

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Rara Mendut, a historical novel, is one of the novels in the trilogy written by Y.B. Mangunwijaya. The story was initially published in Kompas Daily Newspaper in 1982. This novel follows the story of a beautiful woman, Rara Mendut, who lived during Sultan Agung's reign in seventeenth-century Java (Mangunwijaya, 2019). Sultan Agung was Mataram's king, a kingdom in Central Java. As a woman who grows up in a fishing village on the North coast of Java, Rara Mendut represents a woman with a spirit of freedom. She never hesitates and is never afraid to articulate herself. Rara Mendut is a female character who is strong and brave enough to fight for her freedom and independence. Rara Mendut's life turns into a tragedy when she refuses to marry Tumenggung Wiraguna.

As a novel that centers on women's lives, the story of *Rara Mendut* features many female characters. There are Ni Semangka, Rara Mendut's chaperone; Genduk Duku, Rara Mendut's maid-in-waiting; Nyai Ajeng, Wiraguna's wife; Putri Arumardi, Wiraguna's other wife; Nyai Singabarong, Pranacitra's mother and Ni Kuweni, Wiraguna's trusted chaperon. These women and their distinguishing characteristics make the novel enjoyable to study. The objects of study are the main character's roles and other supporting female characters represented in the novel. The objectives are to find out how women are represented. Represented women in seventeenth centuries based on *Rara Mendut* novel give both negative and positive aspects about Javanese

women stereotypes. The negative aspect is women as a second class in the Javanese society. The positive aspect is women or a wife treated like a princess by a man or husband.

There are several other studies about *Rara Mendut* novel, for instance, *Konstruksi Perempuan Dalam Novel (Analisis Naratif Pada Novel Rara Mendut Karya YB. Mangunwijaya)* (Dita, 2018) and *Perempuan Jawa Dalam Novel Rara Mendut Karya Y.B. Mangunwijaya*. (Septiana, 2019). Both Dita and Septiana write about feminism in the *Rara Mendut* Novel. Dita (2018) concludes that the novelist points out how strong the patriarchal ideology in the story, *Rara Mendut*. The female characters are represented as a sex object perpetuated through marriage, whose duties will include reproducing heirs and satisfying the sexual needs of her husband. Meanwhile, Septiana (2019) concludes that Mangunwijaya's novel shares views of liberal feminism. Septiana concludes that the structure of the text is thematically centered on *Rara Mendut* in her relationship with other characters.

The writer's study is different from other studies because this study focuses on women's roles in seventeenth-century Java. Lantara (2015) says that women have external and internal roles. Roles related to women's membership in society are called external roles, while being a mother in a family and a wife in the husband-wife household are called internal roles. In general, men and women have different positions in public. Women have idealized roles and statuses in society. Consequently, Hermawati (2007) says, women should be innocent, graceful, obedient, and submissive to men. In *Rara Mendut*, all women characters and the storyline emphasize women's roles.

1.2 Field of the Study

The field of study is literature focusing on Gender Studies.

1.3 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is women's roles in the seventeenth-century Javanese society as represented by the main character and other female supporting characters in the novel *Rara Mendut* by Y.B Mangunwijaya which is influenced by Dawn Elizabeth England's (2011) western theory of feminine characteristics.

1.4 Problem Formulation

The questions that the writer wants to answer in this study are:

1. What are the roles of the seventeenth-century women in Mangunwijaya's *Rara Mendut* novel?
2. How does Javanese society shape the roles of women?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

Based on the research questions, the objectives of the study are:

1. To find out women's roles in the seventeenth century represented in Mangunwijaya's *Rara Mendut* novel.
2. To know how the Javanese society shapes the roles of women.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The writer expects the readers to know the roles of every woman character in seventeenth-century Java represented in the novel *Rara Mendut*. By learning the women's roles, the writer hopes that the readers will be able to understand how the Javanese society influences women's roles.

1.7 Definition of Term

1. Women's roles

For Torlak (2016, p.164), women and men have their roles. Women and men have equal intelligence to attempt and work, but society's culture has suppressed women for staying at home and keeping the house. Having the same rights as men does not mean that women must relinquish their responsibilities as housewives or mothers. Women in her life have heavier responsibilities than men. Women's double burden means that women today are responsible for domestic and public affairs.

2. Women in Javanese Society

In Javanese society, women tend to be viewed as ideal figures. Budiati (2000) stated that Javanese has many concepts about "true women." The idea of a true woman is always associated with women's body shape and nature. (Budiati, 2000, p. 54) points out that Javanese society generally views women as creatures full of sympathy, loyalty, humility, forgiveness, and fidelity—values of Javanese culture used as guidelines for the Javanese community in carrying out activities of daily life. The values are preserved from generation to generation, forming an order that is difficult or even irreversible. In carrying out duties as a woman who works outside the home, the role of a mother should still be carried out. In *Serat Piwulang Estri* (1756), women should try to maintain their personality by following binding norms in the cultural system.

3. Patriarchal society

According to Kalas & Karpati (1987, p.24), patriarchal society refers to the systemic societal structures that institutionalize male physical, social, and economic power over women. In such a society, men's superior status, leading men to have power and a

dominant position over women, is supported by religious, traditional, and moral beliefs. The concept of patriarchy has been drawn into gender and development theorising; in order to challenge not only unequal gender relations but also unequal capitalist relations, sometimes seen as underpinning patriarchy. Men and women do not have genuine psychological differences; the differences are only due to the influence of culture and people's beliefs.

