



Women's Inferiority in the Novel RE: by Maman Suherman A Study of Feminist Literary Criticism

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan inferioritas perempuan dalam novel RE: karya Maman Suherman dengan kajian kritik sastra feminis. Jenis penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif analitis. Data dalam penelitian ini berupa kutipan teks novel dalam bentuk kata, frasa, klausa, kalimat, dan wacana yang di dalamnya terdapat inferioritas perempuan berupa kekerasan fisik dan seksual. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini berupa data tertulis yang terdapat dalam novel RE: karya Maman Suherman (2014). Instrumen dalam penelitian ini adalah peneliti sebagai instrumen utama. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah *content analysis* (analisis isi) terhadap dokumen dan arsip. Triangulasi adalah teknik pemeriksaan keabsahan data yang memanfaatkan sesuatu yang lain di luar data itu untuk keperluan pengecekan atau sebagai pembandingan terhadap data itu. Hasil penelitian ditemukan adanya inferioritas terhadap perempuan berupa kekerasan fisik dan kekerasan seksual yang dialami tokoh RE dan teman-temannya.

Kata Kunci: Inferioritas Perempuan, Novel RE, Kritik Sastra Feminis

Abstract

This research aims to describe the inferiority of women in the novel RE: by Maman Suherman with a study of feminist literary criticism. This type of research uses qualitative research with analytical descriptive methods. The data in this research is in the form of novel text excerpts in the form of words, phrases, clauses, sentences and discourses in which women's inferiority is expressed in the form of physical and sexual violence. The data source in this research is written data contained in the novel RE: by Maman Suherman (2014). The instrument in this research is the researcher as the main instrument. The data collection technique used in this research is content analysis of documents and archives. Triangulation is a technique for checking the validity of data that uses something other than the data for checking purposes or as a comparison of the data. The research results found that there was inferiority towards women in the form of physical violence and sexual violence experienced by RE characters and their friends.

Keywords: Women's Inferiority, RE Novel, Feminist Literary Criticism

INTRODUCTION

Women and literary works are like two sides of a coin that cannot be separated from being the object of the authors' stories.

Literary works are born as a result of factual phenomena in society that tickle the author's mind to create works such as novels.

Women are one of the interesting objects that should be told.

Both male and female novelists have always been interested in making women the object of their imagination. Women in novels are a vast field of creativity for authors. Literature will be meaningful and interesting if the main character is a woman. The suffering of women, especially those related to inferiority, marginalization, stereotypes, and gender equality, color the themes of recent Indonesian novels.

One novel that questions women in the trap of inferiority is the novel *RE*: by Maman Suherman. The novel tells the story of a lesbian prostitute. Re: is the main character who is forced to become a prostitute in order to make a living and support her child. Re is a young woman who ran away from home because she received inferior treatment from her grandmother. Re's suffering began when her mother became pregnant out of wedlock and gave birth to Re. Re's presence for her grandmother is a catastrophe that destroys the dignity of her family. Re, with a shaken psyche, finally fell into an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Re ran away from her grandmother's house after her mother died. On the run, Re meets the character "mami" who accommodates her in her house until Re gives birth to her child, then Re is made a lesbian prostitute by the character "mami" who turns out to be a high-class pimp in Jakarta. Another character who becomes Re's friend is Herman, a Criminology student who is conducting research on prostitutes. Herman is the character who reveals how Re's life was until she died.

Interesting story facts from the novel *RE*: the injustice experienced by the main character in the form of inferiority is not only carried out by men but the dominant ones do the women. Mami Lani, who is the antagonist, is the one who has power over Re's life. The phenomenon of women's

inferiority towards women is a very interesting thing to research. In fact, women should protect their fellow men, but the facts in the novel *RE*: by Maman Suherman are the opposite. This phenomenon is the main reason for the researcher's interest in examining the novel *RE*: in terms of women's inferiority with the study of feminist literary criticism.

Feminist literary criticism is an approach in studying literary works, especially those related to women. Feminist literary criticism does not mean criticizing women, criticizing women, or criticizing women writers; it simply means that critics look at literature with a special awareness, an awareness that there is gender that has a lot to do with culture, literature, and life. The gender that makes a difference among all of them also makes a difference in the author, the reader, the character, and in the external factors that affect the writing situation (Yoder (1987) in Sugihastuti, 2015: 5).

Novels as a form of fictional prose have been studied by many students and critics, especially using feminist literary criticism. Researches that correspond to this study, for example in the journal *Stylistics: Journal of Language, Literature, and Teaching* with the title *Conflict of the Main Character in Facing Gender Injustice in the Novel Re: The Work of Maman Suherhman* (2018) by Ramadania et al. found gender injustice, inner conflict, and the formation of the character's personality with the surrounding conflict. What is different from this research is that it portrays the inferiority of women to women.

The next relevant research is the *Analysis of Literary Psychology Approach in Novel Re: And Perempuan* (Sartika, 2022). The results of this study indicate that in the novel entitled "Re: and Perempuan" by Maman Suherman there are three kinds of psychic theories of Sigmund Freud,

namely Id, Ego and Super ego. It is different from this research because the research uses literary psychology theory.

Another study *The Myth of Sleeping Beauty and Women's Inferiority in Love Relationships in the Sleepaholic Novel Falling in Love by Astrid Zeng* (Intan, 2022) The results showed that the myth of sleeping beauty was explored by the author to strengthen the idea of women's dependence on men. Women's inferiority is based on gender stereotypes that place men as strong, independent, and heroic. Women's inferiority is shown through their willingness to give in and become servants and victims of oppression in romantic relationships. The author's attempt to construct the female protagonist as a rebellious figure in the face of oppression is considered insufficient.

Verah (2022) *Gender Subordination and Inferiority in the Novel La Barka by Nh*. In this study, the findings are in the form of subordination to place women in an inferior position, which includes (1) physical subordination because it is difficult to have offspring, (2) psychological subordination because they have a high level of sensitivity, (3) social subordination because of their status as domestic workers.

Based on the phenomenon in the novel and several writings that examine women's inferiority, gender, and character psychology, the researcher focuses on the study of *Women's Inferiority in the Novel RE: by Maman Suherman, a Feminist Literary Criticism Study*.

RESEARCH METHODS

The type of research used is qualitative. Qualitative research requires data in the form of texts including literary texts, namely in this analysis using a novel, namely a novel entitled *RE: by Maman Suherman*. The research method used is descriptive

analysis, which describes data in the form of facts from the novel to be analyzed.

Arikunto states that the descriptive analysis research method is a method that tries to collect data as complete as possible according to the factors that support the research to be further analyzed so that it can find accurate research results (2017: 151). If a study aims to reveal the content of text messages such as literary texts, it includes content analysis research.

Limiting the scope of research is carried out as a guide in conducting research so that it is carried out properly and purposefully. The focus of this research is inferiority towards women, especially physical violence and sexual violence in the novel *RE: by Maman Suherman*.

The data in this study comes from quotations of the novel text in the form of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourses that support matters related to women's inferiority in the novel. And the Data Source in this study is written text data from the story in the novel *RE: written by Maman Suherman* (2014).

The tool used in this research is the researcher as the key instrument (main). Researchers who read the novel, then make interpretations, after that compile a research report. Researchers read repeatedly to determine text data related to questions in the problem formulation. The text data is interpreted and then the research results are compiled as the final result.

The technique of collecting data in this study is to *follow the flow of Goets and Lecomte* (Waluyo, 2013: 36) known as *content analysis*.

The steps in research with content analysis can be examined as follows:

1. Read carefully the novel *RE: to understand*

2. Search for theories of feminist literary criticism related to the research problem
3. Inventory data on violence against women in terms of physical violence and sexual violence in *RE* novels:

Checking the truth of the data can be done with data triangulation. This means using tools other than research data for checking needs or how to compare one data and other data (Moleong, 2019: 330).

In this research, the method chosen to see the validity of the data was theoretical triangulation. Theoretical triangulation is more appropriate than other methods such as triangulation of sources, triangulation between researchers or triangulation of methods.

Compared to the other three ways, theoretical triangulation is in accordance with the purpose of this research, namely qualitative research that ultimately results in a formulation or *thesis statement*. The information is then compared with relevant theoretical perspectives to avoid individual researcher bias in the findings or conclusions produced.

Theoretical triangulation aims to analyze the research formulation from the perspective of the novel which is the object and the use of socialist feminist literary criticism theory as a scalpel. The use of theoretical triangulation is useful for sharpening the results of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the problems of physical violence and sexual violence told in the novel *RE*: by Maman Suherman. The following can be seen as a description of each problem formulation.

a. Physical Violence in the Novel *RE*:

The suffering experienced by women in the form of physical torture is a behavior of gender differences in terms of sex that results in suffering on women's body parts.

Physical, sexual and psychological abuse are threats that continue to be experienced by the weak. Violence experienced both at home and in the community.

Physical abuse is an act that harms others with various consequences such as death, physical disability, loss of property, and other suffering. Maman Suherman's *RE* novel found 10 data on physical violence that caused death to women. As seen in the following data.

Data 1

"On the victim's head, there were white splinters covered with blood. Some of her long hair was pulled out of her skull and stuck to the road, probably because of the hard impact of the car. The woman's clear-skinned face and body were peeled to the bone, eroded by a layer of stones and asphalt that was as sharp as a coconut grater" (Suherman, 2014: 6-7).

Based on the quotation in data one (1), it depicts a woman who was hit with terrible injuries. The tragedy is an incident that was deliberately committed by someone against a woman named Sinta.

Data 2

"Intentionally hit ! Must have been hit on purpose ! Nation!
Re: continued to scream hysterically!
Thrashing with a voice that became increasingly hoarse. Squealing with rage mixed with vengeance" (Suherman, 2014: 7).

According to the description in data two (2), it shows the reinforcement that Sinta's character was deliberately hit by someone's orders, which is the analysis of *RE*.

Physical violence to certain parts of the body is also often experienced by lesbian prostitutes by their guests. The prostitutes who experienced this could not put up much resistance, they were only able to report the

act to the bouncer but it had no effect on their lives. This can be seen in data (3).

Data 3

"Some of the prostitutes I met had been traumatized, even had physical wounds on their bodies from the treatment of their guests. If it has gone too far, they can report it to the bouncers in their respective places, but it is usually too late because it has already happened" (Suherman, 2014: 26).

Violent physical abuse can also happen to prostitutes who are competing for sustenance, quarrels are fought by throwing stones at each other and their heads are sometimes targeted. The following data can show this.

Data 4

"It's not uncommon for agreements to be broken. Several times I was in the middle of brawls between the two parties, which usually ended tragically. Some people died after being stabbed by a rhinoceros or a broken bottle. There were also those whose heads were crushed by concrete stones, which I don't know where they were taken from" (Suherman, 2014: 48).

Physical violence can be committed by anyone, including fellow women. RE has experienced this in a hotel. RE's friend attacked by breaking a bottle, the broken bottle was used as a tool to attack his opponent. RE suffered scratches from the shards. The following data explains the incident.

Data 5

"Until one night there was a commotion in the hotel bar. A woman suddenly broke a drink bottle, and shouted that she was going to attack Re: without thinking,

I lunged at her body, trying to grab the sharp object she was holding. I managed to grab the broken bottle. My right arm was bleeding, scratched by a shard. The woman was immediately smothered by the security guards and taken somewhere" (Suherman, 2014: 61).

A female friend of RE who is also a lesbian prostitute suffered an unfortunate fate. Very cruel physical torture was carried out by her pimp whom they usually call "mami". The woman was caught pregnant by her boyfriend so "mami" was angry. Without feeling, "mami" kicked her RE friend in the stomach until she bled. Mami threatened to stab her in the stomach with a cutter. The woman screamed for mercy and the pregnancy was aborted.

Data 6

"There was a child here who secretly dated a boy and got pregnant. The boy was chased by Chris. I don't know what happened to him. And then, that child? He was tried in front of all of us. Mami kicked his distended belly until it bled. And then? Mummy cut his face. Until the child screamed for mercy. The baby? Aborted. Abortion" (Suherman, 2014:68).

Other physical violence experienced by women to the point of death due to the actions of "mami" did not only occur once. However, another case of a pregnant lesbian prostitute was also stabbed in the stomach and a cutter piece was left in the stomach which caused the victim to die. This can be observed in the following data.

Data 7

If Mami doesn't kick, she scratches people's stomachs with a cutter. Did you see it yourself? It happened

before I worked here. Sinta told me about it. Someone was caught pregnant. She stabbed him in the stomach with a cutter. The cutter was broken in the stomach. Died? Just think about it. Should I continue?" (Suherman, 2014: 68).

RE characters have experienced physical violence since they were in junior high school as shown in data (8). The physical violence was carried out by his family. Initially his family could not accept RE's tomboyish appearance. They were angry, his father slapped him, and his mother and brother also hit him.

Data 8

"I've been in lines since I was born. I ran away from my parents' house in Bogor in the second grade of junior high school because my family didn't like the look of me. I was a girl but acted and looked like a boy. I was immediately slapped by my father. My mother and siblings also joined in the beating" (Suherman, 2014).

Physical violence by killing a woman who was crucified on an electric pole, her body was slashed with a knife and cut with a cutter. The victim is the character RE.

Data 9

"It doesn't make sense. It's impossible to crucify someone on an electric pole in the open, in the middle of the city again, without the knowledge of others. Especially if his body was tied up first and then stabbed with knives and cutters until he died. It would have taken at least 20 to 30 minutes, and it was done by at least three people or, perhaps, he was tortured to death first, and then tied to the electricity pole?" (Suherman, 2014: 148).

In addition to his body being crucified on an electric pole, the RE character also suffered

violence on his calf with a cutter found by the community.

Data 10

"Cutter? Yes, there's a piece of cutter still stuck in her calf. Oh, God" (Suherman, 2014:148)

b. Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is defined as a behavior against the female body in the erotic part that is deliberately carried out by other people, both men and women. The act of sexual violence is carried out arbitrarily against women with coercion and beyond the limits of humanity.

Acts of sexual violence against women are intended to cause pain and damage their sex organs. Even women's feelings. The forms of cruelty committed are related to sexuality such as the destruction of women's vital parts, such as breasts, vagina, and others. Violence is not only non-verbal, but also with vulgar words. These indecent words are often received by women as experienced by the female character in the novel RE.

Sexual violence does not only occur in the real world but in literary works such as in the novel RE, women who work as lesbian prostitutes also experience sexual violence.

The following data (11) reveals the suffering of women by their own guests while undergoing their profession. The character RE as a lesbian prostitute due to coercion and evil actions because she was forced by "mami" Lani to become a lesbian prostitute finally experienced sexual violence.

Data 11

" The attitude and treatment of the guests also varies. Some were gentle, but others were rude. Some of the prostitutes I met were traumatized and even had physical wounds on

their bodies from the treatment of their guests. If it has gone too far, they can report to the bouncers in their respective places but it is usually too late because it has already happened" (Suherman, 2014: 26)).

Maman Suherman reveals a female character named Re who is turned into a prostitute and sold by a pimp named Mami Lani. Mami, who only pretends to be kind to help RE, turns out to be a tactic to ensnare RE with debt. RE is unable to pay the debt so she is trapped and forced to follow all of Lani's orders. RE's inability to pay his debts gave Lani great power to trick him. RE lived his destiny without daring to resist, because resisting meant death.

Data 12

All of Re's expenses during the first almost six months of being accommodated in the boarding house, which were originally promised as a favor, turned out to be neatly recorded by Mami Lani. All of Re's living expenses, including during her pregnancy, childbirth, and caring for her baby, were later calculated by Mami Lani as a loan that had to be repaid plus interest. Re was eventually tricked into paying off the hefty debt by selling her body to another woman (Suherman, 2014: 40).

The RE character accepts the bad luck that befalls him. RE is unable to do anything about it. Sexual violence continues to be a part of his life. As in the following quote.

Data 13

"But, why did she have the misfortune of becoming a servant of the lust of people she didn't know" (Suherman, 2014: 86)

The RE character and the female character described as a prostitute by Maman Suherman experience sexual violence. These characters do not enjoy the relationship properly. However, they only get suffering and especially sexual violence. Their guests don't care, in their minds they are paying for their services. The prostitutes' guests can be categorized as psychologically abnormal. He only gets excited when he tortures others. This can be seen in data 14.

Data 14

"There are people who like to make their co-stars hurt and then they lust. Have you ever served him? I've been an artist. Often appearing on TV.

Not only that, my hands were tied to the bedpost. So were my legs. It was just like in horror movies. I screamed in pain, but he still tied me up roughly like someone in a trance. Didn't fight back? At first he asked nicely. I can only play if your hands and feet are tied. I'm not going to be rude, really. That's what he asked. I said yes. I thought he was a famous person, how could he harm me. After all, he called mommy himself" (Suherman, 2014: 88)

The character RE as described by Maman Suherman in his novel continues to experience sexual violence when serving his guests. The following quote explains this.

Data 15

"It turned out that RE was wrong. After Re's hands and feet were bound, the artist treated her roughly. Grabbing, scratching, even biting all over her body, including in the nipple area" (Suherman, 2014: 89).

The character RE experiences sexual suffering when she has to serve a married couple. RE's guests also have abnormal sexuality. They need the presence of other

people to have sex. This behavior is not appropriate. RE cannot refuse because this will make her pimp angry. The data in the following excerpt illustrates this.

Data 16

"Yes, I was just told to serve his wife. Massaging her, rubbing her all over, licking her until she moans. Her husband? Her husband was just in his underwear sitting on a chair watching us. Where were you? Staying on the bed, I was told to stroke her back while she was playing. Is that all? Yes, her husband's hand was also holding my breasts. Occasionally he licks it" (Suherman, 2014: 93)

Another situation tells the story of RE's experience at a sex party. In this place, sexual violence in disguise was also experienced by the sex workers. Basically, they did not accept the treatment but they did not have the strength to fight back.

Data 17

"It's also called an orgy. Yes, all for all. You can't be picky. It's not even just threesomes. In one room I once felt four couples playing. After that, they exchanged partners with each other." (Suherman, 2014: 128)

DISCUSSION

a. Physical Violence

Patriarchal societies position women as inferior beings. Women are considered not to have an important role and are marginalized. The reason for the assumption that women are degraded beings is constructed by men so that their existence is not like men. Men feel that women are their rivals when in fact women are equal partners with men.

De Beauvoir's view of the inferiority experienced by women, especially in relation to physical violence, causes women to become vital objects. This is what is depicted in the novel RE: by Maman Suherman.

The series of physical violence experienced by the female characters in the novel RE: by Maman Suherman proves that in the public world the fate of women has not been free from suffering. Women's rights as echoed by feminists have not been completed until now. In literary works, especially the depiction of the fate of women in cases of physical violence is still a major theme.

Socialist feminist literary criticism that aims to defend women's rights from the elements of capitalism, which sells women's bodies to men and to women themselves, creates a demeaning attitude towards women.

Mami Lani's attitude that forces RE to become a lesbian prostitute in the novel RE: by Maman Suherman clearly puts women at the lowest point. The physical torture experienced by the female characters is carried out by mami Lani and her men whenever a prostitute disobeys or tries to escape mami Lani's power.

The character of Mami Lani and her men acted arbitrarily towards the women who were used as sexual commercial material. Women's bodies are tortured in various ways. There are female characters who are killed by stabbing their stomachs with a cutter as experienced by Sinta and her fellow lesbian prostitutes who are discovered to be pregnant.

The fate of the character RE who also experienced physical torture until he was killed, whose body was crucified on an electric pole with his calf stuck with a cutter knife. The physical violence experienced by lesbian prostitutes is a form of degrading

women both in terms of social status and physicality.

The gap in social status between women and girls is also one of the triggers for the birth of physical violence against women. The character of Mami Lani, who is the pimp of the lesbian female characters RE and her friends, is easily cruel and abusive. Mami Lani does this because she considers her position higher than RE and her friends.

As a result of different social classes in society, including in the world of prostitution as depicted in the novel RE, the position of women is inferiorized by fellow women.

This act of degrading women resulted in the physical violence experienced by RE and her lesbian prostitute friends. Mami Lani's character as the controller and holder of power will easily punish and torture all her subordinates who are considered to be against.

Physical violence against women as narrated by Maman Suherman in RE is a symbolization of the real world. Maman reveals that what is being told is a dark side of women who are forced to be sold because of the influence of materialism in society. Another world of prostitutes covered in blood, revenge, and tears.

b. Sexual Violence

Women's inferior position is based on sexuality. Women are used as objects of sexual violence by men. This can be seen in cases of rape, buying and selling of women, discrimination in the public sphere and in the family environment.

Being a sexual object for other women is depicted by Maman Suherman in his novel. The character RE and her friends become sexual objects commercialized by Mami Lani, the pimp. Mami Lani sells them to service users, especially lesbians.

The RE character and her friends engage in all these relationships under

duress. They felt unsafe under the threat of their guests. They were all tormented and continued to experience sexual violence. RE and other female characters feel pain during intercourse.

The character RE experienced sexual violence that harmed them but benefited mami Lani. The form of violence that RE received was inhumane acts by being slapped and tied up during sexual intercourse. RE was forced to tie up his body and was beaten by his female customers. RE's customer has sexual and mental disorders because he likes the same sex and his behavior is very cruel. RE's neighbor did not care about the pain RE was experiencing. The customer just wanted to vent his wild lust. A customer who has no compassion for his fellow human beings.

Maman Suherman in his novel describes that the main character RE is very tormented and almost tired of all the suffering he has endured but he has no power. The debt to Mami Lani has not been able to be redeemed. RE is forced to undergo all this suffering. Wanting to fight back, there is nothing RE can do.

The character RE feels very miserable living life as a lesbian prostitute, this is because RE is treated harshly when serving her unknown guests.

The RE character is traumatized when she serves her guests due to frequent sexual violence. In addition to her body being tied up or slapped, she was also subjected to unnatural sexual intercourse requested by customers. RE sometimes serves husband and wife customers who treat her unnaturally.

The character RE also experienced torture during a gang sex party. RE was unable and traumatized but had to keep going to pay his debts to mami Lani. Debts that RE never wanted in his life.

The novel RE describes how women are exploited in the form of prostitution.

Mami Lani, a female character with a high social class, acts arbitrarily towards weak women and even kills them without feeling.

The novel also depicts the attachment of female inferiority through the

character RE and her friends. Society and even the media report them by using the word "prostitute" instead of woman.

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