

URBAN SOCIETY IN ROANNE VAN VOORST'S NOVEL *TEMPAT TERBAIK DI DUNIA*

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Abstract

This research is aimed at showing urban society focusing on the social aspects taking place at Bantaran Kali. The social aspects cover economic, political, economic, religious, criminal and cultural aspects prevailing in the urban society at Bantaran Kali reflected in Roanne Van Voorst's novel, *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia*. This research was conducted by using the sociology of literature approach, and the data analysis technique used in this study was genetic structuralism methods. The research results shows that the economic aspects focusing on the conditions of the people who glorify those who have Portofon, and those of the poor at Bantaran Kali were clearly reflected in chapters 1 and 2. Then in chapters 2 and 3, the story of the government's ignorance of the Bantaran people was vividly exposed. In these chapters, the thick political aspects which ultimately cause disasters and harm to other communities were illustrated in detail manners. In chapter 4, the economic aspects and poverty were again the most reflected aspects of the whole chapters, where the people of Bantaran Kali must accept the unfortunate fate that befalls them. Then, the religious aspect was described in chapter 5, and the criminal aspects taking place at Bantaran Kali were clearly reflected in chapter 6. The cultural aspect was illustrated in in chapter 7.

Keywords: Social Aspects, Literature of Sociology, Urban Society

1. Introduction

This research explores the intention of a Dutch writer named Roanne Van Voorst to explore the urban society in Bantaran Kali through her novel entitled *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia*. This research was conducted by using sociology of literature approach. The sociology of literature is a specialized area of study which focuses its attention upon the relation between a literary work and the social structure in which it is created. It reveals that the existence of a literary creation has the determined social situations. In this research the literary work is a novel entitled *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia* and the social structure analysed is urban society in Bantaran Kali, Indonesia. As there is reciprocal relationship between a literary phenomenon and social structure, sociological study of literature proves very useful to understand the socio-economic situations, political issues, the world view and creativity of the writers, the system of the social and political organizations, the relations between certain thoughts and cultural configurations in which they occur, and the determinants of a literary work.

Literature is composition that tells a story, dramatizes a situation, expresses emotions, analyze and advocates ideas, Robert and Jacobs (2006: 2). A literary work created by writers to be enjoyed, understood and utilized by society. Basically, a writer is also a member of a

society that is bound by certain social status. Literary work as a form of the results of a creative work which is essentially a media that utilizes human beings. Therefore, a literary work usually contains the problems of human life and the environment. Literature was born from the background of a basic human urge to express their existence. Human and humanitarian problems and their attention to the world of reliability take place throughout the ages (Sangidu, 2004: 2).

Klarer (2004: 1) says that in most cases, literature is referred to as the entirety of written expression, with the restriction that not every written document can be categorized as literature in the more exact sense of the word. Literary works sourced from the community often express all humanitarian problems as well as the meaning of life, literature also often describes suffering, struggle, affection and hatred, lust and everything that humans experience. Therefore, the society and individuals are the materials of literature. The outer world gets transformed within author's mind and heart and these transformed elements become reality in literature and a source of our pleasure.

A novel is one of a variety of prose in addition to short stories and romance. The novel is a long prose that presents characters and displays a series of events and settings in a structured manner (Sudjiman, 1990: 55). A novel is a piece of prose fiction of a reasonable length. Even a definition as toothless as this, however, is still too restricted. Not all novels are written in prose, especially those written by Roanne Van Voorst.

A novel creates with some aspects of structure like plot, theme, character, language style, and point of view (Sugira, 2004:74). *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia*, by Roanne Van Voorst, was first published in the Netherlands in 2016 with the title *De Beste Plekter Wereld Leven in de Sloppen van Jakarta* by Uitgeverij Brandt, Amsterdam. Then it was translated into Indonesian by Martha Dwi Susilowati and published by Marjin Kiri in its first print, which was in July 2018. This novel is very special because the story written by the author was a real event that she faced. Roanne Van Voorst is an Anthropologist who is also a writer and has previously published several language books the Netherlands. Roanne came to Jakarta to do a research for the completion and taking of her Doctoral degree. Roanne chose a place on Bantaran Kali because of her research on how to overcome flooding but from the perspective of the flood victims themselves. This book is a true story but deliberately names and places are disguised because they are afraid to offend many politician or government and threaten the characters in it so that Roanne packs them in novels, and changes the names of characters with fictional names.

2. Research Method

In general, the data analysis technique used in this study is using genetic structuralism methods. Genetic structuralism is one of the most popular methods of literary research used to analyze literary works, both novels, short stories and poetry. This theory is one branch of the sociology of literature that combines text structure, social context, and the worldview of the author (Yasa, 2012: 28). In this theory, the emphasis is on the relationship between literary work and its social environment.

In society, human beings are actually faced with norms and values, and in literature they are also reflected to face the norms and values that are consciously focused and sought to be carried out in society. Literature is also a picture of anxiety, hopes and aspirations from humans. Therefore, the possibility of such literary works can be used as the most effective sociological measure to human responses to social power.

Genetic structuralism is identified as a method that opposes the previous method which only emphasizes literary research on intrinsic values. In this research, the population and samples were the work of a Dutch writer, Roanne Van Voorst, entitled *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia*. This book consists of 192 pages, and this book was chosen as a source of research because it is very interesting, and bearing a number of morals. It tells the story of an Anthropologist who conducted a research at Bantaran Kali in Jakarta to take her Doctorate degree in the Netherlands. This book consists of 12 parts, and there are 7 chapters in the story. This research uses documentation techniques. The main data was the novel entitled *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia* by Roanne Van Voorst.

Data collection was done by documentation techniques, namely library research. The technique of data analysis is exploring theories that are relevant, namely finding data relating to social aspects reflected in *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia* by Roanne Van Voorst, then analyzing them with a review of literary sociology in the development of urban society.

3. Results and Discussion

In this novel there are 192 pages, and 7 chapters that reflect the detailed picture of the social conditions of urban society at Bantaran Kali in Jakarta.

1. The Social Aspects

The result of analysis of the social aspects in the novel covers economics, politics, population, poverty, religion, prostitution, culture as well as disasters aspects.

- a. Economic aspects are related to the behavior of the people at Bantaran Kali, who glorify more those who look modern and richer, such as the ownership of Portofon in Chapter 1 and uncontrolled poverty that causes fires and other disasters as in Chapter 2.

“How much is the price, do you think?” The woman asked Edi, who answered without the slightest hesitation, “Very expensive. Just as expensive as a car or home. “The woman's eyes turned glazed, “Wow, I don't have that much money. But someday ... I also want to buy one like that, “he sighed.” (Voorst, 2018: 38)

In 2001, the researchers noted that within eight months 437 fires occurred in Jakarta; 80 percent are located in Bantaran Kali. The main cause is a short circuit, but often because of a gas cylinder. Almost all of the fires in Bantaran Kali are very destructive. Not only because houses are made of wood or other combustible materials, but also because framed can't firefighters provide assistance. (Voorst, 2018: 57)

- b. Political and population aspects are related to the government's concern for the Bantaran Kali slum community, which is found in Chapter 2.

“The demolition of slums is mostly done by government instructions. Slums in Indonesia are generally declared as illegal dwellings because they were built without permits.” (Voorst, 2018: 63)

- c. Political aspects as well as disasters can be seen in Chapter 3, when the government is less responsive to the problems of the Bantaran Kali society which later cause disasters, both in the form of floods and fires.

"If only the government had maintained waterways, prevented logging of trees in the upper hills of Jakarta instead of building, factories and various shopping centers; and providing a budget to build settlements for poor people so that they do not need to live in the suburbs, the problem of flooding in 2016 is definitely not going to be this big. Politicians from the present generation know about this, and most of them also try hard to overcome flooding." (Voorst, 2018: 80)

- d. Economic aspects and poverty are also found in Chapter 4, forcing them to accept their fate. When hospitals are very frightening to the poor, health and hospitals are so expensive and traumatized. The social aspects in Chapter 5 cover aspects of religion and also community diseases, called prostitution.

"Some of the results of the research show that people who are not capable, even though they are in serious condition, are often just rejected. There are also several instances when a patient with an acute complaint is placed in one of the rooms at the back without getting treatment and then dies. I heard stories from several residents in the slums about the bitter experience they experienced in the hospital." (Voorst, 2018: 106)

"Working as a prostitute, haram," Marco said, "people should be ashamed to do that." (Voorst, 2018: 118)

- e. Economic aspects and crime are also found in Chapter 6 which seemed to be commonplace for thugs in the area.

Saving and borrowing money are two things that are impossible for citizens to do without the help of Pinter. The opportunity to become an official bank customer is closed to them. (Voorst, 2018: 137)

- f. This cultural aspect is very thick in Chapter 7, where Roanne Van Voorst tells about the habits of the people in Bantaran Kali. Indonesian people are less familiar with the term of "Me Time".

"Indonesian culture is "our" culture, a culture where people do things especially for "groups" and in "groups". (Voorst, 2018: 156)

2. Sociology of Literature in the Development of Urban Society

The following is the data found from the seven chapters and related to the social portraits of urban society reflected in the novel.

- a. Chapter 1; Sleeping with Portofones

In the novel *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia*, Roanne is a character as well as the author of the book so that all the events she experienced were written in it. This is what makes this book very interesting. In Chapter 1, Roanne told us that at the beginning, she found many things that happened far beyond her common sense as well as from the people in his home country.

"Floods have damaged homes and items. Floods, along with a flood of highly polluted river water, make people ill; knocking down electricity poles, and taking casualties from electrocution. People sometimes sink into the stream, or suffer from hypothermia. Some people I interviewed even called floods a traumatic event in their lives or made them often have nightmares. Even so, they will say that it's normal." (Voorst, 2018: 33)

Roanne has been providing herself with Indonesian language since in the Netherlands, she was able to use Indonesian to communicate and it helped her to complete her research. In this chapter 1, Roanne faced a very foreign reality for her, she certainly feels strange and curious at the same time. The fact that these people came to the capital was very strange to her, they came far from many corners of this country and all go to the capital city, Jakarta. Most of them come without expertise at all, and have no a proper education. They assume that the capital city will make it easier for them to get any jobs, while competition is also high in the capital city.

In chapter 1 we can also see how the Bantaran Kali community prepares a lot of strategies to overcome floods, such as buying Portofon, a type of handy talkie that is connected directly to the gatekeeper. If the water is high, they will get information from gatekeeper through Portofon so that Portofon becomes a hero and the owner of Portofon becomes a prominent person in the area because the price of Portofon is also quite expensive.

"How much is the price, do you think?" the woman asked Edi, who answered without the slightest hesitation, "Very expensive. Just as expensive as a car or home. "The woman's eyes turned glazed," Wow, I don't have that much money. But someday ... I also want to buy one like that, "he sighed." (Voorst, 2018: 38)

As a community in Bantaran Kali, Portofon gives a very high social status to its owner. This is what makes people in droves willing to queue to see and praise the portofon as well as the owner. The community of Bantaran Kali has also been affected by social status and dignity which makes them want to compete to look more than others.

b. Chapter 2; When There Is a Power Cord Disconnected

Hartomo and Aziz (1999: 237) explain that urban society is a society that has weak tolerance. All issues that occur to other members of the community are not very sympathetic. This is because the urban society has its own busyness and reduces attention to each other. This also happened in the slums of Jakarta, when something happened to the slums, the government and the people who had no direct relationship with them would not care. As found in the following quotation:

"The number of fires due to short circuit that occurred in slum areas has never been recorded precisely, but the number may have reached hundreds. In 2001, the researchers noted that within eight months 437 fires occurred in Jakarta; 80 percent are located in Bantaran Kali. The main cause is a short circuit, but often because of a gas cylinder. Almost all of the fires in Bantaran Kali are very destructive. Not only because houses are made of wood or other combustible materials, but also because framed can't firefighters provide assistance. The streets

in Bantaran which are packed with buildings are often too narrow to be able to pass by a fire truck." (Voorst, 2018: 57)

It can be said that poverty is a disease that is at the root of many problems of population in Bantaran Kali, they are actually forced to settle because there is no other place that they think is better or willing to accept them. In chapter 2, it can be seen how genetic structuralism greatly influences humanity, interpreted as all forms of human activity in the form of verbal and physical activities that science seeks to understand. These humanitarian facts include all certain social activities, political activities, culture, art, and others.

Faruk (2012: 57) also states that the fact of humanity consists of two parts. The first fact is an individual fact that is the result of individual human behavior both in the form of dreams and behavior. The next fact is social fact, this fact is related to the role of history and the impact of social, economic, political relations between societies.

c. Chapter 3; Waiting or Paying

As Helaluddin (2017: 3) wrote in his journal entitled Genetic Structuralism Lucien Goldmann in Literary Work Studies, that in Indonesian society are actually faced with norms and values, in the literature there are also norms and values that are consciously focused and cultivated to be implemented in the community. And literature also illustrates many things including human anxiety, hopes and aspirations. Therefore, the possibility of such literary works can be used as the most effective sociological measure to measure human responses to social power.

In Bantaran Kali Floods always leave deep and traumatic injuries to the people as well as distrust of the government in this country for their incompetence helping to ease the burden on their citizens.

"If only the government had maintained waterways, prevented logging of trees in the upper hills of Jakarta instead of building, factories and various shopping centers; and providing a budget to build settlements for poor people so that they do not need to live in the suburbs, the problem of flooding in 2016 is definitely not going to be this big. Politicians from the present generation know about this, and most of them also try hard to overcome flooding." (Voorst, 2018: 80)

In this chapter people in Bantaran Kali is confronted with internal and external conflicts which include low awareness of the environment as well as by authorities seeking profit from this country without taking into account the impacts that will occur on nature.

d. Chapter 4; Never Trust a Doctor

The decline of people in Bantaran Kali's trust in everything about government or things that require a lot of money because they realize they will not be able to pay, and always become a society that is considered not worthy of being saved. This pessimistic awakened because of the long trauma in their life at Bantaran Kali residents and from stories circulating among fellow citizens about how proud the rich people and also the hospital.

"The hospital is dangerous," he said, his voice trembling. I realized that he was actually scared, and I also knew the reason for feeling scared." (Best place in the world, p. 106)

Many facts were raised in this novel *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia*, the bitterness of life in the form of poverty, floods, apathy governments, and other moral messages that really slap for this country.

"Some of the results of the research show that people who are not capable, even though they are in serious condition, are often just rejected. There are also several instances when a patient with an acute complaint is placed in one of the rooms at the back without getting treatment and then dies. I heard stories from several residents in the slums about the bitter experience they experienced in the hospital."
(Voorst, 2018: 106)

The formation of community settlements with large, dense and diverse populations is a feature of advanced human civilization, Jamaluddin (2017: 34). If the progress is not balanced with adequate human resources, poverty will certainly arise along with other crimes.

e. Chapter 5; Mangoes, Red Chilies and Other Passion Generators

Daldjoeni (1997: 44-45) explains that the city at first was not a settlement place, but a service center. So, how far the city can become a service center depends on the extent to which the surrounding countryside uses municipal services.

Not only are these services, human services for fulfilling sexual desire also widely sold in cities, in chapter 5, the work of one of Roanne's home rental friends, Neneng, who is a commercial sex worker and is a widow with one child, a boy, is elaborated at length.

Neneng told me about her husband who died of a motorcycle accident. She told me that is her fate that after her husband died, she had to make money selling herself and asked me to promise not to tell her son, Marco, about this. "Working as a prostitute, haram," Marco said, "people should be ashamed to do that." (Voorst, 2018: 118)

"My son is pious, he just wants to have sex if he is married. That is his father's inheritance. He knows more about the Al Qu'ran than about sex." (Voorst, 2018: 118)

Poverty becomes the common reason for many people to justify mistakes. It happens to Neneng, since she does not really want to be a prostitute; it is her poverty that forces her to do so. It also becomes the belief for many women who want to get money more easily or in an easy way; that is to be a prostitute.

f. Chapter 6; Saving to Buy a Damaged Television

In this sixth chapter, Roanne highlighted the savings and loan system carried out by a character named Pinter by Roanne, Pinter trying to give credit to the Bantaran Kali society but through their own savings that he would quote at a specified time. This system can be said to be intelligent, it actually only has a beneficial effect for Pinter, but as long as the system can run according to the agreement there will be no protest.

Bintarto (1984: 36) explains that cities are networks of human life which are characterized by high population densities and are characterized by heterogeneous socio-economic strata and materialistic patterns. From this statement it can be concluded that basically all people in

the city will think materialistically, because what they see every day also illustrates this, as quoted in chapter 6 below.

"For a moment I thought I was misreading." Right, here, the television is broken" I asked, I wanted to be sure.

"Yes, it's true," Pinter answered seriously. "In the future, if you save for television, it's still good. If the television is broken in a few months he can already have it." (Voorst, 2018: 139)

Tikus, Roanne's first friend who took her to Bantaran Kali, had savings for Pinter to buy a broken television, because he would plan to fix it and learn it. The savings and loan system carried out by Tikus and Pinter is also done by many other urban societies, of course, to fulfill their material desires that cannot be obtained only with the money they have. The choice is to save and wait until the savings are enough to buy what they want. Actually it is not much different from saving money in a bank in this country.

g. Chapter 7; Always Together Everywhere

Wirth in Daldjoeni (1997: 29) defined the city as a relatively large and permanent settlement with a heterogeneous population whose social position. Therefore, social relations between residents are loose, indifferent, and impersonal relations. From this understanding shows that there is a diversity or difference in social groups in the city that can be traced in terms of the general environment and orientation to nature, work, community size, population density, heterogeneity, social differentiation, social coating, social mobility, social interaction, social control, leadership patterns, life size, and social solidarity.

"Indonesian culture is "our" culture, a culture where people do things especially for "groups" and in "groups". (Voorst, 2018: 156)

In chapter 7, Roanne has lived for ten months, and usually wherever she goes, she is accompanied by the residents of Bantaran Kali, but for now she just wants to go alone, and do whatever she wants because she needs her Me Time.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research results on the social aspects in the novel which was analysed by using sociology on literature approach in the development of urban societies, several social aspects are found, i.e. economic, political, population, poverty, disaster, religious aspects, prostitution and culture. In chapters 1 and 2, the economic aspects reflected through the conditions of the people who glorify more those who have portofon, followed by the description of the poor people of Bantaran Kali are vividly reflected. Then in chapters 2 and 3, the story of the government's ignorance of the Bantaran people was clearly exposed. This time certainly illustrates the thick political aspects there which also ultimately cause disasters, and harm other communities. In chapter 4, the economic aspects and poverty are again the most uncovered aspects of the whole chapters, where the people of Bantaran Kali must accept the unfortunate fate that befalls them. Then in chapter 5, the religious aspect is found, and in chapter 6, the criminal aspects that occurred in the slum area are plainly uncovered. In chapter 7, Roanne exposes about a culture that is so thick. From all the chapters in *Tempat Terbaik di Dunia*, which are viewed from literary of sociology, it can be seen how urban society that look advanced and educated with the latest technology are not in harmony with what the Bantaran

Kali society describes in this novel. The conflicts faced by all the people there are so real; making this story so close to the reader.

Roanne Van Vorst described all the pains faced by the Bantaran Kali society so straightforwardly, because she felt it directly when she lived there. This time, Roanne also wrote this book as a criticism of life that should be able to make the Indonesian people, both the society and also the government, improve.

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