

Woman Religious Rights' Discrimination in King Mongkuts' Era: an Anthropology Research with Feminist Approach in Novel Anna and the King written by Elizabeth Hand

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to reveal women oppression by men which happened in Siam Palace. This condition makes the life aspects in Siam unbalanced, especially those related to religion. Siamese women have different rights in religion, where women got the lower right.

This study uses an anthropology and feminism approach, so this study will be more comprehensive. The result showed that there is treatment differentiation between men and women, especially in religious system.

I. INTRODUCTION

As we know that literature cannot be separated from the social life. Literature uses language as a media to improve their works in their social environment, because literature is one of the principal functions of language studies. According to Damono, literature as the social institution is using language as the media, and the language itself is as a social reality. So, from this interpretation, life is included in a relation between societies, person to person and a conflict which is usually

happens in the human's personal. However, the events which happened in peoples' personal are a reflection of human relation with other people and society. So, it is stated that literature cannot be separated from its relationship among writers, literature and society, because its affect each other. It is normal if there is a problem among the three elements collision. (Damono, 2003:1).

Furthermore, from these three elements formulated by Damono above, it appears that literature was born from such a long process that will

never be separated from the cultural phenomenon of the author. Literature is a name with specific reason is given to particular outcome in cultural environment. The result of the literature used in communication situations governed by a specific cultural environment, so the literatures' birth closely associated with the culture of particular society, while the literature is a part of the culture with its' own way.

One of the science branch than can help in analyzing literary works related with culture is anthropology. Anthropology is the study of human in society. Therefore, anthropology can be divided into physical anthropology and cultural anthropology, but the literarist mention it with anthropological literature. This relationship between literature and anthropology make the social events that occure in the social environment can be displayed easily, as well as gender issues.

Gender is one of the classical problems that always been discussed from the ancient time until now.

Whatever it takes, gender becomes the essential topic and still has its own attractive power which can makes people wondering to know how to solve the problems about gender. For all that reasons, the problem will never been done to discussed, as long as the difference between woman and man still exists in this world.

There are lots of literary discourse related with the gender issues and it makes the gender increasingly favored by the readers, especially female readers. It happens because women who are the main person which discussed in relation with the gender inequality. One of the novel that tells the story of gender is *Anna and the King*, written by Elizabeth Hand.

Anna and the King, as a result of womens' literature has the characteristics of a strong patriarchal culture. At the beginning of the writing, the work was written by Margaret Landon, entitled *Anna and the King of Siam* (1944) which is based on the diary of Anna Leonowens in her book *Romance of Harem*. After time, in 1999, the novel was filmed

entitled *Anna and the King*. After the movie was published, the screenplay was rewrite again as a novel with the same title that is *Anna and the King*.

Although it is written by a British woman, but this novel takes place in the Siam's Palace (now known as Thailand) in 1864. Feminism and cultural phenomenons which appear in this novel caused by two different cultures opposing. They are two main characters who present different cultures, Anna as British woman who realizes her rights in women position of feminity, and Tuptim as Siamese woman who indigenous and still hold tight to the pathriarchy tradition in her life.

Based on the problems above, the purpose of this study is to reveal the cultural identity that is more focused on revealing the religious discrimination against women within the Palace of Siam in novel *Anna and the King* written by Elizabeth Hand.

II. RELATED LITERATURE

A. Anthropological Literature

Anthropology is the science of human in the society. Hence, anthropology is divided into physical anthropology and cultural anthropology. Related with literature, cultural anthropology divided into two areas, there is anthropology with verbal and non verbal objects, but literary anthropology studies related with the verbal objects.

The anthropological approach based on the fact that first there is a relationship between anthropological knowledge and language. Second is associated with the oral tradition. The most essential thing in this approach is not the aspect of anthropology "in" literature but anthropology "from" literature (Ratna, 2004:63-64).

B. Cultural Theory

In anthropology, culture is a whole system of ideas, actions and products of human endeavor in the context of society that belongs to human. According to Koentjaraningrat (2000:181), culture is a result of creativity, initiative and sense. So, there are three cultural forms:

1. Cultural form as a complex of ideas, values, norms, rules etc.
2. Cultural form as a complex activity with activity pattern of human action in society;
3. Cultural form as an object of humans' work.

Culture has universal elements that can be applied in every country in the world. Based on Koentjaraningrat (2000:203-204), there are seven cultural elements which constitute the main content of world culture:

1. Language system;
2. Knowledge system;
3. Social organization;
4. Technology and life equipment system;
5. Livelihood system;
6. Religion system;
7. Art system.

Each of these elements above are transformed into a third cultural form, there are cultural system, social system and physical culture.

C. Gender

Gender is an inherent nature of men and women who are socially and

culturally constructed (Fakih, 2000: 08).

History of gender has very long process. The formation of this difference due to many things has been socialized, reinforced, even socially and culturally constructed through religious means.

E. Feminism

Feminism is an approach that focuses on women struggle to obtain their existence recognition. According to Djajanegara, the beginning of this movement was a convention held in Seneca Falls in 1848, which was regarded as the Women's Great Rebellion, which managed to make their own version of Independence's Declaration "all men and women created equal" (2000:1). Until now, feminism has achieved rapid development, so that the movement was extended to the literatures' world.

It is well known, one of the initial activities of feminist literary critics are review and evaluate the work of women writers from the past (Sugihastuti, 2000:130). It aims to

show the image of women in the work of man who featuring women as creatures in various ways are suppressed, misrepresented and ignored by the patriarchal tradition.

III. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

A. Subject

This research subject is novel entitled *Anna and the King* written by Elizabeth Hand published in 1999. This research focused on the analysis of religious system and more specific in finding the religious discrimination experienced by a character named Tuptim.

B. Research Procedure

The method used in the research is descriptive analytic method. According to Ratna, the descriptive analytic method is done by describing the facts and followed by analysis (Ratna: 2004: 53). Firstly, the author will describe the data to find the elements related to that will be analyzed.

Method of approach used in this analysis is literary anthropology and feminism. Literary anthropology approaches used to examine the cultural condition of the novel, and the feminism approaches used to fight their rights. It is closely related with class, race and gender conflict (Ratna, 2004: 186).

According to Budianta, feminism approach actually is an ideological critique of the worldview that ignores inequality and injustice in the provision of social roles and identities based on gender (2005: 2).

C. Technique of Data Analysis

Data collection used in this research is library research. The first step of this research was to collect the data from the object. After that, the data then analyzed using textual approach to determine the extrinsic aspects that build the story. Thus extrinsic aspects are anthropology and feminism.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Religious System of Siam Palace

Religious systems that exist in Siam's society is Buddha. Even the King himself has a personal monastery in Nong Khai. King Mongkut had spent half of his life there before he became a King.

The signs which indicate the religious system is the Buddhist temples, Garuda and Vishnu statue, Bodhi tree, as well as a lot of icons, as in the following quote:

"Immense roofs shaped like golden bells, and tiered spires, and serrated upper stories flanking Bodhi trees of gold and crimson and emerald green. And everywhere the images of a thousand wondrous creatures: Nagas and Kinnarees, bird-women and sacred snakes; glaring temple guardians tree stories tall, their bodies encrusted with precious stones; wooden temple dancers and gilded lions, bronze effigies and omnipresent Garuda, Vishnu's sacred steed: a warrior with an eagle's beak and wings." (Hand, 1999:17)

"There were brass censers giving forth the sweet smell incense, and man-size statues of Buddha and other religious icons" (Hand, 1999: 19)

In this novel also indicated that King Mongkut spent almost all his life in the monastery. For 30 years he lived in the monastery and traveled from one city to another in Siam to know the condition of Siamese,

"All of this, of course, was after he had spent much of his life in the monastery, living and praying as his brother monks did. He was fourteen when he took his vows... and he spent nearly thirty years wearing the saffron robe of Buddhist monk, walking across our country with his brethren, owning only his wooden sandals and his robe and the wooden bowl from which he ate."(Hand, 1999: 26)

B. Woman Religious Rights' Discrimination

From the text Anna and the King, it can be seen how the position

of Siamese women in Buddhism. It is stated in Tuptims' debates that occurred when she decided become a monk although she know that is forbidden for women to a monk. It means that Buddhism in Siam still cling to the patriarchal system. The conclusion can be seen from the following sentence *"You have denigrated King Mongkut and Lord Buddha. You have defiled a monastery with your female presence, and destroyed this monk's vow of celibacy."* (Hand, 1999: 236). The terms "with your female presence" indicates severe restrictions for a woman to enter the monastery. And it is emphasized again in the word "defiled" and "destroyed this monastery a monk's vow of celibacy". This statement shows the mistake that has been made by Tuptim is huge and unforgivable.

Women position in Siamese Buddhism is really bad because women should not be a monk. The supported sentence that reinforce the presumption is: *"...I disguise myself. I joined a procession leaving the palace-when I knew he could not*

recognize me-and I became one of his brothers" (Hand , 1999:235)

Dalam teks yang lain juga ditunjukkan bahwa Tuptim berhasil menjadi seorang biksu karena dia menyamar menjadi seorang laki-laki. Ini diterangkan dalam teks berikut *"He never knew I was a woman!"* (Hand, 1999: 236)

The word used by Tuptim is "his brother" instead of "his sister", because she realizes here that it is possible for women to be a monk. As there are concerns here about her identity as a woman. She should be admitted to the trial participants that become a Buddhist because it is a good thing. There is intentional meaning in those words. Tuptim is already aware that she is a woman and due to the rules of Buddhism, cannot be a monk. Because of her attitude, Tuptim suffered humiliation and she is considered as one who has defamed Lord Buddha. She is also alleged to have fouled the sanctity of the monastery with her woman status. A woman is not allowed to enter the monastery and be a monk. It has been

rooted in Siamese ideology that women were given human attributes as a dirty and teasers.

Tuptim decision to be a monk is her biggest decision in her life. It is believed by Tuptim that Buddha was the one who led her towards it. “...*So much so, I am convinced it was Buddha guided me my actions*” (Hand, 1999: 234). Tuptim convinced that her decision is a destiny that has been laid down by Buddha. “*I thank Buddha for giving me a direction, and now, with Mem before me, I thank him, for giving me true friend*” (Hand, 1999: 229). However, Tuptims’ belief was strongly opposed by the court attendance, so she gets very fierce resistance. No one felt sympathy for her.

“Muttered voice rose angrily throughout the room. One of the judges cried, “Buddha would not fill your head with such wickedness” (Hand, 1999: 234)

“There were cries of outraged disbelief from the dowagers as judge Phya Phrom and his colleagues regarded Tutim with

incredulous amusement (Hand, 1999: 235)

Finally, Tuptim has to undergo death by decapitated.

In the book “Perempuan Multikultural by Satha-Anand said that, as a rule, religious institutions dominated by male members, so the mentality and practices centered on men. For centuries, the sacred territory came under the domination of men. Often the religion region becomes the most conservative elements within a society. this is what happening in Siam in King Mongkuts’ era. It is been going so long that all of the monks’ members are men. In the case of Tuptim, she could be a monk because she managed to disguise, but after her cover note, she is opposed by all of Buddha followers. So the author feels that the punishment inflicted Tuptim, not only because of her guilty of the King Mongkut, but even worse, she has been polluting the Buddhist tradition in Siam at that time, which forbids women to be a monk. This is in

contrast if a man want to be a monk, he is considered highly commendable and become a respectable duty, because according to Buddhism, the man who lived in a monastery could live eternally in nirvana. In fact they can also help their parents reach nirvana.

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