

# Blurry Feminism in *Tarian Bumi* Novel Written by Oka Rusmini

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**Abstract.** The *Tarian Bumi* (Earth Dance) novel carries a rebellion against traditions that exist in Bali, in which a woman from the Brahmin caste must marry a man who is of equal status. Through the figure of Telaga, Oka Rusmini presents a rebellion against the system. However, these rebellions went through a long process and were blocked by other female figures. The female characters are presented to oppress each other.

**Keywords:** feminism, *Tarian Bumi* novel

## INTRODUCTION

Up to this point, people are more familiar with the *Tarian Bumi* novel as a novel that carries the big theme of the struggle for equality between men and women without being entangled by the class system (caste). The struggle that was incarnated by Oka Rusmini through the character of Ida Ayu Telaga has given the impression in the minds of readers that this novel is thick with the rebellions carried out by Telaga against the environment that imprisoned her from the choices she wanted. In this case, Dayu Telaga is positioned as a heroine for the old-fashioned customary system that binds women's rights by breaking through the system itself through her marriage with Wayan Sasmita.

Perhaps starting from there, the reader thinks that this novel is thick with the power of expressing a woman's struggle for the life she has chosen. In other words, readers call it a feminist novel that is thick with the struggle for equality between men and women. However, if we read this novel carefully, there are inconsistencies regarding the feminist discourse that can be found by the reader or observer. Feminist discourse is considered as equality between men and women regardless of gender, position or social status, but in this novel it seems that in order to achieve this position of equality, there are events that hurt each other between the female characters presented by Oka Rusmini in the novel that has received an award from this Bhasa Center. Is this discourse still relevant? Meanwhile, in the text of the *Tarian Bumi* novel itself, there are many events that contradict the discourse carried in this novel. This short article will discuss this matter.

## DISCUSSION

*Tarian Bumi* novel tells the story of a Balinese woman of Brahmin descent whose life from a young age has been full of restraints by her family. The restraints imposed by her family are for the life of Telaga herself. However, Telaga refused all intervention by her family, especially from Jero Kenanga, her own mother. Telaga views that she has a different color to her life and is different from the color of her mother's life. Including in determining her life partner in the future. Her rebellion reached its peak by marrying Wayan Sasmita, a *sudra* male. Telaga was banished from her extended family. She must live among the sudras.

Her life among the sudras was full of concern and satire. Especially when Wayan Sasmita was found dead in his painting studio. Gumbreg, her mother-in-law, thinks that Telaga is bad luck in her family. Gumbreg asked her to perform the *patiwangi* ceremony, a caste release ceremony at the *merajan* (temple) of her ancestors. Telaga is ready to carry out the ceremony.

In this novel, the characters presented by the author are mostly women, both from Brahmins and Sudras. More than half of the stories tell about female characters who are not only persecuted by the system but also by the actions of other women. In fact, the women in the *Tarian Bumi* novel actually oppress each other. The first started from the desire of Sagra Pidada who wanted a daughter-in-law from a Brahmin family for her son Ida Bagus

Ngurah Pidada. Nonetheless, her son brought a sudra woman into the griya family who works as a dancer named Luh Sekar. The oppression starts here. Pay attention to this quote.

"You can never give happiness to my son, Kenanga!"  
Grandma's voice sounded bitter and very piercing. The mother was just mute while swallowing her tears deeply.

The senior woman never stopped cursing the mother. Harsh words and swearing that have no clear meaning always slide regularly from her old lips which always look red (Rusmini, 2007: 13).

When she became part of the large family of the house, Jero Kenanga seemed to act as a genuine noble. She treats her son, Dayu Telaga, in an authoritarian manner. Starting from trivial things such as choosing clothes to matchmaking. Even when Telaga married Wayan Sasmitha, Jero Kenanga broke off relations with Telaga. Even when Telaga came back to the griya for the *patiwangi* ceremony, Jero Kenanga did not want to see her daughter. She pretended that her daughter was already dead.

"I have not had a child for a long time, oh my God. She is already dead!" "Kenanga!"  
"My daughter is dead. She can't come back again." (Rusmini: 2007: 168)

When living among the sudras, Telaga was very miserable. She did not only get satire from the sudras themselves. But also from her new family, namely the Wayan family. Especially from Luh Sadri, Wayan's younger sister. She was jealous because Telaga has everything: beauty, honor, and wealth. Even after Wayan Samitha died, she slandered Telaga as a jinx in her family. Even Gumbreg was influenced by her words to ask Telaga to hold a *patiwangi* ceremony at the *merajan* of her ancestors. She believed in the myth that marrying a brahmin woman would have bad luck. Because of that, she treated Telaga with less respect in her family. Especially after Wayan Sasmitha was found dead suddenly in his painting studio.

Additional characters that are also presented by the author are Luh Dampar. She is a dancer who hates other dancers, namely Luh Kambren. She acted this bad deed by hiding Luh Kambren's fan when they were about to dance together. In addition, the figures of Luh Kerta and Luh Kerti were also presented. They are both Luh Sekar's younger siblings. However, her younger sister was the result of a criminal act of rape committed by someone against her mother, Luh Dalem. It is depicted that Luh Kerta and Luh Kerti have bad characters because they often give Sekar trouble, such as stealing her jewelry, or borrowing her clothes without permission. Even when Sekar became Jero Kenanga, they also liked to quip. Even having an affair with her husband, Ngurah Pidada.

Associated with the theory of feminism that emerged along with the rise of awareness that as human beings, women should also have the same rights as men. This theory developed as a reaction to the facts that occur in society, namely the existence of class conflicts, racial conflicts, and, especially, gender conflicts. Feminism tries to deconstruct a system that gives rise to a dominating and dominated group, as well as a hegemonic system in which subordinate groups are forced to accept the values set by the ruling group. Feminism tries to eliminate the conflict between a weak group and a group that is considered stronger. Furthermore, feminism rejects injustice as a result of patriarchal society, rejects history and philosophy as male-centered disciplines (Ratna, 2004: 186).

While feminism does not only question gender issues, but also between groups in power and control, in *Tarian Bumi* novel, there are indeed several events that raise questions about these issues, but to a lesser extent. Only a few events that present the patriarchal culture. At that time Ngurah Pidada was described as a drunken man who liked to play with women. Or when Gumbreg told about a man who did not dare to marry her because she was a Brahmin woman and when Luh Sadri asked Gumbreg for an inheritance. But she flatly refused. The author insinuates, through the Gumbreg character, about men who are not responsible as husbands. Note the following quote.

"Now, *meme* (mother) has a son-in-law like Sarma. What kind of man is that? Poor, but not willing to work hard. Stubborn, with too much self-respect, he does not even understand what responsibility is!"  
(Rusmini, 2007: 162)

Only a few of Oka Rusmini's novels describe her satire against men. The rest of this novel tells about the oppression of a system that imprisons women within the system itself. However, the imprisonment was carried out not only by male characters but mostly by female characters. From Sagra Pidada who strongly adheres to her nobility. Even when she got Jero Kenanga as her daughter-in-law who came from a sudra, her determination to

shine with her nobility grew even stronger. Her daughter-in-law was forbidden to take her own grandson to the house of Luh Dalem, Jero Kenanga's mother. Even when Luh Dalem died, Jero Kenanga was forbidden to touch her mother's corpse! Because: she has become part of the *griya* (noble) family. Surprisingly, even if she is already part of the *griya* family, she is still prohibited from using the same food container as her child, and even forbidden to give leftovers from her food.

The orthodoxy of the system adopted by her husband's family made Jero Kenanga act like a genuine noblewoman and even "feel more noble than the real nobility" (Rusmini, 2007: 72). She began to manage Telaga. Choose a man for her. This is what made Telaga rebel by marrying Wayan Sasmitha, a sudra man. She was expelled from the home family and lived among the sudras. Even in those circles, she was treated disappointingly by her in-laws and sister-in-law who were fellow women!

When a work is written by an author, of course there is already a theme that is carried to be conveyed to the reader. Indeed, in this case, the *Tarian Bumi* novel brings up a rebellion against the orthodox system that exists in Bali, in which a woman from the Brahmin caste must marry a man of equal status. Through the figure of Telaga, Oka Rusmini presents a rebellion against the system. However, these rebellions went through a long process and were blocked by other female figures. The female characters are presented to cover the struggle of Telaga itself. In fact, it seems that fellow female characters hurt each other. As described in the article above. Why don't the female characters support each other to break down the orthodox class (caste) system? In this case, Oka Rusmini further strengthens the system itself with Telaga's willingness to participate in the *patiwangi* ceremony at the end of the story.

## CONCLUSION

A novel that carries feminism certainly mandates that there will be equal status between men and women in social context. However, the feminist element of *Tarian Bumi* novel was met with opposition among the female characters created by Oka Rusmini in the novel itself. The female characters oppress each other so that the struggle for equality of position regardless of gender or class in this novel becomes blurry.

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