

Shekh Abdul Laṭīf Shakūr's Manuscript *Dunia Perempuan* and Woman Representation on Man's View

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Abstract—This paper aims to reveal the background of text and implied messages that Shekh Abdul Laṭīf Shakūr wanted to convey as an *ulama* and a man towards women who lived in a society with matrilineal kinship system in Minangkabau. This study used the theory of Genetic Structuralism Lucien Goldmann with dialectic method. The result of the research showed that there was a structure formed by Shekh Abdul Laṭīf Shakūr through his writings so that women, especially women of Minangkabau, had strong personality and were able to think logically for every problem that they had to cope with. He wanted Minangkabau's women to have a firm principle even though *adat* forces often bound them to always be passive with their wedding. This was because their future had been determined by the matrilineal family. The presence of the manuscript of the *Dunia Perempuan* was an antithesis to the problems faced by Minangkabau's women to balance the application of *adat* and sharia in Minangkabau *adat* philosophy completely.

Keywords—woman, Minangkabau, matrilineal

I. INTRODUCTION

The general perception of the dominance of Minangkabau women in the matrilineal kinship system has always been a "sharp weapon" to attack customary practices in Minangkabau. Hamka [1] and Radjab [2] pointed this problem in their books as a manifestation of their rejection of the perception that seems to imply hypocrisy in the Minangkabau customary philosophy *Adat Basandi Syara', Syara' Basandi Kitabullah* (Custom is based on Islamic Shari'a, and Islamic Shari'a is based on the Qur'an). It is therefore essential to correct misguided matrilineal understanding of non-Minangkabau who consider women as the ruler or the one determining all decisions for their people [3]. Despite occupying a privileged position both in customs and kinship systems, women remain subordinate to men in Minangkabau. They are companions and friends of their husbands. Throughout history, no Minangkabau women ever claimed the right to be a *pangulu* or *datuak* as the customary leader, regardless of worldwide campaign of women's emancipation. In other words, Minangkabau women still obey to the custom that regulates them as *pusek jalo kumpulan tali*, the shelter of all children and relatives in Minangkabau tradition.

Few records in the form of manuscripts about women born in Minangkabau have been found, and few scholars have

narrated the story of Minangkabau women in their customary realms. The *Dunia Perempuan* (The World of Women) manuscript is assumed to be one of the rare works discussing women and was written by a Minangkabau scholar, Shekh Abdul Laṭīf Shakūr (henceforth Syakūr). Syakūr was not familiarly known among Minangkabau scholars when compared with Haji Abdul Karīm Amrullāh, Shekh Jamīl Jambek, and Shekh Purba despite the fact that he was one of the scholars who returned home in 1901 after studying from the great cleric of Masjidil Haram, Sheikh Aḥmad Khaṭīb al Minangkabaw. Syakūr's writing entitled *Dunia Perempuan* was not widely known because it was a unicus codex stored in Chuzaimah's house, his heirs in Balai Gurah, Agam, West Sumatra. This manuscript is an autograph which is never copied and stored as part of his work collection.

Dunia Perempuan is a new manuscript discovered in August 2017 when the researchers visited the scriptorium. The manuscript was written using Malay Arabic script in a single sheet of paper joined by glue to reach a length of 196 cm with a width of 12.5 cm. Syakūr uses black ink without rubrication to write the manuscript, and it is well kept and maintained among his other works. Some ink stains were found in the middle of the page, but it rarely disturbed the reading of the text. The researchers think it is important to discuss the manuscript because its content is not much touched on in other texts. Shakūr's discussion of women in simple, easy-to-understand language contains moral values for Minangkabau women wherein he invites others to "save" the life of mother or women in Minangkabau. He realized that the women movement demanding equality outside Minangkabau at the time would eventually reach and may influence women in his village. Thus, through his *Dunia Perempuan*, Shakūr proposed the ideal position of women in Minangkabau societal structure based on his view as a man and a scholar from Minangkabau.

II. METHOD

In Philology analysis, *Dunia Perempuan* was edited by using standard methods to get the best text so that readers can read directly. The result of edited text is shown in Latin script that has been divided into words and sentences based on PUEBI (*Pedoman Umum Ejaan Bahasa Indonesia* -General Spelling Guidelines for Indonesian). The text of the edits was then

analyzed using the Goldmann Genetic Structuralism theory using the dialectical method. Sangidu argues that analysis by dialectical method will reveal the mutual relationship between the literary work with historical materialism and the subject that gave birth to the literary work [4]. The analysis can be done by structural analysis of the work, the historical analysis that underlies the birth of the work, and the analysis of the author's social group and his vision of the world (*vision du monde*).

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Women in Minangkabau were prepared to become a *bundo kanduang*. They are portrayed in a local proverb [5],

“Bundo kanduang, limpapeh rumah nan gadang, umbun puruak pagangan kunci, umbun aluang bunian, pusek jalo kumpulan tali, sumarak di dalam kampuang, hiasan dalam nagari, nan gadang basa batuah, kok hiduik tampek banasa, kok mato tampek baniaik, ka undang-undang ka Madinah, ka payuang panji ka sarugo.”

Bundo kanduang, a solid pillar and the safety guard in family, the centre of kinship system, the mesh – the center of ropes, lively in villages, decorations in home, true advocates, her life is the source from which to vow, her death is the source from which to intend, laws in Medina, the path to heaven.

The personality of *bundo kanduang* described in the above proverb implies that every Minangkabau woman is a pride in her family and a very special person in Minangkabau. Woman is the source of hope that at the end of the proverb, she is said to be the path for all of her descendants to heaven later.

The fact that occurred at the beginning of the 20th century, however, did not fully support the glorification of Minangkabau women as written in the customary proverb. Hadler noted in his research that Minangkabau women are often marginalized in determining his life choices [6]. People, for example, often manipulated the truth regarding their age to force them into early marriage. Radjab also said that the marriages were arranged by his family in private that she did not know his future husband [2]. Meanwhile, marriage to the clergy was also the desire of many families at that time [7]. This was due to their assumption that the children from the marriage with the clergy, especially those returning from Mecca, would bring blessings to their families. In essence, the early life of Minangkabau women is determined by her matrilineal family incorporated in *rumah gadang*. Some marriages bore fruitful results, but some others ended in divorce because women were physically and psychologically not ready to start a family.

Formal education was considered as something taboo for girls to take. Women remained in the domestic territory that they did not have space to take part in the public sphere. Women were only allowed to study in mosque and returned to *rumah gadang* to remain under the supervision of their matrilineal family [2]. The powerful influence of the matrilineal family and *rumah gadang* was discussed by Blackwood, claiming that the oldest grandmother had an enormous influence on the women who lived in *rumah gadang* [8]. She was the one who decided

everything related to women, including the education and marriage of the daughters in her clan, thereby depriving women of their life choices.

One of the Minangkabau women trying to break this tradition is Rohana Kuddus (1884-1972) born in Koto Gadang, Agam, West Sumatra. As the contemporary of Shakūr, she was also listed as the first woman in Indonesia to publish a women's newspaper entitled "*Soenting Melajoe*" [9]. Rohana Kuddus invited people to get out of the zone that confined them to work in other life fields. She established a special educational institution for women and accommodated them to break away from the cultural constructions that constrained them. Rohana Kuddus founded a special women's school, *Amai Setia Craft (Kerajinan Amai Setia)* on February 11, 1911 as a place where women could get decent education. He taught women a variety of skills beyond reading, writing, counting, and sewing, and also moral education and religion [10]. The lack of education for Minangkabau women often made them weak and unable to determine their future. It was also possible that they would become the object of violence later in marriage [11].

The historical materialism that developed in the Minangkabau society invited Shakūr to contribute to solve the problem. He was present as a collective subject in Lucien Goldmann's structuralism theory to provide a synthesis from the undergoing problems. Shakūr was a subject that lived in the marginalized circles of women's life, and is aware of the condition. He subconsciously felt that there was something wrong with it and then attempted to give his view in *Dunia Perempuan*. Shakūr actually rejected the women marginalization and as a man, wanted a strong and dependable woman who would later give birth to a strong and swift generation in the face of various problems. To realize the women desire to be more independent, the inner force of the women is necessary. The force in turn leads the women to stay on track.

Here's Shakūr's ideas and views on the personality of a woman she writes in the text of *Dunia Perempuan*. In this text, Shakūr gives three dense sets of stories about women who overextend feelings without relying on logic. Therefore, Shakūr's message for women in the discussion of this paper is divided into three as well.

The following are Shakūr's ideas and views on the personality of a woman in *Dunia Perempuan*. In this text, Shakūr narrated three sets of stories about women who prioritized feelings without relying on their logic. Therefore, Shakūr's messages for women in this paper are divided into three discussions.

A. Women Capable of Making Choices

The early part of *Dunia Perempuan* tells about the life of women willing to bear pain and misery for the sake of their beloved husband. She realized that her husband did not love her since the first day of their marriage, but because she was wealthy, she thought that her husband would someday love her. However, it never became a reality and instead caused pain to both parties. Her husband spent his wife's property only for his own needs, while the wife continued to expect her husband to

love her. In the end, they ended the marriage to avoid greater pain.

Shakūr warned women of the dangers of following the heart without thinking of their own safety and happiness. Many women were trapped in their feelings and forget important things they deserve. Not a few women put wealth as their priority. This brought harms in their family and led to frequent violence to women. The harms conveyed by Shakūr were very important to be contemplated first and foremost before stepping into family life. Syakur stressed, *“Jatuh sengsara perempuan sebab menurutkan hati. Kasih sayang itu disuruh, hanya dengan sepertinya banyak perempuan melarat karena percintaan juga”* (line 2 and 3) (Women misery results from solely following feeling. The love is insincere that many women are miserable because of love). Shakūr emphasized that the women's struggle to get a better life was not separated from the woman's ability to manage and condition her feelings. Women feelings often cost their logic.

At the end of the first account of the story, Shakūr emphasized, *“Itulah macamnya nasib perempuan yang tidak terdidik dalam duka penghidupan bertadabbir dan berhemat”* (Lines 41 and 42) (That is the fate of uneducated women, living in sorrow). Shakūr's message at the end accommodated the wishes of Rohana Kuddus and Minangkabau women to get proper education so that they could think logically and made the right choices for their future.

B. Women who Stand Firm

In this section, Shakūr shared a story about a rich girl who eloped with her father's maid. She brought along her treasure and spent it with the man who later became her husband. After running out of it, her husband left her and sought another woman. Luckily, in a state of being lost, he was saved by his father's friend. Unfortunately, he died in her anguish.

This story was quite interesting because Shakūr took the background of England and London. The mention of these two areas were correlated with the fact that the places are where feminist movement initially emerged in the western world. Shakūr realized that the volatile feminism movement in the western world would likely reach Minangkabau at a given time in the future. The mention of the two places was also a sign of how powerfully the movement affected Minangkabau women. What Shakūr wanted to convey was that Minangkabau women should not fight for their fate since they had been placed in a privilege position in Islamic customs, only that the teaching of the faith has not been fully understood. In this case, Shakūr took part in improving the fate of women in Minangkabau. In his own family, Shakūr educated and taught his daughter, Sha'diyah Shakūrah, to become a teacher [12]. Together with her peers, Sha'diyah Shakūrah learned and managed the women's special magazine *“Djauharah Oentoek Bangsa Perempoean”* published in two editions in 1923 [10].

At the end of the story, Shakūr included an adage, *“Menurutkan hati jadi mati, menurutkan mata jadi buta”* (line 100) (Dead hearts, blind eyes). This adage was a reminder that the weakness of the foundation would be bad for woman. Thus,

not all wills and feelings should be followed because logic was the most important thing in determining life in the future.

C. Strong and Resilient Women

This section was no longer telling the story but was entirely a piece of advice to women in order to maintain their greatest strength and weakness: tears. Shakūr really warned of the benefits and dangers of tears for a woman. Women's tears were like a two-edged knife that can save and destroy woman. Shakūr stated,

Sedikit-sedikit dia menangis. Air matanya keluar berhamburan. Apa gunanya menangis? Air mata tidak kan laku. Apa harganya air mata? Tidak ada didapati antara pergaulan dua laki istri yang berani mendakwakan bahwa ia telah memenuhi kesempurnaan. Malahan jika tiap-tiap seorang suami atau istri di alam ini mesti ada kekurangan. Tak dapat tidak, menaruh kekurangan jua.

Dia (perempuan) mudah sekali menangis dan menghamburkan air mata. Apa guna dan harganya air mata? Ia tidak berarti apa-apa. Di antara pergaulan suami istri, tidak akan pernah ditemukan kesempurnaan karena setiap orang pasti memiliki kekurangan.

Shakūr described in this early part about how easily women cried. The cry made them weak and helpless. The imperfection of situations should not actually make women fragile and spill their tears out. The past habit in Minangkabau was for women to mourn (*maratok*). This habit usually triggered by any problems occurring in *rumah gadang* associated with misfortunes such as the death of family members, terminal illness, sold communal land that cannot be redeemed, or any fight, action, and deed tarnishing the image of the big family. Women were often involved to dramatize this situation that the less complicated circumstances seem to be very precarious. Shakūr forebode this habit so that women did not look weak in the face of trivial problems [13].

In another part of the manuscript, Shakūr narrated how women loved to dramatize their cries to attract an exaggerated response from their husbands,

Tetapi kita percaya, sesungguhnya air mata yang diambil sebagai senjata perkakas oleh perempuan itu menjatuhkan kepada khawatir atas kehidupan dua laki istri. Istimewa jika perempuan itu selalu membiasakan tangis sebagai mata beranak air. Sebenar-benar muka menjadi sebagai jambu, sebenar-benar diperlihatkannya sehelai kain yang telah lembabnya oleh renyai matanya. Kadang-kadang bantalnya yang tadi siang hari baharu dijemuinya di panas siang menimbulkan anak sungai yang turun dari sarasah pipinya. Itulah sebenar-benar tipu daya perempuan kepada suaminya.

But we believe the tears of women were the sign of worrying the lives of marriage. It was special that the woman always spilled her tears. She showed a piece of cloth that had been moistened by his eyes. Sometimes the pillow, which had been dried up during the late afternoon, was wet for the tears that was the trick of women to get her husband attention. Shakūr

discouraged the habit because it resulted in nothing but more harms. The women weakness sometimes invited men to abuse them that further highlighted their helplessness.

Though tears were meaningfully close to the weakness of women, but in fact female tears are a usable weapon if used rightfully, for example, to reduce the anger of husband against the family or work that may cause a bad impact on household life if ignored. Obviously, the crying should be the last resort after all reasonable ideas have been put forward. Therefore, at the end of the manuscript, Shakūr reminded women to behave in reasonable, non-excessive manner. The simplicity, wisdom, and tenderness of a woman is a much stronger weapon than the tears that have a negative connotation. Following is a quote in the manuscript he wrote,

Melainkan jadikanlah olehmu hai bangsa ibuku akan jadi perkakas penahan marah, pelembutkan hati suamimu itu, yaitu hati lurus perkataan manis. Bagaikan kata orang kita, mulut manis kucindan murah. Pakaikanlah perangai yang pertengahan antara suka dan duka, antara keras dan lembut, antara tegang dan kendur. Jangan terlalu manis, nanti dijilat orang. Usah terlalu pahit, nanti diluruhkan orang. Pakaikanlah rasa dan periksa. Kalau salah, segeralah surut minta maaf kepada manusia, minta ampun kepada Tuhan. Barang yang jahat, buang. Barang yang baik, pakaikan.

Indeed, the gentle words are an angry retainer and the softener of the husband's heart. Minangkabau people said, *mulut manis kucindan murah* (those who speak gently and politely shall gain sympathy and friends). Act modestly and politely If you are guilty, immediately apologize either to humans or to God.

IV. CONCLUSION

As a scholar and Minangkabau man, Shakūr, through his *Dunia Perempuan* manuscript, wants women to stand firm on their choices, to be strong and resilient in all situations. The weakness of women only lead others to harm and commit acts

of violence to them. Minangkabau women are prepared to be *bundo kanduang* who should be independent in facing various problems. Therefore, as the descendants of Minangkabau, they must possess those qualities. If a woman is weak, her next generation will be weak and unreliable as well. Shakūr also wants every woman to be independent and always behave well to build a harmonious life.

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