

A Portrayal of a Woman's Struggles And Self-Liberation in The Patriarchal System

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the gender inequality undergone by the female character, and her struggles to unchain herself from the unfairness she experienced in the short story *Apa yang Paul McCartney Bisikkan di Telinga Janitra*. In the era where equality between man and woman becomes a daily issue, there is still no guarantee that a woman will easily be treated as equal as man. Career can be a sign that a woman has reached the more or less the same level as man, but in many cases, many women are forced to give up their career to take care of their family as men call it as the nature of women to be housewives and mothers. Feminist literary criticism is applied to examine the short story to reveal how the character struggles to release herself when she is clung by domestic patriarchal strong practice done by her husband. The result of the analysis reveals that the female character in the short story discussed is still portrayed to be only half-completely succeed to attain her freedom and equity against patriarchal confines.

Keywords: feminist literary criticism, patriarchal system, struggle, unfairness

Introduction

Literature is often said as a mirror of society. It means literature often catches the daily events and retell it to society in a fiction. The case of Coronavirus diseases or COVID-19 pandemic (hereafter pandemic) that occurred between 2019 and 2021 has had psychological and social effects on human beings around the globe. It brought many impacts to human life, not only health and physical matters, but also economics, finance, and mental health. Apart from that, policies regarding cutting off employees in business caused social problems that strongly distress families' lives and relationships between the members. While mass media, both printed and digital, reported lots of troubles suffered by population, there are only a few literary works found picturing victims of the pandemic. The short story entitled *Apa yang Paul McCartney Bisikkan di Telinga Janitra* (What Did Paul McCartney Whisper to Janitra – free translation), employs the setting of the chaotic pandemic and portrays its impact on a woman who has a small family. The short story discussed was published in KOMPAS MINGGU on August 2, 2020 which was later selected and compiled in an anthology of short stories. "*Apa yang Paul McCartney Bisikkan di Telinga Janitra*" is one among 17 short stories selected by KOMPAS under the title *Cerpen Pilihan Kompas 2020*.

The short story entitled "*Apa yang Paul McCartney Bisikkan di Telinga Janitra*" tells a story of a married woman named Janitra. She got married to Gupta and they have a very young baby who is implicitly can be categorized as a child with special need. Janitra used to be the head of a science laboratory, but she has to leave her job no matter how much she likes it since her baby needs special attention, and her husband insists that as a mother it is her responsibility to take care of their only child, especially in this chaotic situation. Janitra has no option, but to give up her job though it offers her a promising prospect. Rising conflict

starts when during the pandemic outbreak, Gupta is assigned to work from home. He criticizes and complains almost about everything. Janitra's internal conflicts grow up as she has to take all the blames and critics from her husband. The problem gets worse when Gupta gets fired from his job. The hotel management where he works laid off many staff members including himself. Quarrelling and between husband and wife are inevitable. Gupta as a husband becomes economically handicap due to his being unemployment. He blames his wife of failing to be his support system in economic matter. Meanwhile, Janitra struggles hard to control 'a protective being' hidden within her that is trying to guard her from all outer irritation and aggravation. The only way Janitra learns to pacify the 'tiger-look creature' is by humming the song she is familiar with, the song sung by Paul McCartney: Let It Be, "When I find myself in times of trouble- Mother Mary comes to me- Speaking words of wisdom- Let it be" When finally, the pressure is unbearable and Janitra almost cannot control the "protective creature" within herself, she leaves her husband and baby, and hurts herself.

What had been experienced by Janitra might also be experienced by many people during the pandemic. It is believed that writers do not write from nothing, but mostly because of the influence of her/his surroundings. While printed newspapers, radios, and televisions report the real information and occurrence related to the pandemic, writers with their imagination depict the fictional portraits to articulate unexpressed thoughts and feelings for readers to enjoy in a different way they acquire from mass media. Through this literary work (read: short story) readers can view and analyze their life by parallelizing their life and real-life events in the literary works, like "Apa yang Paul McCartney Bisikkan di Telinga Janitra".

There are some researchers conducted an analysis on this short story. The first research was conducted by Fitriana (2023) who examined the discourse analysis in her undergraduate thesis entitled "*Bahasa Pemberontakan dalam Cerpen Apa yang Paul McCartney Bisikkan di Telinga Janitra?: Analisis Wacana Kritis Sara Mills*". Another study was carried out by Sofyaningrum and Tyas (2024) analyzing the figurative languages used in their article "*Melodi Kiasan: Pengungkapan Dampak Wabah Pandemi dalam Cerpen Apa yang Paul Mccartney Bisikkan di Telinga Janitra?*". Different from those two discussions, this article has a different niche and argument as it will scrutinize the short story using the lens of feminist literary criticism in order to reveal the patriarchal unfair treatments towards the female character.

The aim of this paper is to critically examine the depiction of the female character in the short story "*Apa yang Paul McCartney Bisikkan di Telinga Janitra?*" whether she resists all the domestic pressures suffered or just let them happen upon her in. It is interesting to learn that even in the millennial era, gender inequality still occurs as a common practice in a patriarchal society (Aveling, 2003). This is a fact that in a patriarchal society, women still be treated unfairly no matter how highly educated and modern she is. The domination of gender inequality exposed has been a long issue since decades ago. This fact must be read and learned by readers to open their horizons and lend a hand to make improvements and promote equality between women and men.

Method

This descriptive qualitative research is done by analyzing the content. Data is mainly taken from the text. Analysis is focused on the female character (Janitra), the male character Gupta (Janitra's husband), their arguments and emotions revealed, and other evidence to support finding how the patriarchal system still greatly influences male-female relationship even in modern life and indicates one-sidedness. Even though Janitra is the focus of research,

investigation of the other character (Gupta, the husband) is also crucial for building up a thorough and clear concept of how in the short story the author puts her ideas about the ways Janitra unshackles herself from the pressures.

Feminist literary criticism is well applied to analyse how the female character (Janitra) is portrayed in the short story when she encounters problems which are strongly impelled by patriarchy. Culler (1983) stated that feminist literary criticism is reading as women, meanings that readers must be aware of important differences in interpreting a literary work among people of different sexes as when they analyze the same short story or novel, men might have different understanding and judgment from women. In addition, Guo (2018) pointed out feminist literary criticism does not mean merely woman critics, woman criticism nor criticism on woman writers, but relatively implies that readers must have awareness when they read literary work. Readers must be conscious of the relationship between sex, culture, literature, and life in general as it creates differences in the interpretation. Feminist literary criticism emphasizes on uncovering literary work containing the practice of the patriarchal system which continually constructs gender inequality that positions women in disadvantages (Tyson, 2006).

As far as feminist literary criticism is concerned, one of the significant key terms is patriarchy. Patriarchy, which according to Eisenstein is “*an ideology hammer at destroying woman’s consciousness about her potential power*”, derives from the necessity of society to reproduce itself (Eisenstein, 1981). As it has mentioned, Janitra encounters problems which are deeply rooted in a patriarchal system. Patriarchy can be understood as a social system which place men above women as they are leaders who are central of property, seize leading roles of moral authority, main dignitaries who are vital to social organization and principals that hold authority over women and children in household. Despite her position as a modern, educated woman and a wife in a patriarchal society, especially during a hard time (the pandemic), the short story magnifies Janitra’s incapability to express her thoughts, her emotion, and her voice. There are two ways observed from the text which describe how Janitra controls her emotion and Janitra acts in response of the bullies and pressures. There are three symbols used by the author to portray Janitra’s self-defence mechanism against pressure, and another way is by humming Paul McCartney’ song entitled *Let It Be*.

Findings and Discussion

In patriarchal societies, a married woman tends to be considered as ‘one that belongs to her husband.’ It is in line with the four out of five types of gender inequality as stated by Fakhri (2013) which are marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, and violence. The application of these four types lead to inequality between a man a woman. The inequality found in the text will be discussed as follows.

The practice of patriarchy in Javanese society has some aspects, which start with gender construction. The tradition and culture have constructed an ideal both for woman and man. The general concept of men and women, women are known to be gentle, beautiful, and emotional, while men are known to be strong, rational, valiant and courageous. From the construction of the society about characteristics of men and women above, the issue of hierarchy arises. Due to the characteristics of women that are thought to be weaker than men, generally women are considered to be second to men, less refined, less spiritual, less potent, more spontaneous, more emotional, and thus less deserving of prestige (Mulder, 2005).

In many cultures, including in many parts of Indonesia, marriage indeed places men in a more beneficial, higher, and dominant position (Prabasmoro, 2006). Kate Millet in Prabasmoro stated that marriage or family is the main patriarchal instrument which rules the

behavior and attitude of the cultural members so the maintaining of the patriarchal ideology happened (Prabasmoro, 2006).

The short story does not mention the ethnic background of Janitra and Gupta. However, it strongly reflects the ambience of patriarchy. Despite her high education, when Janitra is married and has a young baby, frequently she must obey what her husband tells her to do as if she can't make her own decisions. Subordinations undergone by Janitra are among others serving coffee, keeping the baby quiet, looking after her baby, taking care of the house chores, and then leaving her job as Gupta directed so. Those are what Janitra has undergone in her life. Previously, she had to resign from her job due to her baby's condition, which needs special attention. The problem arises when Gupta is being laid off by the hotel in which he works due to pandemic. Yet, when her husband finally lost his job, he blamed Janitra for why she left her job. On the one hand, she is made to quit her job, but on the other hand she is blamed for not being able to financially support the family. The argument between husband and wife is as the following:

"Sial! Direksi mengumumkan tak mampu lagi membayar gaji karyawan!"

"Kita masih punya tabungan, bukan?"

"Paling hanya bisa bertahan untuk satu bulan. Sial! Harusnya kau tak berhenti dari pekerjaan itu! Kalau begini, kita tak mungkin bisa bertahan!" Gupta menutup laptopnya dengan kasar. (Gotama, 2020, p. 83)

The above conversation between Janitra and her husband, Gupta, shows how Gupta blames his wife for leaving her job. He does not have the courage to acknowledge that probably the main reason for him being permanently laid off is due to his weak position in his work. The following argument will explain more.

"Aku berhenti atas permintaanmu."

"Aku tak pernah menyuruhmu berhenti. Aku hanya mengatakan, Nara butuh perhatian. Kau bisa menyisihkan waktu lebih banyak di rumah. Bukannya lembur dengan tikus-tikus putih itu! Kalau kau ingin Nara bisa bicara, harusnya kau lebih sering bersamanya!"

"Di lab, aku punya tanggung jawab. Aku tak bisa terus-terusan izin atau pulang lebih awal."

"Nara tanggung jawabmu! Kau ibunya!" (Gotama, 2020, p. 83)

Janitra mentions that she has a responsibility in the lab. It indicates that in contrast to Gupta, she has a potential position. As a husband with a strong influence of patriarchal ideology, Gupta insists that Janitra is Nara's mother and it is her responsibility to take care the baby. He puts the responsibility on Janitra's hands. It refers to the stereotype of what societies construct about women: they must be the ones who are responsible with the kids and their nurturing.

There is concept in feminism that women have equal rights, meaning women obtain equal rights both by sex and gender. Conceiving and giving birth are the nature of women, but nurturing is not a necessity and obligation solely for women, because both parties are supposed to share parental responsibilities.

The way Gupta blames Janitra for quitting her job by emphasizing that *"I didn't say you have to leave it. But Nara needs attention, and you're the mother who is supposed to spend more time with her/him"* is a sneaky way to justify himself. As a husband, he

irresponsibly does not want to bear the risk of what he said. In other words, the decision of leaving the job and its consequences for having financial problems are Janitra's faults.

Janitra's life has been shackled since her baby was born. The subjugation has just intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing her into sharp inner conflict. She, who is implicitly educated and has a career, must remain submissive to what her husband commands. Patriarchy is a social structure in which men are considered as having higher position and having more power than women. Knauss (1987) emphasizes that patriarchal society uses certain facts that male and female as the basis for constructing a set of masculine and feminine gender identities and behaviours that serve to empower men and disempower women. In Janitra's case, she is being disempowered by her husband and indirectly pushed to leave her job. Yet, Gupta states that he doesn't say so, even he blames Janitra for doing it. The deep and ingrained strong influence of patriarchal concept that Janitra's figure is depicted as an obedient wife, always gives in and obeys what her husband says, always follows what her husband instructs even though it is against her own will.

In "*Apa yang Dibisikkan Paul McCartney di Telinga Janitra*" the conflicts illustrated are between Janitra and her husband, Gupta. Apart from those external conflicts, readers also find out internal conflicts within Janitra.

Another conflict is when Gupta yelled to Janitra to stop singing because her voice disturbs Gupta. This prohibition could have been done in a tender way, but, in fact, Gupta treats Janitra as his subordinate, not as a wife. The depiction in the short story indicates how deeply rooted patriarchal concepts are between the wife and husband.

"*Apa yang dibisikkan Paul McCartney di Telinga Janitra*" is a very strong reflection of what is understood about the patriarchal system, which is a system that can be found in almost all over the world. Bashin and Said Khan (1995) stated that patriarchy is derived from patriarch, which means the authority of father. In the relation with the social system, it is where the father has authority over all his family members, all wealth and economic resources, and makes all decisions. The social system should be under man's power and women are part of man's belonging.

The next conflict is when Gupta complained about their baby son. The special needs baby utters in an unrecognizable language. "*Aku ada pertemuan daring penting dengan manajemen. Tolong buat kopi. Dan jaga Nara supaya enggak ribut!*" (Gotama, 2020, p. 82). From these lines, it proves that Gupta considers himself as the patriarch of the family: the center of power, and treats his wife inappropriately and at the same time imposes responsibility as a father to his wife. The role as patriarch to the subordinate one is strongly implemented.

As mentioned previously in the methodology section, there are two ways observed from the text which describe how Janitra attempts to react to the pressures. It is mentioned in the text that Janitra escapes from the arguments with her husband and cuts carrots into small pieces repeatedly. Another way is to hum a song "Let It Be" in order to lull and pacify the "creature within herself" to sleep so that it will not attack the people she loves.

Janitra's first self-escape is her action cutting carrots into small pieces repeatedly and mentioned several times which could be associated with her avenge against the control of the patriarchal system. The carrots can be assumed as manifestation of patriarchy's phallic domination (phallogentrism, a doctrine/belief on the phallus centre as the superiority of male sex) that shackles Janitra into certain restrictions. From this association an idea can be withdrawn: Janitra is aware that she cannot obtain equity, her life as a woman is still under the very strong control of male domination (her husband's) as a result of the strong influence of patriarchy. Her confrontation could only be done by her action, cutting the entire carrots repeatedly until they turn to small cubes. A carrot could be a phallic symbol that Janitra is

strongly willing to attack but she couldn't make it happen. Therefore, her emotional outlet is by cutting the carrot into small pieces. It is mentioned that whenever she does it she gets pleasure.

The second getaway for Janitra is actually harmful for herself as she has to strongly calm down herself in order to sooth the 'tiger-like creature' that is felt and materializes when she is intimidated, cornered and gets furious. Janitra often hums "Let It Be" a song by Paul McCartney she has known for quite a time.

In this piece of fictional writing, the author narrates how Janitra -as a woman grown up in a patriarchal society- is not supposed to express her anger openly, straightly, and rudely. Therefore, it is depicted that Janitra often hums a song "*Let It Be*" wherever she needs to calm down herself, and at the same time to calm "the creature" within herself. Due to the depiction that Janitra cannot channel her anger directly, a horrible creature was created to represent her. The author of this short story portrays the major female character (Janitra) as a woman deeply bound in a patriarchal system that she hesitates to take a strong action to liberate herself from the problems that gripped her (Umniyah, 2017).

The setting of the story is around 2020 (during the pandemic) in which equality between men and women is supposed to be one of the practices. However, women's subordination is still depicted in the story. Women's subordination can be understood as "a social situation in which women are forced to stay under the control of men". The fact that literature is a reflection of society, it indicates that a short story may be the contemplation of incidents that occur in our surroundings. Therefore, it can be assumed that "Apa yang Paul McCartney Bisikkan di Telinga Janitra" is also a mirror image of what really takes place. As far as the gender issue is being discussed, it always refers to male and female which is universally distinguished in social life. The gender-linked roles attributed to adult men and women typically are as wives and husbands and as mothers and fathers which are organized in marriage.

There must be a reason why the song was selected to be integrally built in the plot and especially stated in the title. When Janitra hums the song, it is known that she attempts hard to calm down the 'tiger-look creature' that she feels is about to jump out and attack whoever hurts her. This song is a kind of lullaby for the creature. One assumption can be drawn is the lyric which is repeatedly sung "let it be... let it be" is meant to function as a 'soothing magic' or 'mantra' for Janitra herself to control her emotion. It is mentioned that she loves her husband and baby, she does not want the wild creature to attack them. Therefore, no matter how hard it is, when Gupta hurts her, Janitra hums the song again and again to soften her hard feelings and at the same time to control the wild creature. She has to control the wild creature and at the same time she actually imprisoned herself in the circle of torment.

Discussing feminism is analogous with looking at an object from different directions that gives us different perspectives. Meanwhile, reading as a woman, this study hopes to find a defense for the female character (Janitra) who is under the husband's (Gupta) oppression. The short story leads to a description that the wild creature opens its eyes widely, the ears stand straight, so do its twin tails. *Janitra grips the knife tightly* (p. 87). Contrary to expectations, the study of this short story does not find gender equality. However, apart from minor rebellion which is limited to discourse. Janitra is not portrayed as a woman (wife) with strong revolt. Shackled by strong patriarchal confinement and influence, Janitra then is depicted to sacrifice herself for the people she loves. It is called the conventional depiction of an expected wife and mother should be.

The fact that Janitra is a modern highly educated woman is not significant enough to encourage her to liberate herself. She is somehow still confined to the patriarchal system.

Her action to leave Nara and Gupta is just a temporary leave in order to sooth the wild creature which awakes and ready to attack anyone messing her up. This kind of sacrifice is still often found in many Indonesian short stories in which females are the major characters.

Conclusion

Literature reflects societal life and issues, often drawing from real conditions. "Apa yang Dibisikkan oleh Paul McCartney di Telinga Janitra," set during the pandemic, depicts struggles like job loss and survival. The story shows a patriarchal household with Gupta dominating and Janitra subordinated, a typical patrilineal marriage portrayal. Feminist literary criticism examines women's roles in texts. This paper explores Janitra's struggle against patriarchal pressures. Can she liberate herself? The story mirrors real-life family chaos during the pandemic, highlighting the patriarchal system that enables male domination. Janitra is depicted as a "good woman" in a patriarchal society through a "wild creature" expressing her anger. This device suggests it's not Janitra herself but the creature acting out, still controlling her emotional expression. Despite her professional success, the story doesn't fully support women under patriarchal pressure. It restricts Janitra's emotional expression, portraying women as caring, obedient, and devoted, often at their own expense. Women's freedom and equity still face boundaries. Despite feminist movements and increased female education, women in patriarchal societies continue to face pressure and injustice, as represented in this story.

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