

FREEDOM OF THOUGHT IN SAMAN NOVEL BY AYU UTAMI (1998): A GENETIC STRUCTURALIST APPROACH

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Abstract

This study examined the world view of freedom of thought of the major and minor characters in Saman novel by involving genetic structuralist approach. This research was descriptive qualitative research. The primary data source was Saman, a novel written by Ayu Utami and translated by Pamela Allen in 2005. Meanwhile the secondary data source was the social-historical background of the Indonesian society in the twentieth century. Both data were collected through library research and analyzed by descriptive analysis. Based on the genetic structuralist approach, there was a close relationship between the novel and the realities of Indonesian life. The novel was as an object in which the author presented her world view.

Keywords: *Freedom of Thought, Saman, Genetic Structuralist Approach.*

Abstrak

Kajian ini meneliti tentang kebebasan berpikir dari tokoh utama dan beberapa tokoh lainnya dalam novel *Saman* novel dengan menggunakan pendekatan strukturalis genetik. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Sumber data primer adalah novel berjudul *Saman* ditulis oleh Ayu Utami dan diterjemahkan oleh Pamela Allen pada tahun 2005. Sementara itu sumber data sekunder adalah latar belakang sosial-historis masyarakat Indonesia pada abad kedua puluh. Kedua data dikumpulkan melalui kajian pustaka dan dianalisis dengan analisis deskriptif. Berdasarkan pendekatan strukturalis genetik, ada hubungan erat antara novel dan realitas kehidupan masyarakat Indonesia. Novel ini sebagai objek di mana penulis menyajikan pandangan hidupnya.

Kata kunci: *Kebebasan Berpikir, Saman, pendekata Genetik strukturalis*

1. Introduction

Freedom of thought is the part of the basic human right. It is a fundamental human right that protects the autonomy of the human conscience. A man can never be hindered from thinking whatever he chooses

so long as he conceals what he thinks (Bury, 2004: 11). A man thought is always free. No one can hinder and trammel a thought. To deny a person's freedom of thought is to contradict what can be considered one's most basic freedom. Freedom of thought

is closely linked to other liberties. This freedom is considered as the basis of other freedoms such as freedom of expression and freedom of speech.

Saman novel appeared in May 1998, only a few weeks before the fall of Suharto. This novel is an omen of the changing cultural and political landscape in Indonesia. It is very interesting to be read because this novel reveals some important issues such as sex deviation, politic in Suharto's regime, and also belief to the God. It deals explicitly with themes of sexuality that is considered taboo for women writers in Indonesia at that time. This novel has sold over 100.000 copies and been reprinted 34 times. *Saman* has been translated into six languages and won several awards, including the 1998 Jakarta Arts Council Novel Competition and also the Prince Claus Award 2000 from the Prince Claus Fund.

Saman novel was written by Ayu Utami, a young female of Indonesia. Justina Ayu Utami or Ayu Utami was born in Bogor, West Java, 21st November 1968. She finished studying Russian literature in University of Indonesia. She is an activist, journalist and novelist in Indonesia. Ayu Utami currently works for Radio 68H and independent news radio station which broadcasts all over the country. Now she works in the cultural journal *Kalam* and at Teater *Utan Kayu*.

Saman novel tells about a young priest and four women who are friends since childhood namely Shakuntala, Cok, Yasmin, and Laila. In the city of Perabumulih, young pastor Wisanggeni interacts and knows many people who turns out to be mostly about the migrants who work as rubber plantation workers. Conflicts occur when the migrants as rubber plantation workers are compelled to transfer their land to the employers or owners of capital who want the rubber

plantations become the oil palm plantations by purchasing the land with very cheap prices. It drags him in conflict with the officers and government officials. After being caught and thrown into prison and tortured, Wisanggeni successfully escapes from prison. Wisanggeni removes traces and replaces identity with a pseudonym that is Saman. A framing romance tale follows the story, Laila, a journalist who has fallen in love with Sihar, an already-married oil rig worker that she meets on her assignment. When she witnesses a tragic accident on the rig caused by the negligence of the oil company's supervisor, Laila becomes caught up in Sihar's quest for justice. This leads her to put Sihar in contact with Saman. The plot takes us back in time to follow Saman's journey from the seminary to prison to continuing struggle against state oppression. In the end, the novel returns to the lighter story of Laila and her female friends in the 1990s, who each represents different choices and possibilities for women in Indonesia.

There are some reasons why the writer is interested in analysing this novel. Firstly, *Saman* novel is a depiction of the realities of life with all kinds of problems. Secondly, *Saman* deals explicitly with themes of sexuality, taboo for women writers in Indonesia at that time. Thirdly, *Saman* novel also reflects the destructiveness of Suharto's political authoritarianism during "Orde Baru". Last, freedom of thought that becomes the main issue of this novel is reflected well.

Based on the data above, the writer analyzes the *Saman* novel by using genetic structuralist approach to dig up major and minor characters' freedom of thought. To achieve the purpose of the study, the writer analyzes the novel on its nature of literary, nature of author and nature of society.

The problem statement of this research is how is freedom of thought of

the major and minor characters reflected in *Saman* novel. The objectives of the study are mentioned as follows: a) To analyze Ayu Utami's *Saman* novel based on the structural elements of the novel, b) To reveal freedom of thought of the major and minor characters by means of sociological perspective particularly Genetic Structuralist Approach.

The research on the *Saman* novel has been conducted by some students. The first study about *Saman* novel is conducted by Lusiana Nety Harwati, a Brawijaya University student, in her article published on March 17, 2012, entitled "*Saman: Is It A Gratuitous Pornography?*". The second is study which was conducted by Oktivita (UMS, 2009) entitled *Perilaku Seksual Dalam Novel Saman Karya Ayu Utami :Tinjauan Psikologi Sastra*. This study describes sexual disorientations and reveals complex sexual behavior in *Saman* novel.

2. Research Method

In this research, the writer analyzes Ayu Utami's *Saman* novel (1998). In writing this study, the writer employs the descriptive qualitative research. Then, the steps of conducting this qualitative study are (1) Determining the object of the study, (2) Determining the source of the data, (3) Determining the method of data collection, and (4) Determining the technique of data analysis. The object of the study is *Saman* novel by Ayu Utami which is published in 1998. It is analyzed by using genetic structuralist approach. There are two types of data namely primary data and secondary data that are needed to do this research. The primary data sources of the study are *Saman* novel by Ayu Utami. The secondary data of the study are taken from any information related to the novel. In conducting the study, the writer uses the techniques in collecting the data as

follows: a) Reading the novel repeatedly, b) Taking notes of important part in both primary and secondary data, c) Underlying the important word, phrases and sentences which are related to the study, d) Arranging the data into several part based on its classification, e) Selecting the data by rejecting the irrelevant information which does not support the topic of the study, f) Drawing the conclusion of the analysis that has already done in the former chapter and formulating its pedagogical suggestion.

In analyzing data, the writer employs descriptive qualitative analysis of content. The steps of technique of the data analysis are compiled as follows: a) Analyzing the structural elements of the novel. Focus will be paid on the structural analysis of the novel, b) Trying to decide the sociological analysis of the literary work. Focus will be paid on the meaning of freedom of thought, c) Making discussion of the finding, d) Making conclusion

3. Finding and Discussion

Saman novel is written by Ayu Utami. It is translated by Pamela Allen in 2005. This novel is an omen of the changing cultural and political landscape in Indonesia. It is very interesting to be read because this novel reveals some important issues such as sex deviation, politic in Suharto's regime, and also belief to the God. *Saman* describes the lives of four female friends and a former Catholic priest, Saman. It deals explicitly with themes of sexuality that is considered taboo for women writers in Indonesia at that time.

The tangible theme of *Saman* novel is "women's wilderness does not necessarily mean "wild", it may contain in itself agency, representation and identity." This theme seems to be one of the themes that can be inferred from this remarkable novel. It is demonstrated by Ayu Utami through female characters in her novel. Ayu Utami

wants to break the patriarchal culture by her female characters.

The major characters in this novel are Saman (Athanasius Wisanggeni), Yasmin, Shakuntala, and Laila. Saman is a pseudonym name of Athanasius Wisanggeni. Actually, he is a young priest. He mobilizes his effort to help Upi and the rubber plantation workers in Lubukrantau. Now, Saman runs an NGO. In his organisation, Saman helps people to defend their rights as human being. Yasmin is Saman's friend. Yasmin is also a smart women. She works as a lawyer in her father's firm, Joshua Moningka and Partners. Yasmin is attracted to Saman and she decides to have virtual sex with Saman although Saman does not know how to make her satisfied. Shakuntala is Yasmin's friend. She has a great talent, she likes dancing very much so she is given a scholarship by the Asian Cultural Center to explore dance in New York for a couple of years. Cok is also Yasmin's friend. She is business woman. She is interested in hotel management and continues her mother's business. Cok helps smuggling Saman out from Medan. Laila is Yasmin's friend too. Laila works as a photographer. She falls in love with Sihar, an already-married oil rig worker.

The minor characters in *Saman* novel comprise of Sihar, Rosano, Anson, Wisanggeni's mother, Sudoyo, Sarbini, Hasyim Ali, Imam, Mak Argani, Upi, Ferouz, Romo Daru, Father Westernberg, and Lik Dirah. Sihar is an already married oil rig worker. He works as an oil analysis engineer at Texcoil. He is loved by Laila when Laila makes Texcoil profile. He is very indifferent towards Laila. Rosano is Sihar's employer. He is Texcoil representative. He is very arrogant and neglectful. Hasyim Ali is Sihar's friend at Texcoil. He works as a machine operator. He becomes a victim of Rosano's negligence. He is dead

because of accident in Texcoil. Iman is a junior engineer in Texcoil. He works under Sihar's guidance. Romo Daru is an old priest. He is Wisanggeni's senior. He helps placing Wisanggeni into Perabumulih. Wisanggeni's mother is warm and mysterious. Strange things are always happened to her second until her third pregnancy. The stranger thing happened when her fourth baby is dead at the age of three days. Sudoyo is Wisanggeni's father. He is realist so he does not believe in superstition. Lik Dirah is a servant of Wisanggeni's family. She is from poor and uneducated family. Her job is to look after Wisanggeni's mother. Upi is a young girl from Lubukrantau. She has weird habit namely rubbing her genitals up againsts suitable objects so she is locked in a cage by her family. Mak Argani is Upi's mother. She is one of the rubber plantation worker in Sei Kumbang. Anson is Upi's brother. The left side of his face has melted because of Upi's anger. He is one of the rubber plantation worker in Sei Kumbang too. Father Westernberg is senior priest. He is a Dutchman. He often helps Wisanggeni. Sarbini is an old friend of Wisanggeni's father in Perabumulih. He is a businessman. He often helps Wisanggeni in his attempts to aid Upi and rubber plantation worker. Ferouz is Saman's friend at HRW New York. He is Bangladeshi.

The settings of place in this novel are in Perabumulih, Sei Kumbang, Lubukrantau, Argani's house, HRW office, Central Park, New York and Shakuntala's apartment. Then, the setting of time in this novel takes time in 1960s until 1990s. But, the setting of time in *Saman* novel is considered strange for some readers because the setting of time is complex, moving backwards and forwards in time from the 1990s to the 1980s and 1960s. The setting of time in this novel is written by the writer clearly as in diary book.

The plot of the novel begins with Laila's waiting for Sihar and planning to lose her virginity to him. But Sihar does not come to Central Park, a place where Sihar and Laila make an appointment to meet. Finally Laila feels depressed and sad. Then, the story moves backward which covers Saman's childhood including his relationship with his mother, a woman drawn to the spiritual world, his entry into priesthood, and his attempt to protect a rubber plantation worker in Sei Kumbang. After the attempt fails, Saman is caught and tortured by the officials. Saman can escape from prison. He becomes a fugitive and resigns from his job as a priest. Next, the story moves backward again that tells how Yasmin, Cok, Shakuntala, and Laila meet at high school and become friend. Shakuntala recounts a fantasy she had as a teenager about meeting a "foreign ogres", embracing him and then having a debate on the different cultural aspects of sexuality. Shakuntala notes that she dislikes Sihar, but she supports her friend's efforts to meet Sihar. Then, the next story tells about a relationship between Saman and Yasmin. Saman is hidden in New York by Yasmin and Cok. The entirety of the last chapter consists of emails between Saman and Yasmin, discussing their insecurities, that become increasingly sexualised.

In *Saman* novel, Ayu Utami uses a variety of narrative point of view. The story of *Saman* novel is told by some narrators such as Laila, Saman, Shakuntala, Yasmin and third point of view. The story is told by first participant in some parts, for example in Saman letter to his father or correspondence between Saman and Yasmin. The biggest part of this novel, page 74 until 195 that tells Saman's childhood in Perabumulih, his assignation as a priest until his involvement in the case of rubber plantation worker movement is told through the third point of view. The initial

meeting between Laila and Sihar in oil rig is told by two narrators simultaneously; first point of view and third point of view. The third chapter of *Saman* novel is told by first participant. Shakuntala acts as the first participant of this chapter.

Moreover, Pamela Allen as the translator of this novel uses standard Australian-English so that the reader can comprehend the story easily. While Ayu Utami as the writer of this novel uses some figurative languages such as simile, personification, hyperbole, and metaphor to make the content of the novel more impressive.

The analysis above shows all of the structural elements of the *Saman* novel such as character and characterization, plot, setting, point of view, style, and theme are the whole of unity and have close relation that can not be separated each other. So it makes this novel become very interesting to be read.

Sociological analysis above shows that the author creates the novel to carry her world views. Social background of the author is represented in the novel. The major and some minor characters have their own world view on freedom of thought. Ayu Utami also employs them to describe social, economic, political, science and technology, cultural, and religious aspects at that time.

Ayu Utami's *Saman* novel sets in Sumatra, the island which is rich with oil, palm oil, and rubber. From the analysis above, the author does not portray overall Indonesian society. Social classes and transmigration become the points of social aspect which is conveyed by the author. In oil rig located at South China Sea, there is an enormous gap between the employer and the employee. Sumatra still has rich jungles but the existence of the jungle in Sumatra is threatened by population expansion and exploitation by loggers for

domestic timber use and export. There are many tribes in Indonesia. Batak and Javanese tribes are often mentioned in *Saman* novel. The newcomers like Chinese are also mentioned.

The transition of Soekarno era into Soeharto era influences the economic life of Indonesia at that time. Ayu Utami wants to convey that the life of transmigrants in Lubukrantau is very far from modernity. They live in poverty. The point of transmigration seems not give comfortable space for the people being transmigrated. Oil and rubber are two new products which particularly important for placing Indonesia at the forefront of world economic interest in the twentieth century. Besides agriculture, many residents raise livestock such as chickens, goats, and cow. Besides that, some residents also work as merchant, seller, or hawker.

In political aspect, the system of political party colors political life in Indonesia in the twentieth century. Political life in Indonesia as illustrated by Ayu Utami is full of uncertainty. The uncertainty is caused by the law in Indonesia that always swings. No one is treated equally under the law. The poor always become the victim of that uncertainty.

In science and technology aspect, *Saman* novel which ranges between 1960 until 1996 gives a lot of description of the development of science and technology. The mining of oil in Sumatra uses modern and sophisticated technology. The development of telecommunications equipment is also very fast. Telephone, internet, and email are also used to send messages each other. The existence of computer has been replaced by laptop. Ayu Utami also reviews a technology used to cover the possibility of interception. At that time, there is wide variety of transportation means. The development of health sciences is also very rapid. The existence of doctors

and midwives are also significant in Indonesia.

In cultural aspect, Indonesia is rich in cultural diversity such as dance, music, and musical instruments. The condition of Indonesian diversity is portrayed in *Saman* novel. Ayu Utami tries to describe Indonesian culture in its multiethnic life. Indonesia is also known as the sublime eastern culture. One of the things that always held in high esteem is sex to be covered in marriage.

In religious aspects, Indonesia had always been a multireligious society. Officially, the government of Indonesia recognizes five religions namely Islam, Christianity, Catholic, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Religious life of each individual who lives in Indonesia is respected by other members and also government. In *Saman* novel also presents inter-religious harmony shown by Laila, Cok, Yasmin, and Shakuntala. Harmony among different religions is also indicated by *Saman*. *Saman*, a Christian, interweaves a close relationship with Lubukrantau residents who are predominantly Moslem.

Finally, from all aspects that are reflected in *Saman* novel, there is a close relationship between the novel and the reality of overall aspects in Indonesia. Ayu Utami portrays the misery experienced by transmigrants and the position of the women who are always behind the men. All the major and some minor character represent their world view on freedom of thought. They uphold their own right and also the right of oppressed people.

4. Conclusion

After analyzing *Saman* novel by using genetic structuralist perspective, the researcher draws the following conclusion. All the major and some minor characters want to campaign freedom of thought. The major characters especially *Saman*

and Shakuntala reveal their rebel against patriarchal culture which always creates suffering towards women. They have strong thought that freedom of thought is right for every one. In this novel, setting of place involves some places in Sumatra even in America as a paradise of freedom. The setting of time in this novel is complex, moving backwards and forwards in time from the 1990s to the 1980s and 1960s. Ayu Utami uses non-linear plot. The nature of plot that used is opened so it makes the story in this novel leap very often. Sometimes she uses flash-back plot. Secondly, sociological analysis shows that social background when the author lives is represented in this novel. Ayu Utami employs all the major character and some minor characters as omen of freedom. Saman and Shakuntala are the major character which are strongly believed

representing Ayu Utami's world views as to freedom of thought. Narration from Saman and other characters give much knowledge and evidence about social, economic, political, science and technology, cultural, and religion aspects at that time. Thirdly, based on the sociological analysis, it is obvious that there is a close relationship between the story of the novel and the social reality underlying it. The story of the novel tells the real condition under the destructiveness of Suharto's political authoritarianism during "Orde Baru". Social injustice causes many inflictions to the poor. They always become the victim of the government policy and law. Moreover, gender inequality induces pain towards women. Women's problems are collective problem so men also have to be responsible to solve those problems.

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