

## Conference Paper

# Moral Degradation in Ahmad Tohari's Novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*

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## Abstract

The research is actuated by phenomenon of deterioration in the character of a person or group of community members who are generally influenced by the development of the times and advances of technology, imbalanced with the moral consciousness termed moral degradation. Moral degradation is a social problem that can have a negative impact on individuals, community groups, and the state. The purpose of this study is to reveal the existence of moral degradation in Ahmad Tohari's novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* using a qualitative descriptive method, precisely selected as the object of research is related to social phenomena, namely symptoms or events that occur and can be observed in social life. The research is imperative to do as when morality of an individual or group of community members cannot be maintained as already shifted from a noble cultural, moral degradation arises which furthermore if uncontrolled can cause greater social problems. The data in this study are written data derived from phrases and sentences indicating the existence of moral degradation carried out by characters in the novel. Data collection is done by referring to the note-taking method. The results show that there are two points of moral degradation in this novel: human trafficking and hypocrisy.

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## 1. Introduction

Literature, as a reflection of human life, touches all aspects of human life, tending to create universal appeal and is not tied to *tempora spatio*, limited by space and time (Manugeran. M and Hidayati: 2018). By this it is seen that literature is also a medium of exposing social problems. Social problems and human life are a coin of two sides, meaning that one cannot be separated from another. Through a literary work, an author, with all types of creativities possessed, tries to see, understand and evaluate all types of problems arising in the society and then select those close to the present needs

The author chooses issues closest to the needs and then reveal the problems with artistic style of writing along with personal ideas or views to be the attention of the readers. Thus an author deliberately makes a work to socialize intrinsic problems to

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become general so that the readers realize, understand and gets a solution to the problems that occur around them. This is in line with the issue stated by (Manugeran, M and Hidayati: 2018) that an author is an educational agent. Literary works bring the readers to the phenomena of society over the world of life that is understood by an author as one of the educational agents.

Moral degradation is a social problem unlimited to age, education and profession, but can occur in all circles of society. The imbalance between local cultural values and norms with individual or group behavior is a picture of moral degradation which if not handled seriously can lead to greater social problems and communities with the consequences of the loss of self-identity or cultural identity. On a larger scale this can disrupt the stability of national life.

Ahmad Tohari (1948), an Indonesian writer and humanist, in his trilogy novel entitled *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*, talks of moral degradation. Ahmad Tohari is also a tough social critic. Through his works he always voices the injustices experienced by the lower classes of society. He demands a fair, honest and responsible government as well as reform in the fields of economy, education, politics and culture. He realizes that moral degradation is a problem that can only be overcome through economic establishment. His works are philosophical and cultural and in reality contributions to the change in social history from time to time (Oktaviana: 2016)

*Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* is a written on the phenomena of society. *Ronggeng* is a traditional dance with a female lead dancer, and at the time of her performance equipped with a scarf wrapped around the neck. *Ronggeng* dance flourishes in *Pasundan* area, West Java, Indonesia. At the time of the performance, several couples are seen exchanging partners, reading poems or singing accompanied by traditional music instruments. The rhythm of the music produced is simple but has exotic nuances thrilling the soul (Ambarwati: 2017)

*Ronggeng* dance is always associated with erotic things because basically female dancers with beautiful faces and ideal bodies, dance by twisting their bodies to produce erotic movements, and this erotic movement is an attraction, especially for men and has high commercial value. *Ronggeng* dance is performed as an introduction to traditional ceremonies such as marriages, or thanksgiving ceremonies for the harvest. The show usually begins with offering ritual. As time goes by, at the present time, *Ronggeng* dance can also be found in other parts of Indonesia.

Exoticism and eroticism is a general picture delivered in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* novel, dealing with the existence of *ronggeng* in the community; however behind the negative connotations of *ronggeng* dance in the novel, there is a fairness value accepted

by the local community. This is a picture of hypocrisy; on the one hand it is considered something not in accordance with ethical values and norms, on the other hand still implemented even eulogized.

*Ronggeng* is a representation of women's helplessness against male domination, especially in the context of sexuality, where women in traditional cultural perspectives cannot voice their desires in sexuality activities. (Baumeister and Twenge: 200). Srintil, the second main character, represents women to be able to conquer men, a struggle carried out through dance. Through erotic dance Srintil can conquer men. The men bow to her at the time of the show, a distinctive value of the dancers.

Srintil, illiterate and not knowing anything of cultural traditions is dragged into the chaotic tradition and her life is also uncertain, filled with various waves of sadness, suffering and violence coloring her destiny. The process to become the real *ronggeng* dancer is not easy even though Srintil has a talent for it. It is not easy because she has to carry out a variety of strenuous exercises, burdensome physically and mentally in addition to the various mystical rituals she has to go through. A belief in the mystical world is a distinctive color of the *ronggeng* dance. Through a variety of severe stages, ranging from dancing practice, singing to dressing up, is a long and tiring process. And finally before she becomes a real *ronggeng* dancer, she must carry out a ritual of *bukak kelambu*, a sexual ritual combined with magical nuances.

The research, with a descriptive qualitative method, is focused on the problems of moral degradation with two points of discussion: human-trafficking and hypocrisy. Involved in the traditional arts full of nuances of eroticism, Srintil cannot escape human trafficking because the *ronggeng* dance has commercial value and the object is women. Human trafficking is also followed by hypocrisy from the respective people as they pretend not to know the truth and have contradictions between their words and actions.

These two points of moral degradation found in the novel which are discussed in this study are expressed so that the society is always careful and vigilant so that they are not increasingly developed and can be avoided.

## 2. Literature Review

Moral is a benchmark referring to an action that is in accordance with the conventional ideology in a particular community or environment. If the action is in conflict with the existing values and norms, the phenomenon of moral degradation arises.

Moral degradation involves a society's progressive loss of or weakening of the moral and ethical standards that prevailed in the social traditions (Luo in Zheng: 2014). In a

society suffering from moral degradation, people tend to tolerate, accept, and even normalize immoral behaviors and perceptions. Then Jensen in Zheng (2014) adds that degraded morality, or a state of formlessness, provides fertile soil for the growth of demoralized market arrangements. This shows that moral degradation is not only found in cultural attitude but also in economic attitude, meaning that moral degradation has penetrated into various lines of human life.

The same thing is conveyed by T.S Eliot in Haque (2016) that technological progress and the development of science and the change in social life drastically produce unstable humans because they are always haunted by feelings of discomfort. This has an impact on the mindset and behavior that tends to legalize all ways to obtain life certainty and subsequently results in the emergence of various forms of behavior or actions oriented to moral degradation. So entering the 20th century is often referred to as the modern age, humans tend to forget the ancestral traditions containing morality that actually make people directed and walk in the corridors of inner peace and welfare.

Morality is now seen as a characteristic of the old world because in the new world, anything goes (Umeogu and Ojiako: 2014) This illustrates that today, labeled with millennial age, people no longer regard morality important. Moral degradation is considered a prevalence and even considered to be the development of a culture, a very controversial concept. Even people can no longer distinguish between morality and immorality, without realizing that moral degradation is essentially destructive.

Turiel in Masath (2013) indicated that failure of many people, especially the youth; to incorporate moral values and ideals of the society are indicators of moral decline. This clarifies that a behavior or action that cannot be accepted by the community or local culture is categorized as moral degradation.

Moral degradation in the form of human trafficking is violation of human rights because humans are essentially noble; not objects to be consumed by the public. Human trafficking is generally understood to refer to the process through which individuals are placed or maintained in an exploitative situation for economic gain. Trafficking can occur within a country or may involve movement across borders. Women, men and children are trafficked for a range of purposes, including forced and exploitative labor in factories, farms and private households, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage. Trafficking affects all regions and most countries of the world (UNO: 2014).

The majority of victims in human trafficking are women trafficked for the purpose of being employed as laborers or for sexual exploitation. From the definition of human trafficking, it can be concluded that this action is an act that violates human rights

because it recruits people by coercion or in other disgraceful ways and for the benefits of a certain party. Human trafficking is always done hypocritical thinking people.

Hypocrisy involves some sort of inconsistency, and that hypocritical behaviors advance the actor's self interests. Hypocrites are people who implicitly and explicitly endorse principles that their behavior contradicts. This confirms that hypocrisy is an attitude of a person contrary to his real attitude; or in other words a hypocrite is a two-faced person. The same thing is stated by Alicke (2013) that hypocrites are generally regarded as morally-corrupt, cynical egoists who consciously and deliberately deceive others in order to further their own interests. One reason hypocrisy is perceived negatively may be that it involves inconsistency between words and deeds, which people tend to dislike (Tedeschi, Schlenker and Bonoma in Jordan: 2017)

### 3. Research Method

The research is conducted by a qualitative method with descriptive analysis (Moleong: 2004). Data are obtained from *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* novel by Ahmad Tohari (1982) and the sources of the data are from the sentences and dialogues of the characters in the novel. To obtain information from the actual state of the picture in the novel, the stages of data collection begin with library studies followed by field research completed with interviews. Library studies are intended to obtain information relating to moral degradation and carried out by reading various references such as books, journals, theses and research reports, then the data analysis procedure is carried out after all relevant data have been collected. The collected data are then grouped and selected based on the connection with the discussion points systemically to obtain a structured organization.

### 4. Discussion

Moral is the state of mind, feelings, words, and actions of a person related to good and bad values. Moral is also related to how one can do social interaction because without morals an individual cannot socialize himself in the community. Intact absoluteness is the essence of morality. Moral assessment can be measured based on ideology or local culture. Culture can be interpreted as values held by the community or perceptions owned towards various things. Both values and perceptions are related to psychological aspects, namely what is in the mind. These psychological aspects are important if

realized, that a person's behavior is strongly influenced by what is in the mind of the person concerned.

If someone's actions are in accordance with the sense of value prevailing in the community and can be accepted and pleasing to the community, then the person is considered to have good morals. Moral is a product of culture. Every culture has different moral standards in accordance with the applicable value system and has been established for a long time. Morals can also be interpreted as attitudes, behaviors, actions that a person does when trying to do something based on experience, interpretation, conscience, and advice.

But when a person's behavior and actions are not in accordance with cultural values and norms, moral degradation occurs. Degradation means setback, deterioration or decline of a matter while moral is right and good behavior, then moral degradation is a picture of a deterioration in the character of a person or group of people. Basically everyone knows that moral degradation can be destructive; but there is still someone or group of people who practice it. People like this are categorized as hypocrites, because they know that what they are doing is wrong.

Thus, moral degradation is a condition where there has been a moral decline meaning that individuals and a group of people have violated the rules and procedures applied in society. A person can be said to have moral if the person's behavior is able to uphold moral values in society. The existence of moral degradation in *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* novel by Ahmad Tohari (1982) in the form of human trafficking and hypocrisy is illustrated as follows:

## 5. Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a crime and cannot be tolerated because it is not in line with the principle of humanity; done in a way that is not commendable such as by force or fraud with the aim of benefiting certain parties. Sexual exploitation is a significant feature of human trafficking.

“... But I fear. Rasus, you are really kind. You are here when I am being traded.”  
(Tohari, 1982: 76)

This is delivered by Srintil, the *ronggeng* dancer, to her lover, the protagonist, Rasus. Srintil loves him so much, but Srintil also realizes that Rasus would be disappointed with her condition. As a candidate of a *ronggeng* dancer, Srintil must attend a special ritual termed *bukak kelambu*, an event, done at night, where prospective *ronggeng*

dancer gives her virginity to any man having won in the competition by fulfilling all the requirements set.

Srintil initially is hesitated. On the one hand she wants to become a real *ronggeng* dancer, on the other hand she also has to perform *bukak kelambu* ritual and this ritual could not be ignored and has become an obligation for every *ronggeng* dancer. The ritual is considered as a legitimacy for a prospective *ronggeng* dancer. It is not easy for a woman to do this ceremony, especially Srintil because she has a lover who is then expected to be her husband.

*Bukak kelambu* is basically a form of human trafficking because it is done through auctions and the buyers are men. A man who offers the highest price will get a prospective *ronggeng* dancer and then the man has the right to have sex with the woman. This auction does not stop just the night before a prospective *ronggeng* dancer becomes a dancer recognized by the local community, but will continue, which means that a *ronggeng* dancer can be asked to have sex by any man who wants to pay her. This human trafficking activity continues until the *ronggeng* dancers no longer have selling points. That is why *ronggeng* dancers have a negative stigma, especially in people who still uphold moral values.

Tohari (1982) through the novel emphasizes that *bukak klambu* ceremony, namely having sex with a *ronggeng* candidate by men who have won the virginity auction, is not a cultural tradition, but only a trick of the spiritual caregiver of *ronggeng* dancer to get a share from the auction results.

“ About your grandma, ... don't think too much of that matter. We shall take care of her. We know that from her, comes a brave man, having defeated and killed two criminals, ' said Kartareja, pointing to me. “And I could afford her, as now I have got rice,” he added. “ A cricket!,” I said in my heart. “ You, the old block, you become rich by trading Srintil” (Tohari, 1982: 105).

The above quote is the next illustration of human trafficking in the novel. Rasmus, the first main character, Srintil's lover will leave his loving village, *Dukuh Paruk* because he will become a soldier; then he needs someone to look after and care for his grandmother. He then goes to meet Kartareja, the *ronggeng* spiritual caregiver, who takes care of Srintil. In his conversation with Rasmus, Kartareja is ready to take care of Rasmus's grandma. Kartareja implicitly says that he has got a good income from Srintil. Kartareja is the luckiest person in this human trafficking because he succeeds in making Srintil famous and at the same time making Srintil a trading commodity with a high selling value.

"Yes. A *ronggeng* spiritual caregiver likes to manage all matters, often wanting to control the wealth of the foster children. "That's an old story. I know that a *ronggeng* is often considered a domestic animal by the landlord. Look, harvest time; *ronggeng* takes the stage every night. During the day she must serve men who want her. Meanwhile, the *ronggeng* spiritual caregiver manages all matters, especially financial matters. Poor, right? On the contrary, now Kartareja and his wife become rich, right?"(Tohari, 1982: 125).

The conversation among *Dukuh Paruk* villagers above is another illustration of human trafficking in the novel. A woman is selling sweet potatoes at the traditional market talking about Srintil, who happens to come to the place. Srintil's face looks sad; there is no joy in her expression, even though Srintil has now become a famous *ronggeng* dancer and certainly has a very promising income. According to the woman, Kartareja, Srintil's spiritual caregiver, is actually very happy because he earns a very satisfying income from Srintil's fame. Kartareja is termed as Srintil manager arranging everything for Srintil, especially those related to finance. Kartareja, in this case is utilizing Srintil, earn money and Kartareja currently becomes rich. The men are also not reluctant to spend money on *Ronggeng* dancers. The sad thing is that at night, the *ronggeng* dancers go on stage, including Srintil and in the afternoon, they must serve the men. This makes Srintil looks unhappy, according to the woman selling the sweet potato.

## 6. Hypocrisy

For the people in *Dukuh Paruk*, being a *ronggeng* dancer is a very proud thing. Wives will feel proud if their husbands can have intimate relations with a *ronggeng* dancer because it shows their economic level is well established in the eyes of the community. Therefore, wherever Srintil is, she always gets preferential treatment from people in her village. There is no woman or wife who feels jealous of her. This attitude is very contrary to the attitude of society in general that upholds moral values.

Acts, words and feelings that are not in line are features of hypocrisy and pictures of hypocrisy are listed below.

Kartareja's countenance was not changed, though he feels very happy in his heart a big female buffalo and two silver coins. The *ronggeng* spiritual caregiver burst into laughter in his heart. As Kartareja was very smart, and experienced, he could control his feelings (Tohari, 1982: 70).



This quote explains that Kartareja is a man very good at hiding his feelings; he is like a great actor. The description of this quote is delivered at the time Srintil would become an actual *ronggeng* dancer through *bukak kelambu* procession, namely the auction and Srintil as the auctioned object. There are two young men who come and give a fairly high payment for the size of the era; a big female buffalo and two silver coins. Calmly, Kartareja meets the two young men as if what he is doing is a mandatory part of the local tradition. The calmness of attitude shown by Kartareja is a picture of hypocrisy because basically he is making a trap for them. Only one young man should be chosen, but he wants the two young men, not just one to have sex with Srintil so that he could earn a double income.

The following description of hypocrisy can be seen in the illustration below.

”Yes. Oh, apparently you are a cunning and rancid couple. Okay, I want to sleep here. I have also been tired and sleepy ”(Tohari, 1982: 77)

This sentence is delivered by Dower, one of the two young men who have the opportunity to have sex with Srintil. Dower realizes that Kartareja and his wife have tricked Sulam, another young man, by giving him liquor so that Sulam gets drunk and they invite Dower to enjoy Srintil’s virginity. When Sulam wakes up, Kartareja asks Sulam to sleep with Srintil, while Sulam does not realize that he has been overtaken by Dower. The two young men are victims of the hypocrisy carried out by Kartareja and his wife with great skill. They are deceived and Kartareja gets a very satisfying benefit.

The next description of hypocrisy is seen from other characters in the novel.

Marsusi listened to Tarim’s preaching with full interest. Not only because he caught the truth in the words, but he certainly felt a real pretense. A sorcerer preached about noble values! The incongruity in Marsusi’s heart floated into lines of question marked on his face (Tohari, 1982: 177)

Marsusi is a head of a rubber plantation in *Wanakeling*; he is hurt by Srintil and wants to enchant Srintil by magic because Srintil refuses to sleep with him even though he has brought a gold necklace weighing one hundred grams decorated with diamond pendants. Marsusi feels harassed by Srintil, so he goes to Tarim, a famous sorcerer in another village near *Dukuh Paruk*. When Marsusi spends the night in Tarim’s house, Tarim preaches to him about the teachings of the truth and noble values that every human being must have. It is clear here that Tarim is a hypocrite because the profession he runs as a sorcerer is basically opposite to his preaching about noble values.

## 7. Conclusion

Literary work provides a great experience and understanding of reality outside literary work because it is through literary works that humans could understand the meanings of life. That is why literature is referred to as a medium of disclosure of social problems. *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* is a novel that tells the life of a *ronggeng* dancer named Srintil. This novel is set in a place in *Paruk* village, a remote village in Dawuhan District in Java. *Paruk* village without *Ronggeng* is not *Paruk* because *Ronggeng* is the feature of the village.

The second main character is Srintil, a perfect *ronggeng* dancer, with amazing beauty of face having a specific appeal, especially for men. Srintil, previously a simple village girl then becomes a famous *ronggeng* dancer and also source of income for certain parties.

This novel pictures social reality to note that a literary work is rooted in certain cultures and certain societies. Srintil is a portrait of a woman who voices resistance to local culture dominated by men. The *ronggeng* tradition that has been owned by local residents from time to time is in fact not siding women but making them commodities. The tradition illustrated through this novel provides an illustration of the denial of noble cultural values. Moral degradation is a thick nuance found in the *ronggeng* tradition and is the main topic in this study. There are two points of discussion of moral degradation: human trafficking and hypocrisy. The two points of the discussion are found in the novel. Srintil, as a famous *ronggeng* dancer, is a victim of human trafficking because she is used as a commodity. Srintil not only appears as a dancer on stage, she also has to provide sexual services to men, according to the agreed rates. The moral degradation in this novel also goes hand in hand with hypocrisy because the people involved in the *ronggeng* tradition do not behave in accordance with their conscience.

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