

# CULTURAL ASPECTS IN LITERARY WORK AS A REFLECTION OF HUMAN LIVES

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**Abstract :** This paper is aimed to explain the cultural aspects in literary works through three different kinds of literature (Indonesian literature, British literature, and American literature). The researcher uses descriptive qualitative research design. The data are collected by reading activities. The result shows that the aspects of human lives can be seen in cultural aspects of literary works. The first is social relation that was found in the novel *Weton Bukan Salah Hari* by Dianing Widya Yudhistira, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, and a short story *Superman and Me* by Sherman Alexie. The psychological aspect was found in the novel *Nayla* by Djenar Maesa Ayu, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, and a short story *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner. The own-individual habit was found in Chinese literary work entitled *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden, *The Art of Virtue* by Benjamin Franklin, and *Superman and Me* by Sherman Alexie. The religious aspect was found in the novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, and *(Deliverance) from Another Sore Fit* by Anne Bradstreet. The value aspect was found in the novel *Laskar Pelangi* and *Sang Pemimpi* by Andrea Hirata (education), *Harimau! Harimau!* by Mochtar Lubis (moral), *Kambing Jantan* by Raditya Dika (entertainment), and *Civil Disobedience and Resistance to Civil Government* by Henry David Thoreau (critic).

**Keywords:** culture, literary work, cultural aspects, human lives

Literature is the reflection of human lives. It reflects the real social condition of human beings that was written into a literary work by an author. The literary works itself can be oral literary works (song, sermons) or written literary works (novel, poem, prose). Actually, the function of literary work is a media to express idea, opinion, thought, message, etc. In addition, literature itself is also a media for creativity and imagination. Despite as the media for expressing idea, opinion, and creativity, literary works can influence the human being perceptions. It means the literature can shape the society or vice versa, (the society shapes the literature). This is the concept that literature is a social product.

Literature is also related to the culture in the society. The existence of culture cannot be separated from daily human life. When the word “culture” is mentioned, we can think many cultural things such as language, art, tradition, dance, local clothing, etc. The culture is universal. Culture is the way of living which group of people has developed and transmits from one generation to the next generation. Therefore, the word “culture” is about not only the heritage, tradition, and custom of people, but also the rule of people lives. It reflects all system of human life.

The literary work does not merely explain about the culture, but also the other information related to human activities. The theory of culture has two senses;

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culture in broad sense and in small sense. Culture in broad sense is the advanced development of the body, mind, and spirit by training and experience (Hornby 1985:210). Culture in small sense is all the arts, belief, social institution characteristics of a tribe, race, or nation. The cultural aspects in literary work include many aspects in human lives. According to Koentjaraningrat (2002), the cultural concepts are the religion system, social organization system, knowledge system, language, art, livelihood and technology. While based on the theory of E.B. Taylor, there are seven aspects of culture: knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, capabilities, habit.

## METHOD

Descriptive qualitative research design was implemented in this study. This method is used to describe the facts and continue with analysis. It is not merely explaining, but also giving the understanding. According to Whitney (in Hidayat 2007), descriptive method is seeking the facts with suitable and match interpretation. The descriptive method learns the problems in society, includes the people behaviors and people views. Winarno (in Hidayat 2007) said that the descriptive method is used to solve problems by collecting, classifying, analyzing, and interpreting the data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Social Relation

There are many other examples of social relation aspects in the literary works. One of the examples is the conflict in the society portrayed in the novel *Weton Bukan Salah Hari* by Dianing Widya Yudhistira. The character is a girl named Mukti. The

poverty happens in her society, but the people can live side by side in harmony. Nevertheless, she faced on the complicated problems because she refused the perception about *weton* that was believed by many people in her society. She is an educated person that refuses the power of *weton*. In this case, she has the conflict with the society and her family.

The other example is the society aspect in the novel *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* by Habiburrahman El-Shirazy. This is portrayed by the main character “Azzam” who come from poor family. However, even though they are poor, he can study at AlAzhar University Cairo. There he should be independent and. He makes *tempe* and *bakso* in order to get money. From this point, even though he is poor person, he is never do criminal or bad and unfair action to get money. The social aspects represent the struggle of poor people who kept in good behavior based on their religion value.

The other example is taken from the novel entitled *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens. In this novel, the society differentiates the poor people and the rich people. The poor people are alienated in the city and became criminals. The rich people live side by side in their cozy houses. The city is like labyrinth, someone who enters London will be difficult to escape. The poor people live in the workhouse and the system separated the member of family based on their ability and power. For example, husband is separated from wives and children.

In American literature, the social relation is reflected by the short story entitled *Superman and Me* by Sherman Alexie. This novel clearly explains about the struggle of Indian boy to save his life with his own way. The writer stressed that by reading, everything can be changed. He lived in the reservation with his family and he tried to read his father’s book (book for adult about politics, spy, murderer, etc).

## **Psychological**

The character's psychological aspect is very important in the literary work. The characters should seem "alive" and brought the characteristics of the character. The psychology relates to the soul and mental aspects of characters in the novel. Some literary works have unique and strong characters in the story. They represent the major idea of the novel into the readers. One of the examples is the psychology aspects in the novel *Nayla* by Djenar Maesa Ayu. The novel is about the different characteristics between a daughter and a mother in their hard lives. Mother is portrayed by harsh characters and she is a demanded mother. She asks Nayla to become like herself. She always does bad attitude to Nayla and Nayla hates her mother. For example when Nayla wet the bed (urinating), her mother put the safety pin in Nayla's vagina. It is represented by the sentences:

*"Kenapa ibu tak bisa berpikir bahwa tak akan ada satu orang anak pun yang memilih ditusuk vaginanya dengan peniti hanya karena ingin mempertahankan rasa malas".*

Everyday Nayla get the punishment from her mother without knowing the reasons. The mother was always refusing Nayla's reasons when she does mistakes. This condition makes she hates her mother.

The other example is in American literature entitled *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner. *A Rose for Emily* is one of William Faulkner short story that is very popular in the twentieth century. It is a story about a strange splinter called Emily Grierson and his life's expectation in the town. The simple point in this story is "that privilege can sometimes be a prison".

Definitely, it is not the real "prison" with grating iron bars. The evidence of this statement is that her privilege precisely brings herself into the misery.

## **Individual Habit**

Individual habit is part of culture. It means the person himself/herself did the personal or individual habit continuously and become him/her culture. For example, he has the habit of study hard, therefore he get the best score in his test. Later, his study hard become the culture because he is always does it in his life. In the literary work, the example is Chinese literature's novel entitled *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden. To be a geisha is not easy. Many skills should be learned by a geisha to be the greatest geisha. Chiyo, the main character, learned those skills difficultly. She learned how to play *shamisen*, to dance, to sing, etc. For her, beauty and pain live side by side. A geisha should sleep with their necks on small supports instead of pillow, so she can keep her hairstyle perfect. A geisha also should walk nobly even though she wears the unsymmetrical wooden clog. These activities were learned by Chiyo every day, and then these become her habit. This habit was learned by Chiyo to be the great Sayuri.

The other example is in the American short story entitled *The Art of Virtue* by Benjamin Franklin. In his short story, he explained the "recipe" to be the success person by his experience in daily life. He did it every day and later become his habit. In this work, he also explains the day's management into begin the morning with positive activities (rise, wash, etc), do the duty because work has the big percentage in his life than sleep. The evidence is he list the word 'work' eight times than the word 'sleep' four times. The other example is in the short story *Superman and Me* by

Sherman Alexie. His habit in reading becomes his culture in gaining success.

### **Religion / Belief**

The religion/belief is the basic understanding in the human life. Besides, it is the common issue in each the literary works worldwide. Majority of literary works adds the religion value into the content of literary works. It indicates that the religion/belief cannot be separated from human lives. The example of religion value in the Indonesian literature is in the novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* by Habiburrahman ElShirazy. In this novel, the religion is the major issue. It includes two points: the relationship between human beings and God, and the relationship between the human beings and the society. This novel emphasized that these points should be fulfilled by human beings to get the harmony in their life.

#### **a. The relationship between human beings and God**

The relationship between human beings and God are explained clearly in the novel. It is important to maintain the good relationship between human beings and God. In this novel, the relationship between human beings and God are explained by the main character "Fahri" who always keep his eyesight as called "*gadhul bashar*" to women/girls who are not belonging to his *muhrim*. In Islam, the *muhrim* boundary becomes the rules who keep male and female. This is used to keep the human honorary.

#### **b. The relationship between human beings and the society**

The relationship between human beings and the society is also important in the human lives. As human beings, people should live side by side with other people. In this novel, that relationship is clearly expressed by the author. For example, the character named Aisyah who is the Muslim girl help the American girl and her mother in the bus. She allowed the mother girl to sit in her chair.

This action represents that all human beings are the same. People have the same levels with other people. The heterogeneous and multicultural lives among people should be kept well in order to live in harmony. From the explanation above, the novel entitled *Ayat-Ayat Cinta (AAC)* includes the religion issue and gives the role to shape the human behavior toward God and toward the society surrounding in order to live in harmony.

The other example is in the British literature. Unlike the novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, the novel *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens represents the religious controversy. Since this novel was written in Victorian Period, the religious controversy becomes the major issue. The church gets the bad definition in this novel. Dickens is Anglican but he felt that church is too impersonal and institutionalized. Besides, church did not care to the poor and miserable people. Dickens also criticizes the parish system and workhouse. In this time, the religion and church separated its function into the private practice and as institution. For example, "*I hope you say your prayers every night,*" said another ... gentleman

*in a gruff voice, "and pray for the people who feed you, and take care of you, like a Christian."* "Yes, sir," stammered the boy. The gentleman who spoke last was unconsciously right. It would have been very like a Christian, and a marvelously good Christian, too, if Oliver had prayed for the people who fed and took care of him. But he hadn't, because nobody had taught him. (Chapter 2) In this example, it is clear that Oliver are asked to be a good Christian, but no one have taught him even he was brought into the parish system and workhouse under the Church. The people at that time have the freedom in religion. It means the church cannot act as the leader in expanding religion. The church just focuses on the internal services, such as parish system and workhouse.

The other example occurs in different chapter. "And, when Sunday came, how differently the day was spent ... from any manner in which he had ever spent it yet!" (Chapter 32) It means Oliver never go to Church before, even though he lives in the institution under the church. It indicates that the religion is only the institution without the real application.

Church also differentiates people based on their behaviors in their lives. For example is in the last chapter. "I do believe that the shade of that poor girl ... often hovers about that solemn nook – ay, though it is a church, a she was weak and erring. (53.16)" (Chapter 53) In this case, the girl refers to Agnes (Oliver mother who was getting sex without married). She was never allowed to enter the Church even in the last time of her life. The Church can accept her body after he died.

The condition of church above is the portrait of church in the city. In the countryside, the people can live in harmony and go to the church together. They live side by side in the village and pray together in the church. For example is in chapter 32, "And, when Sunday came, how differently the day was spent ... from any manner in which he had ever spent it yet!" and "There was the little church in the morning, with the ... green leaves fluttering at the windows, the birds singing without, and the sweet-smelling air stealing in at the low porch, and filling the homely building with its fragrance".

Finally, it is also different to American Literature. For example is a poem entitled (*Deliverance*) from *Another Sore Fit* by Anne Bradstreet. This poem was written in the Puritanism age. The most of popular issue in the age of Puritanism is religion. During this period, Puritanism had impact on both religious thought and cultural patterns in America. Puritanism has four convictions. (1) Personal salvation was entirely from God. (2) The bible provided the indispensable guide to life. (3) The church should reflect the express teaching of scripture. (4) Society was one unified whole.

In her poem entitled (*Deliverance*) from *Another Sore Fit*, she talked much about God and a person's admiration toward God. She thinks that God always accompany himself, even though she is in sad condition God always gives her the spirit to live, to wake from the sadness and God always hears her pray. This is illustrated in stanza II: *Thou knowest the sorrows that I felt; My complaints and groans were heard of Thee', And how in sweat I seemed to melt, Thou help'st and Thou regardest to me.*

In this part, she feels that god loves her and God gives her mercies and bounty. Therefore, she should render God with her heart and soul. As human being, person should praise God along life. In the last stanza, she explains that her life dedicated to God.

## **Value**

The cultural aspects in literary works also include value. It means the existence of literary work always carries the value in the society. The value itself represents the importance of literary work in the society. Some values in the literary work are:

### **Education value**

The education value is important in shaping the cultural aspects in literary work. The education value in the novel is used to educate the readers into the better life or based on the author's perspective and understanding. The example in the Indonesian literary work is the novel *Laskar Pelangi* and *Sang Pemimpi* by Andrea Hirata. Those novels give the understanding about the importance of education and the view how children survive to study in the school. This novel can give such motivation and support for students (the readers) to have struggle in reaching the dream. The other example is in the American short story entitled *Superman and Me* by Sherman Alexie. He emphasized that each children have the same opportunity in education; even they came from the Indian children or American children.

### **Moral Value**

In Indonesian literature, the novel *Harimau! Harimau!* explains about the moral value of people. This novel is written by Mochtar Lubis. The novel *Harimau! Harimau!* emphasized the view

that people can do everything, even it is bad or good, when they are in oppressed situation in order to keep their existence safely. In that condition, the people were controlled by fiendish desire, such the desire to be the only winner, egoistic, the desire to kill, the desire to attack other people. Absolutely, in this case, the *Harimau* does not mean the tiger with strange face, but it symbolized the people. The people do not have the good attitude and behavior in the society.

### **Entertainment Value**

In the novel, sometimes just explain the entertainment value as its function. Sometimes, this novel does not carry the "weight" story. For example, the novel entitled *Kambing Jantan* by Raditya Dika and his other works. This novel is easy to read and the language is simple. Besides, the content is simple, just the expression of daily activities. This novel majority's function is to entertain the readers. Therefore, the author hopes that the readers will be happy after reading the novel.

### **Critics and Protest Value**

The critics and protest often become the topic of literary works. The value was expressed by the author. The author would like to express his/her personal critics and protest or it is as the representation of the society's protest. The example is in the short story entitled *From "Resistance to Civil Government" or "Civil Disobedience"* (1849) by Henry David Thoreau. "*If a man who has no property refuses but once to earn nine shillings for the state, he is put in prison for a period unlimited by any law that I know, and determined only by the discretion of those who put him there; but if we should steal ninety times nine shillings from the state, he is soon permitted to go at large again*". It seems that a corruptor imprisoned in

short time, while a thief who steal a wallet was stricken by the society and was imprisoned by the government.

In this essay, he also explain that there is no correlation between the government and the society because the government placed their selves too high and the society is only the subject and tools to run their power. The state will not hear the citizen's voices because they have the authority and run the policy based on their will and desire. The democracy is only the wrapper of their power. In fact, there is no democracy at all. The state never confronts a man's sense but only by his body. It is not armed with superior wit and honesty, but with the superior physical strength. Actually, the American government just improves their skills in speaking or being orators even though their words are actually nothing.

## CONCLUSION

According to the discussion, the result shows some cultural aspects in literary works. They are the social relation, the psychological, the own individual habit, the religion/belief, and the value. The first is social relation that was found in the novel *Weton Bukan Salah Hari* by Dianing Widya Yudhistira, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, and a short story *Superman and Me* by Sherman Alexie. The psychological aspect was found in the novel *Nayla* by Djenar Maesa Ayu, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, and a short story *A Rose for Emily* by William Faulkner. The own-individual habit was found in Chinese literary work entitled *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden, *The Art of Virtue* by Benjamin Franklin, and *Superman and Me* by Sherman Alexie. The religious aspect was found in the novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy, *Oliver Twist* by

Charles Dickens, and (*Deliverance*) from *Another Sore Fit* by Anne Bradstreet. The value aspect was found in the novel *Laskar Pelangi* and *Sang Pemimpi* by Andrea Hirata (education), *Harimau! Harimau!* by Mochtar Lubis (moral), *Kambing Jantan* by Raditya Dika (entertainment), and *Civil Disobedience* and *Resistance to Civil Government* by Henry David Thoreau (critic).

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