

Narrating ideas of Religion, Power, and Sexuality in Ayu Utami's novels: *Saman*,

Larung, and *Bilangan Fu*

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This thesis titled
Narrating ideas of Religion, Power, and Sexuality in Ayu Utami's novels: *Saman*,
Larung, and *Bilangan Fu*

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Abstract

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Narrating ideas of Religion, Power, and Sexuality in Ayu Utami's novels: *Saman*,

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Since 1998, Ayu Utami has become prominent as one of the female authors who have successfully voiced their perspectives on social issues that were once considered taboo. Her three novels, *Saman*, *Larung*, and *Bilangan Fu*, Utami's have praised both nationally and internationally. As a writer and social critic, she particularly focuses on three Indonesian social cancers, those related to power, sexuality, and religion. Utami's characters personify the tragic flaw of modern people who are trapped between the need to struggle for their own personal beliefs and the different pressures placed on them by the nation, traditional concepts and modernism, patriarchal society and women's desires for greater freedom.

Through her male characters (namely *Saman*, *Larung*, *Yuda*, and *Parang Jati*), Utami portrays how modern men face the clash between their beliefs about religion and the government. At another level, the plots also criticize the way in which Indonesia's socio-cultural conditions always disadvantage the poor and women. Her novels also include interactions between these male protagonists and female characters, both modern female characters (*Shakuntala*, *Yasmin*, *Laila*, and *Cokorda*), as well as traditional female minor characters (*Ibu*, *Upi* and *Simbah*). Through these interactions, the novels also act

as a critique to the modern concept of religion in Indonesia and as an affirmation of the traditional values that Indonesia has had for centuries.

This thesis shows how Utami as a modern female writer has been able to integrate into her works her rich thinking about religion, power, and gender. Towards this end, she has been able to include in her works her knowledge of Catholicism in Indonesia, her extensive observation of Javanese and Balinese local traditions, old legends, her understanding on Indonesian political incidents before 1998, and her personal spirituality. In conclusion, this thesis suggests that Utami offers her audience to re-think the need to separate religion from the state, the necessity to re-explore traditional religions, including their old legends and rituals, and the urgency to re-evaluate the 1965-1998 Indonesian history as a way of ameliorating the lives of contemporary Indonesians.

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Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgments	5
Chapter One: Traditional religious elements and social criticisms in modern Indonesian literary works.....	8
The author and her novels.....	10
Reason for this study.....	14
Chapter Two: Review of related studies.....	17
Ayu Utami’s novels and their criticism	18
Power and sex	26
The discourse of religion in Utami’s novels	28
Religion in Java and Bali	31
Characterization	38
Religious themes in Indonesian and Malaysian literary works	40
Chapter Three: Ayu Utami’s novels and ideas of Religion, Power, and Sexuality	43
Saman.....	43
Larung.....	44
Bilangan Fu.....	45
Chapter Four: The modern female characters: Monotheistic religion as a burden and female sexuality as a form of modern personal power	49
Confronting woman’s kodrat through Shakuntala’s character.	49
Yasmin Moningga: The ambiguity of the concept “a good woman is religious and a good housewife”	60
Laila Gagarina: A naïve woman who seeks freedom	67
Confronting the hypocrisy of “a good woman” through Cokorda’s character	72
Chapter Five: The modern male and the traditional female characters: The dispute between traditional and orthodox religions in relation to conflicts with state power ...	78
Saman and his traditional minded mother	78
Larung and his grandmother	100
Yuda and Parang Jati	125
Chapter Six: Conclusion - Narrating the dispute between traditional and orthodox religions, power, and sexuality in the lives of Ayu Utami’s characters	147
References.....	153

Chapter One: Traditional religious elements and social criticisms in modern

Indonesian literary works

The end of the New Order has become the watershed for a new beginning for many Indonesians -- politicians, activists, and educators as well as authors. The new era has also brought a mushrooming publication of novels, short stories, poems. All the topics that once were considered off-limits have become very popular in Indonesian media and literature. However, some scholars question the values transferred by these publications and question the right of some young authors' publications that seem to pass judgment on the existing nation.¹ Nevertheless, who could argue that the fall of Suharto has not had an immense influence on the lives of those who experienced the military suppression of voices of an individual's perspective? Some important issues that were once banned have become splashy themes for literary works. Women authors are one of the groups that have taken this opportunity to voice their ideas to encode the values of their society and to challenge, criticize, and perhaps modify the values that were constructed by male domination and government power, through fictional strategy, something they could not risk before 1998. However, what are the values and criticisms offered by female authors after the 1998 reformation?

Robert Redfield, a prominent American anthropologist, argues, "scholars had traditionally defined civilizations by their philosophical, religious, literary, and artistic expression."² He further suggests that human values, myths, religion, art, and literature are related realms of culture and ways of understanding the whole, civilization. Modern

¹ Maier, H. *We are playing relatives* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004) Pp. 496-497

² Wilcox, C *Robert Redfield and the development of American Anthropology* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004).p.165

writers have long intertwined supernatural elements into their literary works for different kinds of reasons: to create suspense, to complicate the plot of a story, to add some mysterious sense of setting or to position society in unusual ways as the background of the story. The term “supernatural” here includes the use of spirits, ghosts, and myths. These terms, especially myth, are of interest to modern literary criticism. These factors are commonly related to anthropology, folklore, sociology, psychoanalysis, and religion.³ The relation between literature and these three elements can be seen by the ways in which stories can present allegories, philosophies, and truths hidden in various stories.⁴ It can also be argued that inclusion of supernatural elements can help portray a different reality that mainstream religious concepts can neither explain nor adequately describe. In patriarchal societies, this kind of writing is usually found in women’s literary works.⁵

Since the beginning of the New Order, Indonesian society has been undergoing a series of political incidents and maneuvers influenced by the misuse of power. Unfortunately, this power has been utilized not only by the government but also by the patriarchal society to limit the freedom of women to interpret religious values and to express their sexuality. The interference of the government in officializing religions has also restrained society from expressing their traditional belief systems. All of these issues

³ Welleck, R and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*. 3rd edition (Florida: Harcourt Brave Jovanovich, 1956) Pp.189-190

⁴Sorel.,G. *Reflexions on Violence*. (New York:Reinhold Niebuhr, 1914) in Rene Welleck and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*. 3rd edition (Florida: Harcourt Brave Jovanovich, 1956) Pp. 189-190

⁵Jenkins.,R. Authorizing Female Voice and Experience: Ghosts and Spirits in Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Allende’s *The House of the Spirits*. *Melus*, 19, 3, 61-73. Autumn (1994). From www.jstor.org (Accessed June, 09, 2009)

-- religion, power, and sexuality -- are the issues commonly considered taboo during Suharto's New Order.

This thesis will deal with literary works, which explore the study of human culture through the lens of supernatural elements, including myths, religion, and great traditions. The thesis will also explore how Utami's novels present the issues of religious interpretation, power, and sexuality in an Indonesian context. The objective of this study is to reveal one particular woman writer's use of literature to present her perspective on religion, power, and sexuality. The objective of this study is to reveal one particular woman writer's use of literature to present her perspective on religion, power, and sexuality.

The author and her novels

Yustina Ayu Utami was born in Bogor, West Java in 1968. She became one of the popular female writers in Indonesia after she published her first novel, *Saman* in April 1998.⁶ This novel won readers' attention nationally and internationally. Utami gained appraisal both for her sharp creative criticism of Indonesian political conditions and for her openly sensational language.⁷ The Prince Claus Prize in 2000 was evidence of her achievement, as were the Dutch and English language versions of the novel. Utami vividly portrays sexuality in her first novel; words such as *orgasm*, *masturbation*, *sexual organs*, and *condoms* were mentioned many times. Some critics believe that this was a way to show that female authors should have freedom to utilize ideas and words as they

⁶ Junaidi, A, Ayu Utami on literature, sex and politic. *The Jakarta Post*, Jakarta. Sun, 11/13/2005. From www.thejakartapost.com (Accessed March 28th, 2010)

⁷ Aveling, 2007, Bandel, 2006, Pp. 2-3.

please. These topics used to be considered taboo for women authors but not for men.⁸ Others thought the sexuality was too much and was used to boost sensationalism in the new literature genre in Indonesia.

Utami admits that her father was the one who chose literature as her major at the University of Indonesia. She claims that he was afraid she might not be able to earn enough income for her life.⁹ Utami, the youngest child of five, seemed to show her rebellious and determined character at an early age. Unlike her siblings who joined the civil service and the Navy, Utami insisted on having a career as a painter, but she ended up working as a journalist for *Forum Keadilan* magazine, *MATRA*, as an editor at *KALAM* cultural journals and was one of the founding members of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI).¹⁰

Given the fact that she is a young urban female author, the mass media has categorized her as one of the *Sastra wangi* writers. Although she never rejects it, she claims this categorization shows that mass media are more interested in the lives of female authors than in their works.¹¹ In her interviews, Utami says that because some female writers in Indonesia are young middle class urban women instead of coming from small towns and suffering urban shock in cities where the public doubts their abilities to write a good novel. She relates her comment to a vindictive rumor that says Goenawan

⁸ Aveling, 2007, Sears, 2007, Junaidi 2005

⁹ JP, Novelist Ayu finds writing a labor of love. *The Jakarta Post*. Sun, 08/27/2000. Accessed April, 1st, 2010 from www.thejakartapost.com

¹⁰ Aveling, 2007, Diani, H. Some straight talking with author Ayu. *The Jakarta Post*. Jakarta. Sun, 11/11/2001. Accessed March 12th, 2010 from www.thejakartapost.com, and Junaidi, 2005

¹¹ Diani, H, 2007

Mohamad, a journalist who is her mentor, wrote *Saman* for her.¹² This was also influenced by the fact that years ago, the literary world was dominated by male writers, most of whom had agrarian backgrounds. She insists that the label *sastra wangi* is “a social symptom rather than ‘literary criticism.’”¹³ She argues that this attitude is evidence that literary works need to be regarded in a more mature way, and expects her novels to be enjoyed in such a way.

In addition to the awards that she received for *Saman*, there were scathing criticisms from many sides. The way she describes Indonesian politics in *Saman* is still relevant today. Although the story and people are fictitious, she has managed to make the story come alive, from the failure of development to the military’s barbarism against activists, to exploitation of the local population. She admits that she is also concerned with some aspects other than politics, such as religion and women’s sexuality. She says, “Sex is still a problem for women, rather than men. Ninety percent of the physical and social risks are carried by women.”¹⁴ This is one of the reasons why Utami explores sexuality. It is a way to confront cultural taboos from an unexplored perspective. She claims that in a patriarchal society like Indonesia, bringing up a sexual theme is not taboo as long as it does not favor women’s interests. She says, “So far, people exploit sex, but by objectifying women. What I write is no more crude than those pictures or rape stories that they write. But I want to make women become the subjects. That's considered taboo.”¹⁵ She continues with her argument on marriage, she believes that Indonesian

¹² Diani, H, 2007

¹³ Diani, H, 2007

¹⁴ Diani, H, 2007

¹⁵ Diani, H, 2007

society has raised marriage too high. This is to the detriment of women because in most cases unmarried women will be mocked as old spinsters. “Therefore,” she says, “the obligation to marry is a vicious circle for women.”¹⁶ In addition, society always condemns pre-marital sex. Utami assumes that hypocritical people will use this as a way to have affairs with anyone, “not only your husband or wife. That happens. Hotels and motels everywhere are full of people committing fornication. That's it. We are sinners. But do not be hypocrites. You sin and [you] also condemn it. Use your own standard to measure yourself.”¹⁷ She criticizes the hypocritical people who pretend that marriage is a noble act but keep committing adultery at the same time. Her reason for saying this is not that she sees marriage in a cynical way. On the other hand, she says that marriage should not be coerced or considered an obligation; rather it should have a noble meaning.¹⁸ Utami’s perspective on marriage, hypocritical society, and sexuality are well re-presented in her books: *Saman* and *Larung*. Throughout this study, I will use the English version of *Saman* and the Indonesian version of *Larung* and *Bilangan Fu*. *Saman* was written in Indonesian and published in 1998; Pamella Allen has successfully translated the phrases and metaphor of Ayu Utami’s first novel into English version and was published by Equinox Publishing in 2005.¹⁹ The quotations that are used in this thesis, in related to the discussion of *Saman* is based on Pamella Allen’s translation. Due to the in availability of

¹⁶ Diani, H, 2007

¹⁷ Diani, H, 2007

¹⁸ Diani, H, 2007

¹⁹ Junaidi, A, Bahasa or English, 'Saman' an addictive, powerful read. *The Jakarta Post*. Sun,10/23/2005. From www.thejakartapost.com (Accessed April 7, 2010).

the English versions of *Larung* and *Bilangan Fu*, I will translate all of the quotations used from the two novels.

Reason for this study

There are three significant reasons why I would like to put these issues of sex, power, and sexuality on the table. First, Ayu Utami is one of the most prominent young female authors in Indonesia. Her novels are always considered radical. Most of the criticism of her work argues that her first two novels were related to the struggle for reformation. In this thesis, I consider the struggle for reformation to be merely the background or setting for the novel, much more important are the ways in which Utami integrates religions, myths, and supernatural elements in her writing, as a means to depict the diversity of beliefs in Indonesia and to narrate the problem of the socio-culture of contemporary Indonesian society.

Secondly, Indonesia is known as the most populous Islamic country in the world. According to Azyumardi Azra, there has been a considerable discussion since the 1960s of literary works and Islam.²⁰ These Islamic literary works commonly aim at portraying their authors' perceptions of the Prophet, God, and Al-Quran.²¹ Contemporary Indonesian Islamic Sufi writers are a group who have been creatively and imaginatively trying to portray their interpretation of religion and God. Azra goes on to say that because of these conditions, most of the criticisms of these literary works also use Islamic values as the

²⁰Saridjo, M. *Sastra dan Agama. Tinjauan kesusastraan Indonesia Modern Bercorak Islam* (Jakarta: Yayasan Ngali Aksara dan Penamadani) p. 54. See also Harry Aveling. *Secret Need Words: Indonesian Poetry 1966-1998* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2001).

²¹ Saridjo, 2001. Pp. 54-56

core of the works.²² Hence, Ayu Utami's writings have become very significant works of literature for me, personally, I am interested in the fact that she was born and raised a Catholic, yet wrote her fiction from non-Catholic perspectives. Thirdly, as I have already mentioned, the traditional realm of values, myths, and religion are still important in contemporary local culture. Therefore, acknowledging the way in which Ayu's novels perceive supernatural values helps us to comprehend the culture of modern Indonesian society as a whole.

Thirdly, I am interested in the writings of this young, radical, vocal female author because she has voiced the acute function of religions and supernatural elements as tools to present the culture of Indonesia. In the realm of international literature, the works of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1986) and Gabriel Marquez' Noble Prize winning *100 Years of Solitude* (1967), are also literary works related to religion, myths, and spiritual beliefs.²³ In Indonesian literary works, male writers have pre-dominantly produced these types of literary works and have commonly expressed one single belief as the core of their writings. Utami, however, courageously offers the readers three main belief systems in her three works: the great systems of Catholicism and Hinduism, alongside the Indonesian small tradition of spirits, myths, and folktales.

Although, it has been said that Utami's works mainly focus on the struggle for political reformation, I pose a different set of questions: How do works of Ayu Utami's imaginative fiction- tacitly echo the social problems in Indonesia related to religion, power, and sexuality? How does she see the difference between traditional and

²² Saridjo, 2001, p. 56

²³ Siddiq, M. *Arab Culture and the Novel. Genre, identity, and agency in Egyptian fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2007) p. 13-15

monotheistic religion? How does Utami use the old legends, myths, and religious beliefs to criticize how religion, power, and sexuality are being misused in Indonesia? How are these three elements interwoven? Why is it necessary to focus on the interplay of religion, power, and sexuality? It is hoped that this study will offer an understanding of how one female author presents her ideas on how the modern men and the traditional women are open to traditional religion but encounter the problem with state power, while the modern women are trying to adjust the monotheistic religion in favor of their personal needs.

Chapter Two: Review of related studies

In this chapter, I first intend to show how some major literary critics have analyzed Ayu Utami's fiction. I will compare and contrast the idea of each critic in an attempt to better understand how and why Utami crafted her writing in such a fashion, deepening my comprehension based on that criticism. From there, I intend to obtain a more comprehensive view of what Utami was attempting to depict on a larger scale.

Some critics, such as Laurie Sears, Harry Aveling, and Barbara Hatley, analyze the depictions of women's freedom in Utami's works, especially the way she expresses her perspectives on sexuality after the fall of Suharto in 1998. They all agree that Utami is considered a prominent female author who voices a fresh idea in literature. On the other hand, Bandel believes that Utami does not provide a new perspective on Indonesian literature and thus, sexuality is only a way to create the image of a sensational female author. The viewpoints of all these critics encompass the major aspects that can be found in Utami's novels. From these criticisms, I underline two main points in Utami's novels, which are power and sexuality. I then proceed to the next part of this chapter by exploring those key elements of the novels. Since the setting of the three novels is Indonesia, it is necessary to explore how power and sexuality are interconnected in this country. I will use Suryakusuma's explanations of this relationship. After studying this analysis, I find that there is one other element that plays an important role in the connection between power and sexuality. As she explains, religion is described as a vehicle to impose power over women's lives in Indonesia. Therefore, I will also explore what the elements of religion are in Indonesia.

However, I will not attempt to concretely define the concepts of power, sex, and religion, but rather to delineate these elements in the novels of Ayu Utami. It is not the distinctions of the categories that I seek to make, but instead my aim is to focus on how the elements of power, sexuality and religion are depicted and problematized in the novels. The theories that arise from the critics' discussions can be fruitful in showing how these ideas are developed in Utami's fiction.

Since this study relies on Southeast Asian literary works, a broader understanding of how to approach Southeast Asian fiction will also be useful. Therefore, I will divide the last part of this chapter into two parts. The first part will be the discussion of how Southeast Asian literary works depict the element of religions, sexuality, and power. The relevance of this point is to broaden my perspective on what kind of literary elements can be used in exploring these ideas. Using the elements of characters, dialogue and setting, I attempt to draw together the ideas of power, sexuality, and religion to understand Ayu Utami's novels. In the last part of this chapter, I will briefly discuss the features of Javanese and Balinese religion which are relevant to Ayu's novels.

Ayu Utami's novels and their criticism

Ayu Utami's award winning debut novel, *Saman*, shook the Indonesian literary readers like a windstorm. Most critics believe that the most striking point that caught readers' attention was the unveiling of women's sexuality that Utami has exposed.²⁴ Her provocative use of language -- such as '*perkosalah aku*' (rape me), '*aku masih perawan*' (I am still virgin), or '*masturbasi*' (masturbation) -- were considered as a new writing

²⁴ Andrini, S. Young women writers break though convention. Life, *The Jakarta Post*, Sun, 10/16/2005. From www.thejakartapost.com (Accessed December 3, 2009) and Bandel (2006), Aveling (2007), and Sears (2007)

style that broke through the taboo patterns of Indonesian literature.²⁵ Public reactions toward Utami's works were varied, yet most of them applauded her courage for expressing women's sexuality. In fact, some critics agreed to acknowledge this writing style as the major means to free women's rights.²⁶

I would like to focus on the analyses of four major critics. First is Laurie Sears. In her article, "Reading Ayu Utami: Notes Toward A Study of Trauma and The Archive in Indonesia," she uses Utami's fictions to narrate how Freud's theories on "trauma, melancholia and deferred actions" are used in Indonesian pop culture. She says clearly that Utami's two novels, *Saman* and *Larung*, deal with the agony of Indonesian bloody violence in 1965-1966 through her depiction of the hero of *Larung*, and the anguish of Suharto's power in *Saman*.²⁷

Sears goes on to say that these two novels advance the Indonesian history collections by integrating the trauma and memory discourse into literary works. In addition to her effort to use of Freud's theories to understand Indonesian literature, she also notes that Utami's works can be an archetype of "a process of double inscription."²⁸ Sears seems to emphasize the old saying that says history is narrated based on those who have the power – and through literature, history can be seen differently, based on what the readers feel. Although Sears agrees with the idea of classifying Ayu Utami as a member of the group of *sastra wangi*, (author of chicklit) she does not touch on the idea of sexuality in the novels. She focuses more on the power of Freud's theory and how the

²⁵ Bandel.,K. *Sastra Perempuan; Seks* (Bandung: Jalasutra, 2006),p. xviii

²⁶ Bandel, 2006, p. 2

²⁷ Sears.,L, Reading Ayu Utami: Notes Toward A Study of Trauma and The Archive in Indonesia, *Indonesia*,83 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), p.25

²⁸ Sears, 2007, p.38

violence and the government of Indonesia have become the “ghost” in Indonesians’ lives. She also analyses how Utami has used the hero, heroines, and other minor characters as tokens to present the effect of the violence in the past history towards the lives of the individuals.

Another critic who also presents a varied perspective on reading Utami is Harry Aveling. He suggests that the emergence of a new voice from among the women authors is related to the termination of Suharto’s control over Indonesian writing. He suggests that the ancient Indonesian literary works consist of Javanese literature, Sundanese literature, Minang literature, Batak literature, and the Oral Literature of West Irian.²⁹ The main themes of these works included the son of a valiant king, a sweet but lazy princess, social unity as the primary value of stability, and community integration as the representation of a fair and prosperous state, or a mythology. These themes were based on ancient societies that were essentially agrarian³⁰; these themes cannot be found in the works written by the young female Indonesian authors. He states that these young educated women authors propose analytical works on “the lives, the pleasure and the suffering, the sexuality, and the need for full self-expression, of themselves and other Indonesian women like themselves.”³¹ He regards Ayu Utami as one of the most cutting-edge women authors after the Indonesian reformation. He sees that this phenomenon is the impact of what Henk Meir argues is the exclusion of realism, the result of young

²⁹ Aveling, H, *Rumah Sastra Indonesia* (Magelang: Indonesia Tera, 2002) p. 43

³⁰ Aveling, 2002, p.43

³¹ Aveling, H, Indonesian Literature After Reformasi: The tongue of women, *Kritika Kultura*, 8, February (2007), p. 13

women authors' reaction to being limited from the freedom of expression before reformation.³²

Nevertheless, Meir suggests that this censorship was not started during Suharto's regime. In fact, the founding father of Indonesia, Sukarno, also took part in suppressing freedom of speech. This ill-famed decree was published in 1963 and was called PP. no 4/1963. It required all publishers to submit a copy of all books to the closest prosecutor's office two days before they published the original copy. This gave the attorney power to search out the content of the books and remove any potential content that would question the nation's political, economical, leadership, and public faiths, including anything that might disrupt public trust in the government, and banning all but five recognized religions.³³ With these insights, Utami's works can be considered as offering a new style and new literary genre in Indonesia. As Aveling argues, *Saman* contains an important aspect, which is the freedom to express the individual's will, including women's sexuality.³⁴ Prior to Ayu Utami's novels, this aspect was rarely used in Indonesian fiction written by women.

Another criticism comes from Barbara Hatley. She echoes that Utami's works, *Saman* and *Larung*, celebrate the women's liberation in work, political power, and sex.³⁵ She argues that her writing is a typical style of postcolonial work, in that it depicts a

³² Aveling 2007, p.10

³³ Mc Glynn, J.H, *Silence Voices, Muted Expressions: Indonesian Literature Today*, 12, 1, pp. 38-44, (Manoa: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000), Pp. 38-44 from www.jstor.com (Accessed November 3' 2009)

³⁴ Aveling, H., Indonesia Literature after Reformasi: the tongues of women, *Kritika Kultura*, 8, (February 2007),p.13

³⁵ Hatley, B., 2002. Postcoloniality and the feminine in modern Indonesian Literature in Keith Foulcher and Tony Day (ed) *Clearing a space, postcolonial readings of modern Indonesian literature*, (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), Pp. 174-175.

woman author's perceptions on women's role in the nation. In addition, Hatley elaborates that Utami's style in narrating her fictions resounds leitmotifs similar to Suwarsih Joyopuspito's works. Like Joyopuspito, Utami personifies human perceptions of female sexual desires, power, and the search for supernatural belief.³⁶ She goes on to say that Utami's works portray an Indonesian modern author's efforts to explore myths and the supernatural world. Utami interests in expressing mythical themes, supernatural and religions interpretations are not only presented in *Saman*³⁷ and *Larung*³⁸, she echoes these ideas in several other texts, such as *Parasit Lajang*³⁹ and *Bilangan Fu*.⁴⁰

Hatley posits that this is one of her characteristics in her writing, just like other women authors after colonialism and reformation.⁴¹ She believes as a female author, Utami seems to present the experimental manifestation that tries to prove how "old norms are slowly, but surely changing, and that longstanding taboos on the conceptualization and self representation of women are under challenge."⁴² Along with the change of the structure of the state, it seems that Utami attempts to persuade readers that there is a need to reconstruct the subjectivity of women's representations in sexuality, power, and religion. Utami's works, for Hatley, are the representation of archetypal narratives that aim to write back against the idea of 'nativist' and to break the dominant discourse of women's courtesy, passivity, and recognition that are always shaped by the male authors.

³⁶ Hatley, 2002, p.180

³⁷ Utami, 2005

³⁸ Utami, 2001

³⁹ Utami, A., *Parasit Lajang: Seks, Sketsa & Cerita* (Jakarta: Gagas Media, 2003)

⁴⁰ Utami, 2008

⁴¹ Hatley, p.176

⁴² Hatley, p.190

Sears', Aveling's and Hatley's arguments justify the idea that female author's freedom to express sexuality is used to reject control by the government. On the contrary, Katrin Bandel, a German-born writer and literary critic, argues that there was a new trend in Indonesian modern literature post 1998. She believes that Indonesians have agreed to consider that two main points help to make literary works widely accepted in society. These two points are the ability of the writers in using sex as theme or plot, and the fact that the authors of such books are young attractive and sensual women.⁴³ Her arguments refer to two young female authors, Djenar Maesa Ayu and Ayu Utami. Maesa Ayu's *Jangan main main (dengan kelaminmu)* (Don't fool around (with your genitals)), and Ayu Utami's *Saman* and *Larung* all expose sexuality as a way to attract readers' attention. Bandel does not argue that there is any effort done by these authors to criticize society and government. Still, she doubts the reasons behind the readers' reaction toward Utami's two novels: is it because of the new radical theme that they have put on the table? or because Indonesian literary works meet a hunger for sex related themes?⁴⁴

Bandel agrees that somehow Utami's works are geared toward the idea of freedom – including women's freedom to discuss women's sexuality in the public sphere. However, she claims that if readers consider Utami as the first female author who has successfully presented a striking use of sexuality in literature, then readers neglect the richness of older Indonesian literature that presented the idea of sexuality in a slightly different way. She compares the classic works of G.Francis' *Tjerita Njai Dasima* (Njai Dasima's story) and Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Bumi Manusia* (Earth of Mankind), with

⁴³ Bandel, 2006, Pp. 113-114

⁴⁴ Bandel 2006, Pp. 115-116

Utami's use of sexuality. *Njai Dasima* and *Nyai Ontosoroh* are both the *gundik* (concubines) of Dutch high ranked officers during the colonial period. The officers provided their *Nyais* with money, status, and a luxurious life; in return both of these women gave these men the services of sexual relationship without marriage. With this explanation, Bandel denotes that these authors have started to illustrate the taboo idea of sexuality in literature long before Utami caught the public's attention.

In addition to her disagreement with the public amazement shown towards Utami's work, Bandel puts forward the fact that there are a number of female authors who write on significant themes as religions and the misuse of power. However, unlike Ayu Utami's works, these stories failed to gain a splashy reaction from the Indonesian readers. Utami, as quoted in Bandel's book, says she expects the critics to approach her novels in a different way. She wants them to understand that for her, there is a possibility in a woman to combine feminism and phallocentrism. Utami stresses that she shows this ambivalent condition in some of her characters. However, Bandel disagrees with Utami's point of view; she thinks that Utami fails to prove what she says as the ambivalence of feminism and phallocentrism. Bandel claims that the sexuality that Utami illustrates does not show women's freedom. On the other hand, she finds Utami's works as novels that have shown a strong phallocentricism. Yet, sexuality is only a pretension that should not be regarded as a striking point of her novels.⁴⁵

Referring to all the criticisms above, it can be said that Indonesian Literature has often been intertwined with the problem of presenting sexuality, power, and religion.

⁴⁵ Bandel, 2006, Pp.115-117

Bandel's argument on the not so fresh idea of Ayu Utami's writing on women's sexuality, Sears' analysis of Utami interpretations of the influence of government over people, and Aveling's emphasis on the emergence of women writers voicing women's attitudes toward the nation, narrow the idea that Utami's writings offer a common women's point of view on women's sexuality, and various forms of power, both personal and spiritual. Bandel might be right when she suggests that sexuality is not a new theme in Indonesian literature; however, I agree with Aveling's arguments that articulate the significance of Utami's writing, namely, she voices the real feeling of a female writer toward the world of female experience. She tries to reveal what was taboo for women to say in the public sphere. This is the point that I would use to frame my analysis. Furthermore, I stand for Sears' arguments that Utami's works contain the notion of how power compels people's minds in many respects. In this thesis, I do not intend to decide whether female authors have used sexuality themes to make their writing sensational, as Bandel has argued. Rather, I seek to portray what can be seen from Utami's novels. I do not argue for the feminism or phallocentrism that Bandel has questioned, but I explore the interrelation between Utami's way of representing sexuality, power, and religion.

To reiterate, Bandel claims that Ayu Utami's language of sexuality is the way to make the works appear more important in Indonesian literature realms. Sears' approach is more about the way power is presented and influences Indonesians' minds and perceptions. Aveling encourages readers to see Utami's novels as works of women that voice women's attitudes toward their lives and their surroundings. The outcome of these three points is the idea that Ayu Utami's writings can be seen as the depiction of a female

author voicing the freedom to express the sexuality preference, her freedom to access power, and her ability to interpret spiritual experience. Utami presents this idea in such a way that makes readers understand that religion is somehow connected with power and sex. Thus, unlike the previous studies conducted by several literary critics, this current study explores the relationships between the three elements. One approach to introduce this connection is to focus on the discussion of the relationship between power and sex and the definition of religion in the Indonesian context.

Power and sex

This section of the chapter focuses mainly on the discussion of power and sex in Indonesia. To do this, my study will refer extensively to Suryakusuma, who is one of the few critics focusing on this specific discourse. She argues that Utami's novels have become the instrument to illustrate what has happened in a patriarchal society like Indonesia. Suryakusuma argues that Utami has grabbed the public's attention by exploiting a forward sense of female authors that they are the "destroyers of patriarchal values."⁴⁶ She mentions that as one of the women authors that has taken advantage of being called *sastra wangi*, Utami has crossed sectors of class, ethnicity, and religion as these writers "do not bear the psychological, political, and ideological burdens of the New Order and explore daring sexual themes -- taboo-breaking even."⁴⁷ Suryakusuma, an Indonesian writer, has presented cogent arguments on the relationship between power, sexuality, and literature. She states that life, including sex, has been reflected by literature; yet, she believes that commentators rarely consider literature as a means to

⁴⁶Suryakusuma, J, Can literature act as a vanguard for gender equality, *The Jakarta Post*. From www.thejakartapost.com (Accessed November 26, 2009)

⁴⁷ Suryakusuma, 2006, Pp. 6-10

value social development.⁴⁸ She believes that there are other themes that should be considered as striking themes written by women authors. Indonesian women authors should not be regarded only because of the sexual themes that they portrayed but also from the meanings that were inside the works of literature. She believes that some other modern women writers in Indonesia also convey the same message but wrapped the language and plot in a different way. She advises that sex should not only be regarded as the outside theme of the work of art, but it should be regarded from the sexology of the writers themselves, the genders that influence the perception of sex, and social moral values and power that exist in writers' surroundings.

She calls Utami and other *sastra wangi* writers the "MTV Generation." It is a generation in which literature is published as the instrument to break down the borders of class, ethnicity, and religion. She believes that these works have no concern with "the psychological, political, and ideological burdens of the New Order and explore daring sexual themes."⁴⁹ She affirms that some people believe the works of Utami represent patriarchal values, yet some others, especially the feminists salute her works as the destroyer of the patriarchal culture. However, Suryakusuma says that the reason why the feminists hailed her is because her style of language and writing composition that Utami uses start out from the traditional perspective that women are the "guidance of morality"⁵⁰ – therefore, to use such provocative languages to depict women's desires is not incongruous.

⁴⁸ Suryakusuma, 2006

⁴⁹ Suryakusuma, 2006

⁵⁰ Suryakusuma, 2006

Suryakusuma's argument, shows that power can be diffused by the government as it spreads out the ideology about an ideal woman in society – a figure that has to show a respectful attitude toward the world. Women's moral conduct is being portrayed in their attitude, utterances and perception toward religious devotion. Suryakusuma also agrees that religions in Indonesia used to be a part of the government's authority. Thus, it implies that a good woman is a religious woman. This seems that Utami's works cannot only be seen as woman's point of view on women's sexuality and power; these literary works can also be regarded as a depiction of a woman author voicing her religious perception, a spiritual exploration. Following is the description of the discourse of religion that is used in this current study.

The discourse of religion in Utami's novels

Suryakusuma implies that religion has a major role in shaping the lack of power that women have in the nation. However, she does not further explore the definition of religion. In addition, although some major literary critics agree that there are elements of power and sex in Utami's fiction, they do not mention the existence of the elements of religion in Utami's works. Therefore, it is necessary to view what kind of religious discourse will be used in this current study.

Bellah defines religion as “a set of symbolic forms and acts which relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence.”⁵¹ Levine describes that religion is “a complex,

⁵¹ Haynes, J. Religion, Secularization and Politics, a postmodern conspectus. *Third world quarterly*, 18, 4, 709-728, 1997. From www.jstor.org (Accessed December, 1, 2009)

multi dimensional phenomenon, it is imbued with doctrine, myth, ethics, and ritual.”⁵² These are the keys to comprehension of the concepts of death and life. He affirms that this token manifests “on personal and societal levels... The personal experience of religion and its social impact are integrated.”⁵³ Meanwhile, Bowen explains that religion is, “ideas and practices that postulates reality beyond that which is immediately available to the senses.”⁵⁴ Referring to all of the scholars, I assume that religion in Utami’s novels is any kind of belief, ideas, and practice that are conducted by fictitious characters of the novels. This includes the ways the characters say about their beliefs and acts based on the beliefs that they have.

It is important to underline that there is a crucial relationship between the individual and society in interpreting the elements of religions. The elements of religions that will be presented here are not only myths, religious attitudes and behaviors, supernatural elements but also the spiritual experiences of the characters. In this thesis, those elements are related to what Utami describes in the characters. Myths are stories in which the truths occur to be self-evident since most of the time they are told by the elders, the political leaders, or the religious specialist in a society.⁵⁵ In the novels, Utami uses the myths of Nyai Roro Kidul, Syech Siti Jenar, Sangkuriang, and Calon Arang to explain the major characters’ perspective on their beliefs. Religious attitude is related

⁵² Levine, Gregory J. (1986), On the Geography of Religion, *Transaction of the Institute of British Geographers. New series*, 11, 4, pp. 428-22. (p.432). From www.jstor.org (Accessed November 28, 2009)

⁵³ Levine, 1986, p.432

⁵⁴ John Bowen in Emily A.Schultz and Robert H.Lavenda, *Cultural Anthropology, A Perspective on the human condition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 180

⁵⁵ Schultz and Lavenda, 2005, p.161

with the orthopraxy or “correct practice”⁵⁶ – the example of this orthopraxy is the highly ritualized practice in Islam and Catholicism. Religious behaviors also include animism, the belief in souls exists in objects, ancestor worship or the belief that the deceased has the ability to influence someone’s live, polytheism or a belief in more than one deity, monotheism or a belief to a supreme being, and magic. Both of the religious attitude and religious behavior are presented in the novels through the major and minor characters. The thesis also discusses about the spirituality of the characters. Spirituality here refers to any “a priori exclusion of the evidence of subjective empirical experiences which had practical consequences in the lives of certain individuals.”⁵⁷ Therefore, the relationship between the individual and his or her spirituality is indisputable. The character of an individual is the elements that can be used to see how spirituality is embraced in his/her life.

Haynes points out that certain religious organizations will have more problems to adjust to modernity if these organizations have stronger connections with the state.⁵⁸ In other words, it could be said that if the state plays an important role in determining what religious organizations should be accepted within a society, the religious values might have a clash with the changing of modernity. In regard to the state’s authority, Mitra (in Haynes) notes that religious organizations can shape the moral basis of the state. Mitra uses a triadic figure to describe the connection between the state, society, and religion. In

⁵⁶ Schultz and Lavenda, 2005, p. 168

⁵⁷ Turner, *Between Science and Religion*, p. 23 and in Gowan Dawson *X-Club not X-Files: Walter Pater, Spiritualism and Victorian Scientific Naturalism in Crossing Boundaries, Thinking through Literature* edited by Julie Scanlon and Amy Waster (Glasgow: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) p 60.

⁵⁸ Bellah,R. (1964) *Religious Evolution*, *American Sociological Review*, 29 (3), pp. 358-374 in Haynes., 1997

this, he asserts that religion is influenced by the temporal power and by the changing of society. The relationship is interconnected, in which one pole cannot be separated from the other parts.⁵⁹ Thus, whenever a state changes, this alteration will influence the society and the authority of religion. If one state is undergoing a change in development, then the religious system will also change. These scholars believe that one of the most essential ideological changes in relation to religion and the state's development process is the secularism of a state.⁶⁰ Asad defines that secularism is commonly understood as "the separation of religion and state"⁶¹ Utami seems to challenge the fact that Indonesia is called as a secular county; yet the government has interfered with the existence of religions. Her criticism toward secularism and government's interference will be discussed further in the discussion of religion in Java and Bali

Religion in Java and Bali

In terms of religion, the analysis will be based on a social approach in order to understand how Utami perceives religion. One of the strongest religious elements portrayed in Utami's three novels is the traditional religion of Java and Bali. For heuristic reasons, I rely on Max Weber's explanation discussed by Clifford Geertz.

Clifford Geertz quotes Max Weber to propose concepts of traditional and rationalized religions – "rationalized religion" will be used in this thesis as the basic way

⁵⁹ Mitra, S.K., 'Desecularising the state: religion and politics in India after independence,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33, (4), 1991, Pp. 755-777 in Haynes, 1997

⁶⁰ Smith, D.E., (1970) *Religion and Political Development* (Boston: Little, Brown) p. 6 in Tony Walter and Grace Davie, *The religiosity of women in the modern west*, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 49, 4, (Dec 1998) Pp. 640-660. From www.jstor.org (Accessed November 29, 2009)

⁶¹ Asad, Talal in Schultz and Lavenda, 2005, Pp. 193-194

to understand the existence of monotheistic religion in Indonesia. In his *The Interpretation of Culture*, Geertz concludes that the difference between these two is actually rather blurred, although rationalized religion is more abstract, more theoretical and more logically coherent than traditional religion.⁶² Traditional religion, however, has a strong content of myriad defined and relatively ordered entities, its deity satisfaction is fulfilled through “an untidy collection of fussy ritual acts and vivid animistic images which are able to involve themselves in an independent, segmental, and immediate manner with almost any sort of actual event.”⁶³ Nevertheless, the life of people in the 20th century sometimes neglects the existence of the traditional religion because of the requirement to observe a rationalized religion.

In order to limit the focus of the study, I will use the word monotheistic to refer to the rationalized religion. This is due to the fact that Indonesia has six recognized religions, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism; Although Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism cannot be classified into monotheism, but the government promotes the problematic concept of ‘Tuhan itu Satu.’⁶⁴ Utami describes the problematic meaning of this concept. Literally, this concept means God is One; however, some religious followers may interpret it as there is only one god. Utami seems to suggest that this second interpretation hinders the religious tolerance in Indonesia.

⁶² Geertz, C. *The Interpretation of Culture*, (New York, Basic Books, 1973), p.173

⁶³ Geertz, 1973, p.172

⁶⁴ Literally translated ‘God is One’

From another perspective, the reason for using ‘monotheistic religion’ to refer to the rationalized because rationalized religion relies more on the rules of monotheism and this limits the freedom of the people to engage in their traditional beliefs. Monotheists believe in one God alone who “made the world and who reigns supreme over everything he created. He has eliminated all the gods and all their spouses from the heavens: he is the sole creator, the *causa prima*, the agent of life, the embodiment of purpose and reason, of fate and eternity,”⁶⁵ asserting that any other form of deity is fallacious. In the Qur’an, in Surah III, the Imrans, it is said that

There is no god but Him, the Living, the Ever-existing One. He has revealed to you the Book with the Truth, confirming the scriptures, which preceded it; for He has already revealed the Torah and the Gospel for the guidance of mankind, and the distinction between right and wrong.

Those that deny God’s revelations shall be sternly punished; God is mighty and capable of revenge. Nothing on earth or in heaven is hidden from God. It is He who shapes your bodies in your mothers’ wombs as He pleases. There is no god but Him, the Mighty and the Wise one (1-6)

This quotation reveals that Islam understands the existence of God as One, as does any other form of monotheism, but it does not say that only Islam’s God is right. The problem in a monotheist or orthodox religion lies in the interpretation of each individual. Unfortunately, the interpretation of the value in each official religion is based on social norms. For a patriarchal society like Indonesia, the destiny of religious interpretation lies

⁶⁵ Frankl, G., *The Three Faces of Monotheism: Judaism, Christianity, Islam* (London: Open Gate Press, 2005) p. 4

with the male figures -- fathers, brothers, or the male leaders. Furthermore, in order to legitimize the norms that are constructed from the male perspective, cultural values that exist in old legends, epics or manuscripts are also interpreted in ways that limit women's freedom to express their ideas.

Although it is said that the traditional religions were less ordered, this does not mean there was no order at all. Balinese traditional religion, for instance, has three important social orders that followers must comprehend -- the temple system, the sanctification of social inequality and the cult of death and witches.⁶⁶ The temple system allows each Balinese to conduct a ritual based on the individual conditions of each area; each temple has its own priest. The ritual is conducted collectively, in which each family member has to be able to send its household representative. The priest in each district has full authority to supervise the ritual, but it has to be based on the rules of the central temple.

The second system, which is the sanctification of social inequality, mainly focuses on the function of the caste system. The lower caste is closely related to the focus of this study. The cult of death and witches is said to be the darkest side of Balinese religion. It relates to the mythology Rangda and Barong. Rangda, who is "a monstrous queen of the witches, ancient widow, used-up prostitute, a child-murdering incarnation of the goddess of death"⁶⁷ is involved in a deadly fight with Barong, a "vaguely benign and slightly ludicrous deity, who looks and acts like a cross between a clumsy bear, a foolish

⁶⁶ Geertz, 1973, p. 176

⁶⁷ Geertz, 1973, p. 180

puppy, and a strutting Chinese dragon.”⁶⁸ This story represents human strengths and weaknesses. Barong, the deity, wins the battle and defeats Rangda, the rejected mother.⁶⁹ The importance of this story is that people believe that by giving offerings to the gods and goddess, who live in their surroundings, and by conducting rituals based on this story they will maintain the system of nature in their lives. In saying this, Balinese believe there are spirits in everything that control the harmony of nature. In addition to Rangda and Barong, Balinese believe in multiple Gods, such as Shiva, Durga, Vishnu, and many others.⁷⁰

Javanese religion also acknowledges a similar concept of the existence of the spirits in nature. According to Geertz, Javanese religion is a mixture of “Indian, Islamic, and indigenous Southeast Asian elements.”⁷¹ This is the animistic culture of the origin of the Javanese people, and is the result of a balanced syncretism between great religions and small traditions. The Javanese belief system recognizes three main kinds of spirits: *memedis*, *lelembut*, and *tuyul*.⁷² *Memedis* are frightening spirits that sometimes look like the westerners’ version of a ghost. There is, for example a walking skeleton called the *djrankongs*, or *wedon*, a spirit covered by a white sheet.⁷³ *Gendruwos* belong to the *memedis* category but are playful spirits, believed to be less evil or even with no evil intentions at all. They like to get to know humans, but unfortunately, they can transform

⁶⁸ Geertz, 1973, p. 180

⁶⁹ G. Bateson and M. Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (New York, 1942) and in Geertz, 1973, p. 180

⁷⁰ Geertz, C. *Person, Time and Conduct in Bali: An essay in Cultural Analysis* (Cultural Report Series: Yale University. Southeast Asia Studies. 1996). p. 12

⁷¹ Geertz, C. Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example. *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 59, 1 (Feb.1957). Pp. 32-54. From www.jstor.org (Accessed April 14, 2009)

⁷² Geertz, C. *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976) Pp.16-17

⁷³ Geertz, C, 1976, p. 17

themselves into humans and accidentally have affairs with humans. *Lelembuts* are another group of spirits that exists in the Javanese religion. These are malevolent spirits with very dangerous, evil intentions toward humans. They can enter the human body through the feet and are very harmful, causing sickness, insanity, or death.⁷⁴ *Tujuls* are more like slaves to humans who seek for more money in the human world. They live in old ruins or sacred places throughout the island of Java. To command these spirits, one should take a journey to a significant place, like a cemetery, ruins, or other sacred place, accompanied by a *juru kunci*⁷⁵ to ask the spirit to allow her or him to take home and possess the *tujuls*. These spirits will then be asked to take money or jewels from other people, mostly relatives, and bring them to the *tujuls* host. In return, these *tujuls* will magically kill a human sacrifice each year, most often a relative of the person who possesses the *tujul*.⁷⁶ All of these spirits are said to live among humans. By conducting religious rituals, people can make sure these spirits will not be able to disrupt their lives. In Utami's novels, she depicts the interaction between these spirits and human being. Saman's, Larung's, Yuda's, and Parang Jati's lives are heavily influenced by the existence of these spirits

Geertz also mentions that there is a primary core to the Javanese belief - the existence of *rasa* that Geertz defines as "feeling" and "meaning," and *bathin* or "soul." The soul needs to be sharpened in order for human beings to be able to distinguish the existence of bad and good, strength and weakness, evil and deity in nature. This is the

⁷⁴ Geertz, C 1976, p. 19

⁷⁵ A *juru kunci* is a person who takes care of the places and function as a *dukun*

⁷⁶ Geertz, 1976, Pp. 20-21

mysticism that is strongly emphasized in Javanese religion.⁷⁷ According to Geertz, “the knowledge of the ultimate *rasa* is the end of mystical endeavor and should be the religious aim of all men.”⁷⁸ It is clear that the traditional religions of Java and Bali value and acculturate the power of nature, the existence of spirits, myths, and animist beliefs. These concepts of religions are rich with supernatural foci and admit the existence of God.

Nevertheless, conflicts occur when traditional religions have to be registered under a monotheistic religion. According to Geertz, there was a debate during the 1960s between the Moslems and the Balinese on the process of officializing the religions in Indonesia by the Ministry of Religion. Geertz claims that the Moslems accused the Balinese religion of not being a religion due to the unavailability of a holy book. Although the followers of the Balinese religion claimed they had manuscripts that predated Muhammad, the Ministry of Religion, which was dominated by Moslems, regarded it as an unauthentic religion, and refused to admit it. The followers of the Balinese religion also claimed that they believe that God is One but has manifestations in many names and appearances.⁷⁹ Geertz then argues that the refusal to accept the Balinese religion was because the Moslems fear that many Javanese who identify themselves as Islamic but still possess animist beliefs would demand to convert to Bali-ism if the

⁷⁷ Geertz, 1976, Pp. 330-339

⁷⁸ Geertz, 1976, p. 317

⁷⁹ Geertz, 1976, Pp. 187-189

government recognized this belief as official. These differences then were reconciled with the idea that the Balinese religion will be regarded under Hinduism in Indonesia.⁸⁰

The characters of Ayu's novels portray the conflict of traditional and monotheistic religions. In *Saman*, the characters of Ibu, Shakuntala, and Saman depict their traditional beliefs and how these beliefs influence their lives. This, of course, causes problems in their lives since the modern world does not always favor traditional religions and their myths, legends, and superstitions. The characters of Simbah and Larung in the second novel are also representations of these phenomena. Ibu, Saman, and Shakuntala are strongly influenced by Javanese religion, while Simbah and Larung illustrate Balinese religion. The conflict of monotheism and traditional religion is heavily described in the last book, *Bilangan Fu*. Yuda and Parang Jati show that traditional religion needs space for its believers to exist in the 20th century. This will be illustrated in the chapter five.

The intention is to present the religious elements and their relation to power and sex through the elements of three literary works. One of the literary elements used is characterization; it includes the characters' motive, dialogue, and their interaction with other characters. This study will incorporate the analysis of the setting merely to see how the characters develop in the story.

Characterization

Characters are one of the main important parts of literary works. Through characters, the author can present his/her ideas and perspectives. Henry James argues that if fiction is the means to understand what happens in humans' lives, then characters are

⁸⁰ Geertz, 1076, p. 189

the elements to capture that message.⁸¹ Another basic concept of characters, as presented by Abrams, is that they “are the persons presented in a dramatic or narrative work.”⁸² They present the ideas of the author. They provide many direct actions that are endowed with moral value, emotional dimensions and offer the reader the big question about what will happen.

There are two ways of classifying characters: major and minor characters.⁸³ The major characters are those who are the focus in the work from the beginning to the end. Therefore, they establish their motivation to engage the readers’ or audiences’ attention. They also perform the important role of clarifying the idea of the story. The minor characters appear only briefly and are less important in the overall significance of the story.

Acknowledging the above concept, it can be said that characters are “people” in narrative works that are presented as having temperaments, experiences, and moral qualities like those of real human beings. Therefore, readers are able to identify certain motives that generate certain characters into the sequence of actions in the text. To make the readers understand the message that the author wants to convey, an author can intervene authoritatively through the presentation of their characters’ interaction with other characters, their lives and their surroundings. This is how the author presents the idea of the story. The author can use characters to present his or her ideas through the

⁸¹ Philips, B. Character in Contemporary Fiction. *The Hudson Review*, 56, 4, (2004), Pp. 629-642. From www.jstor.org (Accessed January 20th 2009)

⁸² Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 6th ed (New York. Harcourt Brave, Jovanovich College Publishers, 1985), p. 23

⁸³ Holman, C Hugh & William Harmon. *A Handbook to Literature*. 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan. 1986), p.155

description of a person's appearance; the aspects of personality that are stated by other characters in the story; speech or language in conversation; details of their past life; and mannerisms.⁸⁴ These elements can reveal the character's motives, such as hope, desire for some particular reward, love, fears, sense of failure, eagerness for revenge, greed, envy, and so on.⁸⁵ It is plausible to utilize character development in this current study.

As Said says, if a novel can help to mediate social problems,⁸⁶ then literature has to be approached through many different contexts: historical, social, cultural and political. Utami's works contain all of these aspects. Therefore, no one single approach can be used to understand the idea of power, sex, and religion in Utami's works. The current study finds that the existence of political power has a crucial influence on and relationship with sex and religion.

Religious themes in Indonesian and Malaysian literary works

In the realm of Southeast Asian Literature studies, the idea of exploring sexuality, women, power, gender, and religions are not contemporary issues. Religion in Malay literature is probably the most common theme that the readers can find. This is supported by the fact that the Government in Malaysia also has the power to determine the content of literature and the religious life among the citizens. Aveling has explored the connection between Islam, gender, and power in Malay author Shahnnon Ahmad's writings. Using mainly Foucault's theory of language and power, Aveling probes eight works of Shannon Ahmad as the depiction of how literary works in Malaysia reveal the

⁸⁴ Murphy, M.J. *Understanding Unseen: An Introduction to English Poetry and The English Novel for Overseas Students* (London: George Allen&Unwin. 1972), Pp. 167-173

⁸⁵ Russel, C. *How to Analyse Drama*, (London: Monarch Press. 1966), Pp.41-43

⁸⁶ Said, 1995 in Dr. Nyoman Kutha Ratna, SU, *Postkolonialisme Indonesia Relevansi Sastra*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2008), Pp. 35-39

idea of connection of *Islam, Power and Gender*.⁸⁷ Henk Maier, echoes a similar idea to Aveling's. He states that Shahnon Ahmad, a Koran-inspired writer, pictures how Malaysian literature is influenced by Malaysian identity as good Moslems.⁸⁸ Maier's and Aveling's arguments hold up the thesis of the interconnection between literature and religion.

In Indonesia, religion has become a bourgeois topic in literature even before the arrival of modern authors like Ayu Utami. Gunawan Mohammad in Saridjo's *Sastra dan Agama* (Literature and Religion)⁸⁹ claims that religious themes in literature should not be based on one sole doctrine from any particular religious belief. He refers to the fact that the government only recognizes six religions in Indonesia. This famous Indonesian writer and journalist asserts that if a writer, who claims his writings to be a religious work of literature, gives only his own personal emphasis on a certain belief, he has failed to present the value of the religious theme within the literature. On the other hand, he believes that religious literature should present how religions are being interpreted since each individual has a different understanding of religion.⁹⁰

Moreover, Muhammad says that credit should be given to those who try to see religions from a different angle. Due to the variety of cultures in Indonesia as well as the history of how religion is distributed in Indonesia, religions should be acknowledged based on the way the believers regard the concepts of the various religions. Although

⁸⁷ Aveling, H., *Shahnon Ahmad, Islam Power and Gender* (Bangi:Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2000)

⁸⁸ Maier, H, *We are playing relatives, A Survey of Malay writing* (Leiden: KITLV Press 2004) p.271

⁸⁹ Saridjo, 2006, Pp. 56-61

⁹⁰ Saridjo, 2006, p. 59

Muhammad does not neglect works of literature from the group of authors from the Islamic Literature (*Sastera Islam*) or ‘prayer house literature’ (*Sastera surau*), he encourages readers to see that somehow authors have a very uncommon way of interpreting religions. According to Aveling, the religious literature that were renewed by names like Helvy Tiana Rose and Habiburrahman El Shirazy followed the awakening of Indonesian literature that was carried by authors like Utami and Djenar.⁹¹

All of the examples of these literary works allow this current study to narrow its focus. This study aims at describing the way Ayu Utami presents the ideas of power, sex, and religion, and how these elements are connected to each other. Further, this current study is hoping to prove that literature can be used as a means to criticize the social condition in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia. The objective of this current study is also to enrich the realm of Southeast Asian contemporary literary analysis that is written by a female author who depicts the issues of power, sex, and religion. The works of Suryakusuma and Aveling will be the main sources used to approach and understand the message that Ayu Utami conveys.

⁹¹ Aveling, 2007

Chapter Three: Ayu Utami's novels and ideas of Religion, Power, and Sexuality

In this chapter I will present a brief introduction to each of Ayu Utami's three novels. The novels deal with the themes of power and sexuality, but also delve into the world of traditional culture and religion. It will be my argument in further chapters that she faults religion for women being incapable of expressing their perspective on sexuality. In *Saman*, *Larung*, and *Bilangan Fu*, Utami develops the arguments between the traditional traditions of the local people, especially Java and Bali, and the orthodox religions of Islam and Catholicism. These are woven closely into in the plots of the novels. She seems to compare the roots of orthodox religions and traditional religions and notes how these two poles support each another and influence a nation's attitude of limiting women's freedom to express sexuality by forming local norms, from the domestic realm to the national level. She incorporates her thoughts on these issues in the very lively character development of each novel.

Saman

Saman is the story of a struggle and a friendship. It follows the friendship of four young urban women -- Yasmin, a lawyer, Laila, a writer and photographer, Shakuntala, a dancer and Cok, a businesswoman -- with the protagonist Saman or Wisanggeni, a priest turned human rights activist. The women come from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Yasmin is a Catholic of Medanese descent, Laila is a Muslim of Minangkabau descent, Shakuntala is a Javanese Catholic, and Cok is of Balinese descent. They have different ways of thinking, in perceiving their religions and their sexual orientation. All of these women and Saman experienced the social conditions of the

1990s when Indonesia was under the administration of President Suharto. The story describes Saman's effort to help the villagers in their struggle for their plantation rights against a powerful company in Prabumulih, South Sumatra.

With military support, the companies succeed in crushing the villagers, and Saman was accused of turning the villagers against the government. Through the help of the four female characters, he manages to escape to New York. Utami carries the story not only through Saman's life in Sumatra, but also through his childhood memories and his relationship with his mother and her unseen lover. This is the main part when Utami celebrates local Javanese traditions and beliefs. The story also portrays the personal conflict of each female character. Each has to face her personal problem that relates to her life in a patriarchal society where norms and religions limit women's freedom to express their sexuality. Utami has successfully dealt with issues such as gender equality, justice, and traditional religious interference in modern life, and sexuality – all unpopular themes of discourse, especially by women authors, during the New Order.

Larung

Utami started to write *Larung*, her second novel, in 1997. Unlike *Saman* that was only seven to eight months in the writing, *Larung* took more than a year.⁹² It involves the life of a young man named Larung Lanang who attempts to kill his grandmother to rescue her from the curse she has endured since she was young. *Larung* also continues the story of the four female characters from *Saman*. Through his meeting with Cok, Larung was able with Yasmin to help three young activists to flee the country, who had been accused

⁹² Diani, H, 2007

of master-minding the July 27 riot in Indonesia. The attempt was unsuccessful because of one of the activists was suspicious of Larung's purpose in helping them. The day Saman was to help them cross the border, the military arrested and killed all of them.

In this book, Utami also emphasizes traditional religion and how it became a tool for accusing others during the 1965 coup. Unlike *Saman* that does not refer to Indonesian politics prior to the 1990s; *Larung* combines the 1960s political incidents as the setting of the plot. Utami voices her perspective on Hinduism and mysticism in the story. She uses several traditional legends and sources: the old manuscripts of *Serat Centini*, *Calon Arang*, and the legend of Durga. If carefully studied, it seems that Utami shows an increasing interest toward the traditional religion.

Bilangan Fu

In 2008, Utami was named the winner of the Khatulistiwa Literary Award for her novel *Bilangan Fu*.⁹³ Although she claims the award lacked serious criticism of literary works, she agrees with Seno Gumiro Ajidarma, a writer, who says that this third novel shows a “more solid and complex” theme.⁹⁴ It is necessary to separate discussion of *Bilangan Fu*, Utami's third novel, from her first two. First, it went into print in 2008, seven years after *Larung*.⁹⁵ Obviously, some significant notions were expected in this third book. Unlike *Saman* and *Larung*, which are rich with the New Order's political dilemmas, *Bilangan Fu* is not linked to the New Order's political turbulence. She claims

⁹³ Hernawan, A and Messakh M, Ayu Utami, Nirwan Dewanto win Khatulistiwa literary prize, *The Jakarta Post*, Jakarta, Sat, 11/15/2008. From www.thejakartapost.com (Accessed April, 7, 2010)

⁹⁴ Hernawan, A and Messakh, M, 2008

⁹⁵ Sabarini, P. Ayu Utami: Explores her spiritual side. People. *The Jakarta Post*, Jakarta, sun, 07/06/08 from www.thejakartapostnews.com (Accessed April 7, 2010)

this work is a way to explore her suspicions of spiritualism. The novel does not focus solely on spirituality but jumps from one social criticism to another: from modernity, to the military regime, to women, to power. She mostly appraises the idea of monotheism. She states that the idea in the title of her third novel, *Bilangan Fu*, is the result of a mixture of her knowledge of history, her imagination, and her criticism of life in general. She says, “The Fu numeral is something that I've formulated. It is a number that has the properties of both one and zero. It's not a mathematical numeral, but a metaphorical numeral; not a rationalistic numeral but a spiritual numeral.”⁹⁶

She further argues that the monotheistic concept is taken in an excessively contradictory way, because it emerged well “before number zero was conceptualized.”⁹⁷ Utami says that she sees this book as “critical spiritualism”⁹⁸ toward the application of the numeral one to understand god in a monotheistic system. Using a skeptical rock climber named Yuda; she attempts to deliver her understanding of spiritualism as a way to refuse to surrender herself to fatalistic faith. She believes that she has to struggle to understand “to the very final moment and realize that we cannot grasp the ineffable, then yes, we surrender.”⁹⁹ Utami was raised in the Roman Catholic tradition but became an atheist in her 20s – at the age of 30, she claimed, “Religion can renew itself. It's like a historical reality. In the end, what is important is not what is true, but what we do on Earth. Truth will always be delayed -- what's important is kindness.”¹⁰⁰ She states a very important point that links this latest book to her two previous ones, when she says, “In the

⁹⁶ Sabarini, 2008

⁹⁷ Sabarini, 2008

⁹⁸ Sabarini, 2008

⁹⁹ Sabarini, 2008

¹⁰⁰ Sabarini, 2008

past 10 years, people have been interpreting religion in a very shallow and fatalistic way. Religion is used to give life to power, or people are lured to the powerful side of religion. It's a sad development.”¹⁰¹ This being said, *Bilangan Fu* can be considered a criticism of the fundamentalists and the violence in the name of religion in Indonesia lately. Utami has signed the National Alliance for Freedom of Religion and Belief as her concrete rejection of any violence and fundamentalist acts in Indonesia.¹⁰²

Bilangan Fu, which is inspired by Utami's partner, Erik Prasetya - a freelance photographer, Jakarta Institute of Arts lecturer, and a rock climber¹⁰³ - consists of three major parts: Modernism, Monotheism, and Militarism. Using one protagonist, Utami's *Bilangan Fu* tells the journey of Yuda, a young rock climber from Bandung. He is a free spirit and enjoys his freedom. He believes that individuals like him should not be attached to any affiliation, including marriage, religion or any other form of organization. In the beginning of the story, he is described as a modern, independent, irreligious man who has been dating a Javanese girl named Marja for years. He is haunted by a dream about a number name *Bilangan Fu* (numeral Fu), because he does not know what it means. However, since he has always seen himself as a modern person, he ignores his curiosity until he meets Parang Jati, a young, quiet, superstitious mountain climber. At first, Yuda considers Parang Jati to be a weak and harmless but unique person. He thinks Parang Jati believes too much in traditional values in which superstition is a strong influence. They discuss the system of nature, and Parang Jati claims that Yuda is not a real climber because he does not really believe in the “life” in his surroundings. Feeling

¹⁰¹ Sabarini, 2008

¹⁰² Sabarini, 2008

¹⁰³ Sabarini, 2008

challenged, and curious about the meaning of his dream, Yuda agrees to go on a journey with Parang Jati.

During this journey, Yuda becomes aware that Parang Jati's philosophical values come from traditional legends, religions, and folk beliefs, such as the legend of *Sangkuriang*, *Nyai Roro Kidul*, *Syech Siti Jenar*, and *Babad Jawi*.¹⁰⁴ Yuda can also sense the existence of spirits in his surroundings. After his return from the journey, Yuda's awareness of spiritualism and the values of man develop. Although he is not religious and will take no side in a religious discussion, he becomes more sensitive to Javanese traditional values. He also criticizes the military system because he believes that its logic is similar to monotheism, in which a hierarchical system applies and the highest rank is the only point that has power.

Yuda's love life shifts – he starts to feel the ability of one soul to love two genders. He realized during the journey that he has an indescribable feeling for Parang Jati – he still treats Marja as his girlfriend. But his love for Parang Jati grows. Interestingly, Marja also has the same feeling. This uncommon feeling among the three of them seems to show that the real meaning of love is borderless, genderless. Using his diary, Utami presents Parang Jati's views about religion and the fatalistic and orthodox followers. He criticizes the narrow-minded people who see religion as a power, rather than of a belief. His notes strengthen Yuda's way of thinking about spiritualism and militarism. At the end of the novel, Yuda reflects on his own life after Parang Jati dies and Marja leaves him.

¹⁰⁴ All of these will be briefly described in the following discussion part.

**Chapter Four: The modern female characters: Monotheistic religion as a burden
and female sexuality as a form of modern personal power**

Utami develops the story of *Saman* and *Larung* by presenting four female characters: Yasmin, Laila, Cok and Shakuntala. Yasmin and Cok help Saman move to New York, and reunite with their high school best friends Shakuntala and Laila. Wis who has changed his name to Saman has a physical relationship with Yasmin, a successful lawyer who is married. Laila, who is described as the only virgin in the group, has a platonic affair throughout most of the two novels with Sihar, a married man she met on an oil rig in Sumatera. Shakuntala, a lesbian artist, and Cok, though not major characters, move the plot of the story along and assist in the character development of the major characters. The description below presents the character of each of the women in the story and their rejection of the monotheistic religion they experienced during their schooling.

Confronting woman's kodrat through Shakuntala's character.

Shakuntala is the only young female character in the *Saman* and *Larung* who believes in the existence of ghosts and spirits. When she was young, Shakuntala realizes that she is a bisexual. She claims:

Sometimes I'm the Ramayana monkey-king Sugriwa, complete with a low guttural growl. Other times I am Cangik, whose slow, sluggish voice somehow seems to suit the flabby skin around her armpits. When I was a teenager I always used to dance as Arjuna in the *wayang orang* and all the girls would idolize me,

without realizing it, they saw no sign of femininity in me. But I was also Drupadi, who ignites the passion of all five Pandawa brothers.¹⁰⁵

Shakuntala, living in New York, has a scholarship to pursue a higher degree in dance at the Asian Culture Centre.¹⁰⁶ Shakuntala believes that there is a relation between body and soul and that these two poles are intertwined. However, the body rules the spirit, as she says: “God gives breath on the fortieth day after a speck of flesh was formed by the union of egg and sperm, so the spirit is indebted to the body”¹⁰⁷ Shakuntala is described as a Javanese Christian woman. In the conversation that she has when she is about to leave her country, Shakuntala tries to identify a major problem that commonly occurs in a patriarchal society due to the way people interpret religion. At the visa application counter, Shakuntala is advised to use her father’s name as her surname because she is Christian.

“My name is Shakuntala. Javanese don’t have surnames”

You have a father, don’t you?”

“Use your father’s name,” said the woman at the counter.

“And why should I?”

“I was livid. “Madam, you’re Christian aren’t you?” I am not but I learned at a Catholic school that Jesus didn’t have a father. Why does a person have to use her father’s name?”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Utami, 2005, p.112

¹⁰⁶ Utami, 2005, p.130

¹⁰⁷ Utami, 2005. P.110

¹⁰⁸ Utami, 2005, p.129

Shakuntala would like to show that the power of men in society can also be imposed through the interpretation of religion. The symbol of ‘father’, a male figure, seems to be significant for a female’s life, not only because society has already constructed this value, but also because the nation has elevated the concept through the use of religious symbolism. This is in line with Geertz’s and Asad’s arguments that although the ritual and text mean different things to different people, men are always symbolized in more positive terms. In this way the relation between the nation and the human spirit depends on the complex force of the symbols that determine the actions and commitments of human beings.¹⁰⁹

Shakuntala, as a Javanese, understands the value of her ancient culture, but is not trapped in the rules as interpreted by the culture. This shows in the way she refers to the great story of *wayang* but interprets the values in a modern life. When she says, “But I was also Drupadi, who ignites the passion of all five Pandawa brothers,”¹¹⁰ she refers to the figure that is commonly regarded as a good woman because she has her eyes only on Yudistira, her husband. Yet, she emphasises something that people may forget, that Drupadi is an example of polygamous relationships that occur even in the ancient history of Indonesia. Again, she tries to refer to the 20th century condition of women in sexual relationships with the story of *wayang*. She says, “I shared her concern, because these days you can hardly get away with Kunti’s story of the Hindu priest who helped her give

¹⁰⁹ Asad T. *Genealogies of religion: disciplines and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1993) and Geertz, C, 1976. Pp. 33-40, also in Fahardian, 2005.Pp.115-117

¹¹⁰ Utami, 2005, p.112

birth to Karna through her ear so that her hymen wouldn't be broken,...”¹¹¹ It seems to me that through the character of Shakuntala, Utami suggests that traditional values should be interpreted based on the changes of women's attitudes in the 20th century. It also occurs to me that the way Utami uses Shakuntala's character reflects Suryakusuma's argument on confronting *kodrat*. In her argument, Suryakusuma says women in Indonesia are expected to be the symbol of purity and loyalty. This includes monogamous relationships.¹¹² Shakuntala seems to criticize Indonesian leaders' tendency to blur the idea of women's function in society. Women are bound by some obligations that have to be fulfilled their natural destinies, in Indonesian as their *kodrat*. Shakuntala is the best picture of a figure who confronts *kodrat*, just as Suryakusuma argues. She quotes Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi, a legislator of Golkar, one of the largest of Indonesia's political parties,

“Sometimes we treat the words *kodrat* and obligations as the same thing, when they are two different things. *Kodrat* are those characteristics peculiar to women, like menstruation, pregnancy and breast feeding. Our society and religious experts have depicted obligation as the women's *kodrat*.”¹¹³

Shakuntala's rebellious character identifies her moral attitude toward her lifestyle as that of a woman in Javanese culture. She understands the *kodrat* of Javanese women; it is proven in the way she knows and refers to the *wayang* story as her way of thinking – yet, she disagrees with the moral teaching of her father about males and females. This moral teaching is commonly used in the story of *wayang* and religions. From her character and attitude, it can be said that Shakuntala detested God because he had made men and

¹¹¹ Utami, 2005, p.123

¹¹² Suryakusuma, 2004, Pp.127-129

¹¹³ Suryakusuma, 2004, p.137

women unequal and hence created a gap between the two genders. She said, “I wanted to say that God was the one who had sold us short: he had created a hymen for the female but not for the male.”¹¹⁴

Shakuntala also has her own philosophical way of viewing God and religion. She believes that there is a power in the human mind and body but it is not God. She always feels that her body lives separately from the soul; whenever she dances, she feels that her body controls all of her life. She lives in her own world of imagination and when she dances, she can feel a powerful energy. She feels that she can find herself when she dances that there is a connection between herself the essence of her life,

My body dances. Because dancing is an endless exploration through my skin and my bones, with which I feel pain, hurt, chill, pleasure, and – one day – death.

[When?] My body dances it submits not to lust but rather to passion. Passion that is sublime, libidinal. Labyrinthine.¹¹⁵

I used to weep because I wanted to go back to my quiet little town... It was impossible. And so I danced. My body danced. It twirled and writhed like a flower cut by children from its stem and then set on a course in a stream...¹¹⁶

The way she dances seems to be a process of meditation. Suryani and Wrycza mention that in meditation a person will be able to direct his or her attention inward in order to be conscious of what has happened in his or her life. Thus, this person will be able to return to the deepest self and connect to his or her own spirit as the essence of life.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Utami, 2005, p.139

¹¹⁵ Utami, 2005, p.110

¹¹⁶ Utami, 2005. p.114

¹¹⁷ Suryani, L.K and Peter J Wrycza, *Living in the Spirit* (Denpasar: Pustaka Bali, 2003), p. 63

Shakuntala portrays a female figure who denies the existence of God and religion because of her childhood experience. As a result, she believes in the power of her own imagination, the supernatural power that can be gathered whenever she dances. Unlike Saman who saw the value of life differently after changing from being a devoted Christian to a liberal person, Shakuntala continues to believe what she has already experienced as the value of life, that human beings contain two elements -- body and soul -- and that the body has total control over the soul.

Utami also shows how Shakuntala hates the figure of man, especially her father. She has disliked him since he sent her to a remote place, "It was 1975, and my father sent me off to a strange new city... I learnt a lot from Hansel and Gretel. They had an evil father too."¹¹⁸ As was Laila, she was educated within a society that sets a double standard for men and women. From the lesson she learned from the story of the ogres, she was being taught that "First. It is the prerogative solely of the male to approach the woman. A woman who chases a man is a whore. Second. A woman shall give her body only to the right man, who shall support her for the rest of her life. That's what is known as marriage."¹¹⁹ This concept of man's and woman's positions in society makes Shakuntala see marriage as "nothing more than hypocritical prostitution."¹²⁰ She believes that society considers a woman only from her physical appearance, she says, "People didn't consider a girl who didn't yet have breasts to be a virgin."¹²¹ Shakuntala, who was born and raised as Javanese, was strongly advised by her parents that "virginity is a woman's gift to her

¹¹⁸ Utami, 2005, p.113

¹¹⁹ Utami, 2005, p.115

¹²⁰ Utami, 2005, p.115

¹²¹ Utami, 2005, p.118

husband. And virginity is like a nose: once you lose it, it can't be replaced. So you must never give it away before you get married, because then you will be damaged goods."¹²² I assume that the concept of virginity that was engrained by her parents triggered her rebellious character. Instead of trying to contain her desire like Laila, she gives up her virginity to her foreign lover before she leaves for the United States.¹²³ Regardless of the fact that she exposed herself to eroticism and sexuality even when she was a teenager,¹²⁴ Shakuntala is the character who portrays Utami's perspective on the East/West dichotomy.

When Shakuntala meets her sailor lover,¹²⁵ she explains the difference between East and West cultures. She also describes her understanding of how the people from the West always think about the people of the East in the context of Edward Said's *Orientalism* theory. She also claims that there is no moral value in the lives of Western women. She proudly says,

In this country [America] people thought those in the East lived according to strange customs. Their men attached decorations to their penises, on the surface or within the skin. Their women, without shame, aroused the desire of their men and also of strangers, since they indulged in sex without any sense of taboo.¹²⁶

Then she compares how women's sexuality is perceived differently by her society,

In this country, people speak of your land and our land, your people and our people. We are the noble of the East. You, the deprived of the West. Your women

¹²² Utami, 2005, p.118

¹²³ Utami, 2005, Pp.118-119

¹²⁴ Utami, 2005, p.121

¹²⁵ Utami, 2005, p.127

¹²⁶ Utami, 2005, p.127

wear bikinis in the streets and have no regard for virginity. Your school children, boys, and girls, live together out of the wedlock. In this country sex belongs to adults through marriage even if they were married at the age of eleven and regarded as already mature. In your country, people have sex on television. We do not have sex on television. We have a decent foundation in the great East. Your customs in the West are not noble.¹²⁷

However, it occurs to me that Utami is not trying to use Shakuntala to criticize the Western perspective on morality and sexuality, but rather to suggest that in the 20th century, the culture that is used to bind women in the East might not be applicable for women like Shakuntala. It seems that she cynically considers the Eastern values to be not worth holding.¹²⁸ Utami also creates the character of Shakuntala as the strongest among the four female characters in the story. Shakuntala is neither a hypocrite nor an ambivalent person; she knows what she wants and she is determined to have it. Laila, on the other hand, seems to be dependent and cannot decide between what she wants and what she is not supposed to do. Shakuntala is also the most determined woman in the friendship. Unlike Laila, Yasmin, and Cok, who have already negotiated with their enemies and themselves, Shakuntala remains the same. She still dislikes her father because she believes that society's patriarchal system allows a father too much power over all members of the family.¹²⁹

In *Larung*, Shakuntala remains a stable figure. The points that Utami adds to Shakuntala's character are the background of her hatred toward men in general, and

¹²⁷ Utami, 2005, Pp.127-128

¹²⁸ Utami, 2005, Pp.127-129

¹²⁹ Utami, 2005, Pp.143-144

especially her father. In *Larung*, Utami clearly describes Shakuntala's childhood memory which leads to her sexual preference. Shakuntala realises that she had a dual personality even when she was young.¹³⁰ She feels she is more a boy than a girl. But she claims that her parents gave her a girl's name and probably influenced her to accept the fact that she is a girl when she was too young to reject the idea.¹³¹ She feels that among her friends, only she has dual identities, as a man and a woman.¹³²

Shakuntala believes that she has to choose to be a woman because her parents, especially her father, forced her to do so. Her father is the first person she knows who made a clear distinction between the functions of boys and girls. Using a verse from a bible, her father legitimizes women's duties as taking care of children, while men *make* children. As she said,

Orang tuaku percaya bahwa pria cenderung rasional dan wanita emosional. Karena itu pria akan memimpin dan wanita mengasihi. Pria membangun dan wanita memelihara. Pria membikin anak dan wanita melahirkan...Aku tak pernah dipaksanya untuk hal yang sama, sebab ia percaya pada hakikatnya aku tak mampu (My parents believe that men tend to be rational while women are emotional. Because of that men will lead and women will be the compassionate ones. Men are the ones who develop while women are the caretakers. Men make children and women will nurture them...I have never been forced by him [her

¹³⁰ Utami, 2001, p.133

¹³¹ Utami, 2001, p.133

¹³² Utami, 2001, Pp.133-134

father] to do things like my brother because he believes that I am not able to do them).¹³³

From her father, she learns that the male position is higher than females when he says, “*Tempat laki-laki, Nak,*” *katanya, “adalah DI ATAS.”*” (Men’s place my Son,” He said, “is ON TOP”).¹³⁴ Women have a tendency to make mistakes and it is men’s function to straighten out women’s lives. She says

WANITA DICIPTAKAN DARI IGA. KARENA ITU IA DITAKDIRKAN MEMILIKI KECENDERUNGAN UNTUK BENGKOK SEHINGGA HARUS DILURUSKAN OLEH PRIA (a woman is created from the rib and therefore she has a tendency to bend. It is, therefore, the duty of a man to straighten a woman).¹³⁵

I argue that Shakuntala is Utami’s best way to criticise how society favours man’s power over woman. Through Shakuntala’s attitude toward her father, Utami reveals the idea that Shakuntala as a daughter had no power to express the real sexual preference in her life. Her parents paid more attention to the physical attributes of her brother and herself. After her brother died in an accident, she tries to reveal her sexuality to her mother, but her mother rejects her revelation, as Shakuntala says,

“Ibu ada beberapa kenyataan Pertama, dia sudah mati. Kedua aku ternyata juga laki-laki. Ketiga, Tuhan tak ada, Ibu.” Kenyataan kedua kuucapkan dengan antusias.”

Ibuku terkejut, lalu tertawa, “Dia tidak mati. Tuhan ada. Dan kamu anak perempuan, Sayang.”

¹³³ Utami, 2001, p.136

¹³⁴ Utami, 2001, p.137

¹³⁵ Utami, 2001, Pp.136-137

(“Mother, there are several realities. First, he is dead. Second, I am apparently a man. Third, God does not exist.” I said the second reality with enthusiasm- My mother was surprised, and then she laughed, “He’s not dead. God exists. And you are a girl my dear.”).¹³⁶

Shakuntala’s first experience of being bisexual was when she was young. She met a *pesinden* (Javanese traditional female singer) who taught her how to sing and dance. Through this woman, Shakuntala learns about *Serat Centini*, a classic Javanese manuscript, and experiences her first sexual interaction with a female lover. Since then, she understands that she has a desire to be bisexual as she states,

Ia seorang pesinden. Aku pun datang padanya untuk berguru ...Tapi ia juga membacakan aku Serat Centhini dan menyanyikan keluhan dengan suara duka ...Suatu malam, ketika aku duduk dalam sebuah ruang dan mengagumu dia menyanyi...lelaki dalam diriku muncul dari belakang tubuhku seperti energy yang lepas...Mereka melepas kain masing masing dan berdekatan (“She is a pesinden. Then, I came to her to learn...But she also read me Serat Centhini and sang with a sad voice...One night, when I was sitting in the room and admiring her voice... The male side in my body emerged from the back of my body like a liberated energy...They [the male side of her and the pesinden] took off each other’s kain [traditional clothes] and got close one to another”).¹³⁷

However, no one understands Shakuntala’s sexual desire. In the U.S., she can gain full consideration of being a bisexual. When her friends Laila, Yasmin, and Cok visit New

¹³⁶ Utami, 2001, p.142

¹³⁷ Utami, 2001, p.149

York, she has an opportunity to express her love to Laila, her best friend. Laila, a virgin at that time, is ready to give up her virginity to her lover, Sihar. However, Shakuntala loves Laila, believes Laila has to be freed from her curiosity about sex and deserves to be sexually pleased by Shakuntala before meeting Sihar. For Shakuntala, women have the power to satisfy and to know about themselves. She says,

Aku tahu kamu belum pernah mengalami orgasme. Juga ketika bercumbu dengannya. Kini tak kubiarkan kamu menemui lelaki itu sebelum kamu mengetahuinya. Sebelum kamu mengenali tubuhmu sendiri. Setelah ini kamu boleh pergi. (“I know you have never experienced orgasm, even if you have made love with him. Now, I am not going to let you meet that guy before you know about orgasm, before you know about yourself. After that, you may leave”).¹³⁸

Yasmin Moningga: The ambiguity of the concept “a good woman is religious and a good housewife”

Yasmin, another of the female characters, is also one who shapes the story. She is depicted as the richest, the smartest, the prettiest, and the most successful of all the females.¹³⁹ She is a lawyer who helps Saman flee to the U.S. She is married but ends up falling in love with Saman. Yasmin is interesting because she seems like a typical career woman and a housewife. She has a good job and a good husband whom she had dated for eight years – yet, she cannot avoid a love affair with Saman.¹⁴⁰ It might be because her nature as a lawyer makes her a really good negotiator. It seems to me that Utami uses this character to show a stereotypical modern woman in Indonesia. Yasmin is a strong and

¹³⁸ Utami, 2001, Pp. 152-153

¹³⁹ Utami, 2005, Pp.138-139

¹⁴⁰ Utami, 2005, Pp. 143-144, and Pp.155-157

determined person,¹⁴¹ but she is willing to negotiate to get what she wants. She always seems to be a devoted Christian, and considers premarital sex as wrong, as shown in Cok's letter to Shakuntala, "...I am only writing to you. You see Yasmin and Laila would be shocked if they knew about this. They might decide they want nothing more to do with me."¹⁴² Yet, she lost her virginity before she got married, but when her attitude is questioned by her friends because it does not reflect her ideology, she calmly says, ""But we're going to get married, "she add hastily."¹⁴³ The same reaction appears when she tries to justify what she does with Saman. When Saman is in the U.S., he and Yasmin become emotionally attached. It could be because prior to his departure, they have had a brief sexual encounter. Something that Yasmin seems to reject before. The last 27 pages of the novel present not only the chronology of her effort to free Saman from Indonesia,¹⁴⁴ but also discuss the exploitation by men in Indonesia. Utami describes Saman's and Yasmin's perspectives on men's and women's positionality in society and religion through a series of emails that they send to one another.

Through Saman's emails, Yasmin learns about the connection of women's position in the New Order era in Indonesia. Saman shares with her one of the presentation topics at Columbia University that mentions how Dharma Wanita, a women's organization, was established with the aim of limiting women's access to strategic

¹⁴¹ Utami, 2005, Pp.139-140

¹⁴² Utami, 2005, p.145

¹⁴³ Utami, 2005, p.143

¹⁴⁴ Utami, 2005, Pp.162-163

positions in a patriarchal society.¹⁴⁵ Suryakusuma argues a similar notion, stating that women were treated as inferiors during the New Order.¹⁴⁶

In the last part of the novel, Yasmin plays the important role of revealing woman's perception of religion and sexuality. To Saman, she explains her understanding of the story of Adam and Eve. In her way of telling the story, Eve is the victim of Adam's hunger and thirst. She seems to be naive in her perception, and only tries to quench her thirst.¹⁴⁷ Meanwhile, Adam with his power is aroused by Eve's naïveté, yet still blames her as the cause of his desire. Yasmin writes to Saman Adam's words to Eve, "Delicious is sin. But the woman has the punishment."¹⁴⁸

Saman, who used to be a priest, is astonished by her story and finds it pleasurable.¹⁴⁹ This is another interesting point that seems like a twist to me. Saman supposedly understands the origin of the Adam and Eve story because he was once a religious figure who seems to have done exactly what Adam did to Eve in Yasmin's version. Utami seems to say that if religion's and society's power has created a concept of womanhood similar to that of Shakuntala who confronts the concept of *kodrat* through her perspective on patriarchal culture, Yasmin is an example of the figure that challenges the *kodrat* concept in society through her perspective on religion.

Yasmin's character continues to develop in *Larung*. As portrayed in the first book, she is a modern successful Indonesian woman, yet she symbolizes a hypocritical woman. She always wants to present herself as a good woman – yet she has an erotic

¹⁴⁵ Utami, 2005, Pp.166-167

¹⁴⁶ Suryakusuma, 2004, Pp.128-129

¹⁴⁷ Utami, 2005, Pp.177-178

¹⁴⁸ Utami, 2005, p.177

¹⁴⁹ Utami, 2005, p.178

affair with Saman, who used to be a priest. In *Larung*, Utami emphasizes Yasmin as a powerful, ambitious and determined woman but the important point that most differentiates Yasmin's character in *Saman* from that in *Larung* is that she admits that she has a conflict in her mind. She realizes that she is obliged to be a good woman yet understands that she cannot resist the affair.¹⁵⁰ She claims that she is being punished by nature being a woman with all the responsibility of being good based on societal norms. When she says that she has lost her “*keperempuananku dan menjadi wanita*” (womanhood and turned to be femininity),¹⁵¹ it seems to me that she understands that she will face barriers once she turns to being feminine. Having Saman in her life, she claims that she finds the freedom to be the self she wants to be. She admits that she uses Saman to fulfil her fantasy of making a man become the subject of her sexual desire,¹⁵² an uncommon attitude for a woman like Yasmin, whom society assumes to be a good religious woman.

Utami criticises society by using Yasmin's dual identity: as a good woman and as a free spirit. Yasmin understands that a “good woman” is related to morality and religion, and not to having wild sexual experience. Therefore, with her husband, Lukas, she is not the real Yasmin. She is a wife, a figure that society demands she be. However, the “real” Yasmin is a masochist with Saman.¹⁵³ Using her perception of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, she claims that all women are masochists in the way they devote themselves to

¹⁵⁰ Utami, 2001, Pp. 158-159

¹⁵¹ Utami, 2001, p.158

¹⁵² Utami, 2001, Pp. 157-158

¹⁵³ Utami, 2001, Pp.159-160

the patriarchal society without any right to reject the system. She compares the masochist theory of men and women as a way to legitimize her attitude to Saman,

Mereka hanya bicara tentang he dan bukan she. Mereka bicara tentang masokisme sebagai penyimpangan pada laki-laki. Yang saya rasakan, pada wanita itu datang dengan cara yang lebih natural. Karena itu, barangkali, mereka tidak menganggapnya sebagai pengimpangan. (They [the theorists] only discuss *he* and *she*. They talk about masochism as a male deviation. I feel that this deviation comes to women in a more natural way. So, maybe, they do not consider it as a problem).¹⁵⁴

She says that women tend to accept any deviation in men as an extension of being asked to accept anything that men would do because of male domination. As she says,

Sebab, superego, figure ayah, aparat pendisiplin, memang telah tampil di luar diri wanita dalam konstruksi social yang patriarchal. Kami tidak perlu melakukan pembalikan. Kami hanya dapat perlu ikut dalam permainan dominasi lelaki... (Because superegos, father figures, disciplinarians, already exist outside women's souls within the social construction that is so patriarchal. We [women] do not need to fight back. We only need to participate in a game of male dominance).¹⁵⁵

The male dominance here refers to fathers, the military, and all kinds of male domination.¹⁵⁶ She adds that women feel obliged to accept such domination, they might feel it is oppression but they like it. They like to be oppressed naturally. Women's submission to men is encouraged by most religions and therefore women tend to be silent

¹⁵⁴ Utami, 2001, Pp. 158-159

¹⁵⁵ Utami, 2001, p.159

¹⁵⁶ Utami, 2001, p.159

when they get hurt. That is why most women are masochists and society is not aware of it. Using the character of O in the *Histoire d'O*, Yasmin posits that in some cases, women might endure violence because of their submission to a patriarchal system – this includes love and duty toward their lovers, “...dalam *Histoire d'O*, seorang gadis bernama O, yang diserahkan oleh kekasihnya sendiri ke sebuah chateau untuk menjadi budak seks pria-pria yang menjadi anggota klub di kastil itu. Ia menjalani semua itu dengan rasa cara cinta, rasa pengorbanan dan kesedihan yang agung”(...in the *Histoire d'O*, a girl by the name of O, who was brought to a chateau by her lover to be a sex slave of other men, members of the chateau. She did this with love, submission and a great sadness).¹⁵⁷ With this parallel, Yasmin argues that O represents women throughout the world who enjoy the torture they receive from men. As she says:

*Apakah bedanya idealisme terhadap pengorbanan istri, poligami, dengan masokisme? Semuanya adalah internalisasi ketidakadilan. Wanita menyelamatkan diri dengan mengambil ke dalam dirinya dominasi pria (sebagaimana yang dikukuhkan banyak agama) dan menganggapnya agung. Karena itu, aku katakan, Sembilan puluh persen wanita di dunia ini adalah masokis (What is the difference between the ideas of the sacrifice of wives, polygamy, and masochism? All of them are the internalisation of injustice. Women save themselves by submerging themselves in male domination (as is confirmed by some religions) and consider their submission as holy deeds. Therefore, I said, 90% of women in this world are masochists).*¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Utami, 2001, p.160

¹⁵⁸ Utami, 2001, p. 159

However, Yasmin cannot accept her destiny any other way. She understands what society does to women – yet she cannot run away from the fact that she is also a victim. She envies Saman as a man, but she accepts her contradictive character as part of her destiny. She feels that once she became an adult, she lost her power and let her female side become the object, especially in sexuality. She claims,

Menjelang akil balig aku mulai malu atas fantasi-fantasiku...Adakah aku menghukum diriku sendiri, ataukah ini datang bersama masa awalku memasuki dunia patriarchal yang tak kuketahui, dunia di luarku yang memaksakan diri, di mana wanita adalah obyek seksual...Aku kehilangan keperempuananku dan menjadi wanita. Dalam proses yang tak kumengerti, aku mulai menempatkan diriku sebagai si terhukum, wanita yang dikutuk karena kewanitaannya. (When I reached my puberty, I started to feel ashamed of my fantasies ... I was wondering whether I should punish myself or if this [feeling] was the beginning of my life in entering the patriarchal world that I had not known. The world outside pushed me, the world in which women were the sexual object. I lost my youth and became a woman. In a process that I could not understand, I started to see myself as the accused, a woman who was cursed by her own womanhood).¹⁵⁹

With Yasmin's character, it seems that Utami wants to reveal how women understand the unjust treatment from society and how they tend to internalize it as part of their function as women since it is also supported by religion. Yasmin's perspective has changed from the way her character is pictured in the first novel. In *Larung*, Utami finally shows how Yasmin really feels about being a woman. Unlike her attitude in *Saman* when she was

¹⁵⁹ Utami, 2001, Pp.158-159

described as a person of perfection, Yasmin in *Larung* is depicted as having more freedom in her attitude toward how society and religion treat women.

Laila Gagarina: A naïve woman who seeks freedom

Utami opens the first chapter with Laila Gagarina's reflections on her romance with Sihar. He is a local employee of an oil company in Sumatra whom Laila meets in connection with her reporting of the death of a young local worker in an oil rig explosion. Laila, portrayed as a naive young woman, falls in love with Sihar, a married man. Sihar's effort to confront the oil company over the death of the employee is assisted by an NGO activist, Saman, the ex-priest. Due to his struggle, Sihar has to leave for the US, and knowing that he is going there, Laila goes to meet him in New York. As she waits in Central Park for her lover to come, she reveals her feminine perspective toward awaiting her lover,

Here in the park I am a bird that's flown thousands of miles from a country that knows no seasons, a bird that's migrated in search of spring; spring, where you can smell the grass and the trees; trees, whose name or ages we can never know.¹⁶⁰

Laila shows her naïve and soft attitude. She waits for hours. Early in this chapter, we learned that Laila has been trying to negotiate her internal conflict: she is a virgin yet she understands Sihar's desire for her. Her female friends describe Laila as the most naïve woman in the group. She falls in love with Saman, when he is still Wis, the priest. From her admiration of Wis, as her school's priest, one assumes that Laila is also a Catholic. Interestingly, she is a Moslem and according to her local culture, it is a sin to have a

¹⁶⁰ Utami, 2005, p. 11

crush on a non-Moslem. However, the reason she is so afraid to lose her virginity is because of her upbringing.

She is depicted as a victim of how society shapes the idea of woman. She tries to contain her desire not because she is a religious woman but because she knows what society demands. She says, “Because I’m waiting here for Sihar. Here, unbeknownst to anyone apart from the tramp. Away from any parents, away from any wife. Away from those moral judges or the police.”¹⁶¹ She seems to consider sin to be based not on what religion says but on what society thinks. She continues, “Here, people, particularly tourists, can do as the birds do: mate when they feel the desire. No regrets afterwards. No sin.”¹⁶² It is intriguing for me to see how Laila considers sin as something related to her virginity in her country. She keeps telling herself that she is a virgin whenever she is with Sihar, as if it is the only thing that does matter in her life. However, when she is in America, she seems to ready to give up her virginity because no one will judge her. She decided to go to America, because she is frustrated with her relationship in Indonesia. She expects she can do what she wants in America – and this is because it is Indonesian society’s values that limit her,

I didn’t know how I could have made such an impromptu decision. Maybe I was obsessed with him, a shadow that seldom left me. Maybe I was fed up with the entire obstacle to our relationship in Indonesia. Tired of the values that sometimes seemed to terrorize me. I wanted to get away from all that and allow ourselves to do the things we wanted to do. Tear away the things that had been obstructing our

¹⁶¹ Utami, 2005, p.12

¹⁶² Utami, 2005, p.12

relationship.¹⁶³

She learns the power of freedom when she is in New York. She is content, saying, “This is a country where city squirrels face no danger. And neither do we.”¹⁶⁴ She is ready for her lover. She prepares herself to give him her love and virginity and she will not feel disappointed because she is in New York – she will not feel any sin, “I’ll tell him that we’re like birds migrating for the matings season. I am thirty already, Sihar. And we’re in New York. Thousands of miles from Jakarta. No parents, no wife, No Sin.”¹⁶⁵

Her attitude is so different compared to the day she and Sihar were in the hotel room in Indonesia. Laila showed her embarrassment when a waiter brought something to their room; she was ashamed and felt like a sinner,

We were in a hotel room. I was shivering with embarrassment and excitement. I’d never been alone in a room with a man before...

I sensed that he was a little nervous in this room with me, but it was nothing compared to my mortification – I hid in the bathroom when the waiter brought our room service order. Because I was a sinner.¹⁶⁶

Unlike Sihar, who thinks that the relationship cannot be maintained because he has a wife, Laila’s concept of sin does not come from her value of being a virgin. She calls herself a sinner because in her mind she has let Sihar into her heart and because she is bound by the values of being a daughter and a woman having an affair with someone else’s husband; an immoral act in society’s and her family’s concept:

¹⁶³ Utami, 2005, p.34

¹⁶⁴ Utami, 2005, p.34

¹⁶⁵ Utami, 2005, p.12

¹⁶⁶ Utami, 2005, p. 13

On the way home he said it would be best if we didn't see each other again. (I wasn't expecting this.) "I'm married"

I replied that I didn't have a boyfriend, but I did have parents

"you're not alone. I am a sinner too."

He said that was not the point "Once you're married it's hard to forego sex."

I understood. Even though I was still a virgin.¹⁶⁷

She had fallen deeply in love with Sihar after she spent several weeks on the oil rig where he worked. She adores him and regards him as a noble man because he advocates the rights of the oil rig's employees. She has different concepts in valuing men and women. She values Sihar as a good man because of the way he helps others, yet she thinks that a woman is good if she keeps her virginity before marriage. As she says, "A man like him should have married a nice virgin, but he married a widow with a daughter."¹⁶⁸ Referring to this sentence, it occurs to me that she values a good man who deserves better than to marry a widow with a daughter, and she keeps her virginity because she thinks that is what appeals to a good man.

This concept of virginity has been in Laila's mind ever since she was young. How men will value a virgin woman is the upbringing concept that she believes when she claims that men, "...betray women. All they want is a woman's virginity, and then they leave after she's given it to them."¹⁶⁹ She assures her best friends, Shakuntala, Yasmin and Cok, that virginity is the only way to keep men in marriage. Her logic is that what maintains a marriage is that a wife remains untouched until the day a man marries her.

¹⁶⁷ Utami, 2005, p.14

¹⁶⁸ Utami, 2005, p.31

¹⁶⁹ Utami, 2005, p.139

This is clearly shown when she has an argument with her friends. They are discussing what the most dangerous enemy is. When Laila claims that men should be seen as enemy because they always leave their women, Yasmin disagrees, she says “our fathers didn’t leave our mothers, did they? Laila was at a loss for words at first but then she came up with her defense: our mothers didn’t relinquish their virginity until they were married. So that’s why our father didn’t leave them.”¹⁷⁰

Even when she was a teenager and “was still sweet, with a childlike innocence about her,”¹⁷¹ Laila was fond of Wisanggeni, a seminary student, who “wasn’t interested in taking her virginity.”¹⁷² Her naïve personality combined with her concept of a woman’s value also shows in the way she accuses Cok’s boyfriend as the cause of her parents’ anger when they found a condom in Cok’s bag,

Finally, a letter came from Cok. This is what she wrote: Dear Tala...Mom and Dad found a condom in my bag...I’m only writing to you. You see Yasmin and Laila would be shocked if they knew about this...¹⁷³

“Well what are you gawking like that for?” I asked, irritably. I knew they were shocked that Cok was no longer a virgin. Finally, Laila said, “What did I always say? Our enemies are men. A man ruined her.”¹⁷⁴

But I retorted: “Why men? Her boyfriend didn’t leave her, you know! It was she who left him, because mommy and daddy locked her up.”

¹⁷⁰ Utami, 2005, p.139

¹⁷¹ Utami, 2005, p.140

¹⁷² Utami, 2005, p.140

¹⁷³ Utami, 2005, p.141

¹⁷⁴ Utami, 2005, p.142

“But believe me, he’ll soon find himself another girlfriend in Jakarta. Why would he think about Cok when he’s already got everything he wants from her?”¹⁷⁵

Yet again, in the U.S., surrounded by her friends who are less conservative than the way she was brought up by her “Moslem family of mixed Minang-Sundanese parentage,”¹⁷⁶ Laila drastically changes her attitudes. Utami does not explain clearly whether Laila gives up her virginity, yet it is said that she is concerned that she might get pregnant.¹⁷⁷ It occurs to me that even though she loves Sihar, she counts on her best friends more than on him. This shows that no matter how deep her feelings for men-- Wisanggeni in her past and Sihar-- she begins to realize that men can be the cause of suffering for women. In the end, it is because of the concept of a good woman that she has been taught by her culture and society. In *Larung*, Laila’s character develops from a naive photographer and journalist to a lover, and a woman. In *Saman*, it is assumed that she gives up her virginity to Sihar, her male lover; however, it is finally revealed that it is actually to Shakuntala. This happened when she was in New York, a place that she believes offers her freedom.¹⁷⁸

Confronting the hypocrisy of “a good woman” through Cokorda’s character

Cokorda or Cok is the last significant female character in *Saman*. She is a Balinese who lives in Jakarta and attended a Catholic High school with Shakuntala, Yasmin, and Laila.¹⁷⁹ By her first appearance, Cok has already been described as the

¹⁷⁵ Utami, 2005, p.142

¹⁷⁶ Utami, 2005, p.140

¹⁷⁷ Utami, 2005, p.123

¹⁷⁸ See first part analysis

¹⁷⁹ Utami, 2005, Pp.111-123

most sexually active woman of the four.¹⁸⁰ The most interesting part of Cok's character is the way Utami proves how a woman's beauty and sexuality can be used to bribe the people in power in Indonesia. Together with Yasmin, Cok helps Saman flee to New York. On the way across the border from Medan to Pekanbaru, Cok charms the guard patrol with her sensuality.¹⁸¹ This is typical of something a businesswoman might do in order to bypass the bureaucracy. Suryakusuma states that this kind of situation shows the connection between the state, the business community, power, and women in Indonesia. In the military and the public bureaucracy, there is a tradition of sex serving as payoff for a special permit.¹⁸²

The situation above occurs in Cok's case. She is a successful businesswoman, and admits that she can use her charm and connections with the officers with whom she is sexually close in order to help Saman flee to the U.S. The most important point is that her action exposes the tendencies of the military and elite politicians in Indonesia. This condition contrasts with the ideal of womanhood that is promoted in *Dharma Wanita* in Indonesia. This confirms that the ideal of woman that is always portrayed by the government and is said to be based on religious values is merely a hypocritical norm that has been politicized.

Just as in *Saman*, there is no significant development in Cok's character – her function is to show the relationship between Larung and Saman. Cok is the person who introduces Larung to Yasmin. Cok meets Larung in a traditional funeral ceremony in Bali, Ngaben. She was attending her relative's funeral, while Larung was attending his

¹⁸⁰ Utami, 2005, Pp.120-123

¹⁸¹ Utami, 2005, Pp.160-161

¹⁸² Utami, 2005, Pp.212-213

grandmother's funeral. The most interesting point about Cok is how she contrasts to the character of Yasmin. Utami reveals Cok's feelings about woman's hypocrisy. She says,

Lihatlah temanku Yasmin Moningka. Wanita sempurna. Cantik, cerdas, kaya, beragama, berpendidikan moral pancasila, setia pada suami. Paling tidak itulah yang dia mau akui tentang dirinya. Yang dia tidak mau akui: perselingkuhannya dengan Saman (Take a look at my friend, Yasmin Moningka. A perfect woman. Beautiful, smart, rich, religious, educated based on Pancasila morality, loyal to her husband. At least those are the things that she wants to admit. There is another point that she does not want to admit: her physical affair with Saman).¹⁸³

Cok calls Yasmin a person with a *primadona* (prima donna) syndrome. She also claims Yasmin is not only a hypocrite, but is also a person who likes to run her friends down, as Cok said,

Aku suka sekali menggoda Yasmin. Terutama karena dia sibuk membangun citra dirinya sebagai super woman...Dulu ketika masih di SMA, terasa sekali dia punya kompleks primadona. Dia selalu mau jadi nomor satu dalam hal prestasi, kecantikan, maupun moral. Yang menjengkelkan, kadang-kadang dia mau menonjolkan itu dengan cara menjatuhkan orang lain. (I like teasing Yasmin a lot. Especially because she is busy building a super woman image for herself. When we were in high school, it was obvious that she had a primadonna complex. She always wanted to be number one in academics, beauty, and morality. The

¹⁸³ Utami, 2001, p.78

aggravating part is sometimes she wants to be the number one by running down her friends).¹⁸⁴

Outwardly, she is a good moral woman. She never makes mistakes; she does not even consider her sexual affair with Saman as sinful conduct. When Cok tries to claim that her premarital sex with her husband was fornication, a sin, and immoral conduct, Yasmin denies, “*“Itu bukan maksiat. Gua pake cinta. Ngga kaya elu. Nafsu doank.”* (That was not immoral conduct. I did that with love, while you did it only because of lust).¹⁸⁵ This emphasizes the point that what differentiates an immoral woman from a good woman is the reason for committing fornication. Yasmin loved her husband - to - be when they had premarital sex, and she also loved Saman when she gave herself to him, while Cok does it for nothing other than passion.

Utami presents Cok as a figure who typically becomes the object of social judgement. Through Cok’s story of how Yasmin always humiliated her by calling her a *perek* (experimental woman), which refers to promiscuity, we learn how a typical “good” woman like Yasmin would react to a sexual situation compared to a typical “immoral” woman like Cok. As Cok said, “*Tapi Perek tetap Perek. Semua perempuan punya tetek, tapi perek? Perek tentu saja punya tetek. Tapi tidak semua perempuan menjadi perek. Cuma yang bejat dan terhina saja.*” (But *Perek* is still *Perek*. All women have breasts, but *perek? Perek*, of course, have breasts. However, not all women are *perek*. Only those who are depraved and disreputable).¹⁸⁶ Cok argues that society has a double standard concerning women. Society will call women promiscuous but does not make the same

¹⁸⁴ Utami, 2001, p.82

¹⁸⁵ Utami, 2001, p.78

¹⁸⁶ Utami, 2001, p.83

claim about men. A man would be called *Arjuna*, a hero from a traditional *Mahabharata* epic who has a hundred wives, if he has a relation with a number of women, while a woman will be called immoral. In Cok's words:

*Kadang aku jengkel, apapun yang kita lakukan, yang juga dilakukan lelaki, kok kita mendapat cap jelek. Laki laki tidur bergantian dengan banyak cewek akan dicap jagoan. Arjuna. Tapi perempuan yang tidur bergantian dengan banyak lelaki akan dibilang piala bergilir. Pelacur. Apapun yang kita lakukan, kita selalu dianggap object. Bahkan oleh sesame perempuan. Misalnya, oleh si Yasmin brengsek itu. (Sometimes, I get irritated. Anything that we [women] do that is also done by men will have different results differently. We will be considered immoral. A man who is sleeping around with many women will be called a champ, Arjuna. But a woman, who is sleeping around with many men will be called a passing trophy. A whore. Whatever we do - -we will be seen as objects, not only by men but also by women. One of them is by that lousy Yasmin)*¹⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Cok understands the reason for Yasmin's affection for Saman. She assumes that Yasmin likes Saman because of her rebellious side that she never admits to. Because Yasmin always tries to present herself as a good woman, she finds Saman's hard and rebellious experience attractive. Cok observes, "*Gimana dia nggak nampak eksotis di mata Yasmin? Miskin, kurus, kotor dan buron*"(Of course she finds him exotic. He [Saman] is thin, filthy, and a fugitive."¹⁸⁸ Cok believes that the fact that Yasmin hates the military makes Saman more attractive to her. It means that Cok believes Yasmin has

¹⁸⁷ Utami, 2001.Pp.83-84

¹⁸⁸ Utami, 2001, p.86

unconsciously enjoyed the suspense that she and Saman have to handle.¹⁸⁹ Utami uses Cok to compare Yasmin's position in society. Yasmin and Cok both help Saman to flee to the U.S; Cok also helps Larung. It means that in one sense, these women are the same. What makes Cok different compared to Yasmin is that she does not deny what she has done with a number of men. She is not a hypocrite.

Shakuntala, Yasmin, Cokorda and Laila are the depiction of young urban women who are challenged by the internal conflict between their personal needs, including sexuality and personal power, and monotheistic religions imposed by their family or society. All of these modern female characters show how monotheistic religion limits their personal freedoms. The next part of the analysis will be based on a description of how the modern male characters in the three novels encounter the conflicts of traditional and orthodox religions. From the illustrations in the following chapter, it will be seen that the male characters undergo a process in which all of them, Saman, Larung, and Yuda, encounter the clash between the traditional beliefs and monotheism. Meanwhile, the traditional female characters, which are Ibu in *Saman* and Simbah in *Larung*, tend to have less contradiction between their old belief systems and the orthodox religions.

¹⁸⁹ Utami, 2001, Pp.88-89

Chapter Five: The modern male and the traditional female characters: The dispute between traditional and orthodox religions in relation to conflicts with state power

Unlike the modern female characters in Ayu's novels, who reject both modern and traditional religious beliefs and practices, the male characters – Saman, Larung and Yuda -- are far more open to the influence of the supernatural, especially in its traditional forms. This interest is also shared by some traditional minded women -- Ibu, Simbah, and Upi.

Saman and his traditional minded mother

Saman explores the life of one male protagonist and four female characters. Both genders play important roles in shaping the story. Saman is the main male character of the story and he dominates the plot of the story.

Saman's Childhood and His Mother's World of Spirits

Utami develops his character by describing Saman's childhood in Sumatra. His father, a Javanese, works at a national bank in Java. His mother is of Javanese royal blood, a *priyayi*. As a consequence, she engages in some aspects of traditional etiquette, including Javanese mysticism.¹⁹⁰ However, Wis' father's devotion to Catholicism and his mother's mysticism live in harmony. This illustrates two points: the function of Javanese women in society and the syncretism of Javanese belief. According to Cooper, Javanese women function as the spiritual guards of men in the predominantly masculine domain.¹⁹¹ Cooper further believes that Javanese women have power that maintains their men's

¹⁹⁰ Geertz, 1960, 1973

¹⁹¹ Cooper, N.I. "Singing and Silences: Transformations of Power through Javanese Seduction Scenarios" *American Ethnologist*, 27, 3 (Aug., 2000), pp. 609-644. From www.jstor.org (Accessed January 11, 2010)

position in society. Women's power is less obvious in the physical world, but quite obvious in a more private context. They protect and "elevate the status and dignity of men not necessarily at their own expense, but in recognition of men's relative lack of innate power."¹⁹² Wis' mother, Ibu, embodies this idea of the women's power as a twist that protects the existence of men's power in society. Javanese women restrain the sign of their power in favor of men's power in society, in order to achieve harmony or *rukun*,¹⁹³ an important Javanese value in life. Ibu who was born of a Javanese royal family shows her obedience to Wis' father, a man of less exalted birth.

Although the story is set in the 20th century, the fact that Utami emphasizes the experiences of Saman's childhood suggests that she wants to reveal Ibu's understanding of the cosmology of women's function in the Javanese concept. Ibu understands the different cosmologies that she has as a *priyayi* and what her husband has as a commoner. Ibu likes to isolate herself from others and her quietness sometimes defies common sense: "She often seemed not to be in the places she was or to be in the place she wasn't...Sometimes her silence would be brought to an end by a visit to a place that nobody knew, a place that didn't exist anywhere: an emptiness."¹⁹⁴ But she reflects the attitude of a traditional Javanese woman, who obeys her husband unconditionally but still embraces her secret life in order to maintain the concept of *rukun* in the household.

...when she was present in the place she occupied, she was very warm and affectionate and her husband and other people would forget about the other

¹⁹² Cooper, 2000, p. 620

¹⁹³ Geertz, H. *The Javanese Family: A Study of Kinship and Socialization*. (Illinois: Waveland Press, Inc, 1989)Pp. 64-70

¹⁹⁴ Utami, 2005, p.46

incomprehensible side of her nature. In bed she would listen to her husband as he lay with his head on her soft bosoms, talking endlessly in a voice that sounded like a buzz in the middle of the night, and resonated through the air vents above the door. In the morning, she would sing Javanese rhymes about the arioles for the young Wis...¹⁹⁵

I see this as evidence of what Connor argues is the power of Javanese women that is mostly admitted only in their private realms. It also shows what Geertz and Tanner argue as women's agency in maintaining the household and husband – wife relationship.¹⁹⁶ Ibu's character is very powerful; she seems to know the secret happening in the unseen world. However, the fact that she is seen as a passive, quiet figure suggests that, although a woman like Ibu could be an agent who keeps the continuity of the household and the concept of *rukun* in her family, her place is not really at the front, but rather at back, in the domestic sphere.

Ibu's belief is considered a Javanese religion, in which according to Geertz, is a mixture of "Indian, Islamic and indigenous Southeast Asian elements."¹⁹⁷ This is the animistic culture of the origin of the Javanese people, and was the result of a balanced syncretism between great religions and small traditions. Therefore, I argue that Saman's parents' marriage is evidence of how Javanese religion works in society. Ibu still believes in animistic elements as part of her religion. She regards nature as a place for all beings, humans and the spirits. The character of Ibu and her marriage shows the inseparable

¹⁹⁵ Utami, 2005, p.46

¹⁹⁶ Geertz, 1961, and Tanner 1974

¹⁹⁷ Geertz, C. Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example. *American Anthropologist, New Series*, 59, 1 (Feb., 1957), Pp. 32-54. From www.jstor.org (Accessed April 14, 2009)

relation between religion, culture, and the supernatural world. Secondly, there are powers, which exist in human surroundings that cannot be controlled by human beings.

Utami echoes the idea that superstitious¹⁹⁸ beliefs cannot always be recognized in pious persons, yet at a practical level, these two poles can be intertwined and merged. One way to conjoin these two different concepts is through institutionalized marriage. Marriage merges not only different human beliefs but also different social levels, as seen in Wis' parents' marriage:

His mother, a Javanese woman of noble origin, was a figure who could not always be described in rational terms.¹⁹⁹

His father had no noble blood in his veins...He was from Muntilan and was devoutly religious, unlike Wis' mother who, although she went to church on Sundays, also revered the *keris* and other sacred heirlooms.²⁰⁰

Wis' mother was born and raised in an aristocratic family. She bore the title of *Raden Ayu* (princess) and lived in Java before marrying Wis' father. The two dissimilar backgrounds of lives and beliefs are presented here as the acceptance of enculturation between religion and animistic beliefs. The fact that Ibu worshipped *keris* and practiced Christianity at the same time is also a depiction of syncreticism in the Javanese belief system. This is in line with the classic work by Clifford Geertz *The Religion of Java*, published in 1964. Geertz states that there are Muslims in Java who identify themselves with Islam but do not always practice the pillars of Islam. They worship God and practice Javanese mysticism.

¹⁹⁸ Superstitious in this context does not have pejorative meaning. It means that someone believes in the existence of myths, legends and other form of supernatural elements.

¹⁹⁹ Utami, 2005, p. 47

²⁰⁰ Utami, 2005, p. 48

These people are called *Abangan*.²⁰¹ Thus, it can be said that Ibu is an *abangan*. She believes that spirits live in the wood and Wis has to respect their existence by not intentionally entering their domain when she asks him not to venture too far into the forest. She says, "Because spirits and fairies live there,"²⁰² she continues, "They're a lot like us. But Wis didn't see anything."²⁰³

Wis has no close relationship with his mother; he believes she has a relationship with a male spirit in the wood. The first unborn baby was mysteriously aborted at the sixth or seventh month, "When his mother came home from wherever she'd been she wasn't pregnant anymore. Her stomach was no longer distended."²⁰⁴ Wis seems to understand that it was not a miscarriage, when he says, "She looked exhausted. She throws herself onto the divan on the back terrace and looks at the trees, which got denser and denser as they receded into the distance. Wis didn't know exactly what had happened but he felt that something had."²⁰⁵ Young Wis senses the existence of the spirit in his mother's life and recognizes that this creature comes from the forest near their house. As he says, "After the fifth month the same thing happened. But Mother had not gone back to the forest."²⁰⁶ Like his mother, Wis has the ability to sense the presence of the spirits around him. He knows that his mother has given birth, he hears the cry of the baby - yet, only Wis and Ibu know what has happened, and Wis also seems to know that no one, not

²⁰¹Hefner, R., Islamic Java? Religion and Politics in Rural East Java. *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 1987 p.46. From www.jstor.org. (Accessed October 26, 2009). p 89

²⁰² Utami, 2005, p. 49

²⁰³ Utami, 2005, p.49

²⁰⁴ Utami, 2005, p. 50

²⁰⁵ Utami, 2005, p. 50

²⁰⁶ Utami, 2005, p. 51

even his father, would understand this situation, as it is described by Utami in this passage,

When Wis got off the bike beside the house he heard the cries of a baby from the window of his mother's room on the second floor. He turned toward the direction of the sound and listened hard...But Somir just adjusted the chain of the bike...Nobody was paying any attention to Wis' high spirit.²⁰⁷

Wis gathered that nobody else had heard the baby crying. Nobody else had heard that the baby had been born. But something held him back from telling them.²⁰⁸

Wis' decision not to tell anyone might be caused not only by his respect for his mother, but also because he is so confused by feeling and seeing the existence of a nonhuman in his house. Utami seems to suggest that Wis' father is the only person who does not believe in the existence of the spirits and the relationships between the spirit and his wife. It can be seen from the way Utami describes Wis' mother feeling when his father held a funeral mass for his unborn siblings, Ibu felt, "...like a repentant sinner. Tears streaming down her face, over and over again she kissed the hand of her husband whose love for her had not waned even though she never told him what had happened."²⁰⁹ Utami's suggestion on the existence of spirit in Ibu's life and the fact that the unborn babies were taken by the spirit can also be found in the point when Utami says that "...people began to believe that the babies had been taken by the spirits that lived nearby. Some of Sudoyo's friends suggested he call in a sage to exorcise the harmful spirits and

²⁰⁷ Utami, 2005, p.51

²⁰⁸ Utami, 2005, p. 52

²⁰⁹ Utami, 2005, p.52

ghosts...”²¹⁰

Young Wis believes Ibu’s male spirit acquaintance come to see his mother. Only Wis believes that his siblings are actually born but live in the nonhuman world. He says, “But at midnight he awoke with a start because the baby was crying in the bed. Then he heard Mother wake up as she talked to her hungry baby. The bed squeaked as she positioned herself to feed the baby. She sang a lullaby in her gentle voice; *lela lela ledhong*.”²¹¹ From the quotation, Ibu appears to maintain her responsibility as the mother of his unborn siblings. Also, it seems that Utami suggests consciously Wis saw what happened with his mother and the spirit the night after his father held a funeral mass,

“When his [Wis] eyes were heavy and he was on the verge of sleep the sound came back...Whatever was goin on at the back of his nexc felt real to him. Mother was trying to pacify her whimpering baby. Hen there was a man’s voice, suddenly right there in the room...The man wasn’t Father.”²¹²

He changes from one who feels betrayed by his mother’s relationship with this spirit to a child who accepts the fact that his mother is living in two worlds: as a Javanese wife loyal to her husband, and as a lover to the spirit. Wis seems to get used to feeling the presence of his mother’s male visitor and the spirits of his siblings around the house, “They would come at any time of day, morning, noon, or night. Gradually Wis became accustomed to his mother’s secret visitors, the children and the man his father knew nothing about. Whose bodies he had never seen.”²¹³

²¹⁰ Utami, 2005, p.52

²¹¹ Utami, 2005, p.53, ‘lela lela ledhong’ is a Javanese lullaby

²¹² Utami, 2005, Pp. 53-54

²¹³ Utami, 2005, p.55

Wis regards his father as a good husband and a good father. He also acknowledges how different his father is from his mother. Ibu contributes to Wis' sensitivity toward the unseen world, whereas his father is the person who shapes the realistic attitude in Wis' personality. His father, who Wis describes as a religious and responsible breadwinner, seems to deny the existence of the spirits that his wife believes in, as described in the passage below:

Wis never heard his father complain. He kept on with his job, never asking his boss for a transfer so that they could remove themselves from the mysterious and upsetting events that had enveloped their lives. He prayed without caring whether or not God would answer his prayers. He never pried into his wife's behavior. For her he had nothing but love.²¹⁴

The catastrophe of Wis' relationship with his mother occurs after his mother intentionally lets the spirits take his last unborn sister. Wis' father wants to send his wife to Java; however, Ibu seems to use her power to stay in Prabumulih when she says, "Do you want the baby to be born without seeing its father?"²¹⁵ This shows that Ibu really knows the power that she, as a pregnant wife, has over her husband. By that time, Wis has a closer relationship with his father after his mother's frequent visits from the male spirit.²¹⁶

Ibu finally gives birth to a baby girl. Everything seems normal until nightfall when Wis feels the spirit coming to the room where the baby and Ibu are sleeping. He sees his mother let the baby go, and knows it is *his* mother who let the spirit take *his* sister. He tries to fight for her but he fails. At that moment, his respect for his mother begins to

²¹⁴ Utami, 2005, p.55

²¹⁵ Utami, 2005, p.55

²¹⁶ Utami, 2005, p.57

decrease, “because he had felt that there was something else so close to Mother, something with which she was united, something so loving. And he suddenly felt so sorry for his father. He went up to his mother. He hit her in tears of rage...”²¹⁷

Wis’ relationship with his mother gets even worse when he feels her sadness when his family has to move back to Jakarta. This seems to confirm what he has thought about his mother. Intuitively, he believes the spirit has taken the lives of his three siblings, and secretly seduced and fell in love with his mother, as the following words show:

when his father had been transferred to Jakarta. Wis still recalled the way his mother had wept like a widow who has lost her only child. She wept silently, because her voice was gone, but her breath and her body quivered, her teeth chattered. Mother didn’t say a word, she made no signs of protest, she didn’t complain, she just trembled. By that time Wis was old enough to understand intuitively that the departure was putting distance between his mother and something that she loved, something that loved her as well...²¹⁸

Saman in Prabumulih

The story then moves to Wis’ adulthood, twenty-two years after the family has moved back to Java. Wis has become a priest and is assigned to a parish in Prabumulih at his own request. Since Prabumulih is less than five hours from Lubukrantau, his childhood home, Wis visits there every weekend. One reason Wis decides to move to Sumatra is that he wants to confront the pain of his lost siblings; he wants to find an explanation for his childhood intuitions. Utami suggests that Romo Daru, who is “an

²¹⁷ Utami, 2005, p.58

²¹⁸ Utami, 2005, p. 54

elderly priest who was known for his outspokenness in diocese meetings...[and] was well-known for a particular gift...of the seven gifts, namely the eyes to see through to the invisible world, and faith as robust as a mustard seed to exorcise evil spirits,”²¹⁹ understands what had happened in Wis’ childhood and was also responsible for Wis’ return to Prabumulih. Wis has to confront the unreal reality he witnessed when he was young, “But there were still many things he had to do in order to quell his feelings of anxiety about that house, where his mother had given birth to his younger siblings.”²²⁰ Wis, who is once described by Utami as a child who is jealous of his mother’s love of the spirit and the unborn siblings,²²¹ must confront these emotions.²²²

This is further evidence of how the Javanese sees religion. That Wis, who at that time is a priest, still wants to find an explanation for the spirits who lived in his past life shows that somehow Wis has inherited his mother’s characteristic. He believes in the existence of the supernatural well beyond to the religious teaching that he has had. He wants to make a connection between his life and his siblings as is seen in the moment when he feels their presence around him:

He didn’t see a thing. The voices were still there at the base of his skull, breathing warmly onto his neck and shoulders, making his skin creep, “Are you my little sister...?” Wis spoke in a strained tone, somewhere between a question and a statement. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.

²¹⁹Utami, 2005, p.44

²²⁰ Utami, 2005, p. 59

²²¹ Utami, 2005, p. 58

²²² Utami, 2005, p. 59

He turned off the lamp, closed his eyes and surrendered himself and his fear to a realm that seemed to be calling him from behind, a realm that he had been strangely longing for more than ten years. “Mother died of uterine cancer,” he said softly, “She missed you a great deal, I know.”²²³

Despite knowing better as a Catholic priest, Wis cannot ignore his sixth sense of the spirits around him and he believes they live in the house. This is the situation reflected by his mother.

In Lubukrantau, Wis makes friends with a young Javanese couple who live in his old house. His main reason is to encounter or account for the siblings who had been taken by the unseen spirit; however, he is also concerned that the new couple will experience the same tragedy that his family had years ago. He feels happy when the young family decides to give birth in Java and leaves the house to be cared for by Wis. I assume Wis’ feeling of relief implies that somehow he trusts neither his church nor this young couple’s religion would be enough to deal with the power of the spirit in the area. Wis then undergoes another experience that relates to his beliefs concerning the spirits around the house. When the young couple leaves for Java to deliver their first child, Wis stays at the house and experiences a mysterious occurrence:

“When the lamp had been switched off, he felt something. Not a voice, not a noise either, but rather the sensory perception that there was someone else in the room, close to him. His reflexes sprang into action; his fingers flicked the light switch on again. But in the light he saw nobody. He thanked God that it wasn’t a burglar or a thief...There was somebody in the atmosphere of the room;

²²³ Utami, 2005, p. 63

somebody had come in on the molecules of the breeze...From behind he began to hear voices, a woman, occasionally a man, more often a woman, speaking in a language he couldn't understand, but nonetheless he felt that they were addressing him. Wis turned around swiftly, as if he hoped somehow to apprehend the voices with his eyes. He didn't see a thing...Wis spoke in a strained tone, somewhere between a question and a statement. The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want”²²⁴

The idea of a conflict between the existence of the unseen world and the character's own orthodox beliefs is presented again in this part. What Wis believes as a priest clashes with what his sixth sense tells him. The need to find the answer to his childhood mystery is not in line with the beliefs engendered throughout the years of his life as a priest.

He had not been able to reveal his secrets to anyone else, yet his life turned to a different path when he met a girl named Upi. She is the second female character after Ibu to influence Wis' life, character, and belief about religion. The following description will show the transformation of a man who used to rely on religion but fails to hold onto his faith because of the misuse of government power.

Upi and the Power of the Government

The story of Upi is told on pages 80-144, when Utami starts to describe Wis' interaction with the families of rubber plantation farmers. Upi was a mentally disturbed child who lived with her mother and her three brothers. The brothers work at Texoil Company, a branch-company of PTT (a government-run company in various remote areas of Indonesia). Meeting this family led to the incident that influenced Wis'

²²⁴ Utami, 2005. Pp. 62-63

perception of the relationship between religion and human rights. These people are very poor and are oppressed and abused by the government-backed company.

To understand the situation in this setting, it is necessary to provide a short description of Sumatra and the effect of the government's policy on the lives of the farmers in Sumatera. Elizabeth Collins in her book *Indonesia Betrayed* describes how the government has abused the lives of the farmers in Sumetra through the Basic Forestry Law of 1967. This law regards the right of the local farmers to communally plan the lands in the area. However, the farmers become the subject of the government regulations saying they will not possess any lands because the government has total power over the lands. Furthermore, it is the government's right to apply corporate systems in the rural areas. Based on this system, the villagers who were used to apply the *adat* (local custom) system have to transform their plantations for the production of rubber, sugar, palm oil, tea, coffee, coconut, and chocolate. This change followed the World Bank's recommendation to the Indonesian government. Then, in 1980, the Suharto administration allowed a private company to own the corporation that controlled the plantation, which meant, the villagers in the areas were automatically considered corporate labourers.²²⁵ Collins goes on to say that in the 1990s The World Bank expanded a program called Nucleuse Estate and Smallholder Scheme (NES). This program advocated state-owned corporations contracting with local farmers, giving them loans and technical support. In return, the local farmers were expected to develop the crops that the state own company needed.

²²⁵ Collins, E., *Indonesian betrayed: how development fails.*(Manoa: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007).p. 56

The main objectives of this program were not only geared toward the economic benefit of the corporations and the farmers, but it was also designed to transfer knowledge of technology. The farmers, consequently, had to work on the unproductive lands. Along with the high demand for palm oil in the market, there was growing corruption between the corporations and the government. This was because one of the points in the NES program was denial to local villagers of compensation for their work on the plantation. Unfortunately, the government took corporate bribes and agreed for the corporation to pay minimum wages to the villagers. With low income and the high interest rates that the company imposed, some villagers refused to join the NES. This led to confrontations between the villagers and the company, with the company backed up by the military.²²⁶

As noted by Collins, Amzulian Rifai's PhD dissertation reported that there were 78 conflicts between villagers and government backup companies because of this program. Some farmers' and villagers' lands were taken by force and the rubber trees that were once owned by the villagers "were destroyed by companies using fire to clear their lands."²²⁷ Many of the same conditions described by Collins can be found in Utami's novel. Wis learns of them when he starts to get to know Upi's family.

Through Upi, Wis sees how the government misuses its power with the people of Sumatra. Wis' intention is to help Upi have a better life. He learns that Upi is the retarded daughter of Javanese transmigrant in Sei Kumbang, a few hours away from Prabumulih. Sri Kumbang is one of the places the government has established for the transmigrant

²²⁶ Collins, 2007, Pp.56 - 58

²²⁷ Collins, 2007, Pp. 57-58

project. Most of the families there work on the rubber plantation owned by a private company backed up by the government. Upi, with her two brothers and mother, lives there. This retarded girl, although, “she was certainly no beauty...Her face was asymmetrical”²²⁸ is in her puberty phase. She is unaware of the need to control her bodily urges and her family is unable to provide better conditions for her, so she becomes the object of humiliation by the villagers, not only because of her mental retardation but also because of her sexual attitude in public, as described by Rogam,

“Who is she?”

“The daughter of one of the transmigrant families in Sei Kumbang. She used to hang around here quite a bit. She’s a bit...you know...” Rogam circled his fingers in the air around his head.

Wis looked at the girl uneasily. Rogam continued his story. Nobody knew her name. People called her whatever they liked: Eti, Anee, Yanti, Meri, Susi, anything. Like a dog in need of affection, she would respond to any name ending in “i”: Pleki, Boni, Dogi. She had achieved notoriety in this town for one thing. She was in the habit of wandering around the streets and rubbing her genitals against any suitable object – a post, a fence, the corner of a wall – like an animal in heat. Of course a number of the local boys had taken advantage of this particular habit of hers.²²⁹

²²⁸ Utami, 2005, p. 67

²²⁹ Utami, 2005, Pp.67 - 68

I assume that this description illustrates several points. First is the stigma society puts on a retarded person, as mentioned by Wikler.²³⁰ Society always regards a retarded person as someone who can be used as an object of entertainment or to be humiliated; Upi personifies this condition, as written in the passage below:

Then they saw the girl being put into a sort of cage behind the house. Wis could hear her moaning pitifully when the two men had locked the door. The others watched in silence. A group of children momentarily looked up from their game – a competition involving rubber seeds – and laughed.²³¹

Secondly, the conversation between Wis and Upi's family shows Wickler's argument about chronic stresses unique to families of retarded children. She argues that such families always face difficulties, commonly leads to grieving and to a condition where the family does not know what they can or should do with the children.²³² Upi's family reflects this attitude, when Wis tries to stop them from putting Upi in a cage,

“Let her go! She's just a child!” Wis shook one of the men by the shoulders.

But her mother came up to him. “Excuse me, Mister,” she said differentially, as was the custom for a villager addressing a newcomer from the city, “It's not that we don't love her. It's just that we don't know what else to do.” Her voice was weary and Wis turned to look at her. There was no sign of cruelty in the face of this forty-ish woman. She looked with empty eyes at her caged daughter.²³³

²³⁰ Lynn, W., Chronic Stresses of Families of Mentally Retarded Children . *Family Relations*, 30, 2 (Apr., 1981), Pp. 281-288

²³¹ Utami, 2005, p.70

²³² Lynn, 1981, Pp.285-288

²³³ Utami, 2005,p. 70

The next points which Upi's case underlines is the way Javanese people see mental retardation as a sickness of nature. One Javanese system of thought believes in the opposition relationship between nature and culture. Satan represents nature and culture is the tool to restore order in the universe. Humans endure these two poles and are obliged to find a way to control the destructive element of nature and use the constructive element of culture. Human beings have to be conscious and keep their minds occupied with thoughts of God, or Satan will strike the mind unexpectedly. Mental illness is considered a manifestation of Satan because it ruins the function of someone's mind.²³⁴ It is believed that

“The excessive heat of the flesh is believed to have boiled the blood, whereupon the contaminated blood (*darah kotor*) has blocked major nerves (*syarap*) leading to the head. This lack of blood circulation in the head then causes malfunctioning of the mind. The unfortunate patient, now believed to be possessed by spirits, has turned into a mere biological entity like a newly born infant.”²³⁵

The people of Sei Kumbang seem to regard Upi as a person who is touched by Satan's influence. Instead of understanding that her inability to comprehend common language as part of delayed development in a mentally challenged person,²³⁶ the people of Sei Kumbang regard this as a mark of Satan, a concept influenced by people's understanding of nature and culture,

²³⁴ Horikoshi-Roe, H., Mental Illness as a Cultural Phenomenon: Public Tolerance and Therapeutic Process among the Moslem Sundanese in West Java. *Indonesia*, 28, (Oct., 1979), Pp. 121-138. From www.jstor.org (Accessed March 25, 2010)

²³⁵ Horikoshi, 1979, p. 130

²³⁶ Schroeder, S., Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Influenced by Environmental Neurotoxic Insults *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 108, 3 (Jun., 2000), Pp. 395-399. From www.jstor.org (Accessed March 30, 2010)

When she was born, her head was so tiny that her father thought it was some sort of retribution for his having killed a turtle over by the lake in the early stages of his wife's pregnancy. And the child never learnt to speak...Maybe because she could never master the language of humans, Satan took hold of her tongue.²³⁷

But Satan too kept watch over her.²³⁸

Apparently, Satan likes menstrual blood. In the week before her unclean period, she usually becomes very violent.²³⁹

The 'unclean period' refers to menstruation that she, and all women undergo. By saying this, I argue that the culture constructs the idea that there is a time in which women, during their monthly flux, are naturally controlled by Satan. Culturally, people will say that during this time women have *darah kotor* (contaminated blood), which Hiroko argues is the stage in which Satan controls the minds of the people. Utami seems to criticise this concept through the interaction between Wis and Upi. Given the fact that only women have to undergo the *darah kotor* period, I could say that men will naturally be safe from the influence of Satan because they will never experience this biological phenomenon.

Upi's condition also reveals that the government does not make any effort to provide the transmigrants proper and affordable health service. As Upi's mother explains to Wis:

Wis could hardly believe this, but he didn't give up. He said, "Can't you take her to a psychiatric hospital?"

²³⁷ Utami, 2005, Pp.70-71

²³⁸ Utami, 2005, p.71

²³⁹ Utami, 2005, p.71

But the mother sighed. “In Palembang? Where would I get the money for that? As

I told you, it’s not that we’re being deliberately cruel to her...”

The last point is the evidence of how the government neglects to protect the people in Sri Kembang. Upi’s condition shows how poor people have no control over any inconvenient condition in their surroundings--poverty, crime, rape, and human labor exploitation are the social problems resulting from the government’s power and greed with industrialization.

Saman’s Loss of Faith

Wis encounters the condition in which he knows Upi’s family has no power to reject the government’s policy. They become the victims of industrialization just because the company that loans them money goes bankrupt and sells their lands to another company. Although the land is productive, the farmers have no power to reject the policy because the company was backed up by the military. Wis witnesses the inability of the peasants to fight for their rights. This is exactly what Collins describes in her research. Anson, Upi’s brother, is a victim of the NES program. Not only has Utami used the setting Collins has described but she also uses Anson as an example of the Sumatran farmers suffering under the misuse of power by the government. Anson is forced to take a loan from the company in Sumatra and work for the plantation system that the company has set up. When he realizes that the income from this plantation will not support his family, Wis suggests that he forest his land and start a new plantation. When the company sees this, they claim Anson is not following his contract with the company. They harass him.

Other evidence of how Utami's narrative parallels what Collins has described as the misuse of government power and how this condition has caused the farmers to suffer can be seen in the letter that Wis writes to his father. He writes:

I believe that the company wants to own the plantation in the interests of efficiency and ease of control. They set aside a sum of money to buy the land from the farmers, realizing that many transmigrants had in fact already sold off bits of their land to city folk or to smaller business interests, once they could no longer work it themselves. The waters became muddied when the people delegated by the company to negotiate the deals with the farmers did so in a dishonest and ruthless way (and the company either facilitated it or turned a blind eye to it). I'm sure that a lot of the company's compensation money was in fact used to bribe these delegates to engage in deception and bullying as a way of subjugating the transmigrants.²⁴⁰

Realizing that he cannot help the farmers, Wis goes to church officials asking for support. Because he fails to gain support from the church, Wis can do nothing to help the farmers escape the oppression by the company. As Utami writes, "Wis sighed, because this meant that he would have to contact the Bishop for formal permission. The Bishop wasn't renowned for making decisions in a hurry. Especially concerning something that wasn't directly connected to Church business."²⁴¹ But the company does not like what Wis had done for the farmers. Its guards are still threatening the farmers; trying to ruin the oil-palm land the farmers had built. They also rape women in the village. Angry, upset and

²⁴⁰ Utami, 2005, p. 147

²⁴¹ Utami, 2005 p. 80

oppressed, the farmers plan a mob protest against the oppressor. When they try to fight for their rights and protest the company's action, the army uses force and kidnaps some of them, one of whom is Wis. He is jailed without trial and tortured. He is accused of instigating the people of Lubukrantau to hinder the process of development and trying to topple the legitimate government. The guards torture him and force him to accept the accusation.

After days of imprisonment, Wis cries and feels defeated. He starts to question his faith; he wonders why God does not answer his prayers. He feels betrayed by God and by the faith he has believed in. He now accepts that there is no such thing called God. "He felt as if he'd died. And he was distraught because God obviously didn't exist. Christ had clearly not saved him, because he was here in the valley of death, a long silent oppressive corridor, and he was falling..."²⁴² The character of Wis no longer behaves as a Catholic priest. It is said that "the Christian tradition ... realizes the relation between metaculture and culture and includes repentance (turning to God) for past sins...enlightenment (is) an awareness of the truth of things that goes beyond socio-cultural construction of reality."²⁴³

Wis has undergone a series of changes as he moved from devotion to God to disappointment and then to rejection of Him. As a response to being tortured almost every day, Wis finally makes up a story. He says that he wants to convert the farmers to both Christianity and Communism and that this is something that he has learned from the liberation theology theories in South America. He confesses:

²⁴² Utami, 2005. p.99

²⁴³ Charles E. Farhadian, *Christianity, Islam, and Nationalism in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2005) Pp. 108-109

He had studied liberation theology in South America, in some petty banana republic or was it is a pineapple republic...and now he had come back to Indonesia to spread the doctrine. He was setting up a mass movement among the peasants with the aim of starting a revolution to establish the socialist state of Sumatra.²⁴⁴

Although Wis makes up the statement above, Utami still tries to present the ideas of liberation theology in a reasonable way. Liberation theology is a religious movement that occurred as part of the struggle to construct an ideal concept of the Kingdom of God on earth. The basic elements of liberation theology have been described as: an awareness of the oppression of oneself or others, followed by an immediate action taken in order to restrain oppression due to some types of divine inspiration.²⁴⁵ This liberation aims to free the social movements, economic institutions, and ethnic and religious structures that are associated with any oppression.

The farmers, obviously, are an oppressed group, controlled by the government and forced to do the government's will. Wis is also a perfect portrait of a person who has had his consciousness directed towards oppression and who takes action in reaction to that oppression. Utami supports Herndl & Bauer's ideas on liberation theology that although it is an intellectual force, the men and women who live or die in this movement are martyrs who show that religion can connect with such material practices as farming, land ownership, and even politics.²⁴⁶ Although Wis does not criticize religion from any

²⁴⁴ Utami, 2005. p.100

²⁴⁵ Turner.D.J. *An introduction to liberation theology*. (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc, 1994). p.80

²⁴⁶ Jones.S. A novel genre: polylingualism and magical realism in Amitav Ghosh's "The Circle of

conscious perspective, he still implies that religion should be able to protect the poor. He is a martyr of liberation theology because he initiates actions which are part of the fight for equality. He is capable of formulating the idea of liberation from oppression, but he has no power to successfully execute the radical program necessary to achieve that liberation. In order to do so, Wis changed his name to Saman and, supported by his lover, Yasmin, a human rights lawyer, and her friend, Cok, decides to go to New York City to fight for the right of the farmers with the assistance of Human Rights Watch.

Larung and his grandmother

Ayu Utami's second novel, *Larung*, is a sequel to *Saman* and openly discusses the same theme of eroticism.²⁴⁷ Though, as the title, implies, Larung is the main character, such familiar names as Saman, Yasmin, Laila, Shakuntala and Cok are found throughout the novel. The importance of these characters is that there are some additional points that can be used as the evidence to support the interconnections of power, sex, and religion in Utami's novels.

Saman's New Life

Saman, the main male character in the first novel, also appears in *Larung*. Utami focuses on his life in New York and at the close of the novel reveals the assassination in Indonesia that ends of his life. Utami presents Saman's life in New York in 1996, two years after he left Indonesia due to the accusation concerning the Medan incident. Saman works for Human Rights Watch in New York under Yasmin's recommendation and

Reason." *The School of Oriental and African Studies Bulletin*, 2003 66, 3, 431-441. From www.jstor.org (Accessed March 19, 2009)

²⁴⁷ Wijanarka, H., *Eroticism: One common and universal Ground of Literary Text. Phenomenon* (Jogjakarta: Sanata Dharma University, 2007).p. 167

network. His affair with Yasmin is proceeding. He learns from Yasmin's email that the government of Indonesia at that time is still corrupt. She tells him about several incidents which occurred in Indonesia as a result of confrontation between civilians and the military as evidence of the misuse of power there. It occurs to me that one of the strengths of this second novel is in the way Utami incorporates the history of Indonesia into her novel. Several characters have a relationship with the past history that constitutes the dark side of Indonesia's history.

One incident, the July 1996 affair, occurred toward the ends of Suharto's administration. At that time, Indonesia only acknowledged three political parties: Golkar, PPP, and PDI. Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of Indonesia's first president, a member of PDI since 1993, won the election to be the new president of her party. According to Rizal Malaranggeng, an Indonesian politician, Suharto, famous as Sukarno's opponent, did not like the election result. He created a plot that appointed Soerjadi as the new leader and claimed Megawati's status was not legitimate. This caused chaos in the party, which split in two. On July 26, the pro-Megawati office was attacked by pro-Soerjadi followers backed up by the military.²⁴⁸ Utami uses Yasmin's and Saman's correspondence as a way to reveal the untold reality which occurred at that time. Most of the news coverage of the incident stated that Megawati's followers had attacked the military and Soerjadi's followers; yet, through the email exchange between Yasmin

²⁴⁸ Liddle, R.W and Malaranggeng, R., Indonesia in 1996: Pressures from Above and Below. *Asian Survey*, 37, 2, (Feb, 1997) Pp. 167-174. From www.jstor.org (Accessed January 12, 2010)

and Saman, readers learn that it was actually the military that created chaos among Megawati's supporters.²⁴⁹

Saman, after deciding to leave his life in the priesthood and having an affair with Yasmin, decides to return to Indonesia to help her. However, Utami seems to imply that he somehow superstitiously feels that this might be the end of his life. Before leaving for Indonesia, he dreams about his mother, Ibu, who died years ago.²⁵⁰ It seems to me that Saman, who inherited Ibu's sixth sense, has a premonition that his decision to go back to Indonesia will lead to his death. In his dream, he sees Yasmin, but when he hugs and kisses her, she turns into his mother and he smells the dead corpse of himself.²⁵¹

The last part of the novel shows how Saman finally meets Larung in the port of Philips Straits and how their lives come to an end. Saman and Larung fail to rescue the young activists. Unlike Togog, Bilung and Koba who are brought back to Jakarta, Larung, Saman, and Anson²⁵² are brought by a second level of the military. Having experienced being kidnapped and tortured by the military, Saman tries to remain quiet when an officer separates them from the three young activists. However, he cannot warn Larung who seems aware of the officer's nepotistic relationship with Suharto's most loyal general.²⁵³ Larung triggers the officer's anger. He shoots Larung to death and then shoots Saman to death. A second before he dies, Saman calls out to Yasmin.²⁵⁴

Larung Lanang, His Mother, and Grandmother

²⁴⁹ Utami, 2001, pp.173-178

²⁵⁰ See first part of analysis

²⁵¹ Utami, 2001, p. 188

²⁵² Anson is Upi's brother, see first part of analysis, Saman.

²⁵³ Utami, 2001, pp. 256-258

²⁵⁴ Utami, 2001, pp. 258-259

Larung Lanang or Larung is the major male character in this second novel. Through his conversation with his mother, Utami reveals Larung's kinship history of being Javanese with Balinese blood. The mother says,

“”Ia selalu mengaku berasal dari kasta ksyatria Gianyar... lalu ia kawin lagi dengan seorang gerilya republic dan melahirkan ayahmu pad atahun 1944. Bapakmu menikah dengan aku ketika kami berdua umur tujuh belas dan kamu lahir tahun 1960””(She [Larung's grandmother] always said that she was from a Kstyatria caste from Gianyar ...and then she remarried, a guerrilla who fought for Indonesian independence. Then she gave birth to your father in 1944. Your father and I married when we were both 17 years old. You were born in 1960).²⁵⁵

The first two chapters of the book present Larung's efforts to kill his grandmother; as he says *“KERETAKU berhenti di stasiun Tulungagung. Aku datang untuk membunuh nenenku”* (My train stops at the Tulungagung station. I am here to kill my grandmother).²⁵⁶ He tries to end her life to release her from the sufferings and the curse that had been laid upon her -- a punishment for her betrayal of her Balinese family. As in her words to Larung,

“Setengah abad kubiarkan masa lalu itu larut bersama kutukan sebab pada masa gadisku aku meninggalkan puri dan orangtuaku demi seorang Belanda petualang. ...Aku telah tua, dan seluruh keluargaku telah moksa bersama kegeraman mereka” (I let my past dissolve with the curse which has been bestowed on me for half of the century. When I was young, I left *puri* [Balinese castle) and my

²⁵⁵ Utami, 2001, p.15

²⁵⁶ Utami, 2001, p.3

parents for a Dutch wanderer. I am old now, and the whole of my family has already had their redemption along with their anger for me).²⁵⁷

In these chapters, Utami also presents Larung's journey to find a way to kill her. Although Larung calls her Simbah, the Javanese word for grandmother, she was born a Balinese aristocrat. After living in Java for several years, she returned to Bali to follow Larung's father, who served in the military in Bali. After several incidents there, people started to accuse her of black magic. As she told Larung,

"Ibumu menangis. Aku tidak menangis. Sebab aku telah mengosongkan diriku dari segala keheranan dan ketakbersediaan. Dan sebuah kekuatan mengisi kehampaan itu, tetapi orang-orang menyebutnya ilmu hitam..." (Your mother cried. I didn't because I have emptied myself of all the doubts and unwillingness. Then, a power soothes the emptiness, but people claimed it was black magic...).²⁵⁸

Traditional Balinese Myths

One way to understand Larung's effort to kill his grandmother is to comprehend her own understanding of her religion. Simbah is a Balinese woman who believes deeply in the Balinese religion. Hildred and Clifford Geertz state that the religion of Bali is an alternate version of Indian Hinduism through the Balinese religion leaves out many points that are important in India. Balinese Hinduism merges the great world tradition of Hinduism with the little tradition of the people that strongly stresses animist elements. This elevates the power of "ritualistic and dramatic aspects over its philosophical and

²⁵⁷ Utami, 2001, p.63

²⁵⁸ Utami, 2001, p.69

mystical ones.”²⁵⁹ There are several important elements in Balinese religion that should be noted: it is a religion that embraces the belief that supernatural or spirits coexist with humans.²⁶⁰ It holds that there are countless gods or manifestations of God around people’s lives in mountains, oceans, seas, forests, and temples and other sacred places.²⁶¹ What differentiate Balinese Hinduism from that of India are the strong rituals, which are part of the system worshipping spirits in various places. Balinese cultural rituals are always done as a way to practice their religion.

Another element that is important in understanding Balinese religion is the supernatural and spiritual elements the Balinese pass along “like some sacred heirloom”²⁶²-- therefore, whoever is born to the title agrees to act in accordance with the standard of the spiritual divine. The problem is that these spiritual elements pass in a hierarchical system. In the Balinese kinship concept, each family is destined to a specific level in society, commonly called the caste system. The higher a person’s family caste, the closer relationship between him or her and the divine being. As with the Javanese cultural system, the Balinese applies a strong patriarchal system, meaning that societal norms are constructed mostly from the male’s perspective. As discussed previously, if the society’s rules are strongly constructed incorporating male’s perspective, there is a tendency to claim any conduct done by a woman that is considered inappropriate by society will be called a sin. Unfortunately, one of the most important taboos in the Balinese kinship system is the cross--caste marriage. Since the spiritual elements in each

²⁵⁹ Geertz, C and G, Hildred, *Kinship in Bali* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1975), Pp.8-10

²⁶⁰ Geertz, 1975, p.11

²⁶¹ Geertz, 1975. p.11

²⁶² Geertz, C, 1999,. p.30

person are passed along through kinship, marrying a different level of society decreases the value of the divine element in a person.²⁶³

Larung's life has been intertwined with society's judgement of his grandmother. Simbah was born and brought up in a high ranking of Balinese caste but was the object of oppression by her family, and expected to marry someone from her own caste. She was born during the pre-colonial period of Indonesia, a time when "Hinduism was more than a collection of isolated little traditions."²⁶⁴ Instead of marrying a man in the royal line, Simbah married a Dutchman. Larung's mother said: " *Ia selalu mengaku berasal dari kasta ksatriya Gianyar yang kawin lari dengan seorang pedagang candu Belanda...*" ("She [Simbah] lost her noble caste, was cursed by the family, and was forced to leave Bali").²⁶⁵ As said before, one sin that a family member could do is to decrease the divine values in oneself. Furthermore, women from noble families are not allowed to marry people from lower castes, but not vice versa.²⁶⁶ Simbah lost her heirloom rights because she married to a foreigner. She had to relinquish her Balinese caste and change her identity to a Javanese. Larung exclaimed,

Adjani. Ya, Tuhan. Itukah namanya yang tak pernah kuketahui? Sebab bagiku namanya Simbah. Nama itu menanggalkan petunjuk kasta sebab ia telah mengkhianati orangtuanya (Adjani. Oh my God, is that a name of hers that I have

²⁶³ Geertz, 1966, p. 40

²⁶⁴ Hefner, R. W., Multiple Modernities: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in a Globalizing Age. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 27, 1998. www.jstor.com (Accessed March, 8, 2009). Pp.92-93

²⁶⁵ Utami, 2001, p.69

²⁶⁶ Di Klien, 1923, p. 218

never known before? For me, her name is Simbah. She used that name as a way to let go of her caste since she had betrayed her family).²⁶⁷

He saw how his grandmother dispelled the group of people who wanted to arrest his father, “*Ia mengenyahkan orang-orang yang mengepung hanya dengan berdiri di depan pintu, memandang kea rah laut. Sejak itu kutahu ia menyimpan rahasia dalam tubuhnya* (She dispelled the people who came and besieged the house by just standing in front of the door and looking at the ocean. From that moment, I knew she kept a secret inside her body).²⁶⁸

Larung sees his grandmother’s suffering and people’s accusations of her as a parallel to the life of Ratna Manjali, the beautiful daughter of a sorceress named Calon Arang. Utami briefly recounts the legend of Calon Arang. She was a powerful sorceress who lived in the 11th century in an area in East Java, named Dhaha. This area was under King Erlangga, the king of Kediri Kingdom. The novel describes Calon Arang as having six loyal female followers, one of whom was named Larung.²⁶⁹ Utami’s story of Calon Arang is similar to the real legend in the old manuscript of *The Calon Arang*, written in Balinese script and known to exist between the 13th – 15th centuries. In the original manuscript, Calon Arang was a witch-widow who had a beautiful daughter. She was very proud of her daughter, yet angry because none of the men in the village would take her to be his wife because they were all afraid of Calon Arang’s power. Therefore, she asked all her followers to worship the God Durga who granted her wish, and gave her power to take revenge on the people of Dhira. With her magical power, Calon Arang created a

²⁶⁷ Utami, 2001, p.19

²⁶⁸ Utami, 2001.p.13

²⁶⁹ Utami, 2001.p.36

disease that killed the villagers. As the people of Dhira were killed one by one, King Erlangga called for help from a priest named Mpu Bharada. He arranged the marriage of one of his pupils to Ratna Manggali, the daughter of Calon Arang. However, on the wedding night, Ratna Manggali's new husband stole Calon Arang's amulet. Losing her power, Calon Arang was defeated by Mpu Bharada.²⁷⁰

Utami's description of the Calon Arang legend is slightly different. Some names, such as Ratna Manjali and Mpu Bahula are spelled differently. However, it is interesting to note how in *Larung*, Ayu Utami uses the story to illustrate her perspective on male power. In the novel, the story of Calon Arang is given from Ratna Manjali's perspective. As told by Simbah, Calon Arang had six loyal female pupils, one of them named Larung. After Calon Arang was defeated, Ratna Manjali left her husband and fled with her mother's pupils to hide in a cave. She had to endure the curses of King Erlangga and her husband. She sinned because she left her husband and her King. She turned into an evil beast that hid in the dark cave.²⁷¹ Utami stresses that Ratna Manjali had no choice but to endure what the King and her husband did to her. She lost her mother and her dignity. She cried for justice but no one listened to her. As Utami writes, "*Tetapi Manjali menangis, Meski para pujangga tak pernah mencatat air matanya...*" ("But Manjali cried although the poets never count her tears...").²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Santika, H. The Goddess Durga in the East Javanese Period. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 56, 2, (1997). p.216. From www.jstor.org (Accessed March 28, 2010) and see I Made Susastika, *Calon Arang dalam Tradisi Bali*. (Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana University Press, 1997) Pp. 69-71

²⁷¹ Utami, 2001, p.39

²⁷² Utami, 2001.p.39

Utami clearly shows that Ratna Manjali's status is lower not only as a citizen to the king but also to her husband. Utami's comments on male dominance in society when she describes the reason behind Calon Arang's anger toward the villagers,

"Sebab ia janda dan anaknya dara tanpa pelamar, sebab inilah kemalangan perempuan: tanpa lelaki, sebab nilai perempuan diciptakan oleh lelaki" (Because she [Calon Arang] is a widow and no one wants to marry her daughter; women's misfortune is when they live without men, because the value of women are constructed by men).²⁷³

People do not understand the reason behind Calon Arang's anger; they only see her as a witch and not as a mother worried about her daughter's future life. This is illustrated in Ratna Manjali's cry, *"Ibuku--kedengkiannya tidak dating dari kosong. Tapi dari sebuah nilai yang panjang. Prasangka yang tua dan melelahkan."* ("My mother's spitefulness was not without reason. It came because of a longtime norm, long and tiring prejudice").²⁷⁴ I assume this refers to the values constructed in a patriarchal society. Calon Arang worried because she felt that her daughter would end up in misery if she remained unwed. That was why she asked for help from the Goddess Durga.

Utami also uses the story of Durga, one of the Goddesses of the Balinese religion,²⁷⁵ to show how religion or traditional legends allowed male dominance in society. She tells how the Goddess Durga used to be very beautiful. One day she was trying to join Btara Siwa but she had to give up her body to a boatman who took her to

²⁷³ Utami, 2001.p.39

²⁷⁴ Utami, 2001, p.39

²⁷⁵ Geertz, 1976, p.13

meet her husband. She was then cursed by her husband and turned into a beast.²⁷⁶ Using these two legends, Utami seems to reveal her previously discussed ideas that women were conditioned to take pain, to suffer because of men's decisions. The reason Durga gave her body to a boatman was because that was the only way to meet her husband. As Utami said, she did it "...*tanpa birahi, meski dia lakukan untuk menyusul suaminya di seberang bengawan, menuntuskan kerinduannya...*" ("...without desire to do it, she did it only to follow her husband across the sea, to satisfy her longing for him..."),²⁷⁷ unfortunately her longing for her husband did not save her from the curse because, "*kesucian wanita lebih berharga dari apapun. Bahkan daripada asmara pada suaminya*" (A woman's purity is worth more than anything, even love of her husband").²⁷⁸

The legends of both Calon Arang and the Goddess Durga are significant stories believed and told by religious Balinese. This means that women have to suffer punishment for any condition even those beyond their control, as promulgated by the religious teaching. The legend of Calon Arang is one of several ancient manuscripts in Indonesia telling the history of Erlangga Kingdom and the origin of the Balinese religion and culture.²⁷⁹ Having said that, I argue that Ayu Utami perceives religion in this case to be based on the patriarchal perspective. As regards the character of Simbah, she is not punished directly because of her attitude toward the man she loves; she is banished by her family because she does not obey the rules of caste. She marries a man beneath her

²⁷⁶ Utami, 2001, p.37

²⁷⁷ Utami, 2001, p.37

²⁷⁸ Utami, 2001, p.37

²⁷⁹ Santiko, 1997, p.217

family's level and this decreased the divine level of her family. Nevertheless, she has to bear the same punishment - she has to endure the family's curse. After she died, her body was finally accepted for cremation in a Balinese aristocrat funeral ceremony, *ngaben*. As described by Cok,

Ada enam orang yang diupacarakan ketika itu...Anak Agung Styra Adnyani, dianggap telah mencemari nama keluarga besar raja Gianyar. Konon, pada masa gadisnya ia kabur dengan pira Belanda, sesuatu yang amat menimbulkan aib...Sejak itu namanya dicoret dari keturunan Raja Gianyar....Tapi cucunya, yaitu Larung Lanang memperjuangkan agar abu jenazah neneknya dapat disembahyangkan dalam upacara ngaben agar arwahnya dapat dengan cepat meninggalkan dunia ini. (There were six people who were cremated that day...Anak Agung Styra Adhnyani was said to have brought shame on her family...Afterwards, her name was stricken from the list of King Gianyar's descendents...But her grandson, Larung Lanang, had fought for the right for her to be cremated in a family funeral, ngaben, so her soul would leave the world faster.)²⁸⁰

The 1965 Coup and Simbah

After living as a fugitive for years, Simbah returns to Bali to be with her son who is stationed at an army base there. In Bali, she encounters another of society's prejudices – this one related to the political incident that occurred in Indonesia. It was back in 1965-

²⁸⁰ Utami, 2001, p.92

1966 when Indonesia endured bloodshed with the murder of hundreds of thousands of alleged communists that inaugurated Suharto's New Order.²⁸¹

According to Anderson, in 1966 Suharto was appointed by Sukarno as the first commander of the army's elite strike force, Kostrad. It is said that on March 11, 1966, Sukarno gave de facto presidential power to Suharto through a presidential decree named *Supersemar*.²⁸² With this letter and command of Kostrad, Suharto succeeded in restoring civic order after the 1965 coup d'état.²⁸³ The truth about the content of Supersemar remains a mystery, no one but Suharto knew of the existence of the letter, three other generals -- Basuki Rachmad, Amir Mahmud, and M Yusuf -- worked as Suharto's messengers to carry the order from Sukarno in Bogor. Unfortunately, in 1967, a year after the letter was passed to Suharto, Basuki Rachmad died of a heart attack, and though two other two died much later, they took "the secret to their graves."²⁸⁴

No one knew the extent of Suharto's authority to restore order the coup. Anderson mentions that on October 4, 1965, a team of forensic doctors who autopsied the murdered generals alleged to have been kidnapped by the Communist Party, said evidence showed

²⁸¹Cribb, R. Problems in Indonesian Killings 1965-1966. *The Asian Survey*, 42, 4, pp.560-563. (2002). from www.jstor.org (Accessed February 26 2010) and in Anderson, B. Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 42, 3, (May 1983), Pp. 447-496. www.jstor.org (accessed March 13th, 2010), and in Anderson, B. Petrus Dadi Ratu. *Indonesia*, 70 (October 2000) Pp. 1-7. From www.jstor.org (accessed March 14th, 2010), and Roossa, J. *Pretext for Mass Murder. The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'état in Indonesia* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006)

²⁸² It is a presidential decree that was believed to be given to Suharto as a general to restore order the 1965 coup d'état. Supersemar stands for Surat Perintah Sebelas Maret (11th March Letter of Order)

²⁸³ Anderson, B, Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, (May, 1983), 42, 3, 447-496. From www.jstor.org. (accessed March, 13, 2010), p.489

²⁸⁴ Djiwandono, J. S., Reflection on fall of Sukarno, and the rise of Soeharto. Opini. *The Jakarta Post*. Tuesday, 03/14/2006 from www.thejakartapost.com (Accessed March 12th 2010)

they were all gunned down by military weapons.²⁸⁵ Within two days the mass media was controlled by KOSTRAD which published claims that *Gerwani* (the Communist Party's female soldiers) had taken out the generals' eyes. It was further reported that the generals' "genitals [were] cut off by members of Gerwani."²⁸⁶ Suharto took advantage of this rumor and used it to legitimate the mass murder of people associated with the Communist Party. Suharto's myth of the murdered generals fostered a public sentiment to destroy PKI. The RPKAD (The Army Para Commando Regiment), led by General Sarwo Edie Wibowo, along with local people, intended to kill all who associated, "not only [with] the communists but armed, trained and supervised militia units..."²⁸⁷ Using a list of names compiled by the Indonesian army and the U.S foreign reports,²⁸⁸ they dragged away and killed those who were on or who were assumed to be on the mysterious lists of so-called communists.

²⁸⁵ Anderson, B, 2000, p. 3

²⁸⁶ Anderson, B, 2000, p.3

²⁸⁷ Cribb, R 2002, p.552 and see Cribb.R. ed "*Problems in the historiography of killings in Indonesia*". In *the Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966: Studies of Java and Bali*, Monash Paper on Southeast Asia, 21 (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University, Center of Southeast Asian Studies), Pp. 35-37. (1990). From www.jstor.org (Accessed March 18, 2010)

²⁸⁸ Cribb, R in Unresolved Problems in Indonesian Killing 1965-1966, *Asian Survey*, 42, 4. The Legacy of Violence in Indonesian (June – August 2002), Pp. 550 – 563 argues that there is a extensive evidence that the killing was encouraged by the U.S. and that the U.S provided funds and supplied the Indonesian army with names of the people who are accused to be PKI's members. See also the arguments on the U.S. involvement in Benedict R. Anderson and Ruth T. McVey in *Cornell Report 1966* in Harould Crouch, Another Look at the Indonesian "Coup", *Indonesia*, 15, (April, 1978),, 1-20, p.18; and in Col. Latief interview reported by Anderson, B (2000) and John Roosa (2006) The arguments that PKI was used by Suharto and the U.S., to topple down Sukarno can also be found in Adrian Vickers Review: Reopening old wounds: Bali and The Indonesian Killing, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57, 3, (August 19988) 774-785, p. 776; John Sidel Review on Geoffrey Robinson's *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* (Ithacha: Cornell University Press, 1995) xxi, 337 and in Justus M. Van der Kroef. Interpretation of the 1965 Indonesian Coup: A Review of the Literature. *Pacific Affairs*, 43, 44 (Winter, 1970) PP. 557-577. All retrieved May 15' 2010 from www.jstor.org.

Larung's father was one of the targeted officers, who were supposed to be on the list of communist followers. As Simbah reminds Larung of the 1965 mass murder,

*"...1965, kau melihat seperti barisan yang sama, kali ini lebih besar jumlahnya dan lebih nyaring derap dan kengtongannya, menuju rumah kita...Kulihat mereka menanggalkan seragamnya dan menggantung anakku di tangannya pada pohon asam, sehari semalam, setelah mencambuknya dengan rotan dan popor, menindih tungkainya dengan kaki meja...Apa kesalahannya, tak ada lagi orang yang bertanya. Sebab ia dikenal semua tentara di kompleks kita. Maka ketika para perwira harus menyebut orang-orang dalam pasukannya yang terlibat kudeta 30 September, semua menyebut namanya. (...1965, you [Larung] saw a similar regiment but this time the sound of marching and the *kentongan* were louder. They came to our house...I saw them take off his army uniform and hang my son from a tamarind tree, a night after they beat him with rattan whips and rifle butts, put his leg underneath a table...What did he do? No one dared ask. But it is because he was known among all the officers in our complex...So, when those officers had to give any names within their regiments of associates of the September 30 coup, they mentioned his name").²⁸⁹*

She continues,

Mereka memfitnahnya, kata Ibu. Tidak, kataku. Sebab hidup adalah pilihan semena. Suamimu, anakku itu, barangkali bukan komunis, partai komunis barangkali tidak kudeta, tapi apa arti semua itu? Orang-orang harus menunjuk orang lain untuk menyelamatkan diri. (Your mother said they had blackened his

²⁸⁹ Utami, 2001. Pp. 68-69

name. I said, No. Because life is a matter of choice. Your husband, my son, is probably not a communist, the party itself probably did not do any coup, but what's the benefit of talking about it? People had to blame somebody to save themselves).²⁹⁰

This political incident shows how Suharto misused power and Larung's families were just victims of the government power over people. The family's misery continued after the death of his father, when people started to slander them again by saying that Larung's mother was one of the *gerwanis*, as Simbah says, "*Lalu aku mendengar, orang-orang menyebut ibumu gerwani*" (And then I heard people call your mother *gerwani*).²⁹¹ Trying to save her mother-in-law, Simbah called herself as *gerwani*.²⁹² Interestingly, the way Simbah banished the villagers was by looking at the ocean, seeming to search for the power of nature.²⁹³ This power was the virtue Simbah gained as her heritage. This was the second time she used her mythical power to save someone's life. When she was 80 years old, she was in an accident on the way home. Everyone in the bus died but her. She was completely unscratched and people believed she was still alive because of the unseen spirits around her. The spirits had given her power since she was young. She visited some mountains and sacred cemeteries to gain power from the unseen spirits. This illustrates the animistic belief of the Balinese. Everything in nature has its local *Dewa* (God or Goddess), including mountains, rivers, lakes, tree, temples, altars, and statues.²⁹⁴

²⁹⁰ Utami, 2001, p. 69

²⁹¹ Utami, 2001, p.69

²⁹² Utami, 2001, p.70

²⁹³ Utami, 2001, p.70

²⁹⁴ DiKlien, T., 1923, p.217

It appears to me that Utami emphasises that what Simbah has done in relation to her mythical power, it was to save her family or her own life – nevertheless society judged her harshly. People, including her own daughter-in-law, started to consider her a witch because she could not die. Just as in the legend of Calon Arang, Simbah’s power protect the family becomes an abomination to others. People said it was the power that Simbah had from the inappropriate rituals and loyalty that she had for Durga, the cursed *Dewa* (God) from the Hinduism tales. Durga is an evil Goddess who can create chaos, death and curses toward others. This goddess is mainly associated with dangerous demonic spirits and is represented as a “fearsome demoness.”²⁹⁵ The reason Simbah worshipped Durga was because she had been oppressed by her family, and by social standards. She was alienated from society because she became a widow for a second time. She felt that her religion made it impossible for a woman to be accepted in society regardless of her status. She said that the religious epic asserted that “nilai perempuan diciptakan oleh lelaki” (the value of women is created by men).²⁹⁶ Feeling oppressed, humiliated, rejected, and deceived, even by her own caste and beliefs, she decided to interpret religion based on her perspective. She denied Brahman and Siva and devoted herself to Durga.

Larung and the Will to be Free

Ayu Utami’s story in this part shows how rejection is a rupture that leads to one person’s will to be free. In this sense, Simbah’s will is to be liberated from her faith and to refuse to acknowledge the truth. Her unseen power has become the scapegoat in her

²⁹⁵ Di Klien, 1923, p.205

²⁹⁶ Utami, 2001, Pp. 36-37

family and society and alienated her from her own community. As a result, she has put herself closer to the power that she holds, the black magic cursed by society. Larung killed Simbah as a way to liberate her soul from the curse. He believed that the only way to free her was to end her life.²⁹⁷ The character of Simbah actually reflects the idea of religious practice offered by Clifford Geertz. He said,

Religion not only is not pervaded with a consistent, highly distinctive tone (a kind of sedulous theoticalism which only extended description could evoke), but the elements which comprise it cluster into a number of relatively well - defined ritual complexes which exhibit, in turn, a definite approach to properly religious issues no less reasonable for being implicit. Of these, three are of perhaps greatest importance: (1) the temple system; 2) the sanctification of social inequality: and (3) the cult of death and witches.²⁹⁸

Simbah has showed her Hinduism belief, in which accepting spirits is part of the religion. The problem is Simbah has devoted herself to the god and goddess who are believed to have more evil power. As a result, she could not go to her death in peace; she needed shamans to help to end her life. Simbah has violated the teaching of Vrhaspatitvatva, in which, as a Balinese born of royal descent, she had to adhere to three main points to reach *Svarga* (heaven): understand the philosophy of life, release worldly passion, and

²⁹⁷ Utami, 2001, Pp.14-17

²⁹⁸ Geertz,C., 1973, p. 176, and in I Made Titib, *Persepsi Umat Hindu di Bali terhadap Svarga, Naraka, dan Moksa dalam Svargarohanaparva: Perspektif Kajian Budaya* (Surabaya: Penerbit Paramita, 2006) p. 21

denounce the bad deeds in her life.²⁹⁹ Although it is not clear whether Simbah practiced black magic and killed people for her own benefit, she was obviously devoted to Durga, the evil God. Also, she enacted some rituals that main stream Hinduism claimed to be devil's work. She engaged with unacceptable spirits. Therefore, she had to face problems before she could release her soul.

Giving all the weird incidents in his life, Larung grows up in his own world. Saman, Yasmin, Shakuntala, Cok and Laila are all depicted as young Indonesians from upper middle class society³⁰⁰, but Utami does not explicitly state the economic and educational background of Larung. The most important thing about him is that he lives his life in a very unique way. He always hears voices in the back of his mind, including the ones that lead him to the murder of his grandmother. I assume that the way he sees his grandmother is influenced by his own perceptions of her mystical power. He tries to describe her as “*Sebuah kisah tentang Ragda yang menghirup darah...nenekku ataukah Ni Ragda yang berkata kepadaku?* (A tale about Ragda who drank blood....my grandmother or Ni Ragdha, who had spoken to me?).³⁰¹

The name Larung itself is an interesting point that Utami seems to raise. When Simbah told Larung the story of Calon Arang, she mentions that one of her female pupils was named Larung.³⁰² His mother also comments that the name given by Simbah is a

²⁹⁹Titib, I.M.,*Persepsi Umat Hindu di Bali terhadap Svarga, Naraka, dan Moksa dalam Svargarohanaparva: Perspektif Kajian Budaya* (Surabaya: Penerbit Paramita, 2006) p. 282-283

³⁰⁰ Sastriyani.,S.H.(ed) *Gender and Politics*. (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2009), p. 459

³⁰¹ Utami, 2001, p.12

³⁰² Utami, 2001, p.39

female name³⁰³ -- but his name is Larung Lanang, which in the Javanese language means “Larung the man.” Larung seems to have an internal conflict. His mother, who wanted to name him Begawan (priest), supported his killing his grandmother, saying, “*”Nak, tidakkah kamu yang takut mengakui bahwa sepantasnya Simbah meninggal?”* (Son, aren’t you the one who is afraid to admit that Simbah should die?).³⁰⁴ I would not argue that this confusion of names is a significant contribution on Utami’s perspective on gender; however I believe that she wants to show how Larung’s personality was shaped – his dark childhood memory and his ambivalent name make Larung a unusual man, analytic but seeming to have a mysterious side. This description is reflected, when by Cok says, “*Larung Lanang namanya. Anak yang aneh...Ia pendek tapi aku merasa ia dalam...Kadang kecerdasannya menyenangkan, kadang ketakdugaannya menakutkan...*” (His name is Larung Lanang. A strange kid...He’s short but I think he is deep...Sometimes his intelligence is amusing, sometimes his cluelessness is frightening...).³⁰⁵ His mysterious attitude is also discussed by Togog, Koba, and Bilung, the three young activists, who are trying to flee Indonesia.

After his meeting with Cok, Larung accepts her offer to work for Yasmin. He agrees to help rescue the three activists accused by the government as the master planners of the 26 June riot. Just as Yasmin and Cok did for Saman, Yasmin plots to rescue them. She asks Saman to pick them up in Kijang, a city in the south-eastern part of Bintan Island, and smuggle them out of Indonesia³⁰⁶ -- while Larung would be responsible for

³⁰³ Utami, 2001, p.16

³⁰⁴ Utami, 2001, p.16

³⁰⁵ Utami, 2001, p.95

³⁰⁶ Utami, 2001, p.205

getting them to the meeting point with Saman. The tension of the novel comes when Larung's mysterious characteristics collide with the activists' suspicions of him.

Togog, Koba, and Bilung suspect Larung to be part of the government's intelligence. They distrust his intention to help them since he seems to know everything about them and their struggle to fight for justice against the government. Wayan Togog, born in Bali, is from the third - level caste in Bali.³⁰⁷ His original name was Ketut Alit Kertapati; his father is a surgeon in Suryabaya, in east Java, his mother is a lecturer. He was moved by the lives of the people who worked for his father for low pay. He considers it, "...*penghisapan*" (exploitation)³⁰⁸ by his own father. Along with his disappointment about his father's attitude toward his own relatives, he started to read a series of books that were once forbidden, such as *Kaum Tani Mengganjang Setan Desa* (The Peasantry Crushes the Demon of the Village) written by D. N Aidit, a leading communist, chairman of the party's central committee, and a chief tactician, organizer and theoretician.³⁰⁹ He also learned Roeslan Abdul Gani's *Perkembangan Tjita-tjita Sosialisme di Indonesia* (The Progress of the Dream of Socialism in Indonesia).³¹⁰

These two books shape the ideology of socialism in the young Ketut Alit's mind. They lead Ketut Alit and a group of his friends to fight against the government. Utami does not clearly say which of these two books influenced him the most. However, published in 1966, Roeslan Abdul Gani's book highlights a series of important facts that the New Order claimed communist infidelity toward Sukarno government. Roeslan

³⁰⁷ Utami, 2001, p.207

³⁰⁸ Utami, 2001, p.207

³⁰⁹ Van Der Kroef, J.M., Lenin, Mao, and Aidit. *The China Quarterly*, 10, 23-44,(1962), From www.jstor.org. (Accessed March 26, 2010),p. 25

³¹⁰ Utami, 2001, p. 208

Abdul Gani mentions that Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, combined nationalism, religion, and Marxism in Manipol/USDEK. The basic idea of this concept was to replace the atheism point of Karl Marx's philosophy of dialect-materialism by integrating the synthesis of the concept of God, Nationalism with heroism and patriotism and socialism. This integration of concepts was projected in Pancasila.³¹¹ Having said this, Roeslan Abdul Gani underlined the close affiliation between Pancasila and socialism. He supports the fact that it was Indonesia's previous ideology to wipe out poverty by applying the socialist ideology. However, the generation of 1935-1945 would not have understood the dream that the previous generation-- the generation of 1918-1930 -- foresaw and fought against, the West's imperialism and colonialism through socialism.³¹² But the New Order was ruled by the later generation, who Roeslan Abdul Gani claimed was the generation that failed to see the dream of socialism.

In Utami's novel, young activist Ketut Alit was one of the few who tried to get the idea back to the society. However, the government had more power. For Ketut, the government misused its power by twisting and politicising history. The government accused the Communist Party of trying to win control of the nation. This is the highest crime against the government, as said by Ketut,

Jika sebuah rezim memalsukan sejarah secara kecil, maka ia memalsukan sejarah secara besar pula. Jika sebuah rezim menyelewengkan sejarah secara besar, tentu parahlah kesalahan yang hendak ia menangkan. Maka jika rezim ini menumpas dan mendengki komunisme, niscaya benarlah komunisme itu. (If a

³¹¹ Abdulgani, H.R. *Perkembangan Tjita-tjita Sosialisme Indonesia* (Djakarta: B.P. Prapantja, 1966).p.49

³¹² Abdulgani, 1966, p.59

regime falsified one small part of the history of the nation, so it [the regime] must have falsified the big part of the history. If a regime has twisted a big history of the nation, then the regime must have perpetrated a huge error to win the game. Therefore, if this regime destroyed and detested communism, undoubtedly, a communism is on the side of the right).³¹³

Ketut's previous goal was to ask his relatives to demand more money from his father, unfortunately "...*mereka bersyukur bahwa ayahnya mengajak ke kota ini. Daripada harus jadi petani. Ia merasa mereka bodoh. Mereka merasa ia tak tahu balas budi...Lalu ia lebih banyak berada di luar rumah.*" (...they feel grateful that his father had asked them to stay in the city, rather than work as farmers. He felt they are stupid. They felt he was ungrateful...Then he spent more time away from home).³¹⁴ Then Ketut changed his name to Wayan Togog. His original name is an identification of a third-level caste in Balinese kinship,³¹⁵ while Togog is the name of one of the humorous characters in the Wayang epic. He picks Togog because it is the name of "*Semar, abdi para Pandawa, adalah lambing Suharto dan Orde Baru. Maka, Togog, abdi para Kurawa niscaya lawannya. Ia mulai menafsir terbalik wayang purwa: kelima Pandawa adalah elite politik dan keseratus Kurawa adalah rakyat banyak.* (Semar, Pandawa's helper, is the symbol of Suharto and the New Order. So, Togog, Kurawa's servant, is therefore his [Semar's] foe. He started to have a counter thought on *wayang Purwa*: Pandawa and the

³¹³ Utami, 2001, p.209

³¹⁴ Utami, 2001, p.209

³¹⁵ Geertz, C and Hildred Geertz., 1975.

five figures are the elite politicians and the hundred figures of Kurawa are the common people).³¹⁶

Wapangsar Kogam Sebayang, the second of the three men fleeing Indonesia, is a Medanese young activist who moved to Surabaya six years before he met Togog and Bilung. He is the one responsible for spreading the Solidarlit's newspaper for the activists in the city. He learned the idea of socialism from his childhood experiences. He once lived with his uncle who served in the military in Java. He learned of the gap between the life of the generals and that of the lower rank officers. He thought the gap was too wide and the people in power did nothing to help the lower people; he criticized them by writing about the problem of social classes, how the high-ranking generals had to control the lower ranks. The generals made rules called *Sapta Marga*, which imposed the strict bureaucracy that allowed the high generals to take benefits from the corporals and soldiers. He said, “*Sapta Marga adalah candu para prajurit, sebagaimana agama adalah candu masyarakat.*” (*Sapta Marga* is the opium of the military as religions are the opium of the people).³¹⁷ Because of all the disappointment that he saw in his surrounding, he joined the Solidarlit and changed his name to Koba. He knew it was Stalin's name, but he refused to admit that he was trying to be Stalin. He claimed that Koba reminded him of his own and of the cobra.³¹⁸

The last young activist that Larung tries to help is Bilung. He came from a very devout Moslem family and used to be a Javanese *santri* (Moslem student). His original name was Farid Fanani. When he was in the Islamic boarding school, he liked to sneak

³¹⁶ Utami, 2001, p. 209

³¹⁷ Utami, 2001, 217

³¹⁸ Utami, 2001, 217

out to watch the war scenes in the wayang epic. He met Koba and Togog in college in Surabaya. They started asking him to join small leftish discussions on campus. Farid then changed his name to Bilung, which sounds more Javanese and worked for the group. He had expertise in anything related to technical matters, including fabricating bombs.³¹⁹

Although they believed that expanding the network of a struggle for reformation was the way to the goal rather than violence, the government declared them fugitives because they were accused of being the masterminds of several riots in Indonesia. These three young activists start to accuse Larung of being part of government intelligence because he seemed to be against the socialist ideology that they believed in.³²⁰ His mysterious attitude made them feel uncomfortable and they planned to sabotage his plan to rescue them. He did not realize that Koba's call his parents a day before they fled Indonesia was bugged by intelligence. When Larung, Saman and Anson tried to take the young men across national territorial water to Malaysia, they were caught by the military, who then separated Larung, Saman, and Anson from the three youths.

When they were captured, Larung started to irritate one of the officers by saying that he knew how the officer would use Larung and Saman to gain the position that he was pursuing in the military. He began to recount some incidents in which the military had kidnapped, tortured, and killed innocent people. Larung did not stop although he knew that his story offended the officer. He did not stop although he was being beaten by the officer. He condemned the guards and armies and fought for his pride, because he realized that he was about to die. Larung showed his last resistance by exposing the

³¹⁹ Utami, 2001, p.227

³²⁰ Utami, 2001, p.210

corrupted army of New Order. He challenged the guard before being shot to death. He died a few moments before the same revolver killed Saman. The end of the novel seems to highlight the fact that both of these characters saw life at the same phase. Saman and Larung died as martyrs. Unlike Saman, Larung had no religious background. The only explanation for his belief was his relationship with his grandmother, who believed in spirits of nature. However, Larung was not described as a person who had to debate between what he should believe and what he had seen. Saman, on the other hand, had to face an inner conflict in which his religious perspective was challenged by the disparity of life.

Yuda and Parang Jati

Yuda is the main character of *Bilangan Fu*. The story describes the life journey of a rock climber, Yuda, and his best friend Parang Jati. His journey progresses from his effort to conquer some mountains to his discovery of traditional beliefs, Javanese legends, and superstitions. Yuda is portrayed as a liberal young man who adores mountain climbing. He believes that rationality and the mind are the most important things in human lives. He does not believe in any form of spiritualism or mysticism. He appreciates women and is attracted by them physically. Nevertheless, he does not like the idea of marriage because it limits men's freedom. Women manipulate men by using their charms.³²¹ He views women as monsters who want men under their control, "*Dia sungguh manipulatif, terutama dengan cara membuat kita haru dan bangga.*" (She [woman in general] is so manipulative, especially the way she makes us feel so emotional

³²¹ Utami, 2008, p. 473

and proud).³²² Yuda is an example of anti-modernity. He does not like television and detests the urban life. Ironically, he accepts the existence of superstitious beliefs and stories as part of his life as a mount climber, yet he never sees the deeper values of spiritualism based on the traditional legends and superstitious stories in Java.

Parang Jati, another male character in the story, was born in Watugunung, Java.³²³ Parang Jati, who studied geology at the Bandung Institute of Technology in Indonesia, also loves climbing and exploring the mountains. The significant difference between these two male characters is that Parang Jati perceives his life as based on the values conveyed by superstitious and traditional legends. He plays an important role in shaping Yuda's character development throughout the story. He adores nature and believes that an unseen being exists in every part of nature. He argues that to live a harmonious life is to communicate with the spirits through *sesajen*.³²⁴ Moreover, he thinks of the *sesajen* function as a tax that has to be paid to the unseen spirits who live in some areas of human lives. *Sesajen*, literally translated as "offering", is a form of appreciation of nature that is guarded by spirits because humans cannot take care of nature. In Parang Jati's perspective, modern life has made human beings so arrogant that they forget their roots and the necessity to respect the unseen beings. The more modern the world is the more trouble that human life has caused for nature.

Meeting the Spirits

³²² Utami, 2008. Pp.31-32

³²³ Utami, 2008, Pp.52-54

³²⁴ Utami, 2008, p.61

Yuda and Parang Jati set out to climb Watugunung Mountain. During this journey, the internal conflict between Yuda's rational anti-spiritualism and Parang Jati's understanding of mysticism and spiritualism surfaces. The spirits they meet during the journey prove that Yuda's point of view is wrong. Yuda describes their meeting with a *tuyul*:

*Sebuah sosok mumbul dari dalam dedaunan. Hitam. Seperti bola mata. Sesaat aku kehilangan kendali dan meloncat ke belakang. Lalu makhluk itu melesat ke dalam hutan...Aku telah melihat wajahnya. Makhluk itu kecil bagaikan tuyul hitam. Semakin kuingat semakin ia terasa mengerikan karena ukurannya yang tak masuk akal. Brangkali ia hanya sedikit lebih tinggi dari lututku. Tapi kepalanya yang besar adalah kepala manusia. (A creature appeared from the bushes. Black, like the colour of an eye. For a moment, I lost control and jumped backward. Then the creature ran away into the forest but I saw its face. That creature is like a small tiny black *tuyul*. The more I tried to remember, the more it seemed to be frightening because its size was unbelievably not normal. Maybe, its height was a little bit taller than my knee. But it had a big human head).*³²⁵

This creature, a *tuyul*, is one of the three kinds of Javanese spirits. According to Geertz, a *tuyul* functions as a slave spirit for people who want to get richer – those who want to have a *tuyul* need to make a journey to find sacred ruins: after they made vows to the greatest spirit in the ruins, they would be given *tuyuls*. In return, they have to choose one

³²⁵ Utami, 2008.p.105

of their relatives each year as a human sacrifice. The seekers would not kill them by their own hands, but these relatives would die in a mysterious way.³²⁶

In addition to a *tuyul*, Yuda meets another spirit that Geertz called *gendruwos*. Although it is ugly and frightening, this creature can be harmless. *Gendruwos* belongs to the *memedi* class, which Geertz says is equivalent to the English word “spook” - *gendruwos* can appear as a woman or man or both forms – furthermore, “*gendruwos* can adopt the form of a woman’s husband and sleep with her.”³²⁷ Sometimes, they like to follow a person who finds them.³²⁸ Yuda finds one of them on the mountain. He calls this creature, which becomes his loyal follower, *Sebul*. *Sebul* is an imaginative mountain climber who appears in Yuda’s dream and is portrayed as a man that has the feet of a wolf, a woman’s breasts, and two different sex organs. He always whispers the word, the number of *Fu* (literally translated to *Bilangan Fu*). *Fu* is a number that physically looks like a labyrinth.³²⁹

Numerology: Fu and The Rejection of Oneness

In traditional Javanese numbers, this word can be translated as 13, in which in the western world is bad luck. It is a number that symbolizes the notion of mystics. *Fu* or *Hu* is a number, which existed even before humans developed the numerical process. The origin of this concept exists in, “...*masa ketika manusia belum perlu memisahkan bumi dari langit, lelaki dan perempuan, pengetahuan dari seni. Inilah perangkat bilangan itu: ji ro lu pat mo nem tu wa nga luh las sin hu*” (“...at the time when humans did not need to

³²⁶ Geertz, 1960, Pp. 20-22

³²⁷ Geertz, 1960, p.18

³²⁸ Geertz, 1960, p.18

³²⁹ Utami, 2008, Pp.21-23

separate the earth and the sky, men and women, knowledge and art. This is the set of that numeral: (in Javanese) one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen”).³³⁰

Through the idea of the numeral *Fu*, Yuda criticizes the existence of monotheism, especially in Indonesia. He argues that *Fu* means silence, emptiness that is not empty. This is similar to the Javanese concept of religion. From Parang Jati’s father, Suhubudi, Yuda tries to understand the importance of the numeral *Fu* in relation to the criticism of monotheism. For him, the relationship between human beings and God cannot be legitimized with the number “1”, therefore there is no sense in saying “*Tuhan yang Satu*” (God is one),³³¹ because humans cannot think about God as a logic or arithmetic system. God existed before the numeral system was found in Sanskrit.³³²

The Javanese numeral of *Fu* as emptiness is parallel with the way Javanese mysticism applies. Suhubudi, Parang Jati’s father, who is a *guru kebatinan* (spiritual teacher)³³³ explains to Yuda that the essence of the Javanese religion trains the followers to come close to understanding themselves and their relationship with nature through the quintessence of *Bilangan Fu*, which is *ketiadaan* (nothingness).³³⁴ This concept is the core of Javanese religion, a combination of animism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Suhubudi further explains how human beings can reach the point of *Fu*. He says that understanding one’s *batin* (inner mind and soul) is the best way to understand any existence in nature.

³³⁰ Utami, 2008, p.322

³³¹ Utami, 2008, p.326

³³² Utami, 2008, p.323

³³³ Utami, 2008, p.292

³³⁴ Utami, 2008, p.303

His comment parallels what Geertz says that one of the ways Javanese internalize the religion in by the ultimate *rasa*, in which *bathin* not is separated from the self.”³³⁵

Yuda realizes that *Bilangan Fu* is not just an empty number; it is a sacred number that leads him further on his spiritual journey. He also claims that people interpreting God’s existence as *satu* (one) has created the concept that only one’s own God is true. This is the problem of having a monotheist ideology in a pluralistic society. Furthermore, for people to agree with the concept of *Tuhan yang Satu*, modern people tend to neglect the values of traditional beliefs. The worst problem is they consider traditional values as mistaken concepts of superstition. Modern people tend to be artificial and arrogant, as Suhubudi claims, “*Sebab suara manusia, Nak, telah menjadi begitu artificial dan congkak*” (“Because the human voice, my son [Yuda], has become so artificial and arrogant”).³³⁶

Yuda and Traditional Javanese Legends

Modern people, according to Yuda, have twisted traditional mystical legend from a valuable form of belief to a less meaningful superstitious story that usually is considered blasphemy by the monotheist religions. To affirm this perspective, Yuda quoted Parang Jati’s experience of writing an essay about Nyai Roro Kidul and religions when he was in school. It is believed that Nyai Roro Kidul is the queen of the South Sea, which had no king because it was allied with the Mataram Kingdom. The Queen of the South Sea is believed to have consorted with all the kings of Mataram. The first was the

³³⁵ Geertz, C., 1960 p.317

³³⁶ Utami, 2008, p.296

powerful Panembahan Senopati.³³⁷ It is told that one day the Queen of the South Sea appeared to Senopati, the lord of Mataram, because his prayers had caused turbulence in the South Sea. Nyai Roro Kidul, who ruled all the spirits, genies, and fairies begged Senopati to stop and said his every wish would be her command.³³⁸ She took him to her realm of the sea, which astonished him and he asked her to marry him. She said, "It is better to be a queen than to be married. I do not want anyone to give me orders."³³⁹ These words contradicted her vow to be devoted to Senopati. Ever since, Senopati treated her as an unofficial wife. He could visit her to satisfy his desire but Nyai Roro Kidul would never be the wife of the king.

However, the people of Java believe that she remained powerful and young and existed as the unseen wife of all the kings of Jogjakarta, including the present king, now called the *Sultan*.³⁴⁰ They believe that she continues to rule all the various fairies, genies, and other spirits in Javanese mysticism. Most Javanese still imagine her as a charming young woman, visible only to the king of Jogjakarta.³⁴¹

Another important point can be seen in the way Utami uses Parang Jati's story about Nyai Roro Kidul to criticise the way monotheist religion has manipulated the local

³³⁷ Sastrowardoyo, S, Dojo Damono, S, and Ahmad Kasim A, *Anthology of ASEAN Literatures, Oral Literature of Indonesia* (The ASEAN committee on Culture and Information.1983)Pp. 290-306, and Purwadi, Dr.M.Hum.,*History of Java, Local Wisdom Description Since Ancient Mataram to Contemporary Era* (Jogjakarta: Tanah Ait, 2007). Pp. 78-92

³³⁸ Rochkyatmo, A, Adiwimarta, S.S. Soeratman, S.T, Wahjono, P. *Babad Tanah Jawi* (Jakarta: Amanah Lontar, 2004) Pp. 193- 198

³³⁹ Knappert,J. *Myths and Legends of Indonesia* (Singapore: Toppan printing, Co, 1997) Pp.67-69 and see Rochkyatmo, et all, 2007, Pp. 193-198

³⁴⁰ Wessing, Nyai Roro Kidul in Puger: Local application of a myth. *Archipel* ,53, (1997), 97-120. www.jstor.org (Accesed May 20, 2009) p. 90

³⁴¹ Braker,C. "Sandang Pangan" for the Goddess: Offerings to Sang Hyang Bathari Durga and Nyai Lara Kidul. *Asian Folklore Studies*, 1997 56, 2, 253-283. www.jstor.org (Accesed May, 20, 2009)p. 280

legend. Yuda's understanding of *Babad Tanah Jawi*, one part of which is the story of the origin of Nyai Roro Kidul, describes Nyai Roro Kidul as a hermitess. Because of her deep meditation, she was granted the power to legitimate nature, especially in the South Sea. This story, which was written in *Babad Tanah Jawi* and existed before the kings of Java adopted the religion of the prophet, told that before almost all the kings of Java converted to Islam, when Panembahan Senapati, the first king of Java, meditated by the South Sea,³⁴² his meditation disturbing spirits there, caused Nyai Loro Kidul to come see him. Utami urges that instead of begging him to stop, as in previous sources, *Babad Tanah Jawi* describes Panembahan Senopati as making a journey to the bottom of the sea with Nyai Roro Kidul. This is similar to the journey where Bima meets Dewaruci.³⁴³

The journey of Bima meeting Dewaruci is designed to show how Hinduism merges with Islam and animism or Javanese mysticism, as does the journey of Panembahan Senapati to the South Sea. It shows how Islam merges with the mysticism of Java. In the original version of *Babad Tanah Jawi*, Yuda and Parang Jati believe that the Queen of the South Sea is a powerful hermitess who could take the form of a woman or a man. She has great power and is not captured by one single gender. However, Yuda and Parang Jati assume that in the end of *Babad Tanah Jawi*, when the kings of Java had started to profess Islam, the figure of Nyai Loro Kidul became twisted into an immortal, beautiful, and sensual goddess. She not only has the power to control spirits and kill anyone she doesn't like, she can also marry all the kings of Java.³⁴⁴ Yuda claims this is a

³⁴² Purwadi, Dr., M. Hum. *Sejarah Raja – Raja Jawa. Sejarah Kehidupan Kraton dan Perkembangannya di Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Media Abada, 2007). Pp. 373-526

³⁴³ Utami, 2008, Pp. 254-256

³⁴⁴ See sources before

strategy to manipulate people through the idea of modernism and monotheism. As he says, “*Modernisme adalah alat untuk memperalat. Takhayul adalah alat untuk diperalat*” (“Modernism is a tool to manipulate and superstition is a tool to be manipulated”).³⁴⁵ Parang Jati uses the concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* to explain how modern life demonizes the figure of Nyai Roro Kidul.

Parang Jati assumes that this attitude comes from the fact that belief in mysticism and spirits is unacceptable in Islam. He uses the story of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* (I unite with God), a concept rejected by *Wali Songo*, one of the nine *walis* that spread the idea of Islam in Java. This concept was rejected because it was thought to allow the worship of more than one god and questioned that God is One and so powerful that none other could be at the same level of the mighty being. The concept of *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* was taught by Syech Siti Jenar, a member of the first *sunans* who spread the teaching of Islam in Java. However, to understand the perspective that Utami tries to convey through the conversation between Yuda and Parang Jati, it is necessary to understand the history of the debate between the teaching of Syech Siti Jenar’s *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* and mainstream Islam by the nine *walis* (*Wali Sanga*).

Wali Sanga used the Hindu epic of Mahabharata and Ramayana to teach Islam through the shadow-puppet play and gamelan (metal musical instrument). One well-known legacy was the tale of the demi-god Ruci. Sunan Kalijaga, the most prominent figures in the nine *walis*, was said to use this part of the epics to teach the symbolic

³⁴⁵ Utami, 2008, p. 186

meeting of a human with his own soul.³⁴⁶ He made some changes in the realm of Islamic teaching, merging the values of Islam and the culture of the Javanese people.

Interestingly, although Sunan Kalijaga's teaching using the cultural instruments were not written in the Qur'an and Hadits, he was not accused of being *bid'ah* or a threat to the content of Islamic value because of several reasons. For centuries, the king of Java believed in Javanese mysticism, but Sunan Kalijaga succeeded in the promotion of Islam because he was able to integrate the local culture with the practice of Islam. Some of the princes started to learn Islam and conduct some activities based on its teachings. Sunan Kalijaga assured the continuity of Java's rich cultural heritage,³⁴⁷ such as the use of *Gamelan*³⁴⁸ and *sekaten*.³⁴⁹ Sunan Kalijaga also played a role as a peacemaker. He was able to persuade the King of Java to help the people establish the Great Mosque in Demak,³⁵⁰ and brought Islam to the mainstream society in Java.

Wali Songo became the influencing advisors for the leaders of several communities in Java. At the same time, Syech Siti Jenar's controversial teaching appeared against *wali songo's* teaching of *syareah*. Some scholars believe that Syech Siti Jenar was not an Indonesian, but was born in Persia and came to Indonesia along with the

³⁴⁶ Brown, Daniel. *A New introduction to Islam Malden* (MA: Blackwell. Pub, 2004) and see Hussin, Mutalib. *Islam in Southeast Asia. Southeast Asia Background Series*. (Jakarta: ISEAS publication, 2008), Indonesia, National Encyclopedia . [Electronic Version] From www.nationsencyclopedia.com (Accessed March, 5, 2008) and Siska Widyawati, Reflecting on Wali Songo's understanding of pluralism. *The Jakarta Post*. from www.thejakartapost.com (Retrieved October, 29, 2008) and Zoetmulder, P.J. *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti: Panteisme dan Monoisme dalam Sastra Suluk Jawa*. (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1991)

³⁴⁷ Chodim, A. *A New Introduction to Islam*. (Malden: Blackwell.Pub,2002) Pp. 54-59 and also in Tebba, S. *Syaick Siti Jenar: Pengaruh Tasawuf Al-Hallaj di Jawa* (Jakarta: Hidayang, 2003), Pp. 23-35

³⁴⁸ *Gamelan* is a complete music ensemble played by men

³⁴⁹ Tebba, 2003, p. 58 *Sekaten* is an annual ceremony in which the word is derived from the word *shyahadattin* or *shahadat* meaning the first pillar of Islam.

³⁵⁰ Tebba, 2003, p.60

merchants. Others believe that he was born in Java and was one of the nine *walis' santri*. (wali's pupils).³⁵¹ Among the *sunans* and religious leaders in Java, the history of Syech Siti Jenar's life before he became a controversial figure is not clearly documented. It can be interpreted in two ways: either he brought a wrong interpretation of Islam or his teaching threatened the politics of the mainstream. He can be seen as the opposition party that questioned the authority of the highest rank of *ulama*. Although his concern might have been the tendency toward secularized *ulama*, his claim could bring about religious disputes. The life of Syech Siti Jenar is documented in Javanese literature such as *Serat Centini* and *Wirit Hidayat Jati*. *Serat Centini*, describes Syech Siti Jenar as promoting the teaching of *dzikir* and meditation as a means to understand Islam rather than doing *syareat*, as it was being taught by Sunan Kalijaga and other *walis*.³⁵² His arguments confronted the teaching of *ulama* and questioned the capacity of religious leaders in Java.

Syech Siti Jenar believed that if one person could achieve the emanation stage, he would not have to care about the five pillars of Islam.³⁵³ In Javanese religion, this process is called *Manunggaling Kawula-Gusti* (the unity of God as creator and man as the creation).³⁵⁴ The main idea of this teaching is that the universe consists of a hierarchy of beings: animals, plants, human, and God, with God at the top of the hierarchy and while human beings at the nearest to level of God. If human beings are able to unify with God

³⁵¹ Mulkhan, A.M., 2000 and Sudirman, 2003

³⁵² Zulkifli, 2000, Pp. 9-10

³⁵³ Johns, A.H *Gift Addressed to the Spirit of the Prophet* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1995) Pp. 75-76

³⁵⁴ Chodjim, 2002, Geertz,C., 1960, Tebba, 2003

and posses the character of God, then nothing has the right to control them but God himself.³⁵⁵

With these postulations, Syech Siti Jenar was accused of influencing people away from the teaching of other Islamic ulama. Politically, Syech Siti Jenar was dangerous because the King of Java had started to convert to Islam that was being taught by Sunan Kalijaga. The option that Syech Siti Jenar gave in teaching Islam would lead to crucial problems because his followers of Islam might doubt the essence of Sunan Kalijaga's teaching. Furthermore, it would ruin the stability of the court in some parts of Java. It would cause dissension within Islam in Java. Problems of religious authority would arise if Syech Siti Jenar was able to convince the people of his teachings. In order to avoid future problems and the possibility of war between believers, Syech Siti Jenar decided to end his life; other sources believe that he was imprisoned and executed by the court.³⁵⁶ Through the story of the dispute between Syech Siti Jenar and Wali Sanga, Parang Jati shows how power has demonized someone's belief in God. This typical clash between traditional beliefs and monotheistic religion applies in modern world.

Tradition and the Dilemma of the Modern World

In the novel, Yuda and Parang Jati understand that the modern world has actually imposed the same conditions as the era of Wali Songo and Syech Siti Jenar or the story of Nyai Roro Kidul. Yuda describes this as "*Penundaan kebenaran. Manusia menginginkan kebenaran hari ini juga. Sayangnya, kebenaran, jika ia menampakkan diri hari ini, tak lain tak bukan adalah kecongkakan...Biarlah kebaikan yang menjadi pada hari ini.*

³⁵⁵ Tebba, 2003, p. 67

³⁵⁶ Mulkhan, 2000, Pp. 125-127

Bukan kebenaran” (a delay in finding the truth. Humans want the truth today. Unfortunately, righteousness does not appear nowadays. On the other hand, arrogance does exist...so let the kindness exist today – and not the righteousness”).³⁵⁷ Parang Jati seems to get the idea that the belief neither in Nyai Loro Kidul nor in *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* can be considered blasphemy; people should not question another’s loyalty based on the way they express their spiritualism, because people should be open to other traditions and beliefs. As he claims, “*Orang yang berpendapat bahwa Islam tidak bisa hidup berdampingan dengan tradisi lain adalah orang yang picik.*” (People who think that Islam cannot live in harmony with other religions are narrow-minded people”).³⁵⁸ Because Parang Jati believes that to be religious is to be open to other traditions and to respect the differences, he says,

”*Marilah kita sedikit kreatif dan terbuka,*” lanjut Jati. “*Terbuka dalam mempelajari tradisi – tradisi lain. Sebelum menghakiminya dengan kaca mata kita sendiri Supaya kita juga jangan dinilai dengan ukuran orang.*” (“Let us be open to other traditions, before we judge others so we will not be judged by other people’s standards of thinking”).³⁵⁹

He seems to know that any rejection of new ideas of spiritualism based on traditional beliefs will jeopardize the current power of one religion. He sees this as ironic, because, he says, even in the Hadits, the Prophet Muhammad advised, “*Dan nanti kamu akan melewati kaum-kaum yang mengabdikan diri di kuil-kuil, yaitu para pendeta. Maka biarkanlah mereka beserta pengabdian mereka itu*” (“and when you pass the people who

³⁵⁷ Utami, 2008, p.381

³⁵⁸ Utami, 2008, p.314

³⁵⁹ Utami, 2008, p.315

devote themselves to the temples – the priests – you should let them do their worships”).³⁶⁰ It is not the religion that Parang Jati or Yuda criticizes, rather it is the way people apply monotheistic rule in the religious practice – the idea of using, “*Tuhan itu Satu.*”³⁶¹

With this understanding, Parang Jati intends to make his own religion in which Javanese traditional values will be strongly emphasized. The reason for having his own religion is because he does not believe in the righteousness of the monotheists and he is sure that a new religion to be called “Neo- Kejawaan”³⁶² will incorporate all of the values in Javanese religion that will better respect nature and the surroundings. As he says,

“*SAYA TAHU! Saya akan membikin agama baru*” (“I KNOW! I am going to form a new religion.”).³⁶³

“*Agama lama yang dibaruiii, untuk melestarikan alam rayaaa!*” (“The old religion that is being re-shaped in order to conserve the universe”).³⁶⁴

Agama barunya adalah agama yang menyembah pohon. ..Bukan cuma pohon, tetapi juga gunung, tebing, goa, mataair, sungai, dana dan samudra. Aliran ini akan memperjuangkan kelestarian alam dan merevitalisasi budaya local yang menjelang punah. Budaya local perlu dihidupkan kembali, ditelanjangi dari zirah feodalistisnya, sehingga mereka kembali sederhana, memuja alam dan dengan demikian merawat alam (His new religion is a religion that worships trees...Not only trees, but also mountains, mountain banks, caves, springs, rivers, lakes,

³⁶⁰ Utami, 2008, p. 315

³⁶¹ Literally translated to ‘God is One’

³⁶² Utami, 2008, p. 383

³⁶³ Utami, 2008, p. 382

³⁶⁴ Utami, 2008, p. 383

oceans. This belief will fight for nature conservation and revitalization of local culture that is almost extinct. Local culture has to be resurrected, its feudal armor should be taken off – its simplicity should be returned so it can praise nature. By doing so, we would be able to take care the nature as well).³⁶⁵

But this is not Javanese religion as Geertz has described, this is a new religion. The difference lies in the way that this religion will incorporate not only *batin* and *rasa* but also logic. With this logic, the new religion will not be manipulated again by modernism, as Parang Jati claims:

*Tapi ini bukan kejawan lama, melainkan kejawaan baru. Kejawaan Anyar. Neo-Javanism. Perbedaan utamanya terletak pada dasya kritisnya. Spiritualitas Jawa lama tidak merumuskan tapi mengabaikan logika. Menekankan pada inspirasi tapi tidak ada analisis sama sekali. Spiritualitas baru ini milik orang-orang yang rasional namun sekaligus kritis pada rasionya. Milik orang-orang yang telah mengenal modernism tapi tidak tertelan dalam modernism. Milik orang-orang postmodernis (But this is not the old Javanism, but the new Javanese religion. New Javanese-Neo Javanism. The main difference is in the ability to be critical. The old Javanese spiritualism did not formulize logic and neglected logic. It emphasized the intuition but did not analyze at all. The new spiritualism belongs to people who understand rationalism but are also able to criticize their reasoning. It belongs to the people who know modernism without getting carried away by it. This belong to the postmodernists).*³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ Utami, 2008, p. 383

³⁶⁶ Utami, 2008, p. 384

Yuda agrees that the greatest religion is the one that praises nature, the traditional religion, the religion that was not constructed by modern thoughts, because modernism is the enemy of postmodernism.³⁶⁷ The fact that Yuda and Parang Jati emphasize the ‘logic’ in the idea of new religion shows Ayu Utami’s perspective on Javanese traditional religion and the current condition of Indonesia. It seems to me that she poses the necessity of promoting ‘tolerance’ among Indonesians. Through Parang Jati’s words on being ‘*terbuka*’ (open to others)³⁶⁸ and the need to emphasize the logic in the new religion, Ayu Utami seems to argue the importance of tolerance among Indonesians. She also seems to believe that without ‘logic’, religion can be used as a tool to impose power over others. This relates to the idea of ‘*Tuhan itu satu*’. Through these two male characters, Utami seems to criticize the way people interpret the meaning of ‘Tuhan itu Satu’, she claims that people tend to think that their ‘Tuhan’ is the righteous one. The new Javanese religion will accept gods and goddess, and maintain the balance of nature, while at the same time it provides the logic for the believers to see whether the teaching is right or wrong. Yuda’s hatred of modern life is growing. He keeps reflecting on the values of the traditional epic, *Wayang* as his philosophy of life.

Journey’s End

The following part shows how Utami delivers her message of the enemy of postmodernism through Yuda and Parang Jati’s journey. The need to embrace but be critical of traditional values is necessary because some legends are meant to pass through the generations. If the new world people are not careful about which values should be

³⁶⁷ Utami, 2008, p. 59

³⁶⁸ See quotation 349

implemented, they will be either fatalistic to one single power or become ignorant. This perspective is seen in the way Yuda and Parang Jati re-analyze the legends of Sangkuriang and the story of Yudistira Dadu in the Mahabarata Epic. The most significant point that Utami seems to underline here is not only the fact that she exposes the enemy of postmodernism, but she also expresses that there is a relationship between human desires and natural disasters. The relationship between nature and human desires is one of the important religious aspects that are emphasized in the traditional religion – this is why religious followers have to provide offerings to Gods and Goddesses in nature.

During the journey, Parang Jati tells Yuda the legend of Sangkuriang, one of the most popular folk tales in West Java. It is the story of a fine-looking young man who accidentally falls in love with his own mother, Dayang Sumbi. As retold by Aman, Dayang Sumbi was a daughter of a king that was married to a cursed god, a dog named Tumang.³⁶⁹ Her only son, Sangkuriang, liked to go hunting with Tumang. One day he killed a she-pig and asked Tumang to fetch it. Knowing that the she-pig was a cursed god like himself, Tumang refused. This made Sangkuriang angry and he killed Tumang. He brought Tumang's flesh home and gave it to Dayang Sumbi for their dinner. When she learned that it was Tumang's, she was angry and struck Sangkuriang on his head before she asked him to leave.

Years later, Sangkuriang, who had grown to be a handsome man, returned to the village. He saw and fell in love with a girl. It was actually Dayang Sumbi who had

³⁶⁹ Aman ., *SDB Folk tales from Indonesia* (Jakarta: Djambatab, 1991), p.12

remained young and beautiful as a gift of god. She agreed to marry Sangkuriang until she knew from the scar on his head that he was her own son. Unable to tell him the truth, she asked Sangkuriang to dam the Citarum River and build a big vessel in one night. Sangkuriang, using magic power, managed to build the dam and the vessel in one night. Since she no longer had any excuse to stop Sangkuriang from marrying her, she stretched a red woven scarf and used her own magic power to make red light spread over the landscape and give a sense of sunrise. Feeling that he had failed to build the dam and the vessel before the sunrise, Sangkuriang shouted in despair, kicked the vessel upside down and made the river overflow. Sangkuriang did not have a chance to save himself. When the lake dried up, the overturned vessel became the mountain of Tangkuban Prahur which is believed to have Sangkuriang's body underneath.³⁷⁰

From the legend, Parang Jati reminds Yuda that human beings have to be able to manage their desires because once humans fail to control their own passions; they will destroy the harmonies of nature. As he claims, "*Jenis permintaannya menimbulkan bencana...untuk memenuhi permintaan kekasih, menimbulkan bencana alam*" (the demands [of women] causes chaos...to fulfil the demands of the lover is to cause a natural disaster).³⁷¹ This assumes that Sangkuriang's and Dayang Sumbi's desires caused the loss of human souls.

The second story Parang Jati tells Yuda is *Yudistira Dadu*, part of the *Mahabharata Epic*. Yudistira is the eldest of the five noble sons of Pandawa. He is pictured as the wisest and quietest among his cousins. In this part of the story, Yudistira is challenged by

³⁷⁰ Aman, 1991, Pp.11-15

³⁷¹ Utami, 2008, p. 56

his Kurawa rival, Duryudana, to gamble. This idea came after Drestarata, the king of Hastina and father of Duryudana, agreed to divide the kingdom between the two cousins. Duryudana would have the Hastina Kingdom and Yudistira the other, called Kandawaprasta (or Indraprasta). Given the fact that Yudistira's portion was more prosperous than Duryudana's, on the advice of Sangkuni, a treacherous councilman, Duryudana invited his cousin to gamble for the stake of the whole kingdom.³⁷²

Yudistira took the challenge but Duryudana won the game and took the whole kingdom including Drupadi, who was Yudistira's wife.³⁷³ Unable to overcome the cunning plot and the helplessness of Yudistira as her husband, she cried and begged for God's mercy when Duryadana tried to undress her in front of hundreds of people, including the elders of the kingdom. God granted her wish and she was saved from the humiliation, but she had to follow her husband in his 13 years of exile in the forest.³⁷⁴ Yuda sees Yudistira's deed as a failure of man in the world. He had always been depicted to be one of the best and wisest men on earth. But through this story, Yuda also sees that some people tend to use this story as away to remind women that

“perempuan mulia adalah perempuan yang menerima apapun perbuatan suaminya, bahkan ketika dirinya menjadi bida di meja taruhan. Orang demikian tidak bias menerima bahwa satria dan para nabi bias salah. Ini adalah cara

³⁷² See the story of Pandawa Lima in Khalid M.Hussain *Hikayat Pandawa Lima. Siri Warisan Sastera Klasik*. (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kementerian Pendidikan. 1992) Pp.12-20 and in Yessy Augustin, *Pandawa bermain judi* . (Jakarta : Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Proyek Penerbitan Buku Bacaan dan Sastra Indonesia dan Daerah, 1979) and in Hidayat Soesanto. *Pandawa diperdaya* (Bandung : Geger Sunten, 1993) and Apriastuti Rahayu. *Drupadi Permaisuri Pandawa yang Teguh Hati*. (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 2006)

³⁷³ See Augustin, 1979 and Rahayu, 2006

³⁷⁴ See Augustin, 1979, Hussain, 1992, Rahayu, 2006, and Soesanto, 1993

mengambil kesimpulan yang sesat. Pokok kisah ini bagiku bukan ajaran bagaimana amenjadi istri yang baik. Pokok kisah ini adalah bahwa seorang satria harus berani menanggung kegilaannya sendiri.” (A noble woman is a woman who would accept anything that her husband would do, even though he makes her a gambling pawn. This kind of person cannot accept the fact that a knight and a prophet can make a mistake. This is a wrong way to understand a concept. The main point of this story is that a knight has to dare to take responsibility for his own insanity.”³⁷⁵

Yuda argues that a knight or even a prophet can make a mistake, and sometimes people are too blind to see this reality. With this point, Utami seems to confirm what Sabarini quotes – Utami criticises the fundamentalist ideology in perceiving religion and believing solely in what they think is correct.

These values are the perceptions that Parang Jati introduced to Yuda. The significance of using the mysticism of Java is to offer the readers a different concept of belief in Indonesia. Parang Jati is represented as the typical Javanese young man who has a deep knowledge of the Javanese culture, while Yuda is the image of the typical modern man who commonly has a limited understanding of his own culture. He is used to seeing the world pragmatically: climbing mountains, making love to his girlfriend, and wandering around with his friends. His meeting with Parang Jati exposes his mind to the existence of spirits and spiritualism. However, the tragedy starts when the adventure of climbing Watugunung ends.

New Erotic Relationships

³⁷⁵ Utami, 2008, p.108

After the journey is over, Yuda realizes that he has learned the values that he used to neglect. He then returns to Bandung and meets with his girlfriend Marja. However, he reunites with Parang Jati and he realizes that he loves Parang Jati as much as he loves Marja.

*Ia begitu dingin. Ia bahkan tak menyebut namaku atau mengatakan sampai ketemu lagi. Dengan aneh aku merasa takut bahwa kami tak akan bertemu lagi. Bahkan ia meninggalkan aku. Aku merasa seperti telah melukai kekasih begitu dalam sehingga ia tak bias memaafkan aku... (He [Parang Jati] is so cold. He did not even call my name or say that we would meet again. Awkwardly, I am afraid that we would not meet again. It seems that he would leave me. I feel that I have hurt my lover deeply and he cannot forgive me).*³⁷⁶

He continues,

*...Dan ia tinggal bersama kami lima hari lagi. Pada malam terakhir, kutemukan kami tidur membentuk segitiga. Tiba-tiba aku teringat ramalan dukun tarot itu. Aka nada cinta segitiga (...And he stayed with us for five more days. On the last night, I found us sleeping like a triangle shape. All of a sudden, I remembered the prediction of the shaman tarot: there will be a love triangle).*³⁷⁷

Although Yuda does not really understand his feelings toward Parang Jati, he appreciates the lessons that Parang Jati gave him during his journey. In the end of the story, Parang Jati dies and Yuda agrees to cremate his body and scatter his ashes in the ocean because he believes that, “*air, ya air, adalah asal seluruh makhluk hidup di muka bumi*” (water,

³⁷⁶ Utami, 2008, p.211

³⁷⁷ Utami, 2008, p.212

yes water, is the origin of all the human beings on earth).³⁷⁸ This ending emphasises how Yuda has been transformed from an irreligious person to a spiritual one. It also confirms what Sabarini writes about her religious perspective, that Ayu became an atheist at the age of 20 and started to understand religion again in her 30s. Utami still refuses to believe in one form of religion. Rather, she is more interested in spiritualism. She shows her depth of knowledge on her understanding of the history of religion and the way it has two different ways of expanding its belief, as Parang Jati says, “*ada dua jenis alat: alat yang memaksa dan alat yang dialogis*” (there are two different tools, the one that uses force and the one that uses dialogue)³⁷⁹ – and Yuda as well as Utami might have come to the point of negotiating his co-existence with nature as part of an understanding of spirituality.

³⁷⁸ Utami, 2008, p. 530

³⁷⁹ Utami, 2008, p.89

Chapter Six: Conclusion - Narrating the dispute between traditional and orthodox religions, power, and sexuality in the lives of Ayu Utami's characters

Still in her early forties, Ayu Utami has won both international and national literature awards. Her first novel, *Saman* won the Prince Claus Award in 2000 and The Best Fiction Award by Dewan Kesenian Jakarta 1998. Her third novel, *Bilangan Fu* has won the national Khatulistiwa Literary Award 2008. Through her perspective, she voices criticism of Indonesian society. This view is primarily related to power, sexuality, and religion.

To recapitulate the discussion in this thesis: the three points offered in Utami's novels *Saman*, *Larung* and *Bilangan Fu* are the contention between traditional and orthodox religions, the clash of power that occurs between state and individual, and the freedom of expressing women's sexuality. In short, all of these points are interrelated and have influenced the lives of human beings in Indonesia. The dispute between the traditional and orthodox belief systems is seen clearly in the character of Yuda in *Bilangan Fu*. Through his life journey, he learns that monotheism, in Indonesia's case, has marginalized the real value of an individual's belief in divinity. In Javanese and Balinese religions, the traditional belief system was rooted in the lives of the people long before the orthodox religions were officialised in Indonesia. In addition, traditional religion is also important in the lives of Yuda, Parang Jati, Saman, Ibu, Larung, and Simbah. Unlike Yuda and Parang Jati, who claim to be anti-monotheism, Ibu, Saman, Larung, and Simbah still try to find the balance between traditional and orthodox religions. Although it is always said that Javanese Islam is a syncretism of Hinduism,

Buddhism, and animism, the concept of God is One has led to a number of discrepancies among religious followers.

However, the most interesting aspect of Utami's novels in terms of the religious elements is that she has emphasized the young male characters in describing the supernatural adventures. She uses Saman, Yuda, and Parang Jati to explore the mythological journey. They share similarities in being young educated men. Furthermore, all of them, especially Saman and Yuda, have come to the edge in which their lives and perspective toward religion become twisted – Saman leaves the priesthood and Yuda becomes a more superstitious person. Undeniably, Saman's decision is caused by his disappointment in seeking help from the church and his anguish at how the government has exploited the people in Sumatra. Nevertheless, in his journey from childhood to adulthood, it is assumed that he is always surrounded by the existence of other spirits – from his childhood jealousy toward his mother's unseen lover, the *gendruwo*, and his unseen siblings, to the moment when he tries to reconnect his life to the spirits in his old house, it is clear that he has undergone a spiritual journey, not as a priest but as an individual with the ability to sense the existence of the unseen beings. In contrast, Yuda, a modern man with a free spirit and no faith in any religious practice, experiences a life change after he takes a journey with Parang Jati. Through Javanese local legends and myths, Yuda reviews the interpretations of the values offered by these stories. Having learned the values of traditional legends, myths and belief systems, Yuda and Parang Jati believe that monotheism has twisted the essence of these legends and myths for the benefit of a certain group of people.

This being said, the dispute between the traditional and orthodox religions is influenced by the political context. The political interference with people's freedom in understanding religion has existed since the beginning of Islamization in Java. The story of Syech Siti Jenar's *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti* and the story of Nyai Loro Kidul are depictions of this problem. In other words, Yuda's rejection of monotheism and Saman's refusal to stay in his priesthood are mainly because religions have been politicized by a dominant group in society.

In relation to politics and power, Utami also develops most of the male characters' personalities through a series of political incidents. Both Saman and Larung illustrate this fact. Saman's personality is influenced by the failure of government policy toward the people in Lubuk Rantau, including the unjust treatment of Upi. Similarly, Larung has experienced traumatic political incidents in his life, from the death of his father to his own execution that ends his life; he has encountered a series of political injustices done by the government. The minor male characters, the three young activists, also illustrate this situation. All of them decide to shift their ideologies and perspectives after acknowledging unfair conditions in the lives of the poor.

By contrast, almost none of the younger female characters experience similar political conditions. In terms of spirituality, Saman's Ibu and Larung's Simbah are the only female characters that maintain their religious perspective. They believe in the traditional religions and they maintain their faith until the end of their lives despite the fact that it caused problems in the lives of their families – Ibu's affair with the spirit has made Saman lose his siblings and Simbah's Balinese witchcraft has brought a curse to

her family. By contrast, almost none of the young female characters have experienced such conditions. Shakuntala believes in the existence of other spirits. Nevertheless, just like Yasmin, and Cok, she criticizes the intolerance of monotheistic society for denying her freedom of expressing her true identity.

Related to sexuality, these female characters seem to support Barbara Hatley's suggestion that Ayu Utami's *Saman* argues that old values in society somehow need to be revisualised and changed, and taboos are imposed by the dominant group in a society.³⁸⁰ The old norms such as being a "good woman has to be a religious woman and a good housewife" have been reanalyzed by these female characters. All of them, without exception, become portraits of how old values will not be applicable in the lives of modern women; imposing these values will only create hypocritical and dual-personality types of women. To reaffirm, it appears to me that Utami raises unsolved questions about the necessity of applying the monotheistic system because throughout the political history of Indonesia, from before independence to the 20th century, religions have been interpreted by certain dominant groups to the disadvantage of individual freedom, and most of all, of women. Religions and power are not supposed to be linked -- because when they are, a new authority is claimed, including the moral judgement that limits women's freedom in a patriarchal society.

Although these three novels contain vivid portrayals of sexuality and anti-monotheism, Utami seems to urge readers to rethink the social norms and beliefs that have been adopted throughout Indonesian political history, especially during the New

³⁸⁰ Hatley in Foulcher, K., 2002, p. 178

Order. I argue that these novels have questioned the legitimacy of government in making the six religions official. In a very pluralistic nation like Indonesia, the official religions seem to limit many groups of citizens. Indonesia is a land in which local beliefs are part of the culture of the people. To limit the existence of traditional beliefs means to curb the local culture of Indonesia. Utami seems to underline the claim that one's religion should not be a matter of political issues, meaning government should not interfere with the freedom to embrace certain belief systems.

The effect of implementing an official religion also disadvantages women. Since Indonesia is a patriarchal society, the level of taboo is based on the male's perspective, meaning that what is considered taboo for women might not be prohibited for men. Utami challenges the idea that women will always be the ones accused as sinners, and men will always have the power to decide the level of sin in women.

In terms of power, Utami has used some Indonesian political incidents to provide evidence that power is not only misused at the personal level, for example the family or love relationship, but also at the national level. During the New Order, the government of Indonesia exercised its power in an exploitative way. The powerless citizens were the victims of this condition. Development has failed and people's lives have been destroyed by the misuse of power. The characters of *Saman* and *Larung* are among the victims of the situation, while Yuda and Parang Jati are victims of the dispute between traditional belief and official religion. In her three novels, Utami appears to highlight two sets of victims -- poor people and women. She describes the despair and tragedy of the modern age without offering solution, leaving the readers wondering what compromises and

negotiations are required to resolve these issues. It is indisputable that her works expose sensuality and emphasize male characters in the major roles; nonetheless, I conclude that Utami's three novels have to be considered as evidence of how a female author voices her feminine perspective on recent social issues in Indonesia.

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