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Research Article

A Sociolinguistic Analysis: Raja Ali Haji's Portrayal of Women's Roles in Malay Society in *Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk*

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KEYWORDS

Syair Abdul Muluk;
 Language;
 Gender.

A B S T R A C T

This research focuses on the analysis Raja Ali Haji's portrayal of women's role in Malay Society in *Syair Abdul Muluk*. This research employs a sociolinguistic approach. In doing this research, the researcher adopted descriptive analysis method in the form of 1818 rhymes, 9 chapters and 189 pages. In *Syair Abdul Muluk*, women are portrayed as loving creatures but also as someone who can subdue the authorities. The researcher found Raja Ali Hasan has three main views on women role in society these are; as symbol of beauty, symbol of courage dan symbol of resistance. By delving into these themes can offer readers a deeper understanding of societal dynamics and cultural perceptions surrounding gender.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Malays are one of the largest ethnic groups inhabiting parts of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia. The Malay ethnic group in Indonesia has diverged into several parts in Sumatra and Kalimantan (also known as Borneo). Hakim (2017) adds that Malay encompasses a vast archipelago bordered by languages in Madagascar, in the north by native languages o Taiwan, in the South by languages in Indonesia, and in the East by the eastern most islands. The rapid growth of the Malayan ethnic group in Nusantara has also influenced the development of culture and literature in Indonesia. Yanto (2019) explains that due to the use of agile language in translating something into a script, the Malay people have become very popular in Indonesian literature. For instance, the indigenous form of traditional poetry in both Malaysia and Indonesia originally shared common characteristics, known as pantun, syair, and gurindam

(Yanto, 2019). One of the famous writers in the golden age of Malay literature was Raja Ali Haji. Raja Ali Haji was born in 1808 in Lingga, Penyengat Island, Riau. Malay culture is very close to the work it produces. One of them is *Syair Abdul Muluk*.

Fang in Hadiwijaya et. al (2019) stated that Syair Abdul Muluk by Raja Ali Haji is considered a significant artifact of traditional culture. It is originally composed in the Johor Malay language. It gaining prominence upon its initial publication in Tidjchrift Van Nederlandsch Indie at 1847. In short, Syair Abdul Muluk tells the story of Negeri Barbari Sultan's son named Abdul Muluk. He has two wives namely Siti Rahmah and Siti Rafiah. The two wives and Abdul Muluk lived happily until the Sultan of Hindustan attacked Negeri Barbari. During the war, Abdul Muluk and Siti Rahmah were arrested and jailed. Meanwhile, his second wife, Siti Rafiah, managed to escape to the forest and take refuge in the house of a hermit. After giving birth to a son named Abdul Ghani, Siti Rafiah returned to the Barbarian Lands and patiently

disguise as a man named Duri, to save Abdul Muluk and Siti Rahma. The poem ends with Siti Rafiah's victory over the Sultan of Hindustan and being able to reunite with her family.

The researcher finds *Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk* intriguing due to its exploration of Eastern moral values and its connection to language and gender dynamics in gender and language. Across cultures, women are often perceived as subordinate, yet in Malay culture, there exists an ideal of women possessing both beauty and courage in balance. Siti Rafiah, one of Abdul Muluk's wives, plays a pivotal role by defying traditional gender norms. Faced with adversity when her husband and co-wife are imprisoned, Siti Rafiah takes bold action by disguising herself as a man named Duri to navigate the patriarchal structures of society and rescue her family. These narrative challenges conventional notions of gender roles and highlights the fluidity of identity and language use in different social contexts. The portrayal of Siti Rafiah's agency and resourcefulness underscores the importance of recognizing and examining the complexities of gendered language practices within cultural texts such as *Syair Abdul Muluk*.

The exploration of sociolinguistics in *Syair Sultan Abdul Mulu* holds significant importance due to its portrayal of gender roles and language dynamics within Malay society. The poem offers a rich tapestry of cultural insights, particularly regarding the perception and treatment of women. The depiction of women possessing both beauty and courage underscores the complexity of gender representations and societal expectations. Furthermore, the language used to describe women in the poem reflects deeper sociolinguistic patterns, highlighting the interplay between language and cultural norms. By examining these linguistic nuances, readers can gain valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of gender and language within Malay society as depicted in "*Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk*."

Epistemologically, sociolinguistics comes from a combination of sociology and linguistics knowledge. Saleh (2019) explains that sociolinguistics is a study that examines the relationship between language and society. Indirectly, the use of language is very close to the people who influence it. Saleh (2019) adds that language is utilized as a form of social interaction that transpires in concrete situations. It means that the speaker's existence is determined by their word selection. It occurs because after humans decide to interact with the social world, they are no longer seen as individuals but as part of society. So, it can be concluded that language occurs as a form of social interaction in society.

In order to emphasize how meaning encounters contradictions and various interpretations, it important to

give further understanding about how women are represented in language. Chaer and Leonie in Mamentu (2022) said that language is affected by its user, its purpose, language paths and tools, and the formality of the situation. As the medium of social interaction, a harmony of understanding must take precedence. So, it can be accepted by the recipient well. That harmony is obtained by considering whom we are talking to, the place, the problem, or the surrounding situation that affects the conversation. Not only that, but the speaker must also pay attention to the recipient's situational, grammatical, and cultural aspects. It is because situationally acceptable language is not always correct and not necessarily culturally acceptable. It can be said that a language will not work if there is no understanding between speakers and listeners as a form of interaction.

Jumaida and Rokhman (2020) also added that due to differences in social, cultural, and situational backgrounds between one speaker and another, multiple situations when the speech occurs, especially in bilingual and multilingual communities. Given these distinctions, it is unsurprising that language usage may fluctuate based on the comprehension shared between speakers and recipients, which is influenced by social interactions.. Markamah in Mamentu (2022) explains that language can reflect and transmit social and gender differences. It means, a language is the product of the community's thought and shaped by normative beliefs to views on an object comparatively gender. Vocabulary will lose meaning if the social things that build it are not there. So, it decided that the understanding of gender is also arranged through dialect. Susmanto in Saleh (2019) explains that gender is defined as a trait inherent in men and women that is socially and culturally constructed. In other words, gender is a concept of male and female whose existence varies in time, place, culture, nation, and civilization. It is explained by Holmes & Wilson (2022:88) as follows:

Men and women . . . are members of cultures in which a large amount of discourse about gender is constantly circulating. They do not only learn, and then mechanically reproduce, ways of speaking 'appropriate' to their own sex; they learn a much broader set of gendered meanings that attach in rather complex ways to different ways of speaking, and they produce their own behavior in the light of these meanings. . . .

This means that when talking about gender, then we have to talk about the concept of people's thinking about these two things. Many gender-based language variations arise as a result of social phenomena that are closely related to social attitudes. In collective thought, men and women play different roles according to society's identification.

Gender-based linguistic diversity arises because language as a social phenomenon is closely related to social attitudes. Socially, men and women play certain roles because society defines their social roles differently. Language allows us to participate in the views, values, normative beliefs, and worldviews of a particular community.

Adnyani in Agata and Saifullaha (2022) states that the results of character construction and labeling show that women's language is different from men's language. This is influenced by gender roles and relations that occur in society. Thus, culture builds a societal paradigm that men must be masculine and women must be feminine. It continues to happen in our daily lives which are narrated verbally through symbols, language, and words matters related to gender differences also affect the use of language. For example, the use of the words "beautiful", "modest" and "cute" which are synonymous with women, and the terms "manly", "brave" or "aggressive" which are synonymous with men. Although literally, the characteristics mentioned above are not always possessed by men or women, the collective thinking about gender that has been taught since ancient times has shaped the differences between the two genders. In this regard, this paper will explain and study poetry about women's lives in Malay society through the work of Raja Ali Hasan entitled "*Syair Abdul Muluk*". This poem talks about the strength of a woman who not only has love but also has a steel heart as depicted in the figures of Sitti Rahmah and Sitti Rafiah. This poem will be studied from a gender perspective through a deconstruction by Derrida approach.

METHOD

The researcher adopted descriptive analysis method because the data are in the form of 1818 rhymes, 9 chapters and 189 pages. Then, the result of analyzed data will be explained by giving description of each data. The other data sources taken from books and journal related to the discussion about feature of gender language. In this research, the writers collect the data in some steps. The first steps are; the researcher read the work of Raja Ali Hasan entitled *Syair Abdul Muluk* which is published in 1989 by Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Indonesia. The second step is separated the rhymes and pages based on sociolinguistic theory applied in that poem. After the data are completed, the next step is to analyze and drawn conclusion based the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This analysis aims to understand that women are not frail as portrayed and condemned by the patriarchal society in general. In terms of interaction, there is a lot of

vocabulary in a conversation that differentiates the positions between women and men. It seems that just as power can be taken away, the gap in meaning that distinguishes gender can also be changed. In *Syair Abdul Muluk*, women are portrayed as loving creatures but also as someone who can subdue the authorities that would be discussed as bellosed.

Raja Ali Haji's View on Women Role in Malay Society As Seen in "Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk"

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Woman As a Symbol of Beauty

Talking about female figures, Malay people often associate the concept of an ideal woman with the building of Raja Hamidah. Situmorang et, al (2019) say that Raja Hamidah is a female figure who upholds customs, for example, in terms of her courtesy towards older people or elders.

Cantik manis tiada berlawan

Memberi hati pilu dan rawan

Lemah lembut barang kelakuan

Segala yang memandang belas kasihan (Chapter 3, Line 114-117)

The Malay community describes the female figure as a flawless creature. Here, Sitti Rahma is described through poetry as "*cantik tiada berlawan*", which means that the figure of Sitti Rafiah is a woman who has a face as beautiful as an angel. Apart from having a beautiful face, she also has the heart of an angel. Both Sitti Rahma and Sitti Rafiah are still narrated with a diction that is closely related to "feminine" in the view of a patriarchal society. The diction "*berlawanan*" and "*bartara*" are used side by side with the diction "*cantik*" to emphasize that the Malay community still views physical beauty as one of the main things possessed by women. "*Cantik*" here, is a diction that is personified in such a way that beauty makes men intoxicated.

Rafiah elok tiada bertara

Paras seperti bidadari indera

Menghilangkan akal budi bicara

Umumnya belum remaja putera (chapter 4, line 209-212)

For the Malay people, the use of the diction "*elok*" is not only interpreted in appearance but also in manners. This stanza is interpreted as a woman, Sitti Rafiah has achieved the Malay ideal of being polite and kind. Her beauty is **supposedly** perfect after pinning the diction "*elok*" behind her name. This diction "*elok*" is placed before explaining "*paras seperti bidadari indera*", indicating that noble character is more important than visual beauty. If both are accomplished, then that is called the beautiful picture contained in this poem. Interestingly, Raja Ali Hasan not only places the words "*cantik*" and "*elok*" on female characters, but also on male characters, as follows;

Abdul Muluk putera baginda

Besarliah sudah bangsawan muda

Cantik majelis usulnya syahda

Tiga betas tahun umurnya ada (chapter 3, line 5-8)

This poem introduces the figure of Abdul Muluk and his first wife, Sitti Rahmah. The two met at the young age of thirteen and ten years. Besides having a good background, Raja Ali Haji describes the physical beauty of these two characters through the diction "*cantik*". Raja Ali Haji tries to break the myth that "*cantik*" dan "*elok*" are belongs only to women. "*Cantik*" has turned into a gender neutral that anyone can use to describe beauty. It can be concluded that Raja Ali Haji is still bound by diction which tends to represent myths about the ideal physique of a woman. However, by applying the diction "*cantik*" on both genders in his characters, Raja Ali Hasan also breaks this myth and emphasizes that "*cantik*" is a neutral diction.

Women As a Symbol of Courage

It is stated before by Santoso in Mudana and Ardini , that women can fight for their ideology by choosing vocabulary and selecting grammar. Which means that even though a diction is closely related to masculine or feminine diction, but if it used correctly, it can change a stereotype of a gender. It is seen as followed;

Rafiah pun sangat rasa ngeri

*Menghunun pedangnya **bangkit berdiri***

Binatang menerkam datang berlari

Ditahankan pedangnya oleh puteri (Chapter 9, line 201-204)

The quotation above, describe Sitti Rafiah's determination during the runaway. At chapter 9, The King of Hindustan concurred the Barbarian Lands. Abdul Muluk and his first wife taken as prisoner. Sitti Rafiah, who was three months pregnant, fled to the forest. Everyone thought that Sitti Rafiah had died by suicide, but she was hiding to plot

revenge. One day, Rafiah happened to be in the middle of forest and a wild animal tried to attack her. Raja Ali Haji chose "*Rafiah pun sangat ngeri*" to describe how difficult she is to survive in the middle of the forest without supplies. The rhyme "*menghunun pedangnya bangkit berdiri*" is used for emphasize Sitti Rafiah's courageous side. Even though she was in trouble, in fact, Sitti Rafiah was still able to draw a sword to kill the wild animals that came at her. The diction "*bangkit berdiri*" is used to describe "*berani*" that usually resemble with men, in fact, can also be attributed to women. This diction also does not eliminate the main essence of "*bangkit berdiri*" (that is, *not being afraid*) even though it is used to describe women. "*ditahankan pedangnya oleh puteri*" is an affirmation of the courageous nature of Sitti Rafiah who has succeeded in defeating wild animals because of her skill with the sword.

Oleh Rafiah dihampirinya

Serta dilihat diamat-amatinya

Yang seorawng itu hebat lakunya

Seperti hulubalang rupa pakaiannya

Setelah sudah dilihat nyata

Menghunun pedang tatah permata

Ditendasnya Ieber hulubalang pokta

Tolannya keenam dibunuhnya serta (chapter 9, line 385-388)

In chapter 9 entitled "Istri Yang Setia", it is told that Sitti Rafiah has been in the forest for six months, and it is time to give birth. With great difficulty, she sought help and met a Sheikh who helped her with childbirth. After 40 days of living with the Sheikh's family, Sitti Rafiah decided to continue the journey and leave his son under the Sheikh's protection. On the way, she met six *hulubalang* who lost in the wood. Even though, the six *hulubalang* are unable to fight her due to starving, but Sitti Rafiah's courage and determination to save her family deserve an appreciation. It takes courage to kill people. Rafiah's courage has been described since the first line, which says "*Oleh Rafiah dihampirinya*". It is narrated that Rafiah without hesitation approaching the enemy. This is in contrast to the "feminine" nature of her that is narrated in chapters 3 and 9. Due to circumstances, the gentle nature of Sitti Rafiah has changed so courageously, because of the skills that she has acquired while in the wood.

She went to the six *hulubalang*. Through the sentence "*Serta dilihat diamat-amatinya*", it is shown that every decision is carefully thought out by her. "*Ditendasnya Ieber hulubalang pokta*" breaks the myth that women are full of doubt and cowardice. "*Tolannya keenam*

dibunuhnya serta" explains that women are not weak creatures. It is proved that Sitti Rafiah was able to defeat six *hulubalang* with one slash. Through the figure of Sitti Rafiah, it is emphasized that it is actually circumstances that change a person, not gender. Raja Ali Haji deliberately did not use figurative words to describe the events that were taking place in order to emphasize the masculinity side of Sitti Rafiah.

Women as Symbol of Resistance

When it comes to resistance, Malay society considers equal rights for both genders Djono et. al (2022). Call it several Malay figures such as Cut Nyak Dien or Kemala Hayati who bravely fought against the invaders. Just like what Sitti Rafiah did. After successfully winning Jamalludin's heart by playing the lute, Sitti Rafiah uses her diplomatic skills to help Jamalludin seize power from Sultan Bahran.

Duri hulubalang yang petah cerdas
Kerikal diunjukkan pistol dipetik
Menghunuh pedangnya terlalu cantik
Dipancungnya Bahsan rebah bergolek
Adapun menteri yang kelima
Serta sekalian hulubalang panglima
Mendengarkan pistol muda utama
Obat bedil dibakamya bersama
Kaum Bahsan terkejut gempar
Amuk nin datang serta membakar
Melawanlah ia sekedar-kejar
Ke sana ke mari terkejar-kejar (Bagian 11, line 387-390)

Even though she had to disguise herself as a man, Sitti Rafiah was outstanding at using her diplomatic prowess to defeat Jamalludin's enemies. At first, she asked Jamalludin to hold back until the "*obat bedil*" or gunpowder that previously had been requested earlier, arrived. She made Bahsan complacent with power, then when he was off guard, Duri came to kill him. By using "*petah cerdas*", Raja Ali Haji broke the myth that women are unintelligent. With deception tactics, a woman can overthrow throne. It is said that besides being smart, Sitti Rafiah also became a soldier. "*Menghunuh pedangnya terlalu cantik*" is a sign that the masculine side represented by the word "*menghunuh pedang*" can collaborate well with the feminine side of women which is represented by the word "*terlalu cantik*". Through this combination, Raja Ali Haji wants to emphasize that the skill of a sword user in drawing a sword lies in the person, not gender.

Syihabuddin tiada lagi tertenggang
Akal bicaranya habislah hilang
Lemahlah segala sendi dan tulang
Melihat Duri laki-laki terbilang
Tiadalah dapat berlepaskan dirinya
Duri sangat gagah perkasanya
Syamsuddin kodong pula ditangkapnya
Samalah diikat kedua-duanya
Akan hulubalang Duri sultan
Serta keempat wazir pilihan
Tangkap-menangkap di tengah penghadapan
Wazir Hindustan tertangkap sekalian

After succeeding in becoming Sultan Duri because she had defeated Bahsan, Sitti Rafiah ordered an attack on Hindustan. Sitti Rafiah's expertise in planning war was excellent. After previously shocking Negeri Hindustan with her sudden attack, she came to do diplomacy with the Sultan of Hindustan. To intimidate the enemy as well as strengthen his power, Sultan Duri brought with him "*seribu laskar pilihan*" and "*seratus daripada hulubalang*"

To avoid further bloodshed, Sitti Rafiah offered that the Hindustan kingdom surrender. This statement made the Sultan of Hindustan furious. They feel they have never done anything wrong to the State of Bahran. The masculine side of Sitti Rafiah is depicted by the lyrics "*Duri sangat gagah perkasanya*". It shows that even though she is a woman, her strength is no less than men. The side of compassion but full of firmness is shown by the quote above. Sitti Rafiah replied to the refusal of the Sultan of Hindustan with arrest rather than bloodshed. She threw Hindustan officials and Sultan into prison and chose not to execute his enemies. It can be concluded that behind the figure of a woman, who has a soft and gentle character, a woman also a tough character, courage, and contributes to building the nation..

CONCLUSION

After conducting this research, the researcher found that exploration of sociolinguistics in Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk holds significant importance due to its portrayal of gender roles and language dynamics within Malay society. In sociolinguistics, language is viewed and approached as a tool for interaction and communication within society. Therefore, the relationship between language and society cannot be separated from issues concerning language and social activities or aspects. Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk offers a rich tapestry of cultural

insights, particularly regarding the perception and treatment of women. The depiction of women possessing both beauty and courage underscores the complexity of gender representations and societal expectations. Women are always attached by words "beautiful", "modest" and "cute" which are synonymous with women, and the terms "manly", "brave" or "aggressive" which are synonymous with men. Yet, Raja Ali Hasan has three main views on women role in society these are; as symbol of beauty, symbol of courage dan symbol of resistance.

The research aims to stimulate readers' interest in delving into the exploration of sociolinguistics within "Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk," as it offers significant insights into gender roles and language dynamics within Malay society. Understanding sociolinguistics entails recognizing language as a fundamental tool for societal interaction and communication. Hence, it is imperative to acknowledge the inseparable relationship between language and social activities or aspects. Syair Sultan Abdul Muluk highlights the nuanced complexity of gender representations, as women are often associated with attributes such as beauty and modesty, while men are linked to traits like bravery and aggression. However, Raja Ali Hasan's perspective introduces a more multifaceted view of women's roles in society, portraying them as symbols of both beauty and courage, as well as agents of resistance. Delving into these themes can offer readers a deeper understanding of societal dynamics and cultural perceptions surrounding gender.

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