

EKA KURNIAWAN'S PROJECTION OF WOMEN AND PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY: A
RADICAL FEMINIST STUDY OF *BEAUTY IS A WOUND*

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the requirements for the degree of
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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Abstract

The Southeast Asian country Indonesia has witnessed many historical events that shaped its societal structures many times in many ways. Although the history of the country includes the ‘manly affairs’ like the Dutch colonial period, the Japanese invasion during the Second World War, 1965’s communist massacre, and Suharto’s regime, it hardly mentions the women of that time who equally suffered like their male counterparts. Eka Kurniawan with his literary spirit initiates to make visible these women of history who are carefully excluded by the men. In his debuting novel *Cantik Itu Luka* (2002), he contradicts the traditional narration by placing a prostitute as the central character as well as giving the steering in the hand of the female characters. With Benedict Anderson’s inspiration, this masterpiece writing was published in English in the name of *Beauty Is a Wound* a decade later while shaking the readers and literary critics around the globe for the explicit representation of sexual violence. He has touched on all the aspects including prostitution, marriage, reproduction, and others which are institutionalized by the patriarchal society for its own benefits. Through observing the women and patriarchal society in the novel, this paper analyzes the root of oppression of the women with the radical feminist approach. Moreover, it also captures how the women with their radical image can reject the discourse of the male-dominated society while challenging it.

Keywords: women; men; patriarchal society; Kurniawan; sex; prostitution; marriage; reproduction; beauty; body; radical feminism; history; oppression; male-dominated; violence.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

ONE AFTERNOON ON a weekend in March, Dewi Ayu rose from her grave after being dead for twenty-one years.

Beauty Is a Wound

In the very first line, author Eka Kurniawan attracts his readers to the novel by introducing a woman called Dewi Ayu who has risen from the grave after being dead for 21 years. Dewi Ayu is the root of the novel who has been spread so wide that she herself along with her generations reflects all the aspects of the patriarchal society where women are the recipient of violence of war, objects of consummation, and targets of oppression. Again, her physical appearance and beauty become a matter of curse for her that can never be saved from the vicious world. Eka's epic novel *Beauty Is a Wound* boldly reveals the hostility of the society towards the women. In a sweeping polyphony, Eka's integration of myths, legends, folktales, history, dark humor, heart-wrenching tragedy, satire, and romance within the two covers of the novel show erotic relationships, marital rapes, bestiality, and monstrosity of the men. In fact, Eka with this novel often makes the readers feel disgusted by using excessive sexual violence against the female characters to the limit of tolerance and often beyond which forces them to think that this is too much to stop. In another word, the purpose of the author reaches its destination through making the readers compel to rethink by portraying how women are unable to fortify their authorization in terms of their body, their rights and desires as human beings and so on in the prison of the sexist society. Although the women of the novel are suppressed by the men, the women express their untold struggles with their different actions while redefining their position as prostitute, lover and wife. To add more to it, the novel is not confined itself to the tales of

women's sufferings rather it goes to the very root of the discrimination, abuse, subjugation, and cruelty that women have to face because of their gender identity in a patriarchal society.

Furthermore, it also depicts how women reject the patriarchal practices and redefine their positions in the society while standing against the oppression.

In fact, Kurniawan takes a radical feminist stand in order to examine the very origin or root of a patriarchal society that is the cause of women's sufferings. Hence, this thesis attempts to study the roles, actions, struggles, and conditions of the entire womenfolk of the novel through the theory of radical feminism with a view to examining not only their sufferings in a male-dominated society but also highlighting their strength and brevity to oppose discrimination while challenging the society.

Research Questions:

- How does Eka Kurniawan criticize the patriarchal society of Indonesia in the novel?
- How does Kurniawan highlight women's conditions in the novel while referring to patriarchal institutions like prostitution, marriage, heterosexual love, reproduction, and so on?
- How does radical feminism reflect on women's position and courage in the novel?

1.1 Author and content

Eka Kurniawan, born in a distant village in southeastern West Java of Indonesia on 28th November 1975, was only 26 years old while writing the sprawling novel *Beauty Is a Wound*. The village where he spent his early childhood is blazingly portrayed as the scene of his novel. His interactions with folktales, Indonesian pulp fiction, literature, and others worked as great

stimulations in the construction of his writing career. However, his aspiration of becoming a writer found a strong ground when he was stunned by the famous Norwegian author Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger*¹.

Eka considers *Beauty Is a Wound* neither a traditional historical novel nor a magic realist fiction; rather he likes to call it a horror novel. Although it deals with sensitive matters like the Dutch's colonial era in Indonesia, the Japanese invasion, the 1965's communist massacre, the Suharto regime, and so on, the author finely uses all these factors just as elements in order to focus on the main theme of the novel which is regarding women. While attending an event "Beauty is a Wound: The Historical Context of Indonesian Author Eka Kurniawan's Latest Novel" on 28th September 2016 in Washington DC, he talks about what the novel is centered on. He says that when people talk about Indonesian history, they mention men; when communism in Indonesia is discussed, there are men; then where are the women? He also adds that if women are noticed; then only as war victims, prostitutes, and in modern days, as ghosts not as humans. Hence, to highlight the women as humans, to tell their stories, actions, and expressions, he places women in the center of the novel and formulates the content of it in a way that explores the different phases of women as ordinary human beings. Like his other writings, the readers may only concern with violent sex, extreme morbidity, and perverseness in the novel; however, they should not overlook the author's use of "... the sheer, the queer elegance of Indonesian prose,

¹ This novel is published in 1890 based on Norwegian peasants' poverty, misery, and hunger along with a young writer's struggle to discover the self with artistic expression.

which at its best is superior even to Pramoedya's²..." to flourish the content in a vivid manner (Anderson 56).

1.2 Overview of the text

At the age of 26 in 2001, after the completion of the MA thesis on Pramoedya, Kurniawan was at the edge of starting his writing career with his 140,000 words long novel *O Andjing* (O Dog). However, he could not find any well-known publishing company for the novel except a small one in central Java which published only two hundred copies of the book. Nonetheless, his career as an author saw success when Akademi Kebudayaan Yogyakarta (AKY) offered him six months of fellowship while providing him a chance to revise the novel *O Andjing* radically. Eka did not let the chance go in vain as he revised and turned the novel into the scarcely less enormous one. In fact, the novel *O Andjing* was finally published in 2002 by AKY in the name of *Cantik Itu Luka* which could also be called "How Beautiful- Wounds". Though its publication by the very end of 2002 created a controversy among the literary critics; it literally helped to be sold out the book within a very short span of time. Furthermore, the novel was translated into English when the renowned Benedict Anderson³ inspired his friend Eka Kurniawan so that the world could get familiar with this masterpiece writing and in this process, Bahasan translator Annie Tucker put effort to publish it in English in 2015. Additionally, the novel has been translated into more than 25 languages till now including English

While following the Marquezian style in the novel, Eka has set the plot in a fictional town named Halimunda in Indonesia. The entire novel has been divided into various subplots

² <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/2/6/pramoedya-ananta-toer-why-you-should-know-him>

³ Anglo-Irish historian and political scientist

with a view to tracking the gruesome life of a beautiful prostitute Dewi Ayu and her extended family. Dewi Ayu who is born due to an 'incestual' relationship, is compelled to become a prostitute during the Japanese invasion. Even the independence of Indonesia cannot make her free from the prison of prostitution and she has to be a whore for the rest of her life. Moreover, her role as a mother does not meet any fruitful end as her four daughters are not spared from the grasp of the patriarchal society. In fact, this novel shares the tales of women whose identity, rights, and place are constructed, snatched and destroyed for satisfying the male-dominated society's greed. Again, the way society objectifies women's physical beauty and tries to devour it, seems that the title of the novel has been inspired by this aspect. Nonetheless, Eka himself clarifies in the Washington DC's⁴ event that the title of the novel has been chosen outside of the novel itself since in the initial stage he does have not any idea about it. In fact, he chooses the title *Cantik Itu Luka* for his debut novel when he reads an Indonesian actress' interview, who boldly calls her beauty a scare. For her, she does not find herself happy about her beautiful face as it always makes people stare at her like they are seeing a scare.

⁴ <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/events/beauty-wound-the-historical-context-indonesian-author-eka-kurniawans-latest-novel>

Chapter 2

Background

2.1 Women in ancient Indonesia

Even though Eka is not so willing to label the novel as a historical documentary, it focuses a lot on the historical elements that show how women are treated in the land of Indonesia in the ancient time. Additionally, commoditizing the women was a common thing in ancient Indonesia since Javanese kings counted everything as their property including the women of those very lands. Furthermore, these women often belonged to noble families who were presented to the kings in the form of gifts. The women who were taken as the concubines by the kings were called “sineliran”⁵ meaning “the chosen ones”. Furthermore, these “chosen ones” did not only satisfy the sexual pleasure of the kings but also bore the children of the kings so that the royal power could be strengthened. In other words, women were nothing more than objects in the ancient Indonesian period.

2.2 Women in the Dutch East Indies period (Modern Indonesian period)

It is traced that modern prostitution started in the mid-18th century. During the Dutch colonization, the condition of the women did not change rather the exploitation of the women took a new form. In 1602, when the Dutch East India Company arrived in Indonesia, the men folk started using the native female women for sexual services, who worked their houses. These

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318129864_From_Concubines_to_Prostitutes_A_Partial_History_of_Trade_in_Sexual_Services_in_Indonesia

women, who managed the household of the colonizer Dutchmen, gave them company and served as their concubines were called “nyai”. The term “nyai” contains several meanings in different Indonesian dialects. Even during the 17th century, the “nyai” used to be called “Lustful beasts”. Again, they were defined as “mistresses” during the Dutch East Indies period. The Indo descent Dutch writer Rob Nieuyunhuys said that the “nyai” women served as housekeepers and companions before being concubines while having the subservient position. To add more to it, it depended on the Dutchmen whether they would keep or abandon their children with the “nyai”. In fact, when women became “nyai”, they did not have any alternative except to leave their families and loving ones behind. In the novel, Ma Iyang⁶ was forcibly taken as a “nyai” by a Dutch plantation owner Ted Stammler⁷ and later, her daughter Aneu was also detached from her.

2.3 Women during the Japanese invasion

In the article titled “Violence Triangle in Context of Indonesian Comfort Women”, Dania and Singhaputargun have unveiled the situation that women faced in World War II during the Japanese invasion and after the post-World War II period in Dutch East Indies (DEI), Indonesia. The term “jugun ianfu” or “military comfort women” refers to “a Japanese euphemism for a system of sex slaves” in the time of World War II. This was practiced inside the military brothels or “ianjo” which were also called comfort stations. This system was applied in the territory of Southeast Asia especially in Dutch East Indies (DEI) or in the land of Indonesia and through this system; approximately 10,000 women were imposed with forced sexual services for the Japanese soldiers and officials. Although the Japanese army officially decided that there would be no

⁶ Dewi Ayu’s grandmother who was Ted Stammler’s concubine

⁷ Dewi Ayu’s grandfather

forceful recruitment of the women to please the soldiers' sexual gratification rather they would be paid off for their sexual services, it did not work that way. In fact, women were brought to the comfort stations initially by saying that they would be cooking and doing laundry for the soldiers. Apart from this, the women's names were also changed to Japanese names as the part of erasing their identity. Kurniawan's description of Dewi Ayu's condition was not different from it in the novel during the Japanese annexation. Dewi Ayu along with other girls was shifted from Bloedenkamp to Mama Kalong whorehouse with the information that they would be working as Red Cross volunteers. In reality, they were kept in the Mama Kalong whorehouse's private rooms, lost their names and were monopolized by a handful of Japanese officers.

2.4 Women in 1965's communist massacre

Annie Polman, the senior lecturer of Indonesian Studies at Queensland University, has tried to highlight 65's communist massacre from women's point of view in her article "Women and the Indonesian Killings of 1965-1966". She claims that reappraising all generalizations along with the gender-neutral statements can be changed if the perspectives of the women are also included. Additionally, due to the paucity of data, it is quite difficult to assume the nature of persecution that women faced during the communist mass killings in Indonesia. According to Polman, the scarcity of data rarely allows one to reflect on the destiny of the "women, mostly members of the Communist-aligned women's organization Gerwani⁸ (Indonesian Women's Movement)" who were brutally tortured and killed (Polman 8). In fact, the anti-communist fervor targeted the Gerwani members while accusing them of being pornographic and involved

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https://www.academia.edu/172797/Women_and_the_Indonesian_killings_of_1965_1966_Gender_variables_and_possible_directions_for_research

in the Lubang Buaya murder⁹. For this reason, the hatred towards the Gerwani members grew so wild that during the 65's communist mass killing, women, in general, became the victim of anti-communist barbarity.

Furthermore, women were not only the victims of mass killing but also they were at risk of sexual humiliation and rape. Again, their gender-defined roles of being mothers made them most vulnerable at that time. In the novel, Kliwon's¹⁰ mother Mina was one of those women, who suffered the most during the massacre of the communists since she already lost her husband because of the "crazy Marxist ideas" (Kurniawan 175). Moreover, Alamanda also decided to make love to her husband Shodando with a view to saving Kliwon during the period of the communist massacre. Although Eka does not directly come up with women's struggles in the 65's massacre in the novel, he carefully uses the incident to leave some hints towards the women of that time.

2.5 Women in the post-war period during the Suharto Regime

In independent Indonesia, women did not receive their due respect and status. In fact, the Indonesian government did not take any significant step in terms of compensations or punishments. Dewi Ayu was not served with any justice or compensation for being the comfort woman during the Japanese invasion of DEI. Again, the violence against the comfort women in the post-war period was directly linked to women's "body and morality under a deep-rooted patriarchal society" (Dania and Singhaputargun 87). The Indonesian society could never assure

⁹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00472336.2011.610613>

¹⁰ He is a famous communist leader of Halimunda, who is the lover of Alamanda and later marries her younger sister Adinda

the comfort women with protection since the society saw them as “perempuan bekas Jepang” or “second hand women”.

Additionally, President Suharto’s government (1966-1998) constructed a basic ideology of womanhood that tyrannized the roles of the Indonesian women by defining their position only as mothers and wives of men. Also, Suharto’s ideology of womanhood conveyed the message that ‘good’ women were those who performed their duty as wives and mothers by staying at home (Dania & Singhaputargun 88). Dewi Ayu’s eldest daughter Alamanda who married Shodancho was expected to fit into the role of this basic ideology of womanhood. However, her refusal of this role made her suffer the most in her married life. Furthermore, Suharto’s authoritarian government was in the favor of the patriarchal society that confirmed the autocracy and fascist state of the rulers. Hence, Indonesian feminist author and journalist Julia Suryakusuma claimed in her article “Is state Ibusim still relevant?” that Suharto’s concept of womanhood is formed in such a way so that it could be fitted into the patriarchal framework and specific hierarchical order in a deploying force that would ensure the social control as well as check activism.

Chapter 3

Literature review

3.1 Kurniawan's *Beauty Is a Wound* and the critics

When Eka Kurniawan was rising as the new Southeast Asian literary star with his novel *Beauty is a wound* (*BIAW*), Benedict Anderson introduced him as the eligible successor of great Indonesian novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer. With the English translation of the novel, Kurniawan receives a huge international readership along with appreciation from the literary and academic circles. While summarizing *BIAW*, Benedict Anderson has written,

[BIAW] is a quasi-historical novel stretching from the late colonial period, through the Japanese Occupation, the Revolution of 1945–49, the long extremist Islamic rebellion of the 1950s, the rise and bloody downfall of the Indonesian Communist Party, and the early Suharto dictatorship. But the setting is not national or even regional: it is an unnamed little town close to the Indian Ocean. Nothing is documented, and everything is suffused with magic, traditional and newly created legends, and confusing oral histories. (Rojas 190)

Anderson very delicately figures out the author's approach to the narration in the novel by mentioning that it is not just a chronology of some historical incidents. The careful arrangement of the mosaic of the stories blends history with magic realist events together with ghostly interventions and legends. Moreover, the 'textualization' of the novel secures the ambivalence of a terrorizing and conflicting reality that has been captured from a composite point of view that fluctuates "between empirical/realistic accounts and local myths, legends, and magical realist explanations of the world" (190). Besides, to elaborate on Kurniawan's brilliance in *BIAW*, Jon

Fasman highlights some points in his article titled “‘Beauty Is a Wound’ and ‘Man Tiger’ By Eka Kurniawan” published in “The New York Times” while drawing the differences and similarities between Pramoedya and Eka. In accordance with him, Pramoedya’s writing follows the Tolstoyan style when Eka gracefully builds his fictional city Javanese Halimunda in the image of Marquez’s Macondo¹¹ to add the magic realist flavor and Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County¹² to “show how the currents of history catch, whirl carry away and sometimes down people” (Fasman). Furthermore, in the case of similarities between the great Pramoedya and young literary star Eka, Fasman mentions that both of them are tremendously indebted to Indonesian oral traditions since “Their stories are digressive yet riveting, and their characters distinct and profound”. Moreover, Kurniawan has talked about the novel’s historical background during the Q/A session with Tim Mann organized by *Indonesia at Melbourne* in 2015. He says, “...from the first paragraph; it is clear that it is a ghost story. But as I wrote the book, it developed further, and it became a ghost story with a historical background” (Mann). In reply to another question regarding the humorous side of the novel, he clarifies that he builds the story in a dark and epic manner and it raises a lot of ethical questions in a light and humorous way. Furthermore, his dark-epic which circulates around women in the novel has successfully grabbed the attention of the readers, and hence, Sumana Mukharjee while reviewing the book writes, “For all the dark comedy and satire suffusing its pages, there is little irony or subversion here; indeed, sex is the women’s sole weapon of choice, their currency and their downfall” (Mukherjee).

¹¹ Gabriel García Márquez’s fictional town in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*

¹² <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803125350106>

Again, when the novel was published, it stirred lots of controversies for its boldness. While responding to the critical Indonesian readers and English-speaking readers in Mann's interview, Kurniawan asserts, "There have been a few sections that Indonesians found to be too vulgar. Even though the translation is very faithful to the original text, maybe those scenes don't sound as vulgar in English as they do in Indonesian" (Mann). In fact, Kurniawan's coverage of Indonesian tone brought him success and appreciation initially from outside of Indonesia and a decade later, in Indonesia. Meghan Downes mentions in her journal article "Found in Translation: Eka Kurniawan and the Politics of Genre" how the author's two novels *Cantik Itu Luka* (2002) and *Lelaki harimau* (2004) failed to impress the Indonesian publishers and readers. Downes writes, "Indonesian publishers and reviewers at the time had been largely unimpressed by Eka Kurniawan's fanciful approach to history, his ambiguous genre choices, and—perhaps most significantly—the 'vulgarity' and sexually explicit nature of his language and content" (Downes 178). Kurniawan responds to the lust and sexual violence against women in Indonesia in an interview with Canadian-American author Jesse Ruddock and says,

I believe that sexual violence is the worst cruelty that can ruin someone physically, mentally, and, socially. Indonesia's history is dominated by sexual violence. It does display the brutality of our men. My writing is taken from that reality... I think that someone should have written this kind of novel. The barbarous rape and chain of sexual violence in *Beauty is a wound* is no less than the reality. If we feel sick and disgusted, it shows that we are still sane and having a reality check.

In fact, Kurniawan's attempt to focus on the brutal reality of women in Indonesian history comes into being with the creation of his epic novel *Beauty Is a Wound*.

3.2 Southeast Asian Literature: Women's portrayal in the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*

Southeast Asian historians have started to study women very lately; in fact, studies related to women like gender and the complexities between male and female sexes in terms of interaction are very recent in the country. While referring to Jane Monning Atkinson and Shelly Errington, Barbara Andaya states in her article "Studying women and gender in southeast Asia" that in the Southeast region very few publications have recognized women as a distinct topic that can be studied and explored in detail. Moreover, she also identifies some points why women are absent from the standard Southeast Asian history. She adds that the research progress on women in Southeast Asian history is slow as very limited numbers of specialists are interested to study women. Also, before the 20th century, there were no significant materials on the concepts of male-female relations reflected in gender studies. Again, Melani Budianta's discusses in her book *Diverse Voices: Indonesian Literature and Nation Building* how Indonesian literature has been structured with nation-building incidents over the years. In her words, "Indonesian literary history has witnessed instances in which social and political conditions moulded and shaped literary production" (Melani 55). Additionally, before the Dutch colonization to Suharto's dictatorship, women occupied only the sub-ordinate place in the highly patriarchal Indonesian society which evidently affected the women's representation in the Indonesian literary production.

Apart from this, as one of the countries of Southeast Asia, Indonesia's literary production is highly influenced by the literary scriptures of Hindu mythology like the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Dr. Maneeta Kahlon in the article titled "Women in Mahabharata: Fighting Patriarchy" has highlighted seven women of Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, who are most of the time portrayed as 'the subordinates' and often victims of their male counterparts. While analyzing

Drupadi's position and her 'swamyar' where she was won by Arjuna defeating the other kings and princes, Maneeta states,

... Drupadi was not consulted about the swamyar¹³ which was designed for her to be given as trophy to the winner in the contest set up by her father. In the context of Kunti¹⁴ saying share it equally among yourselves, Drupadi seems to have no word to say and had to abide by the family decision to marry five husbands. Nobody asked about her thoughts and feelings. She has to simply acquiesce to the decision made for her. (Maneeta 533)

Besides, Valmiki's *Ramayana*'s impact is powerful in the Indonesian literary canon and it adds many norms and rituals that shaped the gender roles in the Indonesian society. "Ramayana Myth Retold in Hubbu and Kitab Omong and Kosong" by Tjahjono Widijanto, Herman J. Waluyo, and Suminto A. Suyitno puts light on the part of *Uttara Kanda* in *Ramayana*, one of the less known sections of the epic. They explore that after Sita and Rama's return by defeating Ravana, Ayodhya people's doubt about Sita's chastity drove her out of the kingdom until the birth of her twins and was engulfed by the earth. In addition, Rama who forced his wife to prove her purity through 'Agni Pariksha' was "depicted of having the indications of Ravana's characters" in Sang Indrajati's *Kitab Omong Kosong* (Widijanto et al. 6). Furthermore, Ms. Geethu Baby highlights Sita's condition in her paper "Feminist Critique of Traditional Narratives: A Subaltern Reading of Sarah Joseph's *Ramayana Stories*" saying, "Born from earth; brought by the King of Mithila,

¹³ Swamyar was an ancient Indian marriage method where a woman used to choose her groom from a group of suitors. However, the suitors had to take part in a competition to marry the woman.

¹⁴ Mother of Pandavas

married to the most elegant warrior, Rama; Sita had to suffer exile, humiliation, abduction, captivity and even Agni Pariksha” (Baby 5).

3.3 Patriarchy, Indonesian society, and women

In gender studies, patriarchy is considered “an essential tool” to establish male dominance (Walby 213). Veronica Beechey’s journal article “On patriarchy” identifies that the concept of patriarchy is not so simple rather it contains “a whole variety of different meanings” in different contexts (Beechey 66). Additionally, for the radical feminists, the idea of patriarchy varies from others. Beechey refers to the groundbreaking radical feminist writer Kate Millet to define patriarchy. According to Millet, patriarchy is “...male domination and power relationships by which men dominate women” (66). Similarly, Robin Rowland and Renate Klein mention Ruth Bleier’s definition of patriarchy in their article “Radical Feminism: History, Politics, Action” and write that patriarchy is “... the historic system of male dominance, a system committed to maintenance and reinforcement of male hegemony in all aspects of life...” (Bleier qtd. in Rowland & Klein 14).

Again, Jelena Vukoičić reflects on patriarchy in “Radical Feminism as a discourse in the theory of conflict” and says that patriarchal rules and values allow physical as well as all kinds of societal violence “against all those who violate the conceptual norms and rules of conduct” (Vukoičić 38). Asnani Thesya Widya’s “Radical Feminism in Eka Kurniawan’s novel *Beauty Is A Wound*” reflects on the patriarchal societal system in Eka’s fictional Halimunda, which is “... the main cause of discrimination and oppression of the women” (Widya 9). In fact, through the analysis of the novel from the radical feminist perspective, it also unfolds the traditional Indonesian patriarchal society’s roles in terms of women’s sufferings because of their gender. In

an interview with Stanley Widiyanto in Banten's Ciputat district, Kurniawan has talked about criticizing patriarchy in almost all of his books. According to Kurniawan, patriarchy is also practiced in terms of 'sexual dynamics' of the men and women and it is often related to the power structures. Moreover, his writings always concern the repression and injustice within the patriarchal society.

Furthermore, the male-dominated Indonesian society uses religions including Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity as weapons to dominate the women. Joanne McMillan who works as a translator and editor in a West Javanese NGO, has written an article titled "Interpreting Islam for women" where she underlines how the patriarchal society in Indonesia misinterprets the concepts of Islam to prove the women as the weak, inferior and subordinate. In the article, she mentions an Indonesian woman Farah Ciciek who shares her views on the misinterpretation of Islam. She says, "The problem is most Muslims in Indonesia believe Islam tells them that women are naturally inferior and subordinate to men..." (McMillan). Moreover, Euis Nurlaelawati also discusses the patriarchal Muslim Indonesian society in her article by exploring Irma Riyani's book *Islam, Women's sexuality and Patriarchy in Indonesia: Silent Desire* and claims that the "...Indonesian Muslims tend to be conservative and patriarchal" since they think "husbands must serve as breadwinners and women as domestic players" (Nurlaelawati).

Moreover, through shedding light on the sixth chapter of Riyani's book, which is on the perception of West Javanese men about sex, she writes, "... sex is seen as a women's duty and women perceive marriage as a social, cultural, and religious obligation" (Nurlaelawati). Furthermore, women's bodies the commodities that men buy sometimes directly with money and at other times, in the form of marriage. Lena Edlund and Evelyn Korn in "The Theory of Prostitution" become very critical in terms of women's offering their body to men who

commercialize it. They refer to English progressive intellectual Ellis Havelock's words in their writing and state that a prostitute does not only refer to those women who sell their bodies since every married woman who gains a home and livelihood, does it on daily basis (Edlund and Korn 183). To add more to it, while drawing a comparison between being a wife and being a prostitute, they add that prostitution is nothing but getting paid for the nonproductive sexual act. On the other hand, "...the wife provides the husband with children who are socially recognized as his..." (185). In fact, the English writer and advocate of women's rights Mary Wollstonecraft expresses an extremely radical view on the matter that women marrying for support is nothing but legal prostitution (Smith). Again, Julie Bindel's writing in *The Guardian* titled "Marriage is a legal prostitution" illustrates the feminist author Sheila Jeffrey's bold statement regarding prostitution. She argues, "If the state facilitates the prostitution of women, it is obviously maintaining male supremacy. These states are directly colluding in maintaining women's inequality" (Jeffrey qtd. in Bindel). In another word, from her perspective, legalizing prostitution in any country simply affirms that it is trying to assist the patriarchy. In reality, prostitution is a form of constructing inequality between the two sexes.

Besides, Nurlaelawati also mentions that women expressing sexual desires is considered 'pamali' or taboo and if any woman does so, they are identified as 'bad' or 'naughty' woman; however, for men, it is their right and this stigma is legitimized with the help of religious doctrines. In addition to it, the political analyst Debbie Taylor claims that although the religious beliefs do not interfere with men's sexual gratification, it "...could slice as powerfully as the circumcision knife into a woman's enjoyment, undermining with guilt and shame any pleasure she might otherwise experience" (Taylor qtd. in Wolf 131). Additionally, Riyani in her book expresses a critical view regarding women's belief that justifies men's superiority over women

through sexual intercourse. She writes, "... many women believe that they have committed a sin (*dosa*) or broken a cultural taboo (*pamali*) if they refuse to have sex and they fear cultural and religious consequences, such as being cursed by angels" (Riyani 168). Moreover, Gail Corrington Streete's book *The Strange Women: Power and Sex in Bible* examines how the biblical scriptures label independent women's behavior (whether it is sexual or not) with the term 'adultery'. It is also discussed that men's frequenting prostitutes are forgivable when a prostitute is completely reprehensible (Streete 3). In reality, this double standard behavior is a common phenomenon in a patriarchal society.

Apart from this, John Hurtung talks about the dark legacy of The Bible in terms of treating women who lose their virginity during wartime. His article "Chastity, Fidelity and Conquest: Biblical Rules for Women and War" mentions,

The Bible instructs men to take a proactive approach to their problem with paternity... by executing women who have committed adultery and by murdering female prisoners of war who are not virgins... for controlling women, the Bible commands adherents to commit absolute genocide against people whose land they wish to occupy, kill men in surrounding nations unless they agree to be slaves, and take their virgin women and girls as booty. (Hurtung 3)

In fact, Hurtung denotes in the writing how religion can be in a supportive position for men's extremities in case of violating women physically. Again, using religion for subjugating and humiliating women in any context and time are the parts of the power structure that is the practice of the male ideology.

3.4 Traditional beauty standards for women and Indonesian society

In Mary Wollstonecraft's words, women are imprisoned in their own bodies since they are "Taught from their very infancy that beauty is a women's scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round in its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison..." (Wollstonecraft qtd. in Fisher 69). Again, some feminist scholars argue that it is men who "constructed and controlled this elaborate deception called "beauty"" (69-70). Moreover, while realizing men's forming the concept of women's beauty standard, 1960s' "the most daring and versatile" Hannah Wilke¹⁵ comments, "I am a victim of my own beauty" (72). In comparison to the rest of the world, the Indonesian society is also obsessed with traditional beauty standard for women and women's bodies are often commoditized so that their bodies can be used as weapons against the women themselves. American feminist author Naomi Wolf in her book *The Beauty Myth* defines beauty as:

... a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics... In assigning value to women in a vertical hierarchy according to a culturally imposed physical standard, it is an expression of power relations in which women must unnaturally compete for resources that men have appropriated for themselves. (Wolf 12)

As a matter of fact, the traditional beauty concept within the society puts women in an unhealthy race where women run for the satisfaction of their male counterparts and to fit into the patriarchal norms. The Indonesian society literally worships the white skin as the epitome of beauty. While acknowledging the beauty standard in the Indonesian society, L. Ayu Saraswati in her book *Seeing Beauty, Sensing Race: In Transnational Indonesia*, she analyses the construction

¹⁵ American painter Hannah Wilke was famous for her works on sexuality, feminism, and femininity.

and definition of beauty in the country. She exclaims that the beauty standard described in the oldest literary scriptures e.g. *Ramayana* is still in practice in modern Indonesia.

Chapter 4

Theoretical Framework

4.1 Radical feminism: Going back to the root of oppression

The word ‘radical’ in Radical Feminism may seem to have a very negative connotation; however, radical feminism is one of the branches of feminist thoughts which claims that the fundamental conflict in the society is the conflict between the two sexes and oppressing women is the direct implication of patriarchy. In accordance with, radical feminism, patriarchy as a “universal value system” originates from women’s sufferings (Rowland & Klein 14). To add more to it, the theory of radical feminism “... is based on the fact that gender inequality is the foundation of all other inequalities and oppression” (Vukoičić 35). The radical feminists argue that all forms of oppression started with oppressing the women as a class since women were the first social group that experienced enslavement in the history. When the men came to know about the other human group named ‘women’ who could be enslaved, they applied the same thing to the other men. Although radical feminism is a sector of Feminism, it often puts radical feminism in a marginal position. In fact, through the marginalization of Radical Feminism, Traditional Feminism shifts itself into the uncomplicated and comfortable libertarianism, chooses individualism over collective responsibility, or moves into “... socialism with its ready-made structures to attack withdrawing the heat from the main actors of patriarchy: men themselves” (Rowland & Klein 10). Furthermore, while Liberal Feminist Betty Friedan talks about women getting into the position of power, radical feminist activist Ti-Grace Atkinson wants to “get rid of positions of power” that patronize men (Schlick 16).

The Radical feminist theory and movement has emerged roughly around the 1960s while coming up with the bold slogan “Personal is political”. American writer Kathie Sarachild who is one of the active participants of New York Radical Women¹⁶ explains radical feminism: “The dictionary says radical means root, coming from the Latin word root. And this is what we meant by calling ourselves radical. We were interested in getting to the roots of problems of society” (Sarachild qtd. in Nachescu 29). In other words, radical feminism examines the very root of the women’s oppression. Again, another key member of radical feminism and American poet is Robin Morgan who claims,

...sexism is the root of oppression... until and unless we uproot it will continue to put forth the branches of racism, class hatred, ageism, competition... This means... that the so called revolutions to date have been *coupe-d’etat* between men, in a halfhearted attempt to prune the branches but have the root embedded for the sake of preserving their male privileges. (Morgan qtd. in Rowland & Klein 10)

In the abovementioned quote, Morgan critically observes men’s so-called revolutions in the society and states that those revolutions are not for solving the issues like “racism, class hatred, ageism, competition” rather they carefully nurture the root of the issues so that their male privileges can be intact. American poet Ellen Willis criticizes “genuineness the male revolutionary spirit” and asserts, “All around men I see men who consider themselves dedicated revolutionaries, yet exploit their wives...shamefully without ever noticing the contradiction” (Willis qtd. in Schlick 13). Hence, radical feminism wants to eradicate the very root of oppression so that the women can be liberated in a true sense.

¹⁶ <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-note-on-the-new-york-radical-feminists>

Moreover, in order to abolish patriarchy as well as liberate everyone from the unjust society, radical feminism challenges existing societal norms, practices, and traditions. This struggle includes challenging the concepts of gender roles, objectification of women, and also, raising public awareness against the heinous crime like rape and violence against the women (Umunnakwe et al. 2). When the society forbids the women to speak against the political institutions like marriage, motherhood, and reproduction, radical feminism attacks these concepts with a view to envisaging a positive change in the society (Rowland & Klein 11). Moreover, according to the radical feminist ideas, these institutions force women to play “the largest political role in their oppression”. In fact, personal politics denotes that the “private” life has political meaning and it also becomes “the sphere for political actions” (Schlick 20). The men and women are conceptualized as the two opposing parties in personal politics. Beverly Jones has identified the common social position of women as an oppressed class and expressed, “We are a class, we are oppressed as a class... There is no personal escape, no personal salvation, no personal solution” (Beverly qtd. in Schlick 21). Again, since this feminist approach is inspired by the Marxist theory of conflict to some extent, it makes the women conscious of their class. Furthermore, the concept of ‘women as a class’ in radical feminism is related to the idea of ‘sisterhood’ that highlights the necessity of understanding their position in the society by communicating with one another. Also, sisterhood shapes the radical feminist ideas to a greater extent as it refers to the unity or togetherness of women which can change their lives in patriarchal constructions.

4.2 Rejection, Rediscover, Revolution, Change and formation of an autonomous identity

Radical feminism is highly critical of all those definitions that are constructed by men for nothing but the subordination of women. The rejection of biological sex roles is one of the significant tenets of radical feminism. The Canadian- American radical feminist writer Shulamith Firestone mentions in her pioneering book *The Dialectic of Sex* that the final destination of the feminist revolution should be “...not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally” (Firestone). In fact, the discourse about the biological sexes and their connection with the conservative gender roles are defined by the men should be rejected in the first place. Again, while grasping the enthusiasm of radical feminism in *Going Too far*, Robin Morgan explains the action of this feminist approach in terms of rejecting ‘male-defined’ things and continues,

...it wasn't... a wing or arm or toe of the Left –or Right or any other male defined or male controlled group. It was something quite Else, something in itself, a whole new politics, an entirely different astounding radical way of perceiving society, sentiment matter, life itself... (Morgan 13)

Furthermore, another radical feminist figure Mary Daly also agrees while rejecting and detaching from anything that is patriarchal and in this regard, she says, “...women’s strength starts now, with radical feminism, and with women’s complete separation from patriarchal institutions, meanings and values” (Daly qtd. in Thomson 114). Also, American radical feminist writer Andrea Dworkin implores women not to submit themselves “to the institutions which are by definition sexist” e.g. marriage, enforced motherhood, religions, and others (Andrea qtd. in Hynes 48). Apart from this, according to radical feminist ideas, rejection follows the revolution since the radical feminist believes that equality and emancipation are not enough to erase the

women from the patriarchal framework and put them in the autonomous positions. In this regard, British writer Gail Chester who was engaged in radical feminism activism stresses that “a strong, autonomous revolutionary movement” is essential for liberating women (Chester qtd. in Rowland & Klein 12). Besides, Daly illustrates the importance of creating a self-identity as a woman by coming out of the men-created discourse. In other words, Daly focuses on the “selfhood of women” by reclaiming and remarking on the language of the society. She also emphasizes the “journey of becoming women” through bringing changes in traditional societal norms and values (12). Also, according to her, the actions of radical feminism are “...changing consciousness, rediscovering the past and creating the future through women’s radical “otherness” (12). Additionally, the radical feminists believe that studying the male-dominated society under the microscopic lens is not enough to free the women from oppression unless it is transformed into a just society.

Chapter 5

Critical Analysis

5.1 Kurniawan's portrayal of violence against women and the root of oppression

It is already mentioned that Eka Kurniawan's novels are the extreme portrayals of sexual violence which begets revulsion in the minds of the readers to the extent that they start to question the necessity of it while asking –Why? Kurniawan does not delineate any vulgarity in his novels rather he sketches men's vulgar actions toward women. His novel *Beauty Is a Wound* captures different layers of oppression of women throughout the Indonesian history. Apart from this, he has also depicted the oppressed women in the 'radical' image against the unjust patriarchal society. Kurniawan's illustration of sexual violence, prostitution, marriage, motherhood, religion, history, myths, and so on in the novel unveils the reality of patriarchy that causes nothing but the oppression of women. Additionally, the plot building of the novel confirms the radical feminist ideas because it shows how all oppressions find its root in a patriarchal society.

5.1.1 Dewi Ayu and the other female characters: The Sex Commodity

Sexual violence is one of the ways that is used by men to consume women as 'commodities' and to do so, men rape them, make them prostitutes, or marry them. In the novel, Dewi Ayu has to give her body to a Japanese commandant during the Second World War so that young Ola does not need to be the prey of lust of him for saving her mother's life. Kurniawan shows how Dewi Ayu as a woman is exchanged like a commodity with some medicines and doctor by the commandant without any hesitation. Dewi Ayu proposes to the commandant, "I will take place of the previous girl, Commandant. You can sleep with me, but give her mother

medicine and doctor” (Kurniawan 79). Furthermore, it is mentioned previously that religion is another institution that legitimizes women’s sufferings. Kurniawan creates the crudest and sardonic aspect of religion by projecting Helena’s¹⁷ rape by the Japanese soldiers in the Mama Kalong whorehouse. The author dramatizes the incident:

...she began to recite a psalm in a loud voice, in front of the Japanese, perhaps hoping the soldiers would run away howling in fear, like evil spirits at an exorcism. But... the Japanese soldiers were very polite to her and at the end of every prayer they would reply: “Amen.” While laughing, of course. (98)

Again, Dewi Ayu, who later has to become the ‘comfort woman’ for the Japanese soldiers, never finds a way to get rid of the chain of prostitution. Although the ‘comfort women’ have to be paid for their sexual service to the Japanese soldiers; however, in the novel, their bodies are being monopolized without any consent and payment. She intensely suffers the horror because of her gender. Additionally, war is called a ‘men’s affair’ where women are raped to dishonor and hit the enemies in another way. Moreover, due to the lack of money, Dewi Ayu does not have another choice except to sell her body after the war so that she can get her house back. In response to the Japanese general’s question, Ayu ironically says, “We are caring for the souls of sick soldiers...This is how we have been made into whores, by force and without pay” (105). Ayu’s words also denote that prostitution is the sickness of the society which makes suffer the women. Kurniawan brilliantly shows that if women can be left moneyless, it is easy for the patriarchal society to be in the position of power and possess them for satisfying the men’s sexual desires. In “Prostitution and male supremacy” Andrea Dworkin discusses,

¹⁷ Helena is also imprisoned in Mama Kalong whorehouse along with Dewi Ayu to serve as a ‘comfort woman’

The magical function of money is gendered...women are not supposed to have money, because when women have money, presumably women can make choices... not to be with men. And ... men will then be deprived of the sex that men feel they have a right to. And if it is required that a whole class of people be treated with cruelty and indignity and humiliation, put into a condition of servitude, so that men can have the sex that they think they have a right to, then that is what will happen. That is the essence and the meaning of male dominance. Male dominance is a political system. (Dworkin 3- 4)

When looking at the relationship between money and power in the male-dominated society, it is surprising to think that the worth of a woman is so less that she can be forced to be in prostitution which is nothing else than an abusive institution. Besides, Dewi Ayu's daughters Alamanda and Beauty along with her granddaughter Rengganis are also assaulted sexually either by coercion or manipulation. Additionally, manipulation can come in the form of romantic love for women, and hence, radical feminism pronounces rough words against heterosexual or romantic love that is used by the patriarchal society to consume women's bodies like commodities. Kurniawan's view on rape manifests radical feminism's perspective about it (rape), that is to say, "rape functions as a terrorist social practice" which severely makes women dependent on men by limiting their freedom (Primorac 501). Krisan¹⁸ pretends to be in a romantic relationship with his cousin Rengganis as he is coveting her body. Due to her romantic emotion toward him, she cannot realize the real situation when he seduces her, and hence, she states, "There is no other man in my life besides you, Krisan, so you *have to* marry me" (Kurniawan 425). Again, the 'hideous' Beauty is also trapped in Krisan's lust, who presents himself as a 'prince charming' as well as 'the forbearer of humanity' before her, makes her fall for him and assures her that with his help,

¹⁸ Dewi Ayu's grandson

she can escape from her 'hideous reality'. In fact, the author has not failed to outline the male-dominated society's sexual violence towards women as he builds Krisan's character full of lechery. While justifying his lust, Krisan says to himself,

He had screwed his own cousin, so where was the harm in screwing his own aunt? ...

Sleeping with Rengganis the Beautiful and sleeping with hideous Beauty wasn't all that different. Everything was the same, everything made his genitals spew. (Kurniawan 485)

Krisan as the representative of patriarchal society characterizes women's body parts as the 'things of gratification' and reduces their identity just as sex commodities. Both in the cases of Rengganis and Beauty, his intentions are to have their body parts to content his sexual needs. While mentioning Krisan's lustful interaction with Rengganis, Kurniawan writes, "...the moment he found the breasts that he had so longed for, he relaxed again... He began to kiss her lips, which he had coveted for so long" (427). Moreover, Krisan in his first meeting with Beauty expresses, "... for so long I have been wanting to touch you" (474). In fact, all that matters to Krisan is the women's body with which he can please his sexual desires. Furthermore, the patriarchal society's power practicing by using women's bodies as 'commodities' is not only limited to forcing them to stay in a career like prostitution but also it is more organized and complicated in marital relationships. The radical feminists believe that a society that can become an oppressor outside of the marriage can also oppress the women within the marriage (Schlick 32). Shodancho and Maman Gendeng's actions and attitudes toward their wives prove the fact that they consider their wives nothing more than the objects by which they can meet their sexual desires. On the one hand, Shodancho violates his wife Alamanda sexually ignoring her resistance in such a delighted manner as "a child with a new toy" (Kurniawan 178). On the other hand, though Maman Gendeng does not force his wife Maya Dewi to make love to him as Shodancho

does to Alamanda, he too craves for his wife's body that becomes "ripe and tempting" with her age (246).

Men's constant attempt of possessing women's bodies forcibly through prostitution or marriage is rape and it is directly connected to the male dominance of women. Additionally, raping a woman is not only about having sex with her but it is a violence for injecting the idea into the mind of women that they are the subordinate class who cannot rule over the men. This violating factor of men can clearly be detected in Shodancho's words after the rape of Alamanda. He states, "If all you want to do is conquer men and throw them away like abject trash, well then it's too bad you met me, Alamanda. I win every war I fight, including the war against you" (229).

5.1.2 The role of reproduction: the "beasts of burden"

Reproduction is another institution that the patriarchal society builds for oppressing women in the name of motherhood. To say it another way, through the reproductive capacity of women, the patriarchal structure practices its power and secures itself since reproduction is the driving force that keeps human beings surviving in the world. According to Atkinson,

...half the human race bears the burden of the reproductive process and because man, the 'rational' animal, had the wit to take advantage of that, that the child bearers, or the 'beasts of burden,' were corralled into a political class: equivocating the biologically contingent burden into a political (or necessary) penalty, thereby modifying these individuals' definition from the human to the functional, or animal. (Atkinson qtd. in Umannakwe et al. 2)

Shodancho's longing for making love to Alamanda and produce children is only for saving his ego as a member of the patriarchal society. Being a man and not being able to make love to his own wife for producing children is enough to damage his 'masculinity' (power) in front of the society. For Shodancho, Alamanda is only a source of sexual pleasure, a machine which will produce children by fulfilling his desire or an animal that can be used for breeding. In fact, giving birth to children does not depend on the women anymore rather it is controlled solely by the men who own their (women's) bodies legally by marriage. Hence, he literally begs to Alamanda for making love to him as he is "...completely distraught, stewing in a mix of humiliation and anger and helplessness" and having a child becomes "more important than anything else for a man with an ego like Shodancho" (Kurniawan 242).

5.1.3 Is beauty really a wound?

Kurniawan has projected the patriarchal society and its attitudes towards women from several angles and with the very last line of the novel, he sparks the thought in the reader's mind that is it the traditional beauty of the women or their gender which makes them vulnerable in the patriarchal society? The discourse of the beauty standard is formed by the men so that women can be imprisoned in their own physical appearance. Even though 'hideous' Beauty does not identify herself with the traditional beauty standard tries to make herself 'presentable' before her prince charming. In fact, whether the women are fitted into the traditional beauty standard of the male-dominated society or not, they are always at risk of being exploited. In another word, men create different discourses about women so that they stay in control and seek to decorate their prison (appearance).

Again, if the women naturally fit into the beauty standard of the society, men chase to possess them. In the novel, the women characters have traditional beauty e.g. ‘piercing eyes’, ‘gleaming white skin’, ‘gleaming black hair’, ‘bluish eyes’ and others, and the men consider the women with these features like souvenirs which will add some glory to their manly status. Furthermore, women’s identity is reduced to their beautiful appearances. In reality, a beautiful face becomes a wound for a woman. For instance, when Shodancho first sees Alamanda, he sets his mind having this ‘beautiful creature’ as he believes she is made just for him, “...who would be warm in bed, elegant in parties, charming enough at public events, and imperious enough to stand beside him during military ceremonies” (223). Kurniawan perfectly reflects the influence of *Mahabharata* by portraying Alamanda’s condition in the image of Drupadi who is won by Arjuna in the swamyer as a form of a trophy that declares his glory as a fighter. Moreover, Shodancho is projected as a revolutionary figure in the independence of Halimunda like Arjuna on the ground of ‘Kuruksheetra’¹⁹. These two ‘dedicated revolutionaries’ take their wives as objects without even realizing that their actions contradict the revolutionary ideals.

5.1.4 The camouflage of patriarchy

Inside the patriarchal institutions, men have double standard behavior in terms of gender. For instance, even though Maman Gendeng himself is a thug, as a representative of patriarchal society he is content with the fact that his wife does properly fit into the society’s conservative gender roles of managing households. He exclaims, “...look how proud I am of my little wife ... At twelve when I married her she was already good at cooking and sewing...” (331). To add more to it, Kurniawan wittily hints at men’s double-standard behavior with Dewi Ayu’s marriage

¹⁹ The battlefield where Pandavas and Kauravas fought

to Ma Gedik. Ma Gedik refuses to make love to Ayu by questioning her virginity although he himself performs sexual acts with prostitutes as well as beastility. In fact, Dewi Ayu has to prove her purity by tormenting²⁰ her body just like women have to do for thousands of years to pass their 'Agni pariksha'. Again, patriarchal discourse does not hesitate to label Ayu as a 'bad woman' for desiring love from her husband; however, it overlooks Gedik's act of beastility for being a man.

5.2 Kurniawan's the 'radical other'

5.2.1 Rejecting the patriarchal institutions

French author Poulain De la Barre says, "Everything that has been written by men about women should be viewed with suspicion because they are both judge and party". Kurniawan in the novel not only closely examines the root of the patriarchal society that exploits women for its own benefit but also places his female characters in the radical position so that the male-dominated scenario can be changed. In fact, the author illustrates a prostitute called Dewi Ayu as the central character while breaking the traditional bookish narration. Moreover, by doing so, he makes his female characters to questions all those things that men have defined for them.

Although Dewi Ayu cannot save herself from being prostituted, she rejects what the men's society determines for her. She is the "most well-respected prostitute" in Halimunda who leads most of her life according to her will. To add more to it, Kyai²¹ Jahro has to conduct her funeral, who strongly believes that a 'sinful' woman like her will surely be punished in her grave.

Although she is prostituted for her entire life, she as a mother makes sure that her daughters stay

²⁰ In order to prove her virginity, Dewi Ayu inserts her finger into her vagina and rotates it

²¹ For the ethnic Javanese people, Kyai is the person who is an expert in Islam

safe from this vile career. Hence, she sends them to the best schools of Halimunda and also, “to the mosque to recite prayers with Kyai Jahro” (119). She says, “They won’t become prostitutes... unless that’s really truly what they want” (119). Above all, her daughter Beauty is one of the boldest symbols that she presents against the male-dominated society. To be more specific, being chased and hunted by the men for her appearance and her body make her realize that “There’s no curse more terrible than to give birth to a pretty female in a world of men as nasty as dogs in heat” (13). Unlike most of the mothers who want daughters like Shinta or Drupadi, she wants a ‘monster’ looking daughter who will be like a “horned devil, with fangs”, “ears as the handles of pot” and so on. In fact, she wants to create a ‘monster’ who will be rejecting all the aspects of the society that creates stereotypes about women.

Again, Alamanda also does not hesitate to show her ‘radical’ side to her husband Shodancho, when he takes several attempts to rape her. Kurniawan with Alamanda’s character shows if women are determined to take radical steps against the oppression of men, many patriarchal structures can be reformed. Alamanda vows not to submit herself to her husband and cooperate with patriarchal practices like marital rape. The author brings some magical elements in his novel to illustrate how intensely she protests against the atrocious actions like marital rape. She unlike other wives tells Shodancho, “You foul rotten rapist, you rape your own wife” (298). Moreover, in order to protect and set her in an autonomous position both for her body and identity as a woman, she challenges him, “I am wearing new protection now, with ...complicated mantras²². Even if I’m totally naked you won’t be able to penetrate me” (299). With this particular radical act, she shifts from a vulnerable woman to an autonomous person who reclaims her selfhood.

²² Mantra is a sacred utterance that has magical powers

5.2.2 The sisterhood and reduction of vulnerability of women

Kurniawan starts the novel with a woman and ends it also with the women. Throughout the novel, he mentions the journey of different women in the patriarchal society. His narration highlights that the women as a class are oppressed and only a woman can realize other women's sufferings for the male dominance. In the novel, Dewi Ayu keeps Rosinah by understanding her position in the society as an orphan girl and years later, she becomes Beauty's caregiver when Ayu dies. In fact, Ayu and Rosinah develop 'sisterhood' with each other which reduces their vulnerability for belonging to the 'women-class' in the sexist society. Moreover, Dewi Ayu and other girls in the Mama Kalong whorehouse can only survive the horror because of their togetherness. They try to "...comfort and entertain one another and talk about the things that had no relationship whatsoever to their tragic nights" with the Japanese soldiers" (102). Again, Beauty's coming out in public with her 'hideous' face while not caring about people's stares after meeting her sisters proves that together women can build a better life for themselves. Kurniawan writes about the sisters, "The women took a deep pleasure in their new lives, trying to forget all the misfortune that befallen them, loving each other, and satisfied with that love" (479).

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The novel amalgamates so many angles of women's lives in a patriarchal society that it is often difficult to hold the focus on the storyline for the readers. However, it declares the maturity of the author in dealing with serious issues like prostitution, marriage, reproduction, and others that women have to experience in the Indonesian conservative society. With his extraordinary narration, Kurniawan successfully makes visible women not just as the victims of patriarchal institutions but as fighters who try to make them free as humans. In spite of clearly mentioning different historical periods and their marks on the women's life, he has highlighted women's life so that the real scenario can be reflected. Although this novel seems vulgar for its excessive representation of sexual violence to the women characters sometimes by force and sometimes with manipulation, it literally portrays how men treat women in real life.

Kurniawan's radical approach in the novel searches for the root of women's oppression by depicting how a man's lust can become a reason behind generational sufferings. According to the radical feminist ideas, the societal things e.g. prostitution, marriage, virginity, and reproduction which are considered personal matters are the weapons of patriarchal society to control the women and intact the male dominical structure. Again, discourses like religion and traditional beauty standards are also used by the men so that women can be taken under mental domination along with the physical one. In fact, these institutions together with problematic discourses strengthen the power practicing of the men in the society. Moreover, society always tries to keep these things personal because there are hidden political interests for men. Kurniawan in his novel keeps nothing unexplained or hidden rather he has come up with every

other factor of the patriarchal society which seems ‘vulgar’ to many readers. He with the minute details illustrates how the Japanese commandant rapes Dewi Ayu in the exchange for some medicines and doctors, Shodancho’s uncontrollable lust and raping his own wife, Krisan’s possessing Rengganis’ body with the provocation of marriage, Krisan’s making love to his own aunt and others. Women as a class are like ‘beautiful’ commodities or objects which men want to win for the sake of their status. To add more to it, they believe that winning women as the form of commodities and objects and subjugating them as their rights for belonging to a specific class. Kurniawan puts light on the fact that all the patriarchal institutions are kept private so that men can satisfy their needs using women. However, in reality, they literally attempt to cover up the crimes that they have done to women. Though throughout the novel Kurniawan describes Dewi Ayu and other women’s stories in an individual manner; nonetheless, he affluently conveys the message to his readers that women as a class are oppressed. In fact, it is their gender that makes them the target of the male-dominated society. Again, although the women in the novel are oppressed by the men, they do not confine their identities as a prostitute, a mother, a lover, or a wife. With their radical actions by denying the patriarchal constructions, they establish them as autonomous human beings.

Apart from this, Kurniawan does not limit himself only reaching to the root of women’s oppression which is nothing but patriarchy; in fact, he highlights also those factors using which women can challenge the patriarchy and liberate themselves. By introducing one of the aspects of radical feminism ‘sisterhood’, he focuses on the fact that if the women as a class are oppressed; they can only be liberated with a united effort. The idea of sisterhood comes up in the novel when the female characters deal with the most crucial period of their life. Even though being a prostitute Dewi Ayu keeps Rosinah with her but does not enforce her into prostitution as

Mama Kalong does to her. Since Ayu already has experienced the horror of the position as a woman, she does not do the same injustice to another. Moreover, Dewi Ayu's four daughters without caring about society's view lead their life as widows in a happier state with one another than with their male counterparts. In fact, they realize that the love of 'sisterhood' can change their life in a better way. Lastly, Kurniawan with his epic novel *Beauty Is a Wound* draws the pictures of women in Indonesian society who have been oppressed throughout the history and while doing so, he goes to the root of the oppression which is nothing but patriarchal society and leaves the readers to think about the women who remain invisible so long with their sufferings.

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