

THE STATUS AND ROLE OF A WOMAN IN CHRISTIANITY REFLECTED IN CHARLOTTE BRONTE'S *JANE EYRE* NOVEL

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Abstrak

Dalam masyarakat saat ini, banyak fenomena atau kejadian yang terjadi pada perempuan terkait dengan tindakan diskriminasi, seperti pelecehan seksual, penindasan, dan banyak lagi. Masalah peran dan status perempuan akhir-akhir ini menjadi fenomena yang banyak mendapat perhatian. Penelitian ini membahas tentang status dan peran wanita dalam agama Kristen yang tercermin dalam novel berjudul "*Jane Eyre*" yang ditulis oleh Charlotte Bronte. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dan penelitian kepustakaan dengan sumber data dari teks novel. Setelah menganalisis data, dapat ditemukan bahwa peran dan status perempuan dalam novel tersebut adalah penggambaran gaya hidup dan pekerjaan perempuan di era Victoria. Peran dan status perempuan pada saat itu mengikuti ayat-ayat Alkitab yang menyebutkan tentang tugas dan kedudukan perempuan. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa status dan peran perempuan ditempatkan pada posisi yang lebih rendah menurut pandangan Kristen. Wanita harus menjadi istri yang setia dan menganggap dirinya lebih rendah dari suaminya. Mereka juga dilarang melakukan pekerjaan laki-laki dan pekerjaan mereka juga dibatasi.

Kata kunci: Perempuan, Peran, Status, Jane Eyre, Kekristenan

Abstract

The Status and Role of a Woman in Christianity Reflected in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre Novel. Maria Fatima Limun, Sutorejo Prima Utara II no. 1. In today's society, many phenomena or incidents that occur to women are related to the acts of discrimination, such as sexual harassment, oppression, and many more. The problem of women's role and status has recently become a phenomenon that has been getting a lot of attention. This research discussed about the status and role of women in Christianity reflected in the novel titled "Jane Eyre" written by Charlotte Bronte. This research used qualitative method and library research with the novel text as the source of data. After analysing the data, it can be found that the role and status of women in the novel were the depiction of women's lifestyle and occupation in the Victorian era. The women's role and status at that time were following the verses from the Bible that say about women's duty and position. The result of this research shows that the women status and role were put in the lower position based on the Christianity view. Women must become a faithful wife and considered themselves as lower than their husbands. They were also prohibited from doing men's job and their occupations were also limited.

Keywords: Women, Role, Status, Jane Eyre, Christianity

1. BACKGROUND

In today's society, there are many phenomena or incidents which occur to women such as acts of discrimination, sexual harassment, oppression, and many more. According to The National Commission for Women, the cases of violence towards women in Indonesia has reportedly been increasing since 2010 until 2019. Still from the same data, 75,4% from the reported violence were occurred in private environment such as

domestic violence. The remaining 24,4% cases were occurred in community environment such as in the workplace or public places where the perpetrators were mostly unknown person. (Kompas.com, 2020). These kind of phenomenon does not only threaten the life of woman, but affect her main status as well.

The problem of woman's role and status has recently become a phenomenon that has been getting a lot of attention. Basically, the tasks of women are only to give birth and take care of

their children and all household chores. However, along with future development, the role of woman also changed and developed. They could also become the backbone or even head of family. However, those changes also triggered protests from several groups, mostly from religious and economic community which constantly discriminated and harassed women. Therefore, it also resulted in the emergence of feminist fighters who cares about gender relation, role and status, and the struggle for rights of women in political, economic, and socio-cultural developments.

Various attempts have been made to find the role and function of woman as an individual and social being. One of the attempts is through the study of literary studies, because to understand the woman's role and status in society can be seen in the literary works which can be called as socio-cultural products. Because literary work and social life also related to each other, the author could use social background and sometimes talk about the phenomenon around them in their literary work, such as novel.

One of the literary works which depict the woman's role and status in society is a novel titled *Jane Eyre* written by Charlotte Bronte and published in 1847. This novel is one of the English literary works that appeared in the Victorian era. Charlotte Bronte published her first novel entitled *Jane Eyre* with a Victorian style that depicted Christian women as weak creatures who were powerless to rise from the problems at the time. She also touched on three areas of social concern in *Jane Eyre* which were education, women's employment, and marriage in the Victorian era.

According to Charlotte Bronte, in the Victorian era, women were seen as middle class and belonged to the domestic sphere. This stereotype required them to provide their husbands with clean house, preparing food on table and raise their children. When a Victorian man and woman married, the rights of the woman were legally taken over by her spouse. They also lost ownership of their wages, physical property, and all cash they generated

once married. Both single and married women had to live with hardship and disadvantages at that time. Not only that, Victorian women were suffered both financially and sexually, and enduring inequalities within their marriages and society.

In connection with the topic, the phenomenon of Christian women arose from within the surrounding patriarchal society. This society placed men in the authoritative position in marriage, socio-economic status, and also religion where priesthood was restricted to men only. This made the role of women as educators, missionaries, and caregivers were often underestimated. In Christianity views, the status and roles of women in the Victorian era were seen as an illustration of the striking discrepancy between the United Kingdom's national power and wealth. During the era symbolized by the reign of British monarch Queen Victoria, women did not have the right to vote, sue, or own property.

Jane Eyre is set in the Northern England and in the first half of the nineteenth century or the Victorian era. The novel tells about the life of a woman named Jane Eyre as the main character in the novel. Jane, who often suffered unfair and cruel treatment from her aunt's family, decided to run away by attending a boarding school where she found a new life despite being a simple girl. After graduated from the school and became a teacher, she fell in love and married with Mr. Rochester, her employer. However, their relationship was hindered by the differences in principle as well as their own status and social role.

The writer connects this topic with the main character from Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre* because this novel also contains the issue of woman in the Victorian society who wanted to get freedom and equal position as a human. Therefore, the analysis of this research is about the forms of status and role of a woman in Christianity experienced by Jane Eyre in the novel.

Definition of Role and Status

In the social life of human, normally, each individual has a certain set of roles, and these roles are already regulated according to the prevailing norms. According to Berry (2013:105), role is defined as the expectations which are imposed on individuals who occupy a certain social or dynamic aspect of position. A role is the set of norms, value, behaviors, and personality characteristics attached to a status. For most people, having a role in society is important in order to get self-recognition among other people and to expose their position in the society. Most people associate status and role with the prestige of lifestyle, education, or vacation. (cited in person, 1951 P. 114)

According to Linton (1956, P. 105), status is the position which each person has in society. Their status also based on the position in their job, occupation, education, or also religion. Linton also explained that status means a position in social system occupied by designated individuals with the role or behavior to enacting the patterned expectations attributed to the position.

According to sociologists, status and role describe the position in which a person occupies in a particular setting. We all have several statuses and play the roles that associated with them. An individual may occupy the status of students, employee, and club president. Someone with the status and role means that the person is domiciled both in the family, community, and, religion (Christianity context).

Gender Concepts

Gender is a characteristic of the roles and responsibilities assigned to human which determined socially and does not come from God's gift or nature. The concept of gender is the result of social constructions created by humans, which are not permanent, can be changed, and transferred according to place, time, and local culture. According to the Women's Studies Encyclopaedia, gender is defined as a cultural concept that seeks to make

a distinction in terms of the role of behavior status, mentality, and emotional characteristic between men and women which developed in society, and also groups which have feminine or masculine characteristics, and neutral. Gender is defined as a mental and cultural interpretation of gender differences between men and women, which are commonly used to show the division of jobs that is considered appropriate for men and women.

Feminism Theory

According to Nancy J. Chodorow (1898), feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, fictional, or philosophical discourse which aims to understand the nature of gender inequality. It examines the social status and roles of women in various fields, such as anthropology and sociology, communication, politics, media studies psychoanalysis, home economic, literature, education, and culture. Feminism theory focuses on the analysis of gender inequality, as well as the themes explored in feminism include discrimination, objectification especially sexual objectification, oppression, patriarchy, and stereotypes.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research used qualitative method with library research to support the obtained data. The primary source data for this research is come from the novel entitled *Jane Eyre*. From the novel, the narration and dialogue of the main character that leads to the statement of the problem were observed and discussed.

There were some steps to collect and analysed the data from the novel. First step was read the whole content of the novel several times to get a deep understanding. After that, classified and marked the parts and dialogues of the story that related to the research question. Further was relate and analyse the data using the theories to answer the research question. The part of narrations which contain the data related to the research question were also included to strengthened analysis.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. The Forms of Status and Role of a woman in Christianity experienced by the Main Character

In the novel, it is narrated that as a woman who eventually will married and become a wife, she must learn on how to respect and become humble. However, because of that rule, Jane did not have a freedom to express herself. Therefore, she mostly spent her time alone in her imagination as proven by the following text:

“Jane, I don’t like those who ask question.” Said Mrs. Reed. A good child should not speak and must to be respect to an elder in that manner. Go and sit down, and remain silent until you can speak pleasantly.

There was a small breakfast-room next to drawing-room. I quickly hide myself there taking a book from a book-case, after making certain it continued pictures, I climb up into the window-seat. Here I sat cross lagged behind the curtains which I had drawn together, and I was then enclosed in a private world of my own (P.7).

In the Bible, it is stated that as a wife, a woman is asked to submit and respect her husband. She also must become a helper as well. By doing so, it can help her to respect her husband more and also support his decisions. In the novel, John wanted Jane Eyre to marry him, even though it was not based on the love between them, but to be a servant of God instead. This is supported by expression of John Reed where he told Jane that she already became his belonging. This indicates that woman’s submission towards her husband’s orders is part of the duties and responsibilities as an obedient woman. This is also supported by the following sentence based in the novel:

“God and nature intended for missionarry’s wife. It is not personal, but mental endownments they have given ou; you are formed for labout,

nor for love, a missionarry’s wife you mush-shall, you shall be mine; I clime you not for my pleasure, but for my sovereign’s service”. (P. 453)

The status and role of woman in the house is to become helper, builder, and bearer of the word of God. Even though the women have received education, it is not a necessity for them to work and have a career outside home. This means that women must be able to choose which ones that should be prioritized for her husband and family. Not only in Church, the status and role of woman also applies in the family environment such as servants, helpers, and have a loyal and responsible nature. In the novel, Jane Eyre herself chose to be a housewife and according to her, it was more valuable than being a career woman. Jane became both Rochester’s property and guide, a servant and master, and also his eyes which were a symbol of his power. This was supported by the following text:

“I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper. I find you lonely; I will be your companion to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you. Cease to look so melancholy, my dear master; you shall not be left desolate, so long as I live.” (Chapter 37)

In the novel, women were distinguished from men in terms of rights. Men were seen as the sole heir and always be the number one in the family. This is related with the Biblical context about man and woman. According to the Bible, in the beginning God created man first then the woman. This means that because man was created first by God, then man must have a higher position than woman. Besides the conflict regarding man and woman’s status which related with the Bible, there were also two the primary conflict themes which depicted in the novel which are class conflict and gender difference. As a poor orphan living with her

relatives, Jane felt alienated from the rest of the Reed family, and they certainly did nothing to make her feel more comfortable. This was proven in the following statement from John Reed to Jane:

“You have no business to take our books; You are dependent, mama says; You have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen’s children like us and eat the same meals we do, and were clothes at our mama’s expense. Now, I’ll teach you to rummage my book-shelves : for they are mine; all the house belongs to me, or will do in a few ears” (Bronte, 1953 :25)

Based on the statement above, John claimed the right of the gentleman and implied that Jane’s family was from a lower class. She appeared to exist between the upper and servant class. The prohibition of taking and reading John Reed’s books was a form of restriction towards woman from increasing her knowledge or obtaining an education. Jane’s argument with John also points to the potential gender conflicts within the text. Not only Jane was at a disadvantage because of her class status, but her position as female also left her vulnerable to the rules of patriarchal tyrant. As a man, John was entitled to do anything, because he felt that he was the most powerful compared to women.

According to the Bible, aside from becoming a helper and a complement for the husband, a woman can also be the recipient and companion for the husband, obedient and supporter of the husband, and lover of the husband. In the novel, John Rivers realized that Jane had a considerable potential to play a role in his mission to India. However, because his thought was still surrounded by patriarchy thinking which considered women as weak creatures, he offered marriage bond with Jane without the feeling of love. John Rivers only needed Jane Eyre as a companion when carrying out the mission:

“Jane you are docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constand, and courageous; very gentle, and very heroic; cease to mistrust yourself – I can trust you unreserverdly. As a condutress of indian schools, and a helper amongst Indian women, you assosiatance will be to me invaluable, (P. 455)

Besides from John Rivers, Jane also found her chance to become a career woman when she was studying at Lowood. Lowood School presented as the Woman’s ways to get out of oppression by receiving education. Through education, a woman could hone their intellect and personality. Jane’s various experiences at Lowood were a provision for her to face her life in the future. At Lowood, Jane learned the skills taught there such as discipline, responsibility, and also the role model. That way, the role of women that was previously considered limited to domestic work can also enter the world or can be called career women. Therefore, woman play a very important of status and role in Christianity not only as a housewife, but also must have access or opportunities in public work space. This can be proven by the following text:

“I had means of excellent education placed within you reach; a fodness for some of my studies, and a desire to exell in all, together with a great delight in pleasing my teachers. In time I rose to the first class; than I was invested with the office of teacher; which I discharged with zeal for two years, (Bronte, 1953 : 105)

Another status and role of a woman that Jane Eyre experienced in the novel is to become a teacher. The status and role of woman as an educator is the most important thing in building a harmony in family. Family is the first-place children are born in the world, and is the place for how they first learn in life such as how to eat

and drink, speak politely, become humble and respect each other regardless of age, learn to be a good individual, and so on. (Achmad, 1994) In the novel, John Rivers acknowledged Jane's talent to be an educator. John realized that Jane had the ability to become a teacher. Therefore, he gave Jane the opportunity to become a woman who believe in herself, and has the ability to share knowledge which is proven by the following text:

“Jane you are docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constand, and courageous; very gentle, and very heroic; cease to mistrust yourself – I can trust you unreseverdly. As a condutress of indian schools, and a helper amongst Indian women, you assosiatance will be to me invaluable, (P. 455)

4. CONCLUSION

From the research, it can be concluded that Jane Eyre has experienced many statuses and

roles as a woman in Christianity. In the novel, Jane has become an individual who must respect and submissive to her husband, being a helper and service to him, an individual who is below men, a career woman, and also a teacher for women and children. All those experiences were caused by her surrounding environment which still obeyed the law made by the Christian Church during that era.

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