

# ethnic literature and postcolonialism in barta's "gadis tangsi"

Government, Colonialism



The definition of ethnic literature “ is literature like any other, except that it contains ethnic references.” (Reilly p. 2). Another definition of ethnic literature is when there is a literature work that contain religious beliefs, racial issues, linguistics, or cultural heritage. In another word, ethnic literature is the literary work that includes particular culture, beliefs, or linguistics distinction. Postcolonial literary theory draws attention in the issue of cultural difference emerging in the society.

One of the issues which may often appear during the class discussion is hybridity. It seems that people who have been faced by the fact that they are living in a ‘ hybrid world’ tend to be confused by their real status. They realize for their interest, but they can not avoid the possibility becoming ‘ in between’. Although , they are included into one part, the native part, but on the other hand they can not deny the deep feeling to be pleasant considering themselves different with the other. There is a kind of more value they have compared with their surround, and they think it is worthy to be kept. Of course, this feeling comes into their mind by some reasons.

There must be an additional value added into their original culture. The additional value may be in the form of a new ideology, belief or view which are brought by the dominating. The dominated rarely conscious with the impact. They usually only feel that it is a natural process which become the impact of daily social interaction they are engaged in. Another issue which emerges in postcolonial discussion is about dominated-dominating one. We can not expect who actually take the role as ‘ dominating’ or ‘ dominated’.

The practice may turn over, the dominated may become the dominating in the same time toward different object, vice versa. We are also introduced by 'Otherness' theory. It makes someone consider that she or he are different from the other, and other people is not the same with her or him. *Gadis Tangsi* tells a story about a girl life, namely Teyi. She is a Javanese girl who grew up in the Javanese tradition. She lives with his parents and sibling in tangsi area. She was taught to become an obedient girl by her mother with many limitations as a girl. She helps her mother to sell fried bananas every day.

Teyi finds herself limited by some rules which are considered as the right rules for her mother. She even does not know how 'love' or how to be 'loved' by a man. She was taught to be a polite woman. She finally finds who she is when she is introduced to Putri Parasi by Ndara Tuan Kapten Sarjubehi who has helped her. That is the beginning of her new experience to recognize a new world, the world that she has never imagined before. Putri Parasi teaches her everything to be 'a good lady'. Putri Parasi likes Teyi for her politeness. She more likes Teyi after being saved when her disease comes immediately. Putri Parasi expects to teach her how to behave well.

She even teaches Teyi to speak Dutch. Teyi starts to be able to read and write. Putri Parasi really wants to prepare her to be taken to Surakarta Keraton and introduced her to a man who will be married with her. She plans to make Teyi deserve to have a husband from Keraton families. In the novel *Gadis Tangsi* written by Suparto Brata, we can see some unexpected phenomenon occur. It makes me realize that actually there are still many

things covered even by what Javanese people considered as 'budaya adiluhung'.

The word 'politeness', 'hospitality' and 'dignity' which come into people mind when they heard about Javanese culture become blur after they read this novel. Javanese woman who is considered as an obedient woman and become a mercy for whom takes her as a wife may be surprised by what Suparto tells about Teyi and Dumilah. He brings them in this novel as representative of Javanese woman character, in different point of view. However, the story about them, for me, is far from the stereotype of common Javanese women (may be just a few). The feeling of 'in between' seem to be experienced by Teyi. She starts to know about how the way the higher status people behave since she meets Putri Parasi.

Teyi realizes that her life style is quite different from her, and she is glad when she knows that Putri Parasi does not mind introducing this new culture to her. From this intentional interaction, after she is taught how to behave like 'putri bangsawan', Teyi starts to consider she has a chance to be the same with them. Even she lives with her parents, she starts to consider that she is better than them. She has been raised from the lower part. She has more power than the people in the house. The very obvious impact of this teaching actually appears when Teyi has been left by Putri Parasi. After she passed away, Teyi become independent from the influence of Putri Parasi.

Although, there are still some traces of her teaching inside Teyi which reflect in the way she behaves. She seems take the dominating position over her husband, Sapardal. Sapardal feeling about his lower position when they have

been married becomes the cause of the divorce. Only two days of marriage, and Teyi considers that she has a right to sue divorce, while Sapardal can only keep silent without any comment. In this relationship, Sapardal as a man who actually considered as 'the dominating' take the role as 'the dominated'. He does not feel on the same level with Teyi. He admits that he has no power compared to Teyi. He even has no courage to touch her in their first night of marriage.

Here, we can see the role between man and woman has shifted. Brata seems to show us that the role of people in the society is like running on the moving wheel. The dominating and dominated are only a symbol of someone position, which also can be shifted based on where we are standing. Sapardal may fail in maintaining his position as superior in front of Teyi. The cultural change also appears in this novel. Sexual intercourse is not considered as a sacral any longer for almost all the women in this novel. During my reading, I wonder if I read Indonesian culture literary work, especially belong to Javanese one.

However, Brata wrote the novel using the Indonesian condition in the past, in the colonial occupation. In this situation, it is not easy to determine which one who still hold the original value since the influence of other ideology come into the life in that simple way. The force of a new ideology input is not directly felt in this novel. The indigenous people enjoy the acculturation between the dominated and the dominating. It also happens in the shifting of the way they see sexual intercourse actually is. What we call as a taboo becomes commonly conducted by the people. Teyi is defined as a free

woman, even she has been married and becomes a wife of Sapardal, and she breaks the rule by having intercourse with Ndara Tuan Kapten Sarjubehi.

It seems that she wants to take a revenge to Dumilah who is considered had cheated her by having romantic affair with her master. Sapardal can not do anything. He has failed to become a good husband. This thinking is from his own side. When we look at this phenomenon, again, Teyi proves that she has had a power over a man from her own society. She starts to have a right to consider a man like Sapardal is not at the same level with her. However, in my opinion it will not happen if Sapardal never has the way of thinking. Actually, he has thought that she is great and different from the other woman in his environment before they are married. That makes he has no courage to touch her at their first night.

It also makes Teyi feels not being regarding or respecting as a wife. She thinks that Sapardal has no desire toward her, and she thinks that it is better to ask divorce. What a short way of thinking! I found that Teyi has put a wrong way of thinking about what Putri Parasi had taught to her. It seems that she does not consider marriage as a sacral relationship any longer. 'Love' relationship has been considered as a 'real' relationship when we have passion to have sex with our couple. Is that so simple? That is the way Teyi think about love basically. It is shown also when she does not mind to have sex with her ex-master, Ndara Tuan Kapten Sarjubehi, and then she starts to love someone else, Ndara Mas Kus.

There is no any guilty feeling. Finally, we can conclude that there are three aspect of postcolonial reading for Gadis Tangsi has been discussed above.

First, hybridity appears when Teyi finds herself has involved and being a part of Putri Parasi's society, Keraton environment since she has been able to behave and speak like her, so she considers that she is a part of Putri community. While she has that feeling, she still can not avoid other people consideration about her who is only becoming a servant and will not become like them. Second, dominating feeling toward Sapardal comes into her mind. There is dominating-dominated in shifting model between them. It seems a denial for a man who usually considered as the dominating one, while Teyi proves that it can be shifted. Last, ' Otherness' theory also emerges in this novel.

After having taught to have attitude and behave like Putri Parasi model, Teyi finally considers herself different with other woman in her society. It appears in the way she treats Dumilah who is her old friend. She thinks that Dumilah has no right to become ' a munci' of Ndara Tuan Kapten Sarjubehi because she is not at the same level with her or Ndara.