

AN ANALYSIS ON SIAMESE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEMS THROUGH THE FEMALE CHARACTERS' ACTION AND REACTIONS USING A FEMINISM APPROACH IN ELIZABETH HAND'S *ANNA AND THE KING*

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ABSTRACT

Literature pleases humans by imitating life, or more precisely, by displaying its writers' visions of life as it is or as the writers think it should be. The story of *Anna and the King* focused more on the struggle of a British teacher in Siam, Anna Leonowens, who was demanded to teach the English ways to Siamese Royal children and wives who still held the traditional culture and rules. The reflections of patriarchal thoughts and views hopefully could be seen through the actions and reactions of Anna and Tuptim. Since the setting of the story influenced the story a lot, it was a need to start the analysis from the analysis of the setting. In conclusion, a broad picture on the Siamese patriarchal systems could be revealed. As a country which held traditions and cultures, Siamese people put the positions of men higher than women. Men had higher position which gave them power to oppress women for their favors. Polygamy was applied here, which supported the patriarchal power in Siam.

Key words: *setting, patriarchy, feminism*

A. INTRODUCTION

Literary criticism is a study, analysis, and evaluation of imaginative literature. Everyone who expresses an opinion about a book, a song, a play, or a movie is a critic, but not everyone's opinion is based upon thought, reflection, analysis, or consistently articulated principles. As people get matured and acquire an education, their ability to analyze, their understanding of human beings, and their appreciation of artistic craftsmanship should increase. The study of literature is an essential component in this- growth of reflection.

Anna and the King, a novel by Elizabeth Hand is an interesting and touching novel that reflects the power of a woman called Anna Leonowens as the female main character and Tuptim to protest or against the inequality of gender done by male characters or other female characters in the Siamese patriarchal system. Madsen L. Deborah (2000) states that specific cultural values are tied to male interests, such as the oppositions between rational (male) and emotional (female), and between nature (female) and civilization (male). Women are defined as 'other' or they are ignored, rendered invisible and silent, if they do not fit the patriarchal scheme. Outside the dominant definitions of male-dominated culture women exist only as insane, inarticulate, or irrelevant.

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B. PROBLEM FORMULATIONS

To answer the writer's curiosity on any possibilities whether patriarchal systems can be tracked through the actions of feminism, the writer would like to set my problem formulations as follow:

1. How was the setting of the novel described?
2. How did Anna and Tuptim act and react toward the gender inequalities which they experienced in the novel *Anna and the King*?
3. How were the Siamese patriarchal systems in *Anna and the King* described through those female characters' actions and reactions toward the gender inequalities?

C. THEORITICAL REVIEW

1. Theories about Setting

Kirszner and Mandell (2000) state the setting of a work of fiction establishes its historical, geographical, and physical location. *Where* a work is set- on a tropical island, in a dungeon, at a crowded party, in a tent in the woods- may influence the interpretation of the story's events and characters. *When* a work takes place- during the French Revolution, during the Vietnam War, today, or in the future- is equally important. Setting is more than just the approximate time and place in which the work is set; setting also encompasses a wide variety of physical and cultural element.

2. Theories about Patriarchy

'Patriarchy' is another recurrent term, referring to government by men (viz. 'the Father'); patriarchy is a cultural (ideological) system that privileges men and all things masculine, and a political system that places power in the hands of men and thus serves male interests at the expense of women (Madsen Deborah L, 2000).

3. Theories about Feminism

Feminism refers to political, cultural, and economic movements aimed at establishing greater rights and legal protections for women. Feminism includes some of the sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference. It is also a movement that campaigns for women's rights and interests. Nancy Cott defines feminism as the belief in the importance of gender equality, invalidating the idea of gender hierarchy as a socially constructed concept (Glover, David & Kaplan, Cora, 2000).

1. Women Position in Capitalist Patriarchy

Capitalism is viewed as both sexually and economically exploitative; capitalist patriarchy is seen as the source of women's oppression : their alienation from labor (through the necessary

creation of a pool of available labor), the patriarchal ownership of the means of production and reproduction, the construction of women as the class of passive consumers, and the exploitation of women's work (Madsen Deborah L, 2000).

2. Women Position Related to Social Inequality

The condition of women not just as a class but as the fundamentally oppressed class is the starting point for radical feminist analysis as it is often been discussed by the Radical Feminist. Radical feminist theory begins with the assumption that women form a 'sex class'. Radical feminism analyses the relationship between social inequality and sexual difference; the domination of women by men is seen to provide the foundation of social inequality, and the sexual oppression of women is seen to underlie the economic, cultural and social subordination of women for example, a powerful expression of the radical feminist project (Madsen Deborah L, 2000).

3. Women Position Related to Class Status in Patriarchal Society

Women position related to class status in Patriarchal Society is related to the roles allocated to women that are independent of class status (mother, sister, housewife, mistress, consumer and reproducer) as it is voiced by the Socialist Feminist. Violence, pornography, working conditions, but above all the political dimension of private life - the family, reproduction and sexuality - these are the issues that concern socialist feminists. The power relationships between men and women within the family reproduce the power relationships that exist in society; so women find job opportunities primarily in the caring professions - like teaching and nursing - and the clerical posts that require the same kinds of organizational skills that a woman needs to run a household. The social class structure is seen to be inseparable from gender divisions: just as the rich oppress the poor, so men oppress women and this is not something that can easily be blamed on individual men who oppress individual women (Madsen Deborah L, 2000).

D. METODOLOGY

The theory of setting will be used to describe how the setting being described in this novel. Next, the using of feminism theories or approaches are necessary to analyze the next problem formulation that is analyzing actions and reactions toward the gender inequality experienced by Anna and Tuptim in the novel *Anna and the King*. The gender inequalities here are related to women position in Patriarchal Society in their relations to labor, psychology, sex class, and class or social status. Further, the writer will describe the Siamese patriarchal system in the

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novel based on my first findings on Anna and Tuptim's actions and reactions toward the gender inequality experienced by her or other female characters.

E. FINDINGS

1. Setting of the Novel

The geographical setting of this novel took place in Siam, its location described in this novel as Burma in the west to Cambodia in east, with forty nine bountiful provinces, and population six millions (p. 70). Whereas the events or stories took place in the Grand Royal Palace, the Great Temple, and in a Monastery in Non Khai (p.55;126; 263). Finding out the historical setting of the story meant referring to when the story of the novel started that was in English Era, 26th February 1862, the time Anna got an invitation from The King of Siam to be an English teacher for his royal children (p.2). The traditional civilizations were seen through the people lives. Though the King was accustomed with Western language, educations, values, and culture, his people were not. The people were not aware of the use of English as the International language as Anna got difficulty to build communication with Siamese on her early arrival which forced him to use Siamese language (p. 11). Apart from its traditional lives, Siamese Kingdom in the novel Anna and the King was described as a monarch (p. 20; 30). The King had the highest position, followed by the prime minister, and other positions in the kingdom. Talking about religion, Siamese were described in this novel as Buddhists. In Siam, the practices of patriarchal systems were acceptable. Polygamy was considered something normal, as the King had twenty three wives and forty two concubines (p.48). Women seemed to be position as the second class society or even goods, like Tuptim who was presented to the King as a gift by her father, a tea merchant (p.73).

2. The Actions and Reactions toward the Gender Inequalities Experienced by Anna and Tuptim in *Anna and the King*

a. The Actions and Reactions toward the Gender Inequalities Experienced by Anna

Anna as the main female character in this novel did many actions, both consciously and unconsciously, regarding to the issues of gender inequalities which could be classified as feminism actions. She also reacted against some situations which she thought underestimating her positions as a woman. On her first arrival to Siam, the first time she met the Siamese Prime Minister, the Prime Minister kept calling her "Sir". Anna finally protested toward the calling but the answered she got was quite surprisingly that she learnt women were placed as the second citizens after men in Siam. This situation was different from the situation she had in England or India, the places she had used to stay before, that people called her "Mem" to refer to her sex.

Anna's objection was continued as she tried to compare the leader of England, her country of origin, who was a Queen to the leader of Siam, a King, who unfortunately failed to keep his promise to Anna to provide a residence outside the palace for her at her first arrival. These series of actions done by Anna were actually reflections of actions done by Socialist feminists who concerned about the social status or roles of women in the society that put them in the second class of society. It was also a reflection of Radical feminism issues that put women as the inferior class and had no right to get involved in men world like political matters.

Unbounded with Siamese traditions and supported by her intention to gain the King's promise and her manner to keep the British ways was shown on her courage to stand in front of the King.

Anna's concern for equalities of human rights in general was shown clearly when she tried to free a slave for she had been able to pay for her freedom. She dared to exchange her wedding ring-the most valuable thing from her late husband- to the freedom of the slave. Discussing about slavery was discussing about two parties; the party got profit from the slave (owners) and the party being manipulated (slaved). Slaves who were women were forced to work really hard to do households for their masters with lack of appreciation and insufficient income. Anna dared to against this. She reflects the actions of Capitalist feminism which against the exploitation of women works. Beside defending the freedom of the slave, Anna also defended the freedom of Tuptim who was given to the King as a gift for the King's favor. Anna's protest on the practice of women as commodity was the reflections of the feminist actions concerned by those Radical feminists about the sexual oppression of women.

Besides suing for human equalities and right, Anna also took actions and reactions toward the practice of polygamy in Siam. She found it hard to accept the fact that a man could marry to many women as the King of Siam did.

b. The Actions and Reactions toward The Gender Inequalities Experienced by Tuptim

Tuptim was one of King Mongkut's concubines. Unfortunately Tuptim had given her heart to an ordinary man, named Balad. Her true love to Balad and her realization that actually King had enough wives and concubines, which meant that her presence was less valuable to the King than to Balad, encouraged her to leave the King. It was clear that Tuptim actually demanded a right of equality between man and woman. She believed that not only man (even a King) had a right to marry to a woman who pleased him, but even a woman shall have the same right to choose to whom she would like to married to. Tuptim's brave action to defend her

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right, refusing to accept her destiny as a gift to the King, was in line with what the Radical feminists that struggled against the supremacy privileges of men role who oppressed women as sex favors.

3. The Siamese Patriarchal Systems in Anna and the King described through Anna and Tuptim's Actions and Reactions against men power referring to the Gender Inequalities

The previous description underlined the actions and reactions experienced by both Anna and Tuptim toward the gender inequality happened in their lives as results from the man oppression. Those descriptions would lead to further explanations of the patriarchal systems in Siam, where this story took place.

Anna's protest was started from her dissatisfaction to be called "Sir" instead of "Mem". She was getting more confused when the Prime Minister of Siam explained that women did not presence in front of the King, which could be understood that women had lower position than men. Woman had no right to sound their voices. In other word, women were oppressed under the supremacy privileges of the male role. In the case of Anna who was hired to be a teacher of the royal family, she was called "Sir" in order to make her worthy enough to meet the King and taught the royal family. Her position was put equally to men by calling her 'Sir'. This condition was different from what happened in England whose king was a woman-a Queen. When Anna tried to compare the King to the Queen, she was then accused of insulting the King.

From those above explanations it was quite clear that the system in Siam put women in the lower social class than men. It was recognized that the oppression of women as a fundamental political oppression wherein women are categorized as an inferior class based on their sex. Being inferior meant that they had no right to be involved in political works.

The Prime minister of Siam's demand who ordered Anna to wait to meet the King as well as to wait for the residence promised by the King showed the authority of men power toward women, which also meant as men control toward women. Men were decision makers whereas women were doers of the decisions the men had made.

Anna's actions to defend the right of the slave could be used to reflect the patriarchal system in Siam. The slave, who was a woman, was in charge of doing households activities or serving. A slave, who could be grouped in a lower social class, had to face a hard life to serve

people from high social status. Serving here could be connected to the household works. It was then clear that women suffered from their alienation from labor and the exploitation of women's work. When finally she could bring her freedom, she was then tortured. Intimidation, terrorism, and fear - these strategies keep women in a subordinate position where they are dominated by men. It showed the superiority of the patriarchal system. When it was noticed further, the doers of the patriarchal ideology were not only men but could also be women whose minds were influenced by this patriarchal ideology. Like the case of the above slave, the master of the slave was a woman who applied to patriarchal mind to oppress another woman. In short, the supremacy of man in Siam was not only dominated by men but also women who carried the patriarchal ideology.

Furthermore, Anna's protest on the death penalty given to Tuptim showed that women were treated according to the merit of her work, but rather as a sex. It was therefore almost inevitable that she should pay for her right to exist, to keep a position for whatever line, with sex favors. Therefore, when a woman could not play her role well she got a penalty like Tuptim who was sentenced a death penalty as she was accused to betray the King. It seemed that though Tuptim was one of the King's concubines she could not escape from the punishment, especially the mistake she made was a humiliation to men's pride. To conclude that the punishment given to women from any classes was a way to show the men's power over women.

Anna's reaction toward the practice of polygamy in Siam-the way that the King had twenty three wives and forty three concubines- showed another patriarchal view in Siam. In Siam, men were allowed to have more than one wife. A women, in this case a wife did not have to be someone who a man knew personally, like the King who got Tuptim as a present to the King. She had to 'serve' the King who seemed to be a stranger to her. Women were just objects or commodities. They could be sold to satisfy the men sex favor, just like Tuptim who was given to the King by his father-the tea merchant- to make sure that his relationship with the King would become closer.

Beside from Anna's reactions, patriarchal practices in Siam could also be seen from Tuptim's reactions. She took a radical action to leave the King, bolded her hair, and became a monk, in order to be close to a man she loved very much. Unfortunately, she captured and sentenced death. It could be concluded that women did not have any bargaining power. In Siam, polygamy was accepted but not polyandry. Women were truly treated as objects or receivers of any policy made by men.

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In Siam, the domination of women by men is seen to provide the foundation of social inequality, and the sexual oppression of women is seen to underlie the economic, cultural and social subordination of women.

F. CLOSING

From those two characters' actions and reactions against certain conditions which gave advantages on men power, a conclusion on Siamese patriarchal systems could be drawn. The domination of men was clearly seen in most of fields in Siam, started from politics, economics, and social. King-a man- was the ruler of the country and he was considered as god by his people. In the other words, men were in charge as decision makers whereas women were doers. Women must accept to any decision decided by men, though those decisions led them to a big loss, like Tuptim who was served to the King as the King's favor only. In the same words, women were inferior, whose functions were as the sex favor and just in charge of caring the family and caring children. The domination of women by men is seen to provide the foundation of social inequality, and the sexual oppression of women.

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