

LOVE AND FIDELITY: A FEMINIST STUDY ON RAMA-SHINTA STORY IN THE NOVEL *KITAB OMONG KOSONG* BY SENO GUMIRA AJIDARMA

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Abstract

Rama-Sintha is a very legendary story, however this story is always worth-watching in various forms—film, dancing, drama, novel even in cartoon. Seno Gumira Ajidarma, is one of the writers who retells the story from different point of view. *Kitab Omong Kosong*, referred to as *KOK*, tells about Sintha's lawsuit against Rama's love. The novel no longer tells about the epic of their legendary love story, but it criticizes love and virginity-orientation in a patriarchal culture. This is due to the reason what Shinta has experienced in *KOK*, representing the imbalance of woman in society. This research will use content analysis to reveal the *KOK* using feminist's perspectives. This study will employ a feminist point of view to see a biased association of love to virginity. In patriarchal culture, virginity becomes one of the standards to value one's love. The result of this research shows that *KOK* is a deconstruction of Rama-Shinta love story, to a story full of anger, arrogance, and jealousy. As *lelanang* (man), Shinta is a symbol of power. Her kidnapping by Rahwana is a humiliation against Rama's dignity. Thus, to receive her back as his wife, Rama asked her to prove her purity and loyalty. This shows unequal power between Rama and Shinta, as two lovers. She was a true victim of patriarchy. Her choice to disappear (*moksa*) is a resistance struggle against his beloved husband's domination.

Keywords: love, virginity, feminism

Introduction

Love and virginity are two different things. However, these two words become interrelated and important to discuss. This is because love is a very universal thing, timeless and owned by all living individuals. It is just as the Ramayana epic that tells about the love story of Rama and Shinta although the story itself is slightly different from the story that is written by Rajagopalachari. But still the story is always breathtaking to be enjoyed in various forms like movies, ballet, colossal drama to animation / cartoon because it tells a love story that is so legendary and full of meaning.

Rama and Shinta's love story that became the object of the study is Rama-Shinta story which is retold in prose by Seno Gumira Ajidarma (SGA) in the novel *Kitab Omong Kosong* (*KOK*). The love story that is written by SGA among other is unique. What the author writes in each of his works is a portrait of his life and experienced (Windiarti, 2016: 24). Literature is a reflection of human life with various dimensions.

In *KOK*, Rama-Shinta love story is told differently from Rajagopalachari, this is due to

that SGA wrote the story of Ramayana by using Indonesian culture perspective especially Java. The story begin with the journey of a woman named Shinta who is pregnant and afflicted by sadness because it turns out that her beloved husband named Rama, who is the incarnation of god Vishnu, dare to burn her alive in order to convince the Ayodya people, that she is still virgin. For the sake of serenity of Ayodya, after the burning, Shinta was willing to disappear from her husband (Ajidarma, 2013: 22) despite of her being pregnant from a man who burn her alive.

Using the feminism perspective this study will analyze more about the feminist view of love and purity. This is due to in patriarchal culture, especially in Java; virginity has always been used as a basis to measure someone's love.

Methods

This research is a literary research (content analysis) by using qualitative-descriptive method. This method is used to explore information about a phenomenon comprehensively. In this case, the researcher will collect, classify, analyze the collected data in the form

of excerpts contained in *KOK* novels depicting love and virginity. Then the data that have been categorized is analyzed by using feminism theory and then the results of the analysis are presented in the form of explanation of how the meaning of love and virginity depicted in relation to the patriarchal power.

Finding and Discussion

This part will present the result of the analysis in *KOK*, especially focusing on two main points, love and virginity. These two subjects are reflected in two main characters in *Ramayana* that are the basis of the story of *KOK* novel.

Love and Virginity: Rama “the Javanese Man”

Being born as a woman or a man is a gifted. But since his birth, a baby boy can become a reason of a family’s happiness, otherwise born as a baby girl can be a disgrace for a family. Thus, the desirable and unwanted sexes continue to be built and disseminated unnoticed and eventually form a construct in society. This gender distinction, known as gender, is then cultivated not only through the attributes that are imposed once they are born but also their behavior is also monitored. Men must be strong and brave. Women should be gentle and motherly. The existence of a different relationship had caused one side (men) dominant over the other side (women).

This condition can be seen in many *Ramayana* stories, where Rama is the one who served to save Shinta from Rahwana’s hand. But in his novel *KOK*, as in some of his other novels, SGA tells the story with a different and somewhat a distant story, contrary to the ordinary story of *Ramayana*. Being different (*nyeleneh*) is a strong identity of the novel and as well as the title which potentially create controversy, *Kitab Omong Kosong*. Whatever is existed in the novel, whether we agree or not; any protest has been answered by the title written in the cover of the novel.

The great and legendary love story is impeached by the author. Apparently what has been understood and believed by Javanese people, Indonesia, India or even the world is really wrong. Rama and Shinta as a symbol of eternal love are just nonsense. Their love story is not surrounded by the sweetness of happiness but filled with suffering and anger. A story which usually filled with a positive aura like Shakespeare's comedy narrated with cloudy plot as the tragedy of the great poet.

Shinta becomes a grievous victim, and Rama is transformed into a "love villain" filled with anger and jealousy.

Shinta pun tidak lagi percaya ada cinta di hati Rama sejak awalnya:

Kini bahkan ia bertanya-tanya, apa sebabnya Rama memerangi Rahwana dan menyerbu Alengka. Benarkah ia berperang demi cinta? Ataukah berperang demi ketersinggungannya sebagai lelaki dan sebagai ksatria karena Rahwana menculik istrinya?

Mengapa Rama begitu mementingkan kesetiaan dan kesucian, tapi tidak pernah mempertanyakan cinta? Ada banyak peristiwa yang membuatnya bertanya-tanya. (KOK, 2013:19)

The quotation above is Shinta's lawsuit against Rama's love. Did Rama really love her? Though she has been saved from Rahwana, Shinta still questioning about Rama’s motivation of his mission in rescuing her. Is it really a love? Shinta tried to probe deeper into her husband psychology who is a knight and a king. She highly doubts the spirit behind the struggle of rescuing her from the giant, is the genuine love of a husband to his wife.

Shinta believes that the motif of rescuing her is Rama’s anger arising from Rahwana's actions. As a knight who is offended for having a part of him been trampled by his rival knight. This is very reasonable because Shinta was achieved by Rama not from the natural process (approach to get women's heart), but from the competition by competing with many knights and warriors. Shinta, then, is a gift for the superiority and supernatural powers that he possesses. Having Shinta is just the tip of his life journey as a *lelanang*.

The achievement of a man to get a woman who later became his wife is the culmination of the perfection of becoming a real Javanese man. In Javanese philosophy, it is mentioned that man is said to be perfect when he is able to have these 5 things: *curigo* (weapon), *wismo* (house), *turonggo* (horse), *kukilo* (bird), *garwo* (wife) (Sriyadi, 2010). *Garwa* is the peak as well as the result of the possession of the other 4 things. When a man already has weapons / supernatural powers or sources of income then he also has the ability to build a house, and easily to buy a vehicle. After that he can channel his hobbies

through pets (bird) or the other. Having fulfilled all the four things, he then, is allowed to choose woman as his wife. The ability to choose a woman is determined by *curigo*.

Thus, Rama, with his unrivaled supernatural powers, he achieved the highest achievement of the men of his day, obtain the most beautiful woman, Shinta. In Javanese culture men have the right to choose women for their political interests, to legitimize their status or his role as the ordinate who controls the sub ordinate. Culturally, Javanese society positioned women as subordinate. Shinta's beauty legitimizes his status as a man and a king. Due to the concept and ideal of Javanese, the beauty of a woman is reflected from the physical appearance which, then, raises some categorization of women. Among them is to have a good personality. As argued by Synott (2003: 135), face is the source of non-verbal communication. Hence, it is often made use to judge a goodness (or badness) of a person. Likewise, the physical beauty of Shinta is also expected to be directly proportional to her face. As it is depicted by some legendary stories and also fairy tales from Europe, which lately much retold in the form of motion picture (film) produced by Disney. The dichotomy of good women and bad women is seen at once in their physical form. The princess has a beautiful face and a good personality, while an ugly woman (stepmother and witch) has an unsightly, fat, old, and wrinkly physical form. From this depiction, it can be concluded that the face is an honest language to reveal person's character.

Is there any love motive in Rama's mission of saving her? Shinta doubted about. Is Rama the only "love villain" to blame? No, he is not. There is another man to blame, it is then Shinta's father, for having made his daughter a prize in a contest. Then what is the motivation of this father? He wants to make sure that the princess gets the man who is really capable of protecting his beloved one. Thus, it is a justifiable way to achieve that noble mission.

The question of Rama's love in Shinta's heart is very reasonable, because Rama is not quite satisfied with struggling back Shinta. Rama's unreasonable demands made her disappointed. Her kidnapping by Rahwana, is not her will. But to return back to become Rama's wife, she must prove that she is still virgin with all the nonsense. As a husband

and as a king, Rama should be able to protect and defend his people and in this case is her right as a wife and an empress that is worthy to be defended. However, this time Rama was blinded by his ego as a man and as a king. So, he not only sends Hanuman to know Shinta's loyalty through the ring he entrusts to Hanuman, but he also asks Shinta to burn herself in front of the Ayodya people. For Rama, love and virginity are the two inseparable things that he wants to show to the people of Ayodya, even when he becomes a different person.

Pertama, ketika Rama mengutus Hanuman, wanara putih yang perkasa itu, untuk menyelundup ketaman Argasoka, tempat ia disekap Rahwana di Alengka, dititipkannya sebuah cincin. Rama minta ia memakainya, jika jarinya bisa masuk, tandanya ia masih setia. Kedua, setelah peperangan selesai, dan Rahwana terjepit gunung Sodara-Sodari jelmaan kepala anak-anaknya sendiri, masih juga Rama meminta ia membuktikan kesetiaan dengan cara dibakar api... Rama berkata, jika ia masih suci, maka api itu tidak akan membakarnya, jika ia tidak suci, dalam arti pernah disentuh atau membiarkan dirinya dijamah Rahwana, tapi itu akan menghungkannya. (KOK, 2013:20)

In patriarchy world, good wives are those who are obedient to the will of the husband. This is important to Rama who is both husband and king to Shinta. It is important for him to ensure the sanctity of Shinta as a wife and her position as the queen. That reason underlies Rama to question Shinta's virginity. For Rama, his existence as a man and a king is everything.

Apakah cinta bagi Rama memerlukan syarat? Apakah cinta bagi Rama yang mahabijak dan maha mengerti itu memerlukan syarat syarat bernama kesucian? Kesucian cinta bukanlah kesucian tubuh o Rama, karena jika begitu bagaimana seorang pelacur bisa mengorbankan tubuh demi cintanya kepada kehidupan?... "Aku hanya mencintaimu o Rama, tetapi bagimu cinta orang-orang Ayodya lebih penting ketimbang cintaku kepadamu. Apakah itu hanya karena kamu seorang raja o Rama? Apakah karena kamu seorang penguasa? Apakah karena dengan menjadi seorang raja diraja yang berkuasa maka kehidupan pribadimu harus menjadi berbeda sendiri wahai Rama? (KOK, 2013:17)

He was offended of becoming a king as well as a man, when Shinta was kidnapped by her rival Rahwana, a wealthy king, made him ask many conditions when he wanted to get her back.

Lelaki yang malang, tidak mampu memisahkan cinta dari keangkuhan. Dunia ini harus menyerah kepada dirimu, wahai titisan Wisnu, sungguh semua ini adalah kesalahan pandangan. Hidupmu tiada boleh bernoda, bahkan tidak juga setitik noda. Apakah itu karena dikau sebetulnya dewa dan bukan manusia? Namun pandanganmu adalah kelemahan manusia, Rama, dikau sungguh tidak sempurna – tapi sungguh kukatakan kepadamu Rama, berbahagialah menjadi manusia! (KOK, 2013:63)

Thus, even if Rama were the very sacred gods, but Rama's deeply stained behavior and thought of letting his wife burn and leave Ayodya for the sanctity of the land, he was no human. Man is the place of error but why does he demand the sanctity of a human being.

Sungguh tiada pernah kukira betapa ksatria Ayodya yang kukira begitu lembut dan begitu mulia ternyata begitu rendah diri sebagai manusia. O Lelaki mana kiranya yang tidak bisa disebut rendah diri jika tiada pernah percaya betapa suci istrinya meski istrinya itu sudah begitu setia dalam cengkeraman Rahwana yang kaya raya? Rama telah membakar aku dalam api unggun raksasa yang nyala apinya memerahkan langit demi kepercayaan dirinya maupun orang-orang Ayodya. (KOK, 2013:17)

Not only the two unreasonable demands, when finally Rama finds Shinta back after long time leaving Ayodya for the peace of the country, Rama asks her back to prove the sanctity of love towards him, though he knows that Shinta is so faithful and taking a good care of his children alone.

Shinta istriku, ibu anak-anakku, aku datang kemari bukan untuk bertengkar. Aku tidak mempertaruhkan cinta untuk kekuasaan. Baiklah kutanyakan saja sekarang, apakah engkau bisa membuktikan kesucian? (KOK, 2013:63)

Shinta's sacrifice failed to ensure her love to Rama. Virginity is the most important thing to prove her love to him. Even all the sacrifices Shinta has made did not soften her heart at all. His position as king of Ayodya, and his ego as a man is more powerful than the love he has to Shinta. As a king, Shinta is

the symbol of the king's power. Shinta (*garwa*) is the fifth parts to complete the perfection as a *lelanang*. She becomes a part of the authorities under his control. As a territory, empress or the first lady, is *kotaraja* (capital). So, kidnapping Shinta is a form of great humiliation for Rama's power. Perhaps it would be different if the one that is annexed is the periphery, the concubine, which is of little importance to the position. The abduction effect became less important and stabbed compared to Shinta kidnapping. Because when it comes to the ways to obtain, a concubine is usually a reward unlike Shinta, through a contest where all of Rama's integrity is at stake with another knight.

Discussion

Men Need Power, Women need Love

In a heterosexual relationship, the position of women and men will never be the same. As it is explained by Sartre, there is no equivalent and reciprocal relationship between man and woman. There will be no relationship that does not sacrifice the other side. Schmidt (2015), "there were roles in relationships. As times have changed over the past thousand years or so, those roles have been redefined numerous times." Although the rule continues to be redefined continuously but the rule remains. Naturally, a woman wants to be owned by a man and for a man, psychologically, wants to have a woman with the power he has. In short, a man needs power to show his love, while women need the love of a man by surrendering her power. Thus, a heterosexual marriage can be manifested. With this surrender a true love can be achieved.

Likewise, to the story of Rama-Shinta in the novel KOK. Rama, a male and king of Ayodya, defines his love with his strength. He won Shinta from a contest and fought with Rahwana, to show his love for Shinta. And Shinta (*Garwa*) is the last thing to complete his position as a true man in Javanese male philosophy, after *Wismo*, *Kukilo*, *Turangga*, and *Curigo*. So when Shinta, as part of his perfection of being a man being taken away by his richer rival than him, he was offended. To cover it up, he proposed the conditions for Shinta to return to her position as a wife. Makow (2017) stated that in order to show her femininity a woman must have feminine quality that is

loving, caring, gentle, caring and symbiotic with the needs of men. If not, then, a relationship full of love and harmony can not be reached. As it happens with Rama and Shinta's relationship at the end of *KOK* novels. Although Shinta, then, implemented all the requirements requested by Rama, because as a wife she must obey her husband, in accordance with the philosophy of Javanese women who must *setya, bekti, mituhu, and mitayani*, she still questions about what Rama did to her. Shinta's question and anger over Rama's treatment, which was then redefined as a form of women's resistance to the patriarchal power led to the separation between them as a husband and wife. Shinta chose to disappear by merging herself to the ground instead of show her devotion by proving her virginity for the third time.

Conclusion

Establishing a relationship is not about equality because basically the need for love between men and women is different. A man needs power in showing his love. Women need to be loved by giving up their power to men. Maintaining trust and virginity is apparently women's strength to complement each other not to compete with the opponent's strength. That way the harmonization of a relationship can work well.

KOK is a love story of Rama-Shinta that is impeached with a story full of anger, arrogance and jealousy. As a *lelanang*, Rama is the symbol of the power of a man. Shinta's kidnapping by Rahwana is a disgrace and a great humiliation for Rama. That is why in order to receive Shinta back; he asks her virginity and loyalty as a form of surrender (*bekti*) as a wife. The problem of sanctity that Rama demanded of Shinta indicated a power imbalance between the two. Shinta is a victim. And Shinta's choice to disappear with the earth is as a form of resistance to Rama's power over her.

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