

THE REPRESENTATION OF PATRIARCHY IN INDONESIAN CHILDREN FOLK TALES FROM SUMATRA ISLAND

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to discuss the topic of patriarchal research because it still existed in several countries in the world, especially Asia and more specifically, in Indonesia. This research was conducted to reveal how patriarchal values were reflected in Indonesian children's folk tales from Sumatra Island. This research used a sociological approach to literature and used semiotic theory to analyze the data obtained. The researcher chose to use a qualitative descriptive method so that the analysis process could be described completely. The main data used in this research were several children's folk tales originating from Sumatra Island, namely Province of North Sumatra ("Di Balik Derita Si Boru Tombaga", "Bohong Merinang", and "Si Kodok Kata Malem, Baik Budi Penawan Hati"), South Sumatra ("Langkuse dan Putri Rambut Putih"), and Jambi ("Legenda Bukit Perak"). This research finds that patriarchal values are represented in how women are associated with domestic works, women are considered as the subordinates and inferiors, as well as showing their dependence on men.

Keywords: patriarchy representation, patriarchal values, children folk tales, semiotic

INTRODUCTION

Society sets rules, traditions, or habits that eventually become the culture. Culture is one of the shreds of evidence of human existence, both socially and individually. Benedict in Bennet (2015) has said that culture is more than a collection of merely isolated bits of behavior, it is the integrated total of learned behavior traits which are manifest by the members of society. A group of people who live in the same area or surrounding shares the same norms, values, and traditions. The form of the culture can exist at one time but then can be invalid at another time in the future. Culture and its values can change over time.

In Asia and especially in Indonesian culture, men still hold the leading role. Most Indonesian families, man or father, is the person who is called the head of the family. The head of the family is the person who is responsible economically and for almost everything. This male-dominated social structure is called patriarchy. The term patriarchy originally comes from the *patriarkhia* that means ruling father in the mid-century. Walby in Suliman (2019) has said that patriarchy is commonly referred to as a structure or a system that governs social relations pertaining to binary genders within societies, which the main attribute

of its social structures is the domination, oppression, and exploitation of women by men. The domination of men in Indonesia is generally accepted by the community because the system and structure that have been existing for a long time. The society has accepted and becomes accustomed to this value from several generations to the present.

This condition is in line with Sharma in Dutt (2018), who stated that, "Deep-rooted ideas about male superiority enable men to freely exercise unlimited power over women's lives and effectively legitimize it too." The values of how the community accepts the fact that the role of men is more important than women are represented in several children folk tales. Culturally and traditionally, women tend to accept that men are the ones who decide everything for the family because they are considered wiser and smarter. Physically, their strength is above women. Positionally, they are the breadwinners of the family. The role of women is nothing more than child caregivers, doing domestic chores and housework that do not need much thinking, and serving their husbands well when they come home and are tired after working outside.

Most of the cultural practices come from traditions that have been existed for a long time. As literary works are also part of the culture, some of the cultural values

and practices are reflected through them, as in folk tales. Dundes in Florence (2016) has said that in the education of the young, promoting a group's feeling of solidarity and providing socially sanctioned ways for individuals to act superior to or to censure other individuals, serve as a vehicle for social protest, offering an enjoyable escape from reality, and converting full work into play. In line with these definitions, Indonesian folk tale is also known through oral and has been said to children. It can then be read in the book with the advancement of technology in a few generations later. The values and practices of patriarchy are often reflected in them either explicitly or implicitly. Every region in Indonesia has its own folk tales. Folk tales contain the customs, habits, and local values of an area. Folk tales are related to children because parents tend to teach the children their values and traditions by telling stories so that children can understand better, and they can remember it forever. Even Nurhayati (2019) has said that folk tales are particularly beneficial for nurturing children about morals, like friendship, heroism, and obedience to parents.

Indonesia is rich in folklore that is from five main islands, 34 provinces, and more than 100.000 cities. Sumatra Island is the sixth-largest island in the world and the third-largest in Indonesia after Papua and Kalimantan. Melayu or Malay is the native and populates most of the island. Sumatra Island consists of ten provinces, namely Nangroe Aceh Darussalam, West Sumatra, South Sumatra, North Sumatra, Riau Islands, Jambi, Riau, Bengkulu, Bangka Belitung Islands, and Lampung. Folklore from Sumatra Island comes from cities in several of these provinces. On this island, there are various cities, regions, and tribes so that their folk tales are diverse and can be an interesting object of research. Therefore, the main data from this research are various folk tales from the island of Sumatra.

This research is conducted to find out how the values of patriarchy emerged in Indonesian children folk tales originating from Sumatra Island. Masykuroh (2016) is conducted research to find how physical and verbal violence is represented in Indonesian folk tales. The result shows that physical violence is divided into two, using the weapon and using part of the body. The verbal violence is seen by labeling, threatening, humiliating, swearing, cursing, and others. Those actions are portrayed in 115 Indonesian traditional folk tales that have been analyzed as the source of data. Another research is conducted by Adipoetra (2016) about how patriarchy represented in the movie. Using Pierce's semiotics method and Bhasin's theory, she has found that the movie conveys hopes for the people who live around the border, but it is limited for the men. Inequality shows that women do not have the same chance as men. Rawat (2014) in her research, has said that, "Patriarchy imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in the society which strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women."

The next research is conducted by Sakinah and Siti (2017) about some problems that emerge because of the patriarchy system in Indonesia. Law enforcement from cases involving violence towards women is not fair and shows gender inequality. The women's portrait in Indonesia is also represented in the more modern media such as movies. Suhadi (2015) has researched the change in the interpretation against the patriarchy systems has produced a new phase in the movement against the patriarchy such as feminists industry, which survives from the law of social evolution. On the other hand, this research is conducted

using the same data source as the first article but using the same topic as the other three pieces of research.

Each literary work is a reflection of the same social conditions in real life. It is in accordance with what is said by Frye in Fitri and Suparti (2016) that the works in literature might reflect the nature of the society in real life. The researcher chooses to discuss the topic of patriarchy in the folk tales to reveal how the patriarchy is represented. There are ways of how patriarchal practices is reflected in the text.

METHODS

The focus of this research is how patriarchy is represented in Indonesian children folk tales. The researcher uses a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the signs and values of patriarchy in folk tales from Sumatra Island. According to Jones and Bartlet in Fitri and Suparti (2016), a descriptive qualitative method is a research method that investigates the experience, social processes, and subculture of the research object. Thus, the result of this research is presented in forms of words and sentences instead of numerical data. The researcher describes the facts about the signs of patriarchy, then analyzes them using the theory of semiotics. These facts include the social system, the role of men, and the traditions that exist in society. The main data from this research are some folk tales from Sumatra Island which have been published officially by the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education and Culture as electronic books that can be free-downloaded to support the National Literacy Movement. The stories are *Di Balik Derita Si Boru Tombaga*, *Bohong Merinang*, and *Si Kodok Kata Malem*, *Baik Budi Penawan Hati* from North Sumatra; *Langkuse dan Putri Rambut Putih* from South Sumatra; and *Legenda Bukit Perak* from Jambi province. These stories are categorized as literature for elementary school students. The secondary data are taken from books, journals, and related websites to support primary data.

Representation is not separated from the sign and signifier, which is stated by Saussure. In Saussure's semiotics, the main idea is the sign, which is defined as, "A two-fold entity consisting of the signifier and signified." Kurniawan in Adipoetra (2016) has said that semiotics is a study or method to analyze signs in a context of scenarios, images, texts, and scenes in the film to be something that can be interpreted by a human being. In general, semiotics uses signs as a tool that is used by human to represent themselves in analyzing something in some specific context, for example, folk tales. In the story, there is a sign when the patriarchal value was still very strongly embedded in the past. Zaimar (2017) has said that in a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures, and objects.

The semiotic theory is used to analyze data that are found, as dialogs or narration. Quoting from Saussure in Yakin and Totua (2014), a sign consists of two focal components, namely signifier—the sound pattern (marker-sound image), and signified—the concept (the outcome/the interpretation/conception of the signifier). Signifier appears as a form that can be known through the form of work, while signified are seen as meanings revealed through concepts. After that, the researcher links the signs of patriarchy with the data found and give some elaboration regarding those data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The researcher identifies the signs in the dialog and narration. After that, the researcher analyzes the data using the semiotic theory. The first folk tale, entitled *Di Balik Penderitaan Si Boru Tombaga* (Behind the Suffering of Si Boru Tombaga) tells the story of the parents of the Batak Toba ethnic group who have no descendants of sons. At that time, having a son was very important because men were the successors of the family. In this research, the researcher divides the representation of patriarchy into three categories of representation; women as domestic workers, women's subordination, and women's dependence on men.

The first sign of the patriarchy is women as domestic workers. In some parts of the story, there are houses and palaces as the setting. It can be seen in most stories that women tend to stay at home doing domestic chores or housework. They prepare food, clean the house, take care of children, and serve their husbands. Stated by Ruggles (2015) in his article that in the past, household heads owned and controlled the means of production, and their wives and children were obliged to provide the unpaid labor needed to sustain family enterprises. The representations of patriarchy are in several stories used as the source of data. The major things, like activities that are related to the finance of the family, relation with people in society are mostly done by men.

In the story entitled *Di Balik Penderitaan Si Boru Tombaga* (Behind the Suffering of Si Boru Tombaga) from North Sumatra, examples of patriarchy's representations are seen in the narrative below as the first signifier:

Seharian kami berbincang-bincang tentang berbagai hal. Lalu, seorang wanita menyuguhkan minuman untuk kami. Siapa wanita itu, aku tidak tahu.

(We talk all day about various things. Then, a woman served us drinks. Who is that woman, I do not know.)

In the quotation mentioned, the story appears to use the word '*menyuguhkan*' (serve) to illustrate the role of women. The Indonesian word '*menyuguhkan*' comes from the root word '*suguh*' which means '*menjamu*' or 'to serve the guest' in English. This word semantically has a formal form. It implies that women are associated with having a domestic role that is serving as preparing drinks to guests and in this case, related to the patriarchal system and gender role; the wife is the servant to her husband, who holds the authority. It is signified that she should prepare drinks for the guest, yet the man does the talking. The concept of serving also appears in other folk tale excerpts entitled *Bohong Merinang* from North Sumatra as the next signifier:

Kau sudah tidak melaksanakan kewajibanmu sebagai seorang istri; mengurus rumah dan suamimu.

(You have not carried out your obligations as a wife; take care of your house and husband.)

According to the quotation, the word '*mengurus*' means '*rawat, piara, pelihara*' according to Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia. The Indonesian words mean 'to take care or to look after' and has a formal meaning semantically as well. This sentence also shows that the main task of the wife (woman) is to take care of her husband and the house (signified). In different conditions, even though women

are not doing the domestic chores at home (they do the additional job outside), the work is still in touch with the domestic and secondary sectors, not the main sector. This condition is illustrated in another story from South Sumatra entitled *Langkuse dan Putri Berambut Putih* (Langkuse and the White-Haired Princess). In one of the narrative parts, it is told that:

Biasanya pembuatan periuk dilakukan oleh kaum perempuan; ibu-ibu dan anak gadis.
(Generally, pot-making is done by women; mothers and daughters.)

In this narration, it is told that in the land of Perigi, many women work as pot makers. *Periuk* (pot), according to the KBBI, means a tool for cooking rice made from soil or metal. Here, making pots means an industry that is still related to the domestic sector or household. As women are the ones who cook and take care of the house, it is natural for them to do works related to domestic chores. The sectors that support family's life like farming and hunting are still done by men.

These examples signify that women are functionally given a second role, which are managing houses and children while men have a primary role as breadwinners. Sometimes it leads to gender discrimination as stated by Rogers in Rosida and Rejeki (2017) that gender discrimination is the differential treatment based on the individual's sex categories. The role of husbands who interact more with the outside world makes men are trusted more for being involved in important meeting related to social affairs. As can be seen in the dialogue of the story entitled *Si Kodok Kata Malem* from North Sumatra:

"Ya, tentu. Besoklah aku panggil pak penghulu," sahut ibu si bungsu.

(“Yes, of course. Tomorrow I will ask the headman,” said the mother of the youngest.)

"Kok, kamu. Masa iya yang memanggil pak penghulu itu seorang perempuan?" kata paman si bungsu.

(“Why you? Why must a woman that will ask the headman?” said the uncle.) (Sulastri, 2016; 35)

From the conversation, it is signified that the mother is not the right person to ask for a *penghulu* (headman) because she is a woman. This important task cannot be given to women because a *penghulu* is an honorable man, a leader of a group of people. Fathoni (2017) has said that the word *penghulu* itself comes from the word *hulu*, which means head, or someone who leads or someone important. In some regions, the headman has the same function as *Kadi*, which means a religious leader in a certain area. Furthermore, because the *penghulu* has a high position in the community, then it is not proper if a woman is asking a *penghulu* that is implied by the uncle who is a man. This is proof that the man (of the family or a group) is the one who deals with social and important matters.

That elaboration shows that in folk tales from Sumatra Island, especially North Sumatra and South Sumatra, women have a domestic role in the context of patriarchy. Indonesia's marriage law that is said in Asri (2018)'s research has even stated that husband has a role as the head of a family, wife as a housewife, and the wife is responsible for managing the house chores. Some of the examples have been illustrated in some of the mentioned

Sumatran folk tales. Women have been assumed to be responsible for domestic affairs, including serving guests, husbands, and children. Even when women work outside the house to have additional income, it is still related to household things. As their duty is limited in domestic tasks, social affairs related to the community will be carried out by men. This division must be clear in order to have no conflict and tension between the structure of work and family. This statement implies that men are associated with work outside while women deal with domestic problems inside (the house). This condition sometimes does not benefit women. For example, if there is an internal problem, including those that are related to the children, men usually blame the women.

The second sign is women's subordination portrayed in the story. In the folk tales that are the writer's source of data, the position of men is above women. From the Aristotle through Jung and Freud, if it refers to the biological structure, women are incomplete men (Sullivan, 1984). In another paragraph, it is mentioned that men are associated with work because they have more power than women. This places women in subordinate position and men in a superior position. This can be seen from the behavior of a husband or man who tends to rule his wife as the signifier:

Pada suatu hari Si Kodok memetik sebuah labu dan dibawanya pulang. Ia menyerahkan buah labu itu kepada istrinya, seraya berkata, "Sayurlah buah labu ini karena aku ingin sayur labu!". Setelah itu, ia duduk di balai. (One day, Si Kodok picks a pumpkin and brings it home. He hands the pumpkin to his wife, saying, "Make it into soup because I want to eat pumpkin soup!" After that, he sits in the porch.) (Sulastri, 2016; 38)

It also can be seen in another part of the story:

Pada hari berikutnya Si Kodok membawa pulang sebuah labu ke pondoknya. Setiba di pondok, ia menyuruh istrinya memberikan labu itu kepada ibunya. (The next day, Si Kodok brings home a pumpkin to his shack. When he arrives, he orders his wife to give the pumpkin to his mother.) (Sulastri, 2016; 39)

From these two signifiers, it feels natural for husbands or men to tell their wives to do something. This is inseparable from the general idea in Indonesia that man is the leader in most of the life sector. This condition makes man as center culturally and socially. In the first quote, the sign of ruling and commanding is marked by the word "Sayurlah..." continued by "...karena aku ingin sayur labu! (...because I want to eat pumpkin soup!)". The particle *lah* in Indonesian also signifies the word before is imperative. The use of exclamation also underlined the position of the speaker, who is higher than the receiver.

In the second quotation, it is clear in the narration that the husband gives the command to his wife to do something. In part "... ia menyuruh istrinya memberikan labu itu kepada ibunya" means he orders his wife to give the pumpkin to his mother. After that, his wife does what he has ordered her to give the pumpkin to her mother-in-law. It is signified that a good wife must listen to what her husband asks her.

Regarding the inferior position of these women, the birth of sons is also more desirable than daughters. It is caused by the inheritance and patrilineal system. In the past, and in some region until now, inheritance could only be passed on to sons. That is the reason why daughters are hoping for a brother when they do not have one. This can be seen in the story Behind the Suffering of Si Boru Tombaga:

Raja Guasa berharap anak yang akan lahir itu seorang laki-laki agar dapat menjadi pewaris kerajaan kelak.

(King Guasa hopes that the child to be born is a son so he can become the heir of the kingdom later.)

"Siapa tahu dengan upacara ini, ada tanda-tanda ayah kami masih dapat berumah tangga sehingga kami mendapatkan saudara laki-laki. Dengan kami memiliki saudara laki-laki, silsilah keluarga kami dapat diwariskan."

("Who knows with this ceremony, there are signs that our father can still be married so we can get a brother. If so, our family tree can be inherited.") (Aritonang, 2016; 29)

The background of these two signifiers is that their mother had died with the baby she was carrying. After their mother left, the sisters still hope they can have a brother by suggesting their father remarried. They even asked the local shaman to see the probability of the remarriage. Quoted from the research conducted by Sianturi (2017), it is concluded that in the Batak Toba culture, sons are highly preferred than daughters. Related to the things are already mentioned about the legacy, clan, and family tree are also inherited through sons. A family is less than perfect if they do not have any son. This reaction is also shown by Si Boru Tombaga and his younger sister in the quotation:

Mereka hanya mengeluh karena mereka tidak mempunyai saudara laki-laki, apalagi mereka sering mendengar bahwa wanita yang tidak bersaudara laki-laki tidak begitu disayangi dalam keluarga Batak Toba.

(They only complain because they do not have any brothers, moreover, they often hear that daughters who have no brothers are only half-loved in the Toba Batak family.)

Si Boru Tombaga dan adiknya masih sering iri melihat orang yang mempunyai saudara laki laki.

(Si Boru Tombaga and his sister are still often jealous of people who have brothers.)

From these quotations, it can be signified that having sons is very important for Batak Toba family. As it culturally accepted, people tend to be quiet and try to have one son in the family at least. Even daughters in their young age know that sons are more superior than them. The superiority of sons is closely related to their teachings since childhood, so the parents also pass on the same idea to their children. Boys tend to be strong and active, while girls must be more passive and restrained.

The third sign of the patriarchy in the folk tales is women's dependence on men. The patriarchal system already exists and continues to take place at any social level

in Indonesia. The consequence that arises, therefore, is the dependence of women on men, consciously or not. Men as breadwinners make women (wives) who do not work, depends on the existence and income of their husbands. Women often depend on men physically, yet men sometimes do not hesitate to take benefit of it. There are several narratives such as those found in the stories of *Legenda Bukit Perak* (The Legend of Silver Hill) from Jambi with the signs of women's dependence on men. The story tells about Dato Lamo and her son who want to destroy a village by marrying the leader of the village's daughter. To carry out his plan, the son wants to marry the daughter to help them finding out about Dato Sengalo's power. It can be seen in the dialog as the signifier:

"Kebaikanmu dan ketampananmu membuat aku tak mampu menolaknya, Tuan, tetapi aku harus mengutarakan hal ini kepada ayahandaku," ucap sang Putri sambil tersipu. ("Your kindness and good looks make me unable to refuse it, sir, but I have to ask my father first," said the Princess while blushing.) (Manik, 2016; 30)

These words are uttered by Dato Sengalo's daughter (the princess) when Dato Lamo's son proposed to him. Dato Lamo's son uses his charm and good-looking face in persuading the princess to accept his proposal without asking her father's blessing first. The phrase *"kebaikanmu dan ketampananmu membuat aku tak mampu menolaknya"* (your kindness and good looks make me unable to reject it) signifies that Dato Lamo's son persuades her by using his good looks and kindness as he helps her before. He makes it, the princess is persuaded and has no choice but to accept his proposal although without her father's blessing. Later on, the son again persuades then forces her to tell his father's secret as in the dialog:

"Jika kau tak mau menceritakannya, kembalilah kau kepada ayahmu dan jangan pernah kembali lagi kepadaku. Buat apa kita menikah kalau kau masih belum memercayai suamimu."
"If you do not want to tell me, go back to your father and never return to me. Why should we marry if you still don't trust your husband." (Manik, 2016; 3)

The dialogue takes place after the princess becomes his wife. Dato Lamo's son who persuades him to tell him the secret of Dato Sengalo's power. After his wife refuses to tell him, Dato Lamo's son utters the words *"...kembalilah kau kepada ayahmu dan jangan pernah kembali lagi kepadaku..."* (come back to your father and never return to me) as a threat to his wife. The husband does it so that the princess has some dependency on him, because there is a threat to be abandoned by her husband. His wife replies to his words with persuasion so that the husband would not leave her because she loves her husband very much, as seen in the next signifier:

"Janganlah berkata demikian, wahai suamiku. Tidakkah kau tahu betapa besarnya cintaku kepadamu selama ini? Selama ini aku selalu menuruti permintaanmu," sahut sang putri dengan wajah muram dan penuh kebingungan.

(Don't say that, O my husband. Don't you know how much I love you all this time? Until now I do anything you have asked me," said the princess with a gloomy face and full of hesitation.) (Manik, 2016; 35)

After the threat posed by her husband, the princess is feeling sad. She then convinces her husband that she loves him very much by saying *"Tidakkah kau tahu betapa besarnya cintaku kepadamu selama ini?"* (Don't you know how much I love you all this time?). In this dialogue, Dato Sengalo's daughter's dependence is marked by the words *"Selama ini aku selalu menuruti permintaanmu"* (Until now I did anything you have asked me) because unconsciously or not, it signifies she becomes very bounded and dependent on her husband.

The patriarchy system exists in Indonesia culturally and religiously. These discussions show that in Indonesia, patriarchy is generally accepted by most people. The idea of the husband is working, and the wife is cooking is common, and people think that it would be weird if it works the other way around. It is normal to see the wife in the kitchen, taking care of the children, staying at home, while the husband works and socializes.

CONCLUSIONS

Folk tales are literary works that represent the culture of a region in a certain time. In folk tales especially for children, there are values, traditions, and customs that are used for generations in the local area. Folk tales often use to teach children the philosophy of life, whether the reward someone gets in doing a good deed, or the punishment someone gets in doing bad one. It is represented that patriarchy exists and influence values in society, including the children's mindset. It is signified that as children, girls believe that boys are more superior than them, that having boys in the family will give them luck. As folk tales are read a lot by the children, the idea of patriarchy could be unconsciously rooted in their mind. It is then fair that girls think boys are more important, boys would be breadwinner, and boys are whom they depend on. The boys will also think that they are superior, responsible for important things only as they believe, the patriarchal practice has been existed from a long time ago, and there is nothing wrong with it.

After the discussion and analysis in the previous part, it can be concluded that women are associated with domestic work. Some parts as signifiers in the stories show that there are narrations and dialogs of women serving drinks, taking care of husband and children, and doing side jobs that are still related to the domestic sector. It signifies that women are familiar with the domestic role, while men are considered more capable of supporting the family financially. Women are also portrayed as parties who do not deal with social business related to society. Subsequently, the representation of women as subordinates of men is also revealed by the signifier of how the husband freely orders his wife to do something, and the wife is obliged to obey it. It is also illustrated by their high hopes of having sons or the disappointment of girls who do not have any brothers. Patriarchal values are also signified from the woman's dependence on men both consciously and unconsciously. It has been a stereotype in the society that men are more capable than women in making the social connection and making money, which means everything in

life stereotypically. These beliefs then make women more likely to have dependency socially and financially and automatically make them as men's subordinate in society.

This research only focuses on the signs and signifiers of how patriarchal system in Indonesia that exists and continues is also reflected (or signified) in children folk tales. However, a more in-depth research is expected in the future about not only the representation of patriarchy towards women but also how women deal with it. It is important as well on how they either accept it without any opposition or fight against the oppression.

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