction, and (4) consciousness. In the scheme, Carolyn Merchant describes the system of interactions of women's roles to become important (cited by Arivia, 2003; and Isnendes, 2004). Here is Carolyn Merchant's chart:

CAROLYN MERCHANT'S CHART



On the Repression of Women in Ecology. The eco-feminist approach varies but from the differences, the ecofeminist thinking moves toward the surrounding circle whether the association between women and nature must be emphasized, eliminated, or re-constructed. Thus, although the approaches vary, these variations meet in a centralized idea that is "liberation" of women in accordance with liberation of nature (Showalter, 1985; and Hellwig, 2003). This idea which was first spawned by Ruether was elaborated by d'Eaubonne who said that there is a direct relationship between oppression to nature and oppression to women, and liberation of one side will not succeed without liberation of the other (cited by Andriyani & Priyatna Prabasmoro, 2000).

Discussing eco-feminism means discussing unfairness in the society toward women. Unfairness or injustice starts with the concept of unfairness toward nature. The focus of the discourse of environment and women does not lie on the proximity between women and the environment, but on the culture of women and nature as a model that outweighs that of men and the environment. It signifies that the tradition and values of women are considered to be better so that a good environmental model should adopt feminist values in general. According to Griffin, women are the ones that give birth so they know what life means (cited by Mufidah, 2003).

There are three markers of eco-feminist thought that link between females and nature. Those are: (1) imanence, the power coming from the inside that impedes the willingness to conquer someone and/or something; (2) the interconnection that is the connection between the body and mind/ thought that unite to become one, for example, one needs not only to take care of his body hygiene but also his spritual hygiene; and (3) the ways of life that are full of care, love of each other, and maintain each other's feelings, which, in the narrative poem entitled *LK*, are both strengthened and ignored at the same time. Those powers have to be deconstructed to defend and balance the power of patriachal culture that is considered to damage the balance of nature and women (Fakih, 1999; Ghozali *et al.*, 2002; and Suryani N.S. *et al.*, 2002).

RESULTS OF THE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

Having read the text, there were 56 data discovered from the two texts analyzed. The first text was the legend of *Sanghiang Lutung Kasarung* by Ahmad Bakri (AB) and *De Legende van den Loetoeng Kasaroeng* that was rewritten by C.M. Pleyte (CMP). From the text written by AB, there were 33 data found. Meanwhile, from CMP's work, there were 23 data gathered (see the comparison of the story events).

A Comparison of the Stories of *LK* by AB and *LK* by CMP

Legend Text of *LK* by AB (33 events):

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

Legend Text of *LK* by CMP (23 events):

0 1 2 9 10 11 12 13 15 16 17 19 20 21 22 23 25 27 28 29 30 31 32

Considering those three discussions about the text containing the body of women characters in the narrative poems entitled *Lutung Kasarung (LK)*, the results of the discussions show that:

First, in the discussion of the female body, it was depicted that: (1) the events in the text of CPM were almost similar to those in AB's work. The plots moved forward but the events on the female body were represented in different elaborations; (2) the concept of body that was explored, presented, and told referred to the female body in its entirety which was contextual with the story and not independent as a separate body. As many as 14 story events were discovered in the discourse of the female body; and (3) characters in *LK* were those that were presented in a story that experienced events and had attitude, character, emotion, and principles. The main protagonist character was Purba Sari and the main antagonist character was Purba Rarang. Two brothers who were very contradictory in terms of their character and characteristics.

Second, in the discussion of the discourse of the female body in its relation between people and nature framed by Carolyn Merchant's four important aspects: ecology, production, reproduction, and consciousness: (1) women and ecology, in the narrative poems of *LK* there were both conformity and contradiction found with the theory that women were always in harmony with nature. The type of female character in harmony with nature was represented by Purba Sari and the type that conflicted with nature was Purba Rarang, that was against ecological harmony; (2) women and productivity, the women of the Pasirbatang Kingdom participated, determined, and actively produced and consumed products, particularly in food, clothing, make-up, with their houses and equipments being simple, using handicrafts, and simple technology; (3) women and reproduction, the relation between people and people were important. This was discernible in their important daily roles as well as in the kingdom affairs, as a form of socialization and community created by people; and (4) women and awareness, there were awareness values of the "other" world as a reference of people's power. This world is called Sundanese

cosmology, consisting of principles of loving one another, respecting one another, taboo, and worthiness. The etiquette for processing rice reflects the culture of dry rice farming or *pahumaan*.

Third, in the discussion of injustice toward women by the ambitious view of men, unjust practices took the form of: (1) sidelining, (2) subordination, (3) stereotyping, (4) violence, and (5) workload burdened on Purba Sari by Purba Rarang. This injustice was not discernible at a glance because it was wrapped in the glorification of behavior, Purba Sari's professional success in overcoming her problems, and the victory at the last part of the story.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The conclusion of the discussion in the presentation of women characters in the texts of the narrative poems entitled *Lutung Kasarung* (*LK*) in reality constitutes the discourse of the society of the Pasirbatang Kingdom, that is, there are story events as a presentation background of women characters. In other words, there are some discourse acts showing exploitations of the body of women characters. Meanwhile, the characters themselves were those who were presented interconnectedly and moved to form events in social reality in the Pasirbatang Kingdom.

The results of the interpretation about the discourse of the body of women characters in the texts of the narrative poems entitled *LK*, in relation to man and nature framed by Carolyn Merchant's four important aspects, namely: ecology, production, reproduction, and consciousness both validated and falsified. The theory was mostly falsified in terms of the relation between women and ecology. Purba Rarang explicitly opposed the balance of ecology. In spite of the fact that Purba Rarang was the *de facto* queen who was supposed to nurture her people and the nature of the kingdom, she carelessly exploited the natural resources of her kingdom. In addition, based on Carolyn Merchant theory, this fact denies the connection between women and reproduction. Purba Rarang as the first daughter was not simultaneously chosen as the queen by her own father. Her not "being selectedness" as the queen of the Pasirbatang Kingdom was not because of her being "oldest" and "youngest" child, it was merely due to her not being "well mannered" in characters; thus she was not suitable to be chosen as the queen of the Kingdom.

It was validated that there existed the phenomenon of injustice toward female characters despite its being wrapped in glorification of them. The acts of injustice took the form of: (1) sidelining, (2) subordination, (3) stereotyping, (4) violence, and (5) the workload burdened on Purba Sari by her older brother, Purba Rarang. In fact, there emerged reactions that

represented Purba Sari as noble, successful in solving problems, and appeared as winner at the end of the story, but injustice occurred on her and she turned out to suffer heavily due to the unfairness.

Three markers of eco-feminist thought that link between females and nature are: (1) imanence, the power coming from the inside that impedes the willingness to conquer someone and/or something; (2) the interconnection that is the connection between the body and mind/thought that unite to become one, for example, one needs not only to take care of his body hygiene but also his spritual hygiene; and (3) the ways of life that are full of care, love of each other, and maintain each other's feelings, which, in the narrative poem entitled *LK*, are both strengthened and ignored at the same time. Those three markers are strengthened by the character of Purba Sari and ignored by the character of Purba Rarang.

The suggestions given in the data collection are: (1) the research instruments were not sufficient to use only one card, it needed to add some cards based on the problems discovered in the data collection; and (2) in the data collection, the possibility of data addition was a must. The researcher had to be consistent in controlling the data addition in order not to be overloaded due to the limitation of time of the research.

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