

***CULTURAL TYPOLOGY OF INDONESIA
REVEALED IN PRAMOEDYA'S NOVEL***

**TIPOLOGI BUDAYA MASYARAKAT INDONESIA
DALAM NOVEL PRAMOEDYA**

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Abstrak

Seperti halnya Poerbatjaraka, meskipun berbeda tipe penulisannya, karya-karya Pramoedya berisi perlawanan terhadap budaya Jawa yang diketahui saat menghabiskan masa kecil dan masa mudanya. Sepanjang yang penulis ketahui, Pramoedya tidak pernah menerbitkan karya dalam bahasa daerahnya. Namun, tidak berarti Pramoedya jauh dari budaya Jawa.

Kata kunci: tipologi budaya, budaya Jawa

Abstract

Like Poerbatjaraka, though in a very different style, Pramoedya Ananta Toer was, and is, a rebel against the Javanese culture he imbibed as a child and young man. So far as I know, he has never published a page in the language of his childhood home; but this does not mean that Java and its culture are ever very far from his mind.

Key words: *cultural typology, Javanese culture*

1. Culture and Literature

In a narrow understanding culture is concerned with all high aspects of life, such as special arts and tradition. However, in a wide definition, culture deals with all activities and behaviors human beings do as their efforts to achieve their adjustments and perfect life (Ismail Hussein 1966:15—17). Agus Salim argued that culture is a unity of 'soul' and 'power', becoming an integrated mind. The meaning of culture, therefore, refers to all efforts and minds which result from the mind for the sake of achievement.¹

The above discussion leads to the point that culture covers all activities in connection with traditions, the systems and way of life of a

community, most of which are inherited from the past. It is clear then that culture as human beings' efforts for the past and present civilization. Cultural change cannot take place without the existence of the past culture and this can be historically shown from the fact that there have been cultural borrowing and influences among the countries in the world. Through these elements, culture gets new triggers in its wealth and continuity (Koh Young Hun 1996:103).²

We cannot deny that literature is a community phenomenon due to the fact that literary products reflect their community despite different forms and ways. This idea is strongly underpinned by the fact that the role of poets as a

community member. Literature is also sensitive regarding the phenomena of its community who shapes it and interprets these phenomena presented in their literature works. Consequently, analyzing a writer actually means to study his/her views on the world as reflected on his/her works. It, then, can be accepted that the essential spiritual and physical life of the writer can be felt as the life experience of the community where this writer lives.

G. Lukacs also argues that literary works are created according to a certain perspective their writers construct and without such perspective a literary work is merely a report. Moreover, he argues that literary is knowledge about facts channeled through creative writing which shapes its genre. These shapes are actually not the technical or linguistic matters as expected by the literary critics of formalists or structuralists; on the contrary, literature is an aesthetic or stylistic one existing in its content, form manifested through plotting techniques, such as the period of narration and the connection between the characters and atmosphere in literature (Jefferson & Robey 1998:204—205).

When this issue is referred to Pramoedy's literary works, it is strongly felt that he gives a special attention to his own national culture with terrible concern which is useful because this concern trigger the wealth and weakness of national culture functioning as two of the factors leading to the victory and failure facing external challenges. The definition of culture in this paper, therefore, means to cover: (i) one inner-life element referred to spirituality, meaning and purposes of life and truths; (ii) one bodily element referred to material culture, anything which can ease or

soften people's life; (iii) a concept considering culture as an effort of a community; (iii) the concept considering culture as an effort of a community to face the existing challenge in a certain development stage.

2. Strengths and Weaknesses of Indonesian Culture

Since the early settlement of the Indonesian islands, these ancient settlers realized that Indonesia has got her specialty from geographic, geo-economic and geo-politic factors. The wealth of spices, and natural resources and strategic location of Nusantara islands became once well-known among Indian and Chinese traders in the first and third centuries. Peaceful seas, strategic straits, sources of forests, mining and agricultural products were interesting keys to establish important trade traffics (Wolters 1989:68—80).

This fact is not a coincident that busy trading with these natural wealth gradually became community advancement leading to power and government centralization. In addition, the absorption of the value system influence in the centers of trading and governments who had a connection with Indian and Chinese traders is not either an unexpected fact. The Buddhist and Hinduism monks joined these trading activities and actively disseminated their own religious teaching and values. The same thing happened to Islam entering this archipelago in 13th Century (Umar Kayam 1989:5) and this entrance has played an unquestionably important role in establishing belief system and culture in this area.

In this case, Indonesian society maintain old attitudes and traditions as called 'historic instructions' by Umar Kayam, namely a historic calling in

order that these attitudes and traditions are maintained to be done in daily activities. This fact leads to the difficulty in quickly and thoroughly accepting foreign influences traditionally adjusted with local conditions, such as 'elegant', 'flexible', 'creative', as reflected by Borobudur as the monument of Buddhism Mahayana during Syailendra kingdom in 8th Century and Prambanan as a Hinduism-Buddhism monument in the same century, illustrating elegant, flexible and creative traditions to face and accept the great influence of India in term of developing and enriching Indonesian traditions. This cultural transformation, therefore, reflects change process of 'Indonesianization', instead of 'Indianization', against Indian civilization influence (Umar Kayam, 1989:5—6).³

According to Umar Kayam, the Indonesianizing process influenced by Indian tradition took place until post Mataram period which was not actually under the Indian shadow. Majapahit can be considered as the process peak of Indonesia-Hinduism cultural process and after Sriwijaya in 8th Century, Majapahit reached its Nusantara empire status in 14th and 15th Centuries. The Hinduism belief system civilization is clearly illustrated in the temple monuments and Nagarakartagama and Prapanca texts. This color of Hinduism, however, was then creatively and elegantly adjusted and then cultivated in East Indonesia. The emergence of Demak as an Islam-Indonesia dialogue discourse leads to the bankruptcy of Majapahit and this makes the Indonesia-Hinduism cultural changes stop (Umar Kayam 1989:7).

Islam entering Nusantara followed the same step, through the tradesmen and ulemas who intended to disseminate this new religion, but these

dialogues between Islamic civilization and Indonesian culture took place unsteadily. What we call Indonesia-Hinduism synthesis as the change result occurred in 7 centuries through various achievements and experiments from Mataram I, Kediri and Singasari periods to Majapahit and this is a cultural change experience as an important way of cultural search.

This fact results in the in-depth absorption of various cultural bases and cores of great civilizations into Indonesian culture. When Islam entered Indonesian culture, the meetings between religion and cultural value system so as to strengthen this cultural system (Umar Kayam 1989:8). The cultural changes viewed from the above context does not show the cultural loss against foreign cultures and this idea results from the cultural change at that time to face influence acceptance and existing local cultural creation.

However, when the Netherlands came to Indonesia to control all spice trading activities and settled here to be the colonist of Nusantara archipelago, the kingdoms in this area were not ready to face the European power with advanced and complex military and organizations that they had not previously experienced. Their coming to Indonesia was to seize, press and monopolize spice trade and to control all these trade routes by force. The confrontations between European and Nusantara traders were direct and forceful and these confrontations defeated Nusantara kingdoms against these European traders (Koh Young Hun 1996:107—108).

Pramoedya was principally proud of Indonesian culture treasure and he argued that considered from written manuscripts, Indonesia is actually much richer than the European nations

by the 8th Century due to the fact that Indonesian people could already read when most European nations were illiterate when the Dutch just had a contact with Christian religion and even they killed the first evangelist group, Bonifacious. Pramoedya was also proud of the essence that Mpu Tantular and Prapanca, as poets, succeeded in writing Sutasoma and in 14th century in Hayam Wuruk period.

Viewed from another perspective, however, Indonesia experienced continuous defeats against the Western cultures in the battlefields in three hundred years. Pramoedya argued that human beings, the Earth and Indonesian thoughts were defeated by Europe again and again, and this defeat led Indonesia to the fact that Indonesia did not know the big world and Indonesia closed herself to be a continuously defeated country because Indonesia lost anything owned on land and on the sea and even Indonesia herself. What is left is merely a historical burden (Rumah Kaca: 374). Pramoedya presented this idea by saying:

“Indonesia has continuously been defeated. When it is defeated by praise, she actually does not know anything what has happened in this world so far. A human being is usually conquered by the first praise. If you learn the history of Indonesia, too few number of heroes have been murdered in the battle fields to defend their philosophy. All are unsteady, give up to the Dutch and this defeat acknowledges the power and philosophy of Europe, not only merely knowledge” (RK: 306).

In the same context, Ben Anderson states that “beginning in the early seventeenth century, Javanese rulers had indeed experienced an almost unbroken series of defeats, humiliations, and catastrophes”

(Anderson 1990:200). Most of these defeats of Indonesia, according to Pramoedya, are considered to result from both the efforts of the colonial countries to have Indonesian people fight against other Indonesian community and particularly the greediness of their own kings. He further states that Indonesian culture does not have the power to face the development of the Western culture elements. Moreover, the weakness of this country can be reflected through her own apparently colonized mentality, leading to weak and passive culture (Nadi Insan 1982:31).

3. Indonesian Culture and *Priyayi* World

Defining the *priyayi* (aristocrat) group is not that easy due to various perspectives regarding this term. Geertz defines *priyayi* as an elite group who have official statues and master intellectual fields, such as religion, philosophy, arts, knowledge, and academic skills, and this group differs from farmers who are under this elite group and control the society's basic needs, i.e. food stocks (Geertz 1981:305). Koentjaraningrat explained that prior to the Second World War, the government officers were called *priyayi* (Koentjaraningrat 1984:234). Suseno defines *priyayi* as a worker group and educated people who do not do what forced labors do; they are considered as officers from various levels and fields, such as Elementary School teachers, post-officers, and train officers in small towns, middle officers and high level officers in big cities (Suseno 1988:12). Van Niel also explains that *priyayi* is a group of administrative officers, government officers and educated people with high official structures (Niel 1984: 30).⁴

Pramoedya's novels present bad *priyayi* who do not obey their own cultural values, such as *sepi ing pamrih* (sincere) and shows a conflicting attitude between feudal *priyayi* and the main characters in his novels. These cultural conflicts stem from perception disputes on life values between main characters and *priyayi* characters who still maintain their national cultural heritage, considered by Pramoedya as the main drawback for the national development. For example, Minke as the main character in Bumi Manusia (BM) tetralogy novel can be claimed as a *priyayi*, because the father is *bupati*, a district head, and Minke can be promoted to be a district head upon his education at HBS, and STOVIA. Minke, however, has refused to be the feudal district head since the beginning of this story due to the fact that Minke intends to be "a free man is not controlled, and does not control the community"(BM: 123). This thought is a new horizon which is different from what the local élite perceived at that time. The education in European schools makes Minke humiliated if he is forced to crawl on hands and knees respecting a *priyayi* and this cultural humiliation on human beings' dignity is cynically criticized by Pramoedya. The following are his views on strongly refusing feudalistic attitudes of *priyayi*. Facing a district head means to be ready to be humiliated without any opportunities to defend ourselves. Never do I force anybody to do such things to me. Why should I do this for others. Damn it! - - - - - Really, my school mates will fully laugh at me seeing a drama of how human beings who really walk, on their own feet, but they now have to walk in a half-way, underpinned by two hands. Ya Allah, you the ancestor, you, why did you create a tradition which humiliates your

own grandchildren as such? Don't you think about it, damned ancestor! (BM: 116).

This quotation illustrates that Minke strongly intends to take off feudalistic elements inherited by ancestors and to refuse to be a *priyayi*. Keith Foulcher also agrees to state that "the condition of his (Minke) life begins to be formed of potential which Nyai appears to embody, and a repudiation of his Javanese *priyayi* background" (Foulcher 1981 "Pramoedya Ananta Toer and the Indonesian Consciousness: Some Considerations", a paper presented at Seminar Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia, 19-22 Agustus, Pacet: 2). This refute is considered important and serious because the descendent element is used as a key factor used to differentiate *priyayi* from non-*priyayi* (Geertz, 1989:309) and illustrates Minke's view to be a free man. He does not want to become a *priyayi* whose daily needs are collected from humiliating the poor.

The negative illustrations on *priyayi* group drawn in his novels are connected to Pramoedya's views on their duties and functions in the colonial era. He believes that *priyayi* did not have a significant role to make this country free from colonization. Some groups of *priyayi*, however, intentionally established the cooperation with the colonial agents to negatively govern and systematically humiliate the poor. Umar Kayam also states that the important movements in Indonesian history, such as *Sarekat Islam* who was not from the *priyayi* group or descendants, but they were *santri* and (students of pesantren, Islamic boarding schools) traders and did not have *priyayi* ethos based considerations (Umar Kayam,

1989:21). Anderson has similar views on this issue as follows:

After 1830, the only Javanese who clashed physically with the colonialists were small clusters of Haji, local toughs, peasants and other elements of common people. The Javanese upper class became the pliant tool of the Dutch in erecting the ruthlessly exploitative cultuurstelsel, in facilitating the depredations of private agrarian capitalism in the Liberal era, and so on till the close of the colonial age (Anderson 1990:200—201).

Pramoedya criticizes the pseudo-*priyayi* attitudes deviating from the general truths of *priyayi*, all of which are etiquettes, arts, and mystical practices as three *priyayis'* main principles. These three key principles function as the successive efforts moving from human beings' physical experiences leading to their inner-life, from external aspects to internal ones. One example is that an etiquette factor is really emphasized as a way to polish people's behavior to become a socially appropriate interaction tool, to draw mental formality on day-to-day activities, double discipline of thoughts and physical matters, illustrating the deep meaning on physical movements. There are four important principles underlying the *priyayis'* etiquettes: appropriate forms for correct structural levels, discontinuity, pretense, and avoidance of each behavior showing wild acts or inability to do self-control (Geertz 1989:319—326).

In this perspective, Pramoedya thinks that the deviation of *priyayi* who dare to sell their own children for the sake of job promotion or job maintenance is considered a terribly serious one as reflected by the case of Sanikem and Surati in BM trilogy. A 14-year old Sanikem is sold to be a *nyai* (mistress) by her own father,

Sastrotomo, who wants to be promoted from a clerk to be a cashier at the Tulangan sugar company in Sidoarjo. These traditions are inherited to his son of Sastrotomo, Sastro Kassier, who sell his own daughter, Surati, to an administrative officer of the sugar company in Plikemboh, to maintain his official structural position. These two inherited cases show that it is the official position which is really important in *priyayis'* community. Selling someone's own children for any purposes cannot clearly be accepted as a normal way! Sanikem and Surati are surely disappointed to their own parents. Sanikem says that "since then, my appreciation and respect to my father have really disappeared; to anybody who in his life sells their own children" (BM: 77). In addition, Surati revenges through a terrible way, suffering from chicken pox then attacking Plikemboh till his death. Boris Parnikel argues that a marriage by force experienced by Sanikem in Indonesian mythology symbolizes a tie by force between Indonesian land and the coming agent from overseas who is not invited, the ties agreed by cowardly and intentional Indonesian land kings (Parnikel 1981:260—261).

The characters in Pramoedya's literary works reveal the importance of the official structure in an office for *priyayi* groups and this phenomenon is actually connected to the Dutch policies in order to spread and empower their bureaucracy on their colonized countries. The demands of Dutch's cultural idioms emphasizing rationality, impressions and productivity added with colonial system greediness do not give any room for the local people to comprehensively understand them. The worse one is that princes, district heads

and others, due to their pessimistic ideas, are searching for the adjustments to put themselves even as the parts of the Dutch's bureaucratic machinery. In the 20th Century, the Dutch successfully established the East Indies as an country without politics (*beambtenstaat*), focusing on bureaucratic dynamics but neglecting political power. This is the cause which local governmental system absorption into the Dutch bureaucratic system comes into existence (Sutherland 1979: 1-2).

That this condition leads Indonesian people to prioritize bureaucracy can be accepted. In addition, being a member of bureaucratic elites, becoming a government officer, is what most Indonesian people want to be and it is an old value, '*ngawula ing praja lan raja*' (employing oneself to the king and nation). Therefore, the story of Sumantri Ngenger puppets narrates an ambitious young man who urbanizes to a big city and then gets a good job in the kingdom by scarifying his sister and this story is an important one for Indonesian (Umar Kayam, 1989:19). Pramoedya's views on posts as follows:

But post: -- it is everything and all are for the local people, not farmers and not craftsmen. Wealth can disappear, families can be destroyed, names can be damaged, posts have to be safe. Post is not only a matter of making money, internally it is a respect, truth, dignity, and even living itself. People fight, pray, austerity through fasting and meditation, false accusation, lies, hard working, bringing misfortunate to others, just for the sake of the post. People are ready to lose anything just for the sake of the post, with which anything can be redeemed (ASB: 130).

Pramoedya's cynical perspectives on *priyayi*'s frozen or passive attitudes showing satisfaction and interests merely on salary raise and post maintenance are clearly presented. It is the *priyayi* group who get educational benefits provided by the Dutch Government for Indonesia and this groups work in the Dutch's sugar manufacturers, export-import companies, and transportation agents. This group, however, does not have an intention to make this country free from colonial control and this attitude is actually connected to one of Indonesian principles, the ones connected to respect based on the idea that all communities' references are hierarchically structured and this hierarchy contributes values to the structure itself.

Every human being, therefore, is obliged to maintain this structure or order and brings themselves according to it (Hildred Geertz, 1961:147). This view is actually based on the idea to well put the community's existence in order that human beings acknowledge their posts and duties so as to contribute their participation to making the community united to be one. Each community member, accordingly, is required in order that this member does not develop the idea of competing each other, instead, this member feels satisfied with the post s/he occupies and does her/his the occupation consistently. In other words, someone's dream and competitiveness should be sacrificed to avoid fractions, disharmony and contradictions. Respect principles are actually good, but these can make *priyayi*'s attitudes frozen rather than efforts to improve this now.

According to Indonesian perspectives, initiatives mean to leave a guaranteed place and set new heavy

posts. This idea can shake the existing balance and then the idea destroys existing universe system as illustrated by the following expression *rame ing gawe*, frequently used to describe such attitude and meaning that everyone has to fulfill his/her obligation at each post. Mulder interprets this expression as “Each human being is obliged to do his/her duties, due to the loyalty to accept and do the duties, s/he does the duties in her/his life where s/he was born and does acts according to the karma laws, God’s and human beings’ laws, instead of her/his own initiatives or personal responsibilities. Similarly, he thinks of the doubts whether Indonesian etiquettes are marked by *rame ing gawe* as an aware effort to improve the world (Mulder, 1984:40—41).

In the same context, Pramoedy disagrees with the Indonesian attitude which neglects personal initiatives and creativity due to the fact that this attitude can hamper the national development. Pramoedy gives a strong view on this issue as illustrated by the dialogue between Mingke and Bunda, visiting the child who is studying at STOVIA, as follows:

“You say it is for the sake of freedom of human beings from the burden other human beings have created. Don’t you remember, kid? That’s not an Indonesian way. Indonesian do anything just the sake of doing their obligation, orders are from God, gods, from the kings. Upon completion their job, people feel happy to be themselves until another job is ordered again. Therefore, human beings express thanks, acknowledging thanks. Human beings are not chased by the giant in their body.” “Mother, I’ve got a lot of lessons so far. Therefore, I realized that life is not that simple.” (JL: 54)

Similarly, Pramoedy refers this with Indonesian characters, self-adaptation, self-compromise, and self-accommodation, all of which are national characters which throw these characters when they meet the nations with stronger characters. These characters which are actually connected to the cultural experiences become the peak of our own defeat. When the nation was still struggling with the correct formulation to deal with the cultural changes in the Indonesia-Islam synthesis, European culture with strange aggressive cultural idioms came beating this nation. These strong experiences and history-oriented demands in order to be elegant, flexible, creative, and tactful to use archipelagic geography, geo-economics and geopolitics, therefore, become the weak point when this nation faces the West. These are considered to become the weak points according to Pramoedy’s perspectives, as follows:

In a wrong philosophy, God, it’s only self-defense left. Indonesian nation facing the white is not due to aggression. They just know to defense themselves, defense and then they get defeated, due to the defeated philosophy. The philosophy is more declining, as God knows at the moment it’s not the four-hundred-year-ago nation. -----Now what left are just adaptation, compromise, even this nation cannot defense herself. No development. It’s a pity, they themselves do not this condition. It’s a high time this nation look at other nations as models. In the last one hundred years their writing has been merely the thoughts of the defeated nation who does not understand how to set herself free from her own defeat (Rumah Kaca; 80).

Pramoedy believes that a left-behind country is colonized by the

developed one. This can be learned from the West and we have to know the refuse the sickness from the West. He further argues that modern human beings must be set free from unnecessary things, such as weak cultural heritage. His idea resembles Sutan Takdir Alisjabana's thought that he strongly states the nation's cultural development orientation should be associated to Western cultures and urges to leave static Hinduism thoughts (Achdiat, 1986:13—34), i.e. Indonesian culture must be free from feudal culture which can kill individualistic perspectives. Pramoedya has an idea that a developed world is the one which is developed, free from historical burdens,⁵ some of which are passive, static, and feudal ideas. Criticizing the static members of Sarekat Islam movements, Pramoedya argues that "The members are static *priyayi* members without any initiatives and life spirit, merely intending to spend their time peacefully in the Governor's official duties. It shouldn't have been like this, well we have no reason not to accept it because these mistakes have taken place (JL: 230). The characteristics of *gamelan* (a set of Javanese musical instruments) are used by Pramoedya to cynically criticize these problems:

Gamelan mostly sings the longing of a nation to welcome a Messiah—missing something/someone, does not do the searching and does not give a birth. *Gamelan* itself represents Indonesian soul life which is lazy to do the searching, going around in the circle, repeating, like prayers and magic spell, drowning, killing thoughts, bringing human beings to be in the misleading exhaustion, no individuals. (BM: 188).

4. Conclusion

It is true that a nation needs to have its own literary works to help its people remember their past (Bachtiar, 1981:31). From this idea, Pramoedya successfully fulfills this perspective, because his works are rich with the problems which can make the people aware of their own past and horizons of the strong and weak points of a nation from the perspectives of Pramoedya who was very sensitive of the nation's defeat resulting from its own weak cultural heritage. In this context, forgetting bad historical burdens is a way to encourage a nation which once had great historical experiences due to the fact that burdening historical heritage leads to an endless cultural tiredness.

Pramoedya's interpretation should be well accepted as implied suggestions in literary works, without any prejudice on him. Pramoedya himself argues: "It's true that discussing literary works cannot be separated from their writers. Somehow, literary works really depend on their writers' hands, including historical lump-sum, present situation, and future prospects. I myself do not mind being evaluated on my own matters as a person, writer, social shady character with all involvement. We finally agree that we are earth creatures, instead of hell and heaven creatures, with strength and weaknesses, spirit and powerlessness, with truths and errors – all of which are the process of 'nation building', as the Earth creatures who always human beings' problems and humanity to express deep love to our own nation.⁶ With these ideas, Pramoedya was a literary writer who always searched for human beings' problems and humanity to express deep love to our own nation.

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