

The impact of women's roles in the preservation of nature: Analysis of ecofeminism on *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*

Dampak peran perempuan dalam pelestarian lingkungan: Analisa ekofeminisme dalam karya sastra *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*

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ABSTRACT

The roots of the catastrophe, environmental pollution, and the decline in culture are the empirical assumptions of positivistic humans. A strategy of deconstructing and reconstructing the epistemological framework of knowledge is needed through the creation (counter) of a positivistic view that can determine the attitudes and roles of a person, both men and women, towards the environment. On this basis, this article aimed to explain women's role in preserving nature as a critical analysis of the ecological perspectives of literary texts. This research utilized qualitative descriptive and ecofeminist methods in the eco-criticism discourse. The ecofeminist method refers to methods related to environmental science, especially methods related to the preservation (conservation) of nature and culture, which are associated with the role of women in literary works related to research. The primary data was the excerpts of *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* by Ahmad Tohari. Based on the analysis, it can be explained that the role of women impacts him. The impact of women's roles in conservation consists of two things, namely, positive impacts and negative impacts. This article contributes to the humanities and the foundation for applied research, such as using literature from an environmental perspective.

KATA KUNCI

dampak peran perempuan; pelestarian lingkungan; ekofeminisme

ABSTRAK

Akar dari krisis dan pencemaran lingkungan serta menurunnya kultur budaya adalah asumsi-asumsi empiris positivistik manusianya. Diperlukan strategi dekonstruksi terhadap kerangka epistemologis pengetahuan, dan kemudian merekonstruksinya, salah satunya melalui penciptaan (counter) pandangan positivistik yang dapat menentukan sikap dan peran seseorang, baik laki-laki maupun perempuan terhadap lingkungan. Berdasar hal tersebut, artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplanasi dampak peran perempuan dalam pelestarian lingkungan sebagai telaah kritis wacana teks sastra berperspektif lingkungan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan pendekatan ekofeminisme dalam wacana ekokritik, yaitu pendekatan yang berkaitan dengan ilmu lingkungan khususnya pelestarian (konservasi) alam maupun budaya yang dihubungkan dengan peran dan studi perempuan dalam teks karya sastra. Data dari penelitian ini adalah potongan-potongan cerita yang diambil dari novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* karya Ahmad Tohari. Berdasar analisis, dapat dijelaskan bahwa peran perempuan membawa dampak atas dirinya. Dampak peran perempuan terhadap pelestarian terdiri atas dua hal yakni dampak positif dan dampak negatif. Tulisan ini memberikan kontribusi untuk ilmu humaniora sekaligus sebagai pondasi dan landasan penelitian terapan seperti pemanfaatan karya sastra berperspektif lingkungan.

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Introduction

Pollution and environmental damage have become significant issues over the past decades, along with the development of modernization and globalization. If examined, the cause of environmental crises and decline in culture are optimistic empirical assumptions of humans (Neina et al., 2023).

Human negligence towards nature raises issues related to preservation efforts that balance the exploitation of nature, inappropriate spatial and environmental management policies, and decreased awareness of socio-cultural structures. With various physical changes in the environment and pressure on the social environment, one of the most significant changes is a shift in society's values, norms, and culture (Dickinson, 2013; Koger & Winter, 2011).

Therefore, a strategy is needed to minimize the deconstruction of knowledge epistemological frameworks and then reconstruct it, one of which is by understanding the role of both men and women as human beings. This anti-positivist view can determine the attitude and part of a person (male and female) towards the environment. Finally, the readers can understand the roles of men and women by reading literature that represents the actual views of society.

In other words, literature is a medium to express ideas, visions, and thoughts by describing people's experiences of things that happen, including environmental issues, concerns, ecological preservation, and all of its correlations. The correlation between literature and society that supports cultural values cannot be separated because literature represents reality in social settings, even though literary works reflect nature and the subjective world of humans (Wellek & Warren, 1989). In addition, literature also functions as a form of social control, which contains social expressions and issues in people's lives. According to Jabrohim (1994), literature presents a picture of life and life itself as a social reality (Jabrohim, 1994).

Literature, reason, race, ethics, and art can develop in synergy and balance. The environmental and cultural theoretical framework can further explore the relationship between these values, enlightening social norms, behavior, and environment (Qomariyah, 2022). However, based on the perspective of conservatism, stereotypes and hegemony appear to strengthen the legitimacy that, from the standpoint of environmental destruction, women are considered to play a significant role. On the contrary, men are believed to be more dominant.

The explanation above further inspired various studies that determine women's roles in society as objects of research (Kayam, 1988; Ruthven, 1990). This includes exploring the impact of women's roles on environmental conservation. Thus, this study aimed to explain the impact of women's role in preserving the environment as a literary criticism of environmental literature.

Women's issues in environmental literature are not limited to women's involvement in literary creation, criticism, and connoisseurs but also how female figures are represented in literature (Andersen, 1988). The issue of women received attention, especially from people who viewed women as mistreated in the family and society. The emergence of this discussion about women was driven by concerns over the reality of the small role

of women in socio-economic and political life, including the discourse on environmental conservation (Shiva & Mies, 2005). Therefore, this paper has led to the ecofeminism approach.

Regarding the relationship between women, nature, and culture, ecofeminism emphasizes that cultural background will seek to strengthen instead of weaken the connection between women and nature. One of the issues that emerged in this topic is that women hold a closer relationship with nature than men, but it is considered to have an undermining value.

Shiva (1990) pointed out that ecofeminism is a socialist and political movement that unites environmentalism, feminism, and women's spiritual movement due to their similar interest in Earth and all its life forms (Shiva, 1990). Ecofeminists believe sustainable development and equality are sacred and interrelated, and it is the interconnection of all living forms.

Critical awareness is acceptable at a certain level where a person cannot directly convey his thoughts in a social setting. To be delicate, a strategy is needed to understand one's thoughts. This can take the form of creative communication, for instance, through literature. Ecological feminism that emphasizes the relationship between ecology, literature, and female discourse is called eco-criticism. As the destruction of nature and the environment worldwide has become increasingly complex, eco-criticism in literature is constantly developing. Various ecological problems that humanity has to face have attracted the attention of academia and conveyed the idea of protecting the environment through literature. In other words, literature is used to criticize the harsh environmental conditions caused by humans itself. Symbolic resistance given through literary works can raise public awareness to pay more attention to protecting the environment.

The phenomenon of literature, the role of women, and the environment have led to research studies from several aspects, including those conducted by Kronlid (2003), Alexander (2003), Keulartz, J. (2007), Krishnakumar and Jayakumar (2011), Qomariyah (2013), Bonnett (2017), Sharnappa (2016), and Krishnasamy (2018). This paper emphasizes that studying women, the environment, and literature is necessary because of their existence and importance in deconstructing their positivistic human cultures. This study substantially aims to explain the impact of women's role in environmental conservation as literary criticism on environment-themed literature.

Method

This paper is focused on the impact of women on the preservation of nature. Therefore, the method used in this paper is a descriptive qualitative study by performing a literary criticism of a literary work based on an environmental point of view. The primary object of this research was a literary work titled *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, now known as RDP, by Ahmad Tohari. The research data were words, phrases, clauses, and sentences from all the characters extracted from RDP.

Subsequently, to analyze women's impact on nature preservation, the data acquired from RDP will be analyzed using ecofeminism theory, a literary theory that combines the perspective of ecology and feminism.

Results and Discussion

A role describes social interactions based on the actors that reenact actions based on cultural definitions. Anthropologist R. Linton (1936) pointed out that a role is the dynamic aspect of status (Linton, 1936). In other words, one performs their duties according to their rights and responsibilities. Linton believed that roles use culturally determined characteristics to describe social interactions. According to this theory, it is understandable that expectations through roles guide a person's everyday actions. Furthermore, people with specific roles, such as dancers, students, parents, wives, and mothers, are expected to act based on their roles.

Therefore, roles can be described as a series of formulas that limit the expected behavior of people. For example, in a family, a father's role is to be the family's breadwinner, protector, and educator with love and sincerity. Similarly, the role of parents, including both parents, should set a good example, give their children a good education, guidance, and discipline, and teach the difference between good and evil. The role is associated with a person's position in a spatial and dimensional environment.

In addition, one could see all aspects that limit the role of women, such as family, community, and working environment. In a family, women could be filial daughters to their parents, loving wives to husbands, and devoted mothers to their children. In a working environment, women can assume the role of professionals and hold the role of "female professionals."

There are many reasons why women become female professionals. It can be seen as a reflection of the family's economy. When a family has a poor economy, women are forced to work to earn additional income and become the second breadwinner of the family. The second reason is that female professionals are not only looking for additional income for the family due to the middle and upper class's social and economic conditions. Raising money can also be seen as an "excuse" to find places to socialize.

In such a case, the description above shows that women are a vital part of the family economy because they are highly productive. Therefore, improving conditions and creating employment opportunities in current realities and changes are also necessary. On the other hand, female professionals, that is, women who assume dual roles such as being homemakers and blue/white-collar workers, can engage in dual activities, which are activities that have an impact on themselves and the family and its struggles.

The impact of women's role in the preservation of nature

An impact is an influence that affects (either negative or positive) particular circumstances. Another expert sees impact as the results of an influence that occurs (be it positive or negative) from an action taken by an individual/a group of people who carry out certain activities (Cahyono, 2018). Positive impacts are good results or beneficial effects obtained from various things or events, while negative impacts are detrimental effects or consequences that occur and tend to worsen the situation.

The study results displayed that the role of Srintil in the novel impacts the environment, both positively and negatively. The impacts correlate with women's role as environmental preservation activists.

In this study, we have analyzed Srintil, a female character, and her impact on the preservation of nature, both positive and negative. These impacts correlate with women's role as environmental activists. The following sections display the effects of women's role in preserving nature and the study's literary criticism of RDP.

Positive impacts

Srintil is a girl from Dukuh Paruk, a small, remote, and poor village. However, all the villagers are proud because they have inherited the art of *Ronggeng*, which always excites them. This tradition almost died out after the *tempe bongkreng* poisoning incident, which killed dozens of villagers of Dukuh Paruk and took away the local community's passion and enthusiasm. Fortunately, they rediscovered the motivation after finding several young adolescent girls with natural talents as prospective *ronggeng* dancers dancing at *Tegalan* farms with their friends (Rasus, Warta, and Darsun). Srintil's dancing skills were discovered by her grandfather, Sakarya, who then realized his granddaughter was naturally gifted as a *ronggeng* dancer. Therefore, Sakarya handed Srintil over to a *ronggeng* shaman named Kartareja, expecting that someday Srintil would become a famous *ronggeng* dancer by society. As a *ronggeng*, Srintil must undergo a series of traditional ceremonies to become a *ronggeng* dancer.

Srintil, who dances in the rice fields and gives new hope to the community, is an interpretable sign. In dire circumstances, nature provides balance, supports beauty, and introduces peace to the community. The dancing women and the blooming hopes of the villagers are seen as signs that women will be able to realize the community's expectations.

Some notions see that women play a central role in preserving nature, even though women also get the impact of natural damage and its conservation. The effect can be seen from two aspects, either positively or negatively.

The positive impact is apparent when women act as a balancer to nature. After all, the duality of the role of women makes them realize that nature is an integral and inherent part of oneself. In other words, nature gives women pleasure in their roles. Nature also makes them more confident and gives them hope when performing their duties based on their roles. This causes women to have the initiative to protect, preserve, and balance nature, as nature is viewed to provide positive things for them.

Of course, this notion can only be understood by people who recognize the impact of nature on women. These insensitivities sometimes drift people away from their responsibilities to preserve nature. These people need to realize that the preservation efforts of nature complement the role played by an individual.

Likewise, the novel depicts that Srintil (who was later crowned) has the role of a *ronggeng* dancer and holds her duties as a *ronggeng* dancer. Srintil is described as a mother, wife, and *ronggeng* dancer of the people. The role of women is metaphorized as having a positive impact on the ecosystem.

The positive effects are seen in the following quote:

(1)

Sepasang burung bangau melayang meniti angin, berputar-putar tinggi di langit. Tanpa sekali pun mengepak sayap, mereka mengapung berjam-jam lamanya. Suaranya melengking seperti keluhan panjang. Air. Kedua unggas itu telah

melayang beratus-ratus kilometer mencari genangan air. Telah lama mereka merindukan amparan lumpur tempat mereka mencari mangsa: katak, ikan, udang, atau serangga air lainnya (Tohari, 2003, hlm. 9).

(1)

A pair of cranes are flying in the wind and circling at the heights of the sky. Without even flapping their wings, they floated for hours. Their voices were shrill, like a long sigh. Water. The two birds had flown hundreds of kilometers looking for puddles. For so long, they have longed for the mudflows where they find their food: frogs, fish, shrimp, or other aquatic insects (Tohari, 2003, p. 9).

RDP is a novel embedded with many natural imageries, especially in rural areas. This description gives assurance that the book can be analyzed from an environmental perspective. The novel is intense, providing an ecological picture that cannot be separated from the ecosystem's various constituent components, such as abiotic and biotic factors. Abiotic factors include temperature, water, humidity, light, and topography, while biotic factors are living things consisting of humans, animals, plants, and microbes.

Ecology is also closely related to the organizational levels of living things, namely populations, communities, and ecosystems that influence each other. Ecology is a relatively new branch of science that only emerged in the 70s. However, the field has a profound influence on the branch of biology. It studies how living things can maintain their life by connecting with non-living things in their place of energy or their environment. An example of such connections is the depiction of the food chain in the wild.

The previous quote describes the state of the sky with a pair of cranes floating in the wind. Not to mention the sound of birds longing for the mudflats where they find their food: frogs, fish, shrimp, or other aquatic insects; this illustration profoundly depicts how much RDP covers an intense natural setting.

More samples of positive impact are seen in the following quote:

(2)

Di pelataran yang membatu di bawah pohon nangka. Ketika angin tenggara bertiup dingin menyapu harum bunga kopi yang selalu mekar di musim kemarau. Ketika sinar matahari mulai meredup di langit barat, Srintil nemari dan bertembang. Gendang, gong, dan calung mulut mengiringinya. Rasmus bersila, menapak-nepak lutut menirukan gaya seorang penggendang. Warta mengayunkan tangan ke kiri dan kanan, seakan ada perangkat calung di hadapannya. Darsun membusungkan kedu apipinya. Suaranya berat menirukan bunyi gong (2003: 13)

Angin tenggara bertiup. Kering. Pucuk-pucuk pohon di pedukuhan sempit itu bergoyang. Daun kuning serta ranting kering jatuh. Gemerisik rumpun bambu. Berderit-derit baling bambu yang dipasang anak gembala di tepian Dukuh Paruk. Layang-layang yang terbuat dari gadung meluncur naik. Kicau beranjangan mendaulat kelengangan di atas Dukuh Paruk (RDP, 2003: 10)

(2)

In the petrified courtyard under the jackfruit tree. When the cold, southeast winds blow the fragrance of coffee that blooms in the dry season. When the sun began to fade in the west, Srintil was dancing and chanting, accompanied by drum, gong, and mouth calung. Rasmus crossed his legs and flapped his knees to imitate a drummer's style. Warta swung his hands left and right as if he had a calung instrument in front of him. Darsun puffed out his cheeks. His voice is heavy, imitating the sound of a gong (2003: 13).

The southeast wind blew. Dry. The treetops in the tiny hamlet swayed. Yellow leaves and fallen twigs, the rustle of bamboo clumps. The bamboo propellers that the shepherd boy had installed on the edge of Dukuh Paruk rattle. Gadung-made kites rose high up in the sky. Continuous chirping broke the silence over Dukuh Paruk (2003: 10).

The quote above illustrates that women can balance nature and become one with nature. Srintil, a girl prepared to become a true *ronggeng* dancer, has many duties and responsibilities. Srintil is the *ronggeng* dancer of the Rakyat or people, meaning that *ronggeng* belongs to the whole community, to Dukuh Paruk. The *Inang Ronggeng*, the host, regulates the actions of a *ronggeng* dancer. While training to be a *ronggeng* dancer, Srintil always involves nature and makes companions of heart in the search for her identity.

The image of the courtyard under a jackfruit tree when the southeast wind blows and Srintil looks engrossed in dancing and singing is a context for Srintil's activities. Dancing is an activity that Srintil likes. She can move her body with precise flexibility without anyone teaching her.

The people of Dukuh Paruk believe that if someone becomes a *ronggeng* dancer, a *ronggeng* performer is possessed by a supernatural entity called *inang ronggeng*, which causes one to involuntarily move their body and dance sans prior teaching or instructions.

This is what Srintil did in the middle of the wilderness. In addition, Srintil and his friends use nature to balance the rhythm of notes and songs to accompany the *Ronggeng* dance. The quote pictures the situation: “The southeast wind blew. Dry. The treetops in the small hamlet swayed. Yellow leaves and fallen twigs, the rustle of bamboo clumps. The bamboo propellers that the shepherd boy had installed on the edge of Dukuh Paruk rattle. Gadung-made kites rose high up in the sky. Continuous chirping broke the silence over Dukuh Paruk”. Srintil’s process of unifying with nature is also depicted in the quote below:

(3)

... Yakin bahwa binatang gembalaan mereka tidak merusak tanaman orang, ketiganya berjalan ke sebuah tempat dimana mereka sering bermain. Di bawah pohon nangka itu mereka melihat Srintil sedang asyik bermain seorang diri. Perawan kecil itu sedang merangkai daun nangka dengan sebatang lidi untuk dijadikan sebuah mahkota (RDP, 2003: 11)

(3)

... Convinced that their animals are not destroying people's crops the three of them walk to a place where they often play. Under the jackfruit tree, they saw Srintil playing alone. The little girl is stringing jackfruit leaves with a stick to make a crown (RDP, 2003, p. 11).

Women receive the most impact from environmental problems. This happens because of various unequal treatments experienced by women. For instance, men will go to urban areas when natural disasters occur in Central Africa. At the same time, women must live in villages and are forced to survive by farming amidst harsh climate conditions. In addition, the frequent discrimination against women also causes women to be vulnerable to poverty, making it difficult for them to survive on the brink of climate change disasters. Therefore, the involvement of women in climate change prevention is essential to raise awareness of nature and form inclusive and efficient nature

preservation efforts. The participation of women is not only good for environmental conservation, but it can also inspire other women and other communities to save the Earth.

Negative impacts

From the patriarchal point of view, women and nature are heavily objectified and exploited. In response to such a phenomenon, ecofeminism was born as a social movement with a strong ideology against objectifying and exploiting women and nature and industrialization that kept disrupting the ecosystem. According to Candraningrum (2013), ecofeminism in the patriarchal culture has developed categorized strategies to justify exploitation, such as heaven/earth, mind/body, men/women, humans/animals, spirits/non-sentient being, culture/nature, white/colored, and other dichotomies (Candraningrum, 2013). In this case, matters in these dichotomies are seen as objects that may be exploited and regulated to yield profit. The products of these categories then pave the way to capitalize on women and Earth. Nature and everything within are not seen as living things but as a source of capital and investment fundamentals.

From the perspective of ecofeminism, this notion refers to the interconnectivity and integrity of every living thing. Such a movement is identified as a women's movement (Shiva & Mies, 2005). This aligns with Vandana Shiva's (1990) previous explanation that nature and women have extraordinary abilities to organize, re-establish, and sustain the life of all humans and creatures in the universe (Shiva, 1990). This approach is referred to as ecofeminism, as Karen J. Warren (in Tong, 2006) proposes; if there are connections between oppressions towards women and nature, an understanding of nature to figure out the oppressions towards women and nature needs to be acknowledged through feminist theories from the ecological perspectives, together with the efforts of problem-solving from feminist point of view.

The marginalization experienced by women and nature originates from the marginalization imposed by humans on non-humans (or characters). Since women and nature are associated, a relationship between feminist and ecological issues is conceptual, symbolically, and linguistically established. For example, women are always "naturalized," "feminized," or put under control in certain activities related to nature. Thus, it is acceptable to declare that social reality depicts women and their hearts as symbolically oppressed by people who tend to be masculine.

The existing marginalization and oppression of women by presenting them as symbols of "damaged" nature are interpreted as the justification to exploit women's beauty. In this case, women negatively impact the relationship between nature, women, and human beings. This negative impact can be seen from the perspective of women's role.

As illustrated in the previous part, the role of women in nature preservation in RDP has no adverse impacts other than the reduction of time and contribution given by women in efforts to conserve nature. In the book, Srintil experiences such situations herself, and in the end, spends much time with everything related to *ronggeng* dance preparation and stage preparation.

(4)

.... Tetapi Srintil tersenyum bukan untukku, melainkan untuk semua orang. Meskipun begitu, pengajaran demikian tidak menolongku. Aku tetap kecewa karena aku tidak lagi bisa bermain bersama Srintil (RDP, 2003: 39)

(4)

.... However, Srintil's smile is not for me but for everyone. Even so, knowing such a thing did not help me. I am still disappointed because I can no longer play with Srintil (RDP, 2003: 39).

The novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* by Ahmad Tohari depicts the journey of a *ronggeng* dancer candidate. According to the traditions of *Dukuh Paruk*, before bearing the title *Ronggeng*, Srintil, who has possessed the spirit of Ki Secamenggala, must first undergo various sacred ceremonies. This ceremony includes a *ronggeng* bath in front of Ki Secamenggala's grave and the *bukak-klambu* ceremony. *Bukak-klambu* refers to a competition to fight for the virginity of the *ronggeng* dancer candidates. The task of preparing Srintil to become a candidate for *ronggeng* causes the role of women in nature conservation to be reduced. This duality of women's roles hurts nature conservation. Such *ronggeng* preparation rituals take much time and decrease women's role in natural preservation.

In this novel, the act of conservation, protection, exploitation, and preservation of nature is done by Srintil. Apart from that, Srintil can also take advantage of her feminist side by being able to read natural signs as having a conservative attitude towards nature. As a product of culture, literature contains values that previous generations wanted to preserve. Academic works can unravel the local wisdom that influences human personality. This way, the ratio of race, ethics, and art can harmonize. In this regard, the reciprocal relationship between language as the medium of literature and the story's meaning must be addressed. This relationship can be further explored in a cultural orientation frame that reinforces values, norms, behavior, and social reality.

Literature with an environmental perspective can regeneratively convey certain wisdom and policies. Every event becomes the primary means of shaping the community's virtues, character, and feelings and raising society's awareness. This includes understanding the importance of conserving the environment where humans live and depend. Such glorification and absorption of literary functions are typical in traditions of cultural conservation. People think literature can educate and make people better and more valuable because of its wisdom and meaning. These literatures describe educational actions and events. One of the literary works from an environmental perspective from a woman's perspective is the novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* by Ahmad Tohari.

Conclusions

In the effort to conserve nature, women usually experience impacts, obstacles, and conflicts. The character of Srintil in the novel RDP provides access to nature conservation. However, there are impacts, constraints, and conflicts caused by Srintil's dual role as a woman breadwinner. Based on the discussion, the study elaborates that an impact is a strong influence that has consequences (both negative and positive). Based on the analysis, the impact of the role of women on conservation consists of two things: positive and negative. Positive impacts are good results/beneficial effects obtained from various things or events that occur. The negative impact is the detrimental effects or consequences that worsen the situation.

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