

AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE ON SAUDI ARABIAN WOMEN'S RULES IN JEAN SASSON'S PRINCESS

(PANDANGAN ORANG AMERICA TERHADAP PERATURAN-PERATURAN WANITA ARAB SAUDI DALAM NOVEL *PRINCESS* KARYA JEAN SASSON)

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Abstract

Princess is a novel written by Jean Sasson published in 1991. The novel tells about Saudi Arabian women's condition under patriarchal system. Patriarchy is a social system that men considered dominate everything. In this kind of society, men hold most power and authority. Women are considered weak. In Saudi Arabia, women are controlled by male relative and the traditional rules. Sultana, the main character in the novel, shows her disagreement toward the rules of Saudi Arabia. She tends to compare the differences between American and Saudi Arabian culture in women treatment. She brings the voice of America about freedom and everyone right. This article uses qualitative method. The primary data are the information about the rules being Saudi Arabia women that is reflected in the novel, *Princess*. The secondary data are Saudi Arabian women's culture and political position related to women education, marriage, fashion, and public access. The article uses inductive method in searching the result of the research and uses Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingwood's theory, *Literature and Sociology* becomes a device to relate the text and the reality. The article aims to find American perspective in *Princess* on the rules of being Saudi Arabian women.

Keywords: *Perspective, Women, Rule, Patriarchal, and Sociology*

Abstrak

Princess adalah sebuah novel karya Jean Sasson yang diterbitkan tahun 1991. Novel ini bercerita tentang kondisi wanita-wanita Arab Saudi di bawah tekanan sistem Patriarki. Patriarki adalah sistem sosial dimana laki-laki dianggap mendominasi semua keputusan. Di dalam masyarakat seperti ini, laki-laki memegang kekuasaan dan otoritas penuh. Wanita dianggap lemah. Di Arab Saudi, wanita dikendalikan oleh saudara laki-laki dan adat istiadat. Sultana, tokoh utama dalam novel ini, menunjukkan ketidaksetujuan terhadap peraturan-peraturan Arab Saudi. Dia cenderung membandingkan perbedaan antara budaya Amerika dan Arab Saudi dalam memperlakukan wanita. Dia membawa suara Amerika tentang kebebasan dan hak-hak semua orang. Artikel ini menggunakan metode kualitatif. Data primer adalah informasi tentang peraturan menjadi wanita Arab Saudi yang tercermin di dalam novel, *Princess*. Data sekunder adalah data tentang budaya wanita di Saudi Arabian dan posisi politik yang berkaitan dengan pendidikan, pernikahan, fashion, dan akses publik wanita. Artikel ini menggunakan metode induktif untuk mencari hasil dari penelitian ini dan menggunakan teori Diana Laurenson dan Alan Swingewood, Sastra dan Sosiologi menjadi perangkat untuk menghubungkan teks dan realita. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui perspektif Amerika di dalam novel *Princess* tentang peraturan-peraturan menjadi wanita Arab Saudi.

Kata kunci : *Perspektif, Wanita, Peraturan, Patriarki, dan Sosiologi*

Introduction

Patriarchy is a social system where men inherently dominate to everything, especially females (*Walby, 1991:20*). Millet mentions that term of patriarchy (rule of the father) is to describe the cause of women's oppression. "Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male" (in Salden, 1985:131-132). They are taken for granted to be fully submissive and obedient to men. Saudi Arabia is one of the countries

applying patriarchal system. "Saudi Arabia women have not been treated as equal citizens with men" (Zuhur, 2011:218). Women and men are not in the same position.

Patriarchal system, apparently, gets a lot of criticism in some countries. They assume that the patriarchal system violates human rights, especially women. America declared the independence on July 4 1776 said that "*all men are created equal*" (Welliman, 1991:2). The main principles of declaration of independence are the right for a good life,

liberty and the pursuit of happiness, therefore none can interfere the other person's freedom. The author, Jean Sasson, is American. She was born in United States in 1947. She moved to Saudi Arabia in 1978.

Related to the explanation above, I analyze the women's treatment in *Princess*. The novel describes the life of Saudi Arabia Princess, Sultana, in the royal family in the twentieth century. Sultana, the main character of the novel, feels frustration and rebellion on Saudi Arabian rules. The ideal woman in Saudi Arabia is woman who obeys her male relative order and the rules. Sultana wants to be treated as a society member whose voice is heard and listened to. The description indicate American perspective in the novel. This research is focused to analyze Saudi Arabian women's oppression. Liberty and equality is the socio-cultural background of the author. Finally, the article is entitled American Perspective on Saudi Arabian Women's Rules in Jean Sasson's *Princess*.

Research Methodology

This article uses qualitative method. Qualitative method also helps the researcher to interpret and to give the complex reality of a given situation portrayed in some textual data. Qualitative method is effective in identifying the textual data. The data are selected and collected by quotation.

The collection of the data uses documentary method to find the supporting data for the article. Blaxter *et al.* states that documentary method in collecting data by wearing written material as a basis for the research by reading (2006:154). The primary data are the information about the rules being Saudi Arabia women that is reflected in the novel, *Princess*. The secondary data are Saudi Arabian women's culture and political position related to women education, marriage, fashion, and public access.

The data processing and analysing to see the information about Saudi Arabian women from the novel, book, journal, and any other form that are relevant to the topic of discussion. The data are gathered to support this analysis. The data processing is started by classifying the data. Data classification is an activity of categorization. The article uses inductive method in searching the result of the research and uses Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingwood's theory, *Literature and Sociology* becomes a device to relate the text and the reality.

Result

The result of this article indicates that Sultana in the novel brings the voice of America about freedom and human right. Sultana wants to be free but she knows that she is truly Saudi Arabian woman and she should be proud her culture. Sultana's reconciliation indicates that the author tries to civilize the restricted culture of Saudi Arabia in western standard. She shows that Sultana is Saudi Arabian woman, she cannot to be American woman. Therefore, the condition of women in a particular era and place cannot globally be standardized, even by American perspective.

Discussion

The article intends to present the reflection and the criticism toward the social phenomenon that are reflected in the novel. The discussion is about the rules of being Saudi Arabian women and how American perspective is used to see these restricted Saudi Arabian rules. Saudi Arabia has so many rules to treat women in the society included their education, marriage, mobility, and fashion. The rules are portrayed by the presentation of the main characters' attitude in the novel.

Saudi Arabia have so many rules for women, and one of Saudi's rules is that women limited to get education. Education is expected as a vital agency in importing the desirable goals and families have important role in child education. Family can be understood as the place for child protection. The parents will not give different treatment between their children in education, but the patriarchal system in Saudi Arabia gives impact in treatment a boy and a girl. Patriarchy is a set of value that makes men as the ruler of society. Millet mentions that term of patriarchy (rule of father) is to describe the cause of women's oppression (in Salden, 1985:131-132). Men, as the pillar of the family, are given the authority to control their family.

The novel, *Princess* depicts the men authority. Father is the highest holder in the family. A father has authority and the responsibility on his family's member, especially on his wife and daughter. He has authority in controlling any activities include his daughter's education.

For many years, my father is refusing even to consider the possibility. My five older sisters received no schooling other than to memorize the Koran from a private tutor who comes to our home. For two hours, six afternoons a week, they would repeat word after Egyptian teacher, Fatma, a stern woman of about forty-five years of age. She one asked my parents' permission to expand my sisters' education to include science, history and math. Father responded with a firm no; and the recital of the Prophet's words, and his words alone continued to ring throughout our villa.

(Sasson, 1992:35)

The statement above shows that a father is the decision maker. Sultana thinks patriarchal system as women's right violation. The patriarchal system makes women get much oppression. Women are controlled by men. Women in Saudi Arabia must have a male guardian. A guardian encompasses major aspects of women's lives. A man is a guardian in Saudi Arabia because the patriarchal society constructs gender idea that a man is stronger and more capable rather than a woman. Sultana's education also depends on her father's decision.

Girls are not allowed going to school unlike boys in Saudi Arabia. Although the girls study math, science and history and get a classroom to study, there are still social gap and social differences between boys and girls. The Islamic standard of education is separation of women's education. Girls are taught by women because Islamic law

does not allow girls to meet boys in the same room if they are not *Mahram*. The system of education in Saudi Arabia is also divided into different courses between boys and girls by a differential tracking system whereby boys are taught to think about male activities and girls are encouraged to develop for their future roles as mothers and housewives (AlMunajjed, 2009:6). Sultana shows that the system indicates women discrimination.

The discrimination gives Sultana much oppression. Sultana thinks that education is very important in woman's life. Woman not only gets better life but also any happiness in her life. Woman is able to be successful housewife, an ideal wife and good mother for her children if she gets a good education.

During the years of Uncle Faisal's reign, Iffat driving force behind education for young girls. Without her efforts, the women in Arabia today would not be allowed in a classroom. I was in awe of her forceful character and declared I would grow up to be just like her.

(Sasson, 1992:38)

Sultana's attitude indicates the side of feminist. Feminism seeks social change in women's status by changing the way in which society views them. Feminism wants people in society to change its idea of patriarchy and to accept women as being a valuable part within society. Sultana shows that education is the right of everybody who lives in the world. She knows that knowledge is very important in women's life.

The second rule of being Saudi Arabian women is obligated to wear Abaya and veil. The traditional women dresses in Saudi have requirements in style especially Bedouin society. The dress must be covering women body, looseness, thickness, and should not attract men's attention to the women beauty (Badawi, 1969:7-10). Abaya, in Bedouin society is a long black cloak worn over the clotting of Bedouin women in Saudi Saudi Arabian (Sasson, 1992: 268). Saudi Arabian women must wear Abaya and veil when they get their first blood or the first menstruate.

In Saudi Arabia, the appearance of to first menses means that it is time to select the first veil and abaya with the greatest of care.

(Sasson, 1992:74)

Dress is one of the products of culture. Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. Saudi Arabia law bases on religious belief. Therefore, Saudi Arabian society constructs that women cannot show their bodies. To cover woman's bodies, the society forces women to use a dress called Abaya .

Women should not display their bodies except to their husband, their father, their son and their brother. Women's

bodies cannot be seen by unrelated men, therefore Saudi Saudi Arabian rules force women to wear the full black Abaya (Laalaj, 2013:4). Women do not have choices except wearing Abaya and veil. Women must wear Abaya when they go out.

Sultana sees that Abaya and veil are women slammer. wearing Abaya and veil are as coverage of a women's brains. Women in Saudi Arabia are not treated as human being. They cannot convey an opinion. They cannot do what they want to do. Sultana wants to fight against the rule. Sultana and friends go to the parking park area where the man parked their car.

Randa squealed and slapped my hand when I raised my veil so that I could see the traffic. Too late, I realized that I had exposed my face to every man in the street! The men appeared stunned by their luck, for they had seen a woman's face in a public place! I instantly realized it was far better for me to be run down by a speeding automobile than to commit such an act of revilement.

(Sasson, 1992:96)

Sultana's bravery indicates an expression of liberty. Women also have to be free to show their minds. Wearing Abaya and veil should not cover women's aspiration. She shows that women are supposed to be free wearing what she wants and to be fashionable. Everybody has human right that must be respected. Women have the same chance to pursuit their happiness.

The third rule is restricted mobility. Women's social reputations are the concern of their guardians, first their father or other male relative, then their husband. Saudi Arabian women are not given mobility freely. They cannot be admitted to do a surgical procedure, even elective surgery without the guardian's permission. They cannot travel without their guardians. The rules and regulation restrict women's access to public based on the guardian's permission. Women are also banned to drive a car in the street and are not allowed in the same car with man unless they are relative.

They have to get their guardians' approval to leave. They are forbidden to go outside without their husbands or male relatives. They must be accompanied with their husbands or male relatives, when they want to go everywhere. They must bring a travel letter when they leave their houses. The travel letter is a sign that they are traveling by their guardians' approval.

Omar drove us by Father' office he had forgotten to collect our travel papers. In Saudi Arabia, a man must write a letter granting permission for female in his family to travel. Without the papers, we might be stop at the customs office and prevented from boarding the plane. Father also sent our passports since, as he told.

(Sasson,1972:55)

Sultana sees much trouble in her society. Saudi Arabian women are oppressed by the rule, passive and under the strict control of man. They cannot do anything without their male relative permission.

Sara and I were thrilled to hear that Kuwaiti women, who are allowed to drive and go unveiled, were even driving across our road and into the street of our capital. No Western women could ever imagine our mixed emotion. We were crashing into a storm, and while our glee was mixed with wonder, at the same moment we were frothing with jealousy that our Arab sister were driving automobiles and exposing their naked faces in our land!

(Sasson, 1992:236)

Sultana thinks that women must have opportunities to travel without being interfered. As the result of the rule, many women do not have higher education and job opportunities. They are supposed to be free. Women are free to do what she wants to do. Sultana sees the paradigm if women have to be free like men is affected by feminism movement. Feminism believes in human's equality. Men and women have the same chance to go and work to get better life.

The fourth is the marriage pattern. Marriage is one of the traditions reflected in the novel. Traditionally, marriage is seen as a communal more than an individual one. Marriage is perceived as mechanism for reproduction, human survival, the reinforcement of family ties and interests, the preservation of private property through inheritance, socialization, and the achievement of other goals that transcend the happiness of the individual to guarantee communal interests. The principle is seen in patterns related to marriage, including arranged marriage, polygamy and divorce (Barakat, 1993:107).

Arranged marriage is a marriage that the parents choose their daughter's husband for their future. Arranged marriage is commonly father's decision. Sultna's father is already arranged her marriage when Sultana gets her first menstruation. The menstruation is the sign that a girl is already to marry. Her father already knows about her menstruation.

I lay most on the night and thought of Huda's words. For the first time in my young life, I feared my future. Nura returned to our villa the following morning to advise me that I was to wed Kareem, one of the royal cousins.

(Sasson, 1992:125-126).

The statement above shows that all decisions are made by men and all women have to do is following it. Sultana thinks the arranged marriage as nightmare. Women cannot decide with who they want to get married. Women are expected to avoid from expressing their wishes and leaving their fathers to decide their husbands.

I called Kareem's sister, whom I knew

slightly, and told her to advise her brother that he had best reconsider marrying me. I threatened that if we married he could not take other wives or I would poison them all at my first opportunity. Besides, I told her, Father had a difficult time finding a husband for me since I had an accident in the school lab.

(Sasson, 1991:126)

Sultana always tries to show her felling although her felling often breaks Saudi Arabian rules. Sultana bravery indicates liberal expression. She shows that marriage is seen as an individual choice that does not depend on parental approval. Sultana wants to be happy with her husband but she never receives her freedom although only choosing her husband.

Another tradition in Arab is polygamy which is restricted by Islam to four wives. Kareem wants to marry another woman when Sultana has to lose one of her breast. She cannot birth children anymore. Sultana does not want Kareem to conduct polygamy but Kareem wants to have lot of children.

My scream pierced the air. The name I called my husband caused the gathering servants to freeze. Like a wild creature, I spit in to Kareem's face and watched his astonishment grow as he witnessed the fury he had triggered.

(Sasson, 1992:220)

Sultana's bravery indicates that human being have the right to be independent from any other. She voices out her disagreement in order to make Kareem think over of his decision.

The last rule of being Saudi Arabian women in this research is divorce. A husband in Saudi Arabia can easily divorce his wife and it is impossible for a wife to divorce her husband, except by the consent of a court of law in extreme case of neglect, maltreatment, nonsupport, indefinite absence of the husband, or impotence (Barakat, 1993:115). A husband can divorce his wife by verbal regulation and does not require a reason. He needs to say "I divorce you" three times to his wife. It means that they divorce at that moment and a husband only needs to register the divorce.

I told Kareem that I wanted a divorce, I would never submit to the humiliation of his taking another wife. Kareem replied that divorce would be out of the question unless I chose to give up my children for his second wife to rise.

(Sasson, 1992:217)

The statement above shows the men's domination. Women who have an initiative to divorce are not given right to raise their children. Sultana does not want to lose her children. She is afraid that she will be separated from her children, but she also does not want her husband to take another wife.

Sultana sees that divorce is gender discrimination. She escapes from her husband and brings their children. Sultana bravery indicates a liberal expression. She wants to be independent. People also have right to voice and make a decision by themselves

Those are the example of traditional perceptions in patriarchal society that exists in Saudi Arabia. These restricted rules give Sultana much oppression. She feels desperate with all Saudi Arabian restricted rules. She thinks that the rules only make women become the victim of injustice act. Sultana, as female character, is in a painful situation.

Sultana escapes from her husband and Saudi Arabian rules. She believes that if she leaves Saudi Arabia she will get a better life without man's authority. She will get happiness with her children. She is not afraid of that she will lose her property and her economic power. She will get her freedom. Sultana attitude in the novel indicates that she believes in Western liberal value. Unfortunately, Sultana cannot do anything about the tradition.

Sultana's reconciliation appears in the end of the novel. Sultana knows that she is an Saudi Arabian woman. She believes that Islam is never giving wrong instructions. She believes that the rules and the regulations in Saudi are formed by the holy religious leaders. Sultana sees so much trouble in society that must be change.

Sultana, therefore, brings the voice of America and then shares about American culture to Saudi Arabia. America by the declaration of independence is the symbol of liberty, live and pursuit of happiness. She tries to equalize the position of women between Saudi Arabia and America. She wants women in her country to be free like American women, but Sultana forgets that she has the culture and the religious as the foundations of her culture. Finally, Sultana's reconciliation appears that she is a truly Saudi Arabian woman. She has her own heritage and believes. She must be proud to Saudi Arabian culture.

Conclusion

The article concludes that *Princess* presents Sasson's perspective on restricted rules toward women in Saudi Arabia. The novel is a portrait of patriarchal system in the society which treats women in pejorative way. It also exposes the oppressions from patriarchal culture that occurs toward women. The injustice and the gender discrimination toward women are shown clearly in this novel. The society described mostly in the novel is the patriarchal society. Patriarchal society regards that men is the highest authority holders. Sultana, the main character in the story, experiences oppression due to the patriarchal system. Sultana character is as the counter of oppressive rules toward women in Saudi Arabia. Sultana indicates as one of the women with liberal thought. Liberal thought is a good choice in developing human character or personality because it gives chance for anybody to develop his talent without any interference from any other. People should respect individual's liberty.

Sultana in the novel brings the voice of America about freedom and human right. She shows and compares the differences between American and Saudi Arabian culture in

the treatment of women. Sultana firstly tries to see Saudi Arabia in American perspective. She gives a solution to fight against the oppressive regulation toward women in her country. She wants to be free and equal with man but she cannot do anything because she is Saudi Arabian woman. Sultana's reconciliation in the novel indicates that Jean Sasson tries to civilize the restricted culture of Saudi Arabia in western standard. She shows that Sultana is Saudi Arabian woman, she cannot to be American woman. Therefore, the condition of women in a particular era and place cannot globally be standardized, even by American perspective.

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