

## WOMEN AND HUMANISM IN ACEHNESE NOVELS

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### Abstract

This research is entitled *Women and Humanism in Acehese Novels*. The issues being discussed in this writing are women and humanism issues found in Acehese novels. This research aims to describe women and humanism issues related how social realities being related to fictional stories. The method used in this research was descriptive-analysis with the structural approach. The resources for this research are some novels: *Seuleusoh* was written by D. Keumalawati, *Bidadari Hitam* written by T. I. Thamrin, *Tungku* was written by Salman Yoga, *Lampuki* written by Arafat Nur, and *Marwah di Ujung Bara* written by R. H. Fitriadi. The result of the study shows that these Acehese novels are filled with humanist values and woman issues. Women become the iconic figures of humanities fighter in Aceh. The novels also show the reflection of what realities are on the field. The way women are portrayed in the novels is exceptionally bold, brave, fair, wise, and socialist even though facing with great obstacles.

**Keywords:** Women, humanism, Acehese novels.

### 1. Introduction

Humanism is the understanding of every stance related to human beings. The norms and cultural values are born from human well-constructed human interactions. Human identity as the leader on the earth has turned humans to be social creatures which continually inherit world civilizations. As God creatures, a human has a mandate from God to actually preserve and protect world balance both physically and mentally, of course, apart from the fact that world destructions are also caused by humans.

Humanism is closely related to women as one of the points in the Human Right Charter of The United Nations is protecting women. Women are weak, soft and have a high emotional level. Women's images are more highlighted on their efforts of the search of identity, characters, and personalities. Women frequently try to show their best selves. They always try to beautify themselves to be the most beautiful they can be. They also try hard to maintain their politeness and preserve the norms. In other words, women always work hard to maintain their image as the perfect "jewelry".

There is a number of records of human rights violations. The data from the United Nations shows that women and children are the biggest number of any humanity crisis or civil war. This comes to happen due to the moral crisis of the parties related to the confrontation. These parties performed brutal actions towards the innocents especially women and children to fulfill their ambition. Besides that, the fact that there was no strict supervision and resolution towards the human rights conducted by the United Nations is also one of the reasons why human right violations were conducted.

In Aceh, there are a number of records about inhuman treatments towards women in the conflict era. This caused the humanity crisis not only in Indonesia, but also around the globe. Human Rights agencies under The United Nations recorded that the conflict resulted thousands of civilian deaths, yet these cases are not solved until now. The long haul of the widows and orphans become the unrecognized grievance. Even though the government ignores these cases, there were still some agencies including litterateurs who didn't. They fought for the human rights.

The political crisis in Indonesia in the decade of 2000s had affected terribly and turn to be a military conflict which made women suffered. The arbitrary and inhuman treatment had become common norms at that time that lead to the degradation of humanism values including the inhuman treatments towards women. Women were stuck in the conflict cycle at that time; they were abused, and sometimes they lost their dignity. People and media were put silence on how women were treated at that time.

However, the literary works were not. Literature works did not stay silent with the injustice that was so common at that time. The pen was stronger than weapons. Ideas, thoughts, and feelings were implied in the form of words. They were written as tragedy or comedy in literary works to actually stab the leaders. Acehnese novels written by the professional author consisted with humanism values towards women. They were so experienced in expressing the social reality at the time and turned it to be a valuable story. These literature works were actually a form of their voice to fight for women.

The significances of this research are:

1. Broadening the minds and ideas about humanism and women.
2. Finding the relations between human rights violations case and women through prose stories.
3. Exploring the humanism and women issues in Aceh.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Sahid (2008, p. 26) states that literature is the reflection of real life and it expresses the social issues. The review about women in literature becomes has become the ideas towards the development of women from time to time because literature works always represent the society in the particular time.

Literature has its own characteristics. It has its own ethics and beautiful values which differ from other work of arts. Literature is the expression of humans' feelings and thoughts which are transferred through oral and written forms. In addition to humans' expressions, these works of feelings and thoughts need to consider the aesthetics values, so that these works have their own values and readers. The author of literature works certainly eager to maintain the emotional distance to their readers because literature works are actually a form of media which connect the author's emotions and their own selves and also the social reality in the society. Literature is divided into three genres which are prose, poem, and drama. This study limitation is on prose in the form of novels.

Literature experts have defined novels based on its development. Nurgiyantoro (1998, p. 13) stated that novels are utilized with the precise descriptions of the settings situation so that it can illustrate the states in the novel to be clear, concrete, and exact. Sumardjo (2007, p. 204) said that novel is a long fictional story. Not only is it in physical form, but also in its plot. Moreover, Trisman (2003, p. 118) mentioned that novel can be regarded as a recording tool for society life at any particular time and place.

From all the opinions mentioned earlier, it is clear that novel is longer than short stories. As for the content, the novel is more complex in the plot story. The characters built in the novels are grouped and with various flows and backgrounds. However, the novel focuses on one main topic. It means that novel is collaboration between imaginative story form and complex content. Apart from its long form, novels, the problems in the novel may be various focusing on one topic. Besides, short stories have a multidimensional effect and complex characters, plot, and settings.

Novels are fictions developed by intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. Nurgiyantoro (1998, p. 23) mentioned that intrinsic aspects are the things that develop the literature works themselves. The intrinsic aspects include the theme, characters, setting, flow, and messages. According to Stanton (in Herawati, 2006, p. 21) extrinsic aspects are the aspects out of the story that influence the literature works. The extrinsic aspects are the aspects that build up the story, but not included in the story. The parts of the extrinsic aspects are the author subjectivity, author psychology, and everything happened around the author.

Sumardjo and Saini (1985, p. 29) mentioned that novel is categorized into three which are romance, adventure, and fantasy. Romance puts women and men characters in the same proportion; even sometimes women are more dominant. Most of all novels written with various themes are actually a romance. The adventure novels are less concern on women part where most of women characters are stereotyping and less affecting. Fantasy novels at another hand, are telling more unrealistic things which seems impossible to be happening in daily lives.

Women characters are interesting figures to discuss where women's role is portrayed being insignificant and being underestimated, while in fact, women have various roles in life. Herman (2010, p. 3) stated that women's roles cannot be put apart from life. Women as the readers, authors, or as the notable characters in the story are always interesting issues to discuss especially the feminism theory developed by critical and activist thinkers. Especially for Aceh, women issues never vanish.

From mental side, women possess the higher emotional sense compared to men. Women are more delicate and receptive. Their feelings are more sensitive. Women are easier to get cry and easily get touched when faced with problems. Furthermore, women are smaller physically. Their skin is softer and their voice is gentler. This is how poets illustrate women as "jewels" which should be respected and honored.

Al-Ghazali (2007, pp. 5-15) stated that there are some aspects that develop women. These aspects are likely found in the literature works and these aspects are believed to be the obstacles in developing women in general. Al Ghazali argued that these aspects are emerged because the Indonesian people hold the cultural values and norms dearly that men are always above women in social life.

Women always become the humanism and humanity aspects. They are interrelated through values. The humanity values means the morality which defines the good and bad norms held by the society. It includes deeds, attitude, obligations, values, norms, and else (Dictionary of Bahasa Indonesia, 2002, p. 123). According to Koenjaraningrat, the humanity values (ethics and moral values) are related to human deeds which appropriate to norms that respect human kind. The truth values are the humanity values which are things

that are important and beneficial in life (Nurgiyantoro, 2010, p. 320). Human values consist of five pillars which are truthfulness, good deeds, peace, love, and no violence. Therefore, if we take a closer look, these five pillars are relevant to the characters values (Jumsai & Na-Ayudha, 2008).

From the reviews of the experts, it is concluded that humanity aspects are the implementation of morality, characters, and ethical values. The humanity principles itself elevate the characters aspects. Thus treatment towards women is a part of human values implementation.

### 3. Research Methods

This study used qualitative approach. Qualitative approach is the type of study with natural setting to define the phenomenon and it is done through utilizing some methods. Moleong (2010, p. 5) states that qualitative research is the type of study which does not use the statistical analysis or other quantification ways. It is clear that this study contradicts between the qualitative method and a research with quantitative approach by emphasizing that all quantitative approaches are not necessary to be used in the qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln (as cited in Moleong, 2010, p. 5) state that qualitative research is a research with the natural background in order to define the phenomenon by using the particular method.

The qualitative research method is also called naturalistic research because the research is conducted in the natural setting which is also called ethnography method for the beginning of this research method being used, it was more likely to be used in the cultural anthropology research. Moreover, it is called qualitative because the data analysis is done in qualitative ways (Sugiyono, 2013, p. 8).

From all those experts' opinions, it can be concluded that the data in qualitative studies is more on elaborating, explaining, and describing data as a whole. This type of research is also subjective as most of researchers believe that the readers can possibly decide their own interpretation. It contradicts the quantitative research method as it is objective and it has absolute result and interpretation.

Qualitative research method is suitable for literature, especially novels review. In the literature studies, interpretation is essential. The researcher that tries to interpret the text should be aware of the tendency and the message inferred in the text. The intelligence and the accuracy in interpreting a work of literature are essential in determining whether the study is succeeded or not. The literature study especially the study of human expressions, is related to interpretation or hermeneutics as a fundamental matter (Sumaryono, 1993, p. 31).

The qualitative study is conducted by describing the data which is followed by the analysis of humanity and women values in Acehese novels. These novels are *Lampuki* by Arafat Nur, *TeuntraAtom* by Tayeb Loh Angen, *Tungku* by Salman Yoga, *Malam Memeluk Intan* by Sulaiman Tripa, and *Marwah di Ujung Bara* by R. H. Fitriadi.

These works are based on the reviews done by Darsono (2006) entitled *Citra Perempuan dan Relasi Gender dalam Novel-Novel Indonesia Mutakhir* [Women Image and Gender Relations in New Indonesian Novels] by Para Perempuan. This study reviews the image of women and their gender relation and how the humanity workers fought for these values. In this study, it is concluded that the next researchers can study and review the works of literature especially written by people of literature. The purpose is to get the illustration of women image in the overall humanity implementation.

The approach used to analyze the data in this research is the qualitative approach. A qualitative approach was conducted by describing the data, the Acehese novels, which were then reviewed. The sources for this research are some novels as follow, *Seuleusoh* by D. Keumalawati, *Bidadari Hitam* by T. I. Thamrin, *Tungku* by Salman Yoga, *Lampuki* by Arafat Nur, and *Marwah di Ujung Bara* by R. H. Fitriadi.

Data collection technique used in this research is a literature review. The steps taken to collect the data are listed below:

- Reading the novels and comprehending the stories in them.
- Coding the novels so it will be easy to group the data
- Identifying the data to be suited to the theoretical framework of the research
- The next step is grouping and classifying the data which are the humanist values in Acehese novels.

The steps taken in data analyzing are as follow.

- The authors read all the assigned Acehese novels. This was done so that the author understands the novels completely.
- Data descriptions.
- Humanism and women values analysis using assigned conceptual theory
- Drawing conclusion

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In this part of the writing, humanism and women values in Acehese novels is elaborated. Following is the exploration of a novel entitled *Tungku* by Salman Yoga.

But for Anan, whoever commits to crimes including murder, rape, and other forms of betrayals that disturb the village peaceful state has to be punished. They have to be punished by the law and rules that have been implemented by the ancestor's hundreds of years ago. (Yoga, 2006, p. 149)

The citation above illustrates Anan's attitude as a wise character. The image of leader figures from women groups that is fierce to fight for justice in the society. For her, everyone who commits crimes should be punished, no matter whether he/she is a notable figure, rich, poor, or even family member. This implies the clear humanities values which are truly the concern. This has turned Anan to be Gayo woman figure with the high value of humanities. Anan figure becomes the reality image of Acehese woman with the leadership, heroine and bravery souls to fight the tyranny for the sake of humanity. We can see the examples of these Acehese women who were the sultanas and the leaders in the fights against colonials; they are Sultanas Safiatuddin, Cut Nyak Dhien, Cut Meutia, Pocut Baren, and Commander Malahayati. Aceh has become the only place in Indonesia with abundant numbers of female notable figures.

Below is the excerpt of the novel *Tungku* which elaborates about the humanity values:

"Isn't there any other lighter punishment? Anan, doesn't it mean by doing this *qishas* (death penalty in Islam), we will loss another guy from this village. Doesn't it mean..."  
"No...No...That's the risk and it's been our responsibility, Empun Siti! Besides, law is law. Even though we have to kill all the guys in this village because their immorality and abuse, we will still do it". (Yoga, 2006, p. 134).

From the excerpt of the novel, it can be seen how strict Acehese women in implementing the law. However, from another point of view, it can be seen that this excerpt that it is a part of implementing the local culture and values. However, it also shows how Anan becomes the fighter of human rights that glorify the humanity values. Murders, rapes, and harassment are the actions of violating the human rights, thus a strong and tough leader is needed in implementing the law and rules. It can be seen in the figure of Anan, a female leader.

Following is the humanity and woman values in *Bidadari Hitam* novel by T. I. Thamrin.

“Aceh has been destroyed all over because some president’s men cannot be trusted,” Mak Santan added. “To persuade Acehese people when Indonesia cornered by the Netherlands, the president Soekarno promised to allow sharia law to be implemented in Aceh. He merged Aceh and North Sumatera instead with the capital city in Medan. (Thamrin, 2008, p. 34)

The part of this novel illustrates about Acehese women memory about Acehese social values towards this beloved republic. This humanities value of Mak Santan has grown in the midst of suffering military conflict in the place. She always tells her children and grandchildren about the Dutch who were settled in Indonesia while doing the propaganda to outside world that Indonesia is no longer exist in the world. However, president Soekarno request delivered through Acehese noble figures, Acehese people flocked around to collect their wealth so that the government of Indonesia could afford to buy an airplane to show the international world that Indonesia still existed. This is a good example of humanity in reality.

This is the reality experienced by the Acehese. Granting the President Soekarno with was not only regarded as the nationalism. In fact, it shows empathy of Acehese people to other people in Indonesia. By collecting the people money to purchase the airplane, Indonesia declared to the whole word that it has its dignity for being free of the colonialism. It is actually a part of the values possess by Acehese women.

Another part of *Bidadari Hitam* novel related to human values is shown as follow.

Geubrina, a neighbor kid of Cutwa in Ateuk Munjeng, takes Inong to Zainal Abidin Hospital in Kuta Alam. Dr. Burhan Meuraxa, the doctor who examined Inong, has known Geubrina because as a student in medicine in Syiah Kuala University, Geubrina helped him in a conference about HIV/AIDS in the university in Darussalam. (Thamrin, 2008, p. 206).

This illustrates about Acehese women good deeds that care about the society around them. She likes to share her knowledge about the danger of HIV/AIDS without getting paid. She did it sincerely just for the sake of Allah the Almighty. This reflects an example of Acehese women attitude who hold honor the humanity values.

We can see a lot of humanity institutions concerning of human rights are dominated by females. It affects heavily on mental psychology development of women who suffer badly because the abuse they experience. The examples are immoral actions like the spread of HIV/AIDS. Therefore, there is a big number of women who are able to manage more proper life rather than suffering from mental and psychological illness during the conflict.

Following is another excerpt from the novel *Bidadari Hitam* which elaborates the humanity values.

"Ahya," said Mak with sad tone, "I regarded Inong as my own daughter at first. But the villagers do not help at all. Inong found out that she was found by your grandfather from the massacre field in Pidie years ago after Red Net Operation...Alas! This news is already public consumption". (Thamrin, 2008, p. 161).

The excerpt from this novel shows Mak Santan attitude that really cares towards other life, Inong, the sexual abuse victim at the time of Military Occupation in Aceh. She took her and took care of her until he grew up facing a lot of risks, people negative words, and even life threatening threat. Mak attitude is the reflection of Acehese women which glorify the humanity values.

Following is woman humanities values found in *Marwah di Ujung Bara* novel by RH Fitriadi.

It's not that nobody has tried to deter his husband idealistic principles through her. Even her own family has warned her because they are worried about their life now, after having a child. (Fitriadi, 2011, p. 379).

Acehese women are described through the character of Dewi is a female figure who supports her husband's duty in maintaining the humanist values in the community. It is not like they have no obstacles at all. Even her own family constantly persuades her to influence her husband idealism by offering better jobs and luxuries. However, that doesn't reverse Acehese women's humanities principles. That is a part of social life in reality.

These things are common in life. There are so many people who put their own interest over social and public interest. It's not without reasons. Social concern in the conflict time was risky and threatens life. People worry about their own kids' safety who help in humanitarian aids. There were just few people who actually involved in humanitarian works, even though it was too risky to do.

The character of Siti who is someone with social values is described in the *Lampuki* novel by Arafat Nur as follow.

We held a simple party, and then we struggled to build a wooden house and an Al Quran teaching place beside it so that we can teach kids in this village how to recite Al Quran. (Nur, 2011, p. 12)

Like the character of Dewi in the novel of *Marwah di Ujung Bara*, the novel *Lampuki* also consist of a female character who support her husband works in doing beneficial activities for society around them. In this novel, Siti and her husband have a strong will to start Al Quran teaching school for the kids in the village, even though their family financial conditions are in bad condition. This reflects the social reality which we need to appreciate.

It is actually the reflection of reality in Aceh. Acehese women are polite and obedient to their husbands because they are aware that husbands are leaders in the family that they always need to follow as it is mention in Islamic teaching. There are a number of Al Quran verses and the Prophet's words that say women should obey their husbands. Besides, this is also a part of common norms in Acehese culture.

Following are the humanism values found in *Seuleusoh* novel by Keumalawati.

Actually, I have to go to the hospital to find a midwife to help me cut the umbilical cord from the baby on that *spring*. I have to sew that mother's torn sheath, and gave her some

injections so that she can recover her immune system and get healed eventually. (Keumalawati, 2007, p. 100).

The humanist values are clearly illustrated in a part of novel above. Even though she is not a midwife, she has a high social value. As a woman with limited skills in the source, she still helps another woman to give birth. This act is considered a noble act. She is definitely a nurse with a high value of sharing. This story inspires the readers to do good deeds to others in every condition. Reading this story send us the message to young generation to improve their humanist values, especially to Acehnese women. This is the reflection of social reality of Acehnese people. Many women helped others without hoping for getting paid back, for example in helping other women in labor. In Acehnese traditional ideology, there is village midwife. The midwife helped the pregnant women before giving birth in traditional way, and the midwife gets paid after helping the process. However, they accept anything the patient gives sincerely.

Below is another excerpt from novel *Seuleusoh* which elaborates the humanity values:

Nek Pi'ah never complains, even though she got so tired and had less sleep for waiting the babies born. She still nodded "Yes" every time people came asking for her help (Keumalawati, 2006, p. 45)

This excerpt from the novel shows Nek Pi'ah struggles in the village in assisting women to give birth. Her sacrifice is massive. She even is willing to stay awake late for the sake of mother and babies safety. She keeps helping the people in the community sincerely. She puts others interest over her own, and this is one of the principles in implementing the humanity values. It is actually the reality of Acehnese people.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestions

Humanism is the ideology of humanities. The issue which has been the attention of world humanities institution nowadays is discrimination against women. It has been a part of the draft of United Nations Declaration about humanity the women protection. In every humanity crisis, the discrimination against women can always be found. Deaths, tortures, sexual abuse are always suffered by women especially ones who live by the conflict zone or political conflict zone.

From the review, it is concluded that Acehnese novels are filled with the human values towards women. Women have become the icon for humanism fighting in Aceh. The novels also portray the social situations happened in real life. This can be seen in the women characters illustrated as bold, brave, fair, wise and social figures although they were faced with the great obstacles. Most of the Acehnese novels illustrate the humanism and women values in the strong sense. This is reflected in the reality that Acehnese women still showed their concern towards humanity in the midst of political chaos.

Acehnese women image in implementing the humanities values is real. From so long time ago, women were side by side with their fellow man fighting for their freedom against the inhuman colonial. It can be proved by the number of heroines that were there such as Ratu Safiatuddin, Cut Nyak Dhien, Cut Meutia, Pocut Baren, and Commander Malahayati. It is merely for the sake of humanity values. The Acehnese women life dedication for their social and humanity have moved a number of authors to write the novels about Acehnese women and humanity.

Acehnese novels are worthy to read for students, society, and writers. First, as for university students, reading Acehnese novels allow them to get some references or research foundation, especially about humanism and women. This study can be a foundation for academic study related to literature. It can also be the reflection and inspiration for youths to honor the humanity and women values. However, libraries in Aceh lack of Acehnese novels. Therefore, the existence of Acehnese novels contains of humanities and women values will support the academic study about this matter.

Second, as for students of junior and senior high schools, the existence of Acehnese novels will improve their knowledge about Acehnese literature. However, Acehnese adolescents have less interest in Acehnese arts, especially the Acehnese novels. It may be because Acehnese culture influence that is more on spoken culture rather than written one. The existence of Acehnese novels can also elevate teenagers' spiritual feeling to actually conserve and love Acehnese literature works, especially ones that concern on humanity and women values. It can also improve students' awareness about values.

As for the public society, this study will improve public knowledge about Acehnese works of literature. Acehnese novels can also be the reference for humanity and women values.

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