

Learning Lessons from Human Tragedies in the Drama *Kapai-kapai*

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the structure of characterization of the *Kapai-Kamat* drama by Arifien C. Noer with a theatre semiotics approach. *Kapai-kapai's* dramas are interesting because the problems presented by the author are quite contextual to date even though they were written in 1979. This drama structure contains many signs (sign) so that it needs to be analyzed using the theatre semiotics approach. Theatre semiotics examines objects by interpreting a sign that is associated with the socio-cultural context. Drama scripts, including *Kapai-kapai*, are semiotic symptoms, so researchers must regard the drama as a sign. The results of this study are as follows. The Emak figure functions as a signifier (signifier) of power, while Abu signifies (signifies) for the weak who are oppressed by power. The grandfather, who is religiously observant (signifier) functions as a marker of humans who still consider religious values as a determinant of a better life direction (signifies). The Mirror of Deception (signifier), which is always hunted by Abu, is a marker of uncertainty or endless values (signifies). Employer figure II, who always calls Abu (signifier) with bell sound, is a marker of the industrialization process that does not bring prosperity to the community (signifier). The social background of the lower class where Abu and Emak are located (signifier) is a symbol of poverty that hit the community (signifies).

1 INTRODUCTION

Sociologically and psychologically dramas can play an important role in modern society, which always deals with real and difficult life problems. Literary works, including dramas, can bring benefits to life. Dramas and other works of art generally cannot be separated from human life and society. It is true that Indonesia, as a developing nation, can live without art. The view above implies that dramas cannot be separated from life, meaning that it certainly can enrich our spiritual life or experience. Life without art means, to some extent, life without consciousness. Thus, it feels right if one says that life without literature will seem vulgar and rude.

One of the most noticeable benefits of dramas is the role it plays in human mental development, which is vital for balancing human material needs. It is related to efforts to improve the spiritual ability to appreciate all aspects of life and the prevailing norms and values to achieve the greatest possible happiness in life.

One way to carry out mental development is by enjoying dramas. Dramas offer a deep understanding

of humans as well as the interpretation of and reflection on every single event that happens in life. Based on the story it tells, it turns out that Arifien C. Noer's drama entitled *Kapai-kapai* (1979) (literary a struggle to get something) proves useful for attempts to enrich insights of the nation's people, especially in relation to mental development of today's people who tend to deify more the values of materialism than spiritual values.

In connection with the foregoing, in the following analysis, the author will study the relevance of the drama entitled *Kapai-kapai* as a means to sharpen the nation's intelligence, especially related to moral education. This drama contains signs whose significance needs to be studied further, for example, the character named Abu. In this work, the author limited the analysis only to the drama. This was based on the consideration that compared to Arifien C. Noer's other dramas, moral values presented in *Kapai-kapai* seem more intensive. The theory used to study this drama was semiotics.

One of the characters that make Arifien C. Noer's dramas unique is the theme on which development of the story is based. He often raised social issues that

arose amidst society. It can be said that Arifien is one of a few Indonesian male dramatists with a great commitment to social issues. His dramas often revolve around the themes of unemployment, economic poverty, moral (spiritual) poverty, and the like as in the drama *Kapai-kapai*.

2 THEORIES OF SEMIOTICS

Semiotics includes a theoretical approach to art, which is currently quite popular among artists and scientists. It is the study of signs (Nur Sahid, 2012). The signs have both meanings and significance, which are determined by their convention. A drama is comprised of various structures of meaningful signs. The semiotic approach includes an analysis of literary works, including dramas, as an example of language use based on additional conventions including features that give significance to various modes of discourse (Preminger et al., 1974: 980). By looking at variations in its structure or the relationship between its elements, a drama will have various significance. In fact, in addition to the denotative aspect, signs in a drama inevitably have secondary significance for the audience that connects them to social, moral, or ideological values associated with a particular community (Nur Sahid, 2012).

Semiologist Ferdinand de Saussure states that signs in semiotics have two aspects, which are the signifier that refers to a concept or form of signs that mark the signified, which is the significance (Noth, 1990: 60). Various facts show that most language signs are symbols. About literary works, Preminger et al. state that language is the first-order semiotics, while literature is the second-order semiotics (1974: 981). The meaning of language is a meaning, while the meaning of literature is the meaning of meaning or significance. In a drama analysis, semiotics functions to determine significance to the literary work because a drama as a literary work constitutes a system of signs that have significance. Drama as an artwork is not a single symbol, but more to a semiotic unit network that employs work-related symbols (Nur Sahid, 2017: 155).

Michael Riffaterre suggests that determination of the significance of a particular work as a system of signs is also often referred to as an effort to examine the significance of such signs (1982: 23). He argues that a meaning (signified) does not lie "behind" the sign (signifier), but the signifier is a sign which implies a meaning that readers should try to figure out. Literary works as a structure of signs is an artefact that has no significance before their readers

interpret their significance (Vodicka in Teeuw, 1983: 191). The theories above were used to study drama *Kapai-kapai*.

3 THE THEME OF THE DRAMA *Kapai-kapai*

When creating a work of art, an artist starts with discovering its basic concept. The basic concept of a work of art is often referred to as a basic idea (Stanton, 1965). The theme of a drama is the accumulation of various problems that exist therein. The problems in the drama *Kapai-kapai* concern poverty, both financially and spiritually, of its protagonist named Abu. The poverty that Abu and Item (Abu's wife) suffered was caused not only by their ignorance but also by a social system that did not give the oppressed opportunity to develop themselves, except for those who had money, such as the character Master. It was such a condition that made it increasingly hard to bridge a social gap between the poor (Abu and Item) and the rich (the Master).

Abu's poverty constitutes structural poverty, i.e. a type of material poverty that was passed down from generation to generation. The only asset owned by Abu was a bamboo house that would flood every time it rained. Even, he often could not afford food (Arifien C. Noer, 1984: 52). Before being trapped in extreme hunger suffering, they, to some extent, still upheld religious values (the teachings of Islam), even though it was not that intensive. For example, formerly Abu and Iyem refused to eat pork as instructed by the teachings of their religion. However, they finally did not comply with this order any longer as they felt so hungry that they could no longer resist it (Arifien C. Noer, 1984: 67). The shift in the way of life of both Abu and Iyem, from a religious one to disobedient one, resulted from their poverty. Thus, poverty had transformed them into human beings who were *kufir*/infidels (denying their religious teachings).

The poverty also led Abu and Iyem to lose human values and spiritual values as well. This can be seen from the moment when they had the heart to kill a newborn baby Iyem had just given birth on the grounds that they were unable to feed the baby (Arifien C. Noer, 1984: 52). Such an act conflicts with not only human values, but also religious teachings.

The problems in the drama *Kapai-kapai* are also related to the tendency of the lower classes or the common people (Abu) who are powerless and have

no power to deal with pressure from various elements of power (Mother). Mother tried to control Abu's life (the protagonist), and Abu seemed unable to get rid of the influence of his mother. Since the beginning, Abu had been bewitched by all the tales his mother told him about various kinds of worldly beauty, such as the Mirror of Deception, the beauty of the princess, and a handsome and powerful prince. These made him forget his bitter life. All the persuasions and tales his mother and her servants told him were nothing more than an attempt to plunge him into a deeper valley of suffering.

Under conditions of quite repressive pressure, the character Abu was like a robot that is easy to program as the ruler wishes (the character Master). In front of Mother, Abu was powerless, and so was he in front of the character Master. Abu is the embodiment of the lower classes with no economic or social power, and so on. In his entire life, he often submitted himself to the influence of other parties, such as Mother and her servant, and the Master. Even in front of the character Master, Abu completely did not show his dignity as a human being. As labour working at his Master's place, Abu was easy to control and obedient. The ways he worked and acted were so mechanical and monotonous that if the bell rang, he would think that it was his Master calling him.

Based on the problems mentioned above, it can be concluded that the drama *Kapai-kapai* concerns the tendency of modern humans who are blinded by worldly values that they forget religious values, making their life lack physical and mental happiness. The characters Abu, Mother, and Master are victims of modernization. Their suffering resulted from deviating from transcendental values.

4 ANALYSIS OF SIGNIFICANCE

As mentioned in section A, this study will analyze the drama *Kapai-kapai* using a semiotic approach because the problems in *Kapai-kapai* manifest themselves as signs, symbols, or signifiers that have significance, or in short, the discussion of the structure of *Kapai-kapai* was discussed further in its semiotic framework. Thus, it is expected that this play can be interpreted based on a broader perspective.

4.1 Symbolization of Power

In the analysis of the structure of *Kapai-kapai*, it has been revealed that the character Mother had enormous power. The character Abu was always in the grip of her control. In semiotics, the character

Mother serves as the signifier. She is a symbol of great power. She controlled Abu's life as evident from the beginning to the end of the story, where she always controlled Abu's life. On the other hand, Abu also seemed unable to get rid of his mother's influence. Since the beginning, he had been bewitched by all the tales his mother told him about the Mirror of Deception, the beauty of the princess, and a handsome and powerful prince. These made him forget his real life. Because he was often tricked into believing the dreams his Mother offered him, he was often unable to deal with a tough life. All the persuasions and tales his mother and her servants told him were nothing more than an attempt to plunge him into a deeper valley of suffering

Moreover, the character Mother was also quite powerful to order the Moon and the Dark. She always ordered the Moon to comfort Abu and the Dark to torture Abu. The Dark and the Moon viewed Mother as the character who had absolute power, making them unable to refuse her orders. In semiotics, the power which Mother and Master had can be categorized as the signified, while the characters Mother and Master who had such power are the signifiers.

4.2 Symbolization of Religious Values

The presence of the character Grandfather in *Kapai-kapai* reminds us of the character named Sabaruddin in the play entitled *Sumur Tanpa Dasar* (A Well without a Bottom) written by the same author. Both figures instilled Islamic religious values into the protagonist. In *Kapai-kapai*, Grandfather always guided the protagonist's life direction based on religious teachings. Because the memory of the Mirror of Deception had been imprinted on his mind, Abu did not respond to Grandfather's invitation. As a result, Grandfather's attempts to make him forget the Mirror of Deception did not succeed.

As a man who believed in God, the character Grandfather has fulfilled his obligations, namely to call on others to live their life based on religious teachings. Whether his attempt succeeded or not is another matter. The character Grandfather also serves a ritual function. This was evident at the time Abu passed away, where he and Koor joined the others, bringing Abu's body to his grave. In semiotics, the character Grandfather functions as the signifier while the religious values demonstrated by his actions are the signified, i.e. the aspect denoted by a sign.

4.3 Symbolization of Endless Values

It is obvious that the title *Kapai-kapai* has a symbolic meaning, namely a manifestation of the desire to achieve something or, more precisely, the quest for the Mirror of Deception. Actually the beauty and magic of the Mirror of Deception existed only in the imagination of Mother's tale. Abu would never have it because it was not real. If in the end, he managed to get it as he passed away, it was useless. It means that the Mirror of Deception was actually useless for Abu because he already died when it was there. The values are increasingly sought for, the more unclear the existence. It all happened because these values were not based on a clear concept. The values instilled by Mother are different from the religious values instilled by Grandfather. The values instilled by Grandfather were grounded in a clear religious concept, namely Islam. As a play writer, Arifien seems to side with the character Grandfather. In the semiotics of literature, the Mirror of Deception may function as the signifier, while endless values function as the signified.

5 CONOTATIVE MEANING

The explanation above provides an analysis denotatively. The following section concerns the connotative analysis. Sociologically, Arifien C. Noer's way of life and the process of creating both dramas are influenced by the actual social conditions of Indonesia, which are characterized by the process of social change that is extremely powerful. Social change results from the process of modernization in various aspects of life, including industrialization. Industrialization promoted by the government in an effort to increase the national economy turns out to have an impact on the emergence of the culture of materialism among the people. As a result, many people worship money and other worldly goods and no longer comply with transcendental values. Today's humans tend to adore worldly matters rather than spiritual or transcendental matters.

In this case, Arifien, as an author and dramatist, tried to respond to various negative effects of modernization through his works, especially dramas. In addition, it seems that he intends to express his views on the shift in values in society as a result of modernization. This drama is a manifestation of Arifien C. Noer's social criticism of Indonesia's development process which only emphasized an economic approach, rather than a humanitarian one. This results in a shift in the value system in society.

For Arifien C. Noer, the condition above is not right. Thus it needs correction.

In a semiotic perspective, the drama *Kapai-kapai* shows a variety of symbolic elements. The symbols (signs) include symbolization of the values of power, the symbolization of the oppressed, the symbolization of religious values, and symbolization of endless values. These symbols contradict one another. The symbolization of the values of power is in opposition to the symbolization of the oppressed, while symbolization of religious values is opposed to endless values.

Connotatively, the characters Abu and Iyem are the symbolization of the oppressed. The dream of the glitter of the palace with beautiful princesses, adorned with diamonds and gems, with Abu as the Prince represents Abu's unconscious obsession trying to escape from his tough life. Furthermore, when the character Grandfather persuaded him to live his life based on religious teachings in order that his life would become better, he always refused it. Because of his ignorance and illiteracy, Abu could not understand his Grandfather's view of the importance of belief in God's power that promises happiness in the hereafter (Arifien C. Noer, 1984: 33-34).

Abu's reluctance to follow Grandfather's order to understand religious teachings—instead of trying to get the shadow of illusion, which is the Mirror of Deception also has a connotative meaning. The meaning is related to the fact that in the context of modern society, people are more interested in the illusion and imagination of worldly beauty which is not real rather than the imagination of eternal happiness in the hereafter. They prefer to worship worldly happiness rather than preparing themselves for life after death. The life tragedy that happened to Abu constitutes a human's suffering who believed too much that worldly matters could give him inner and outer happiness. The truth is in the absence of a balance with spiritual matters that are based on divine teachings; worldly matters will actually cause sufferings, physically and spiritually.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that life suffering experienced by Abu is manifested in his poverty and *kufr* in the course of his life. Poverty made him focus on trying to get worldly beauty, even if he did not succeed until he departed from life. On the other hand, the divine teachings taught by Grandfather were not implemented during his life, making Abu a poor and *kufr* (did not comply with the

teachings of his religion) human being at the same time.

As an author, Arifien C. Noer does not seem to allow the characters to look for a value system between the two value systems. In *Kapai-kapai*, the author seems to side with the character Grandfather, who always reminded Abu to live according to the religious teachings instructed by God. Abu's death at the end of the story was actually more to confirm that the worldly values offered by Mother to Abu should never be put into practice. In reality, these values had caused Abu great suffering in the course of his life. The existence of the character Grandfather who was still alive until the end of the story, even accompanying Abu's body, is a sign that these values should be implemented.

So, through the character Grandfather, Arifien C. Noer tells the moral of the story to the readers. Arifien did not let the readers find out on their own the moral values of the plays. Instead, he clearly directed them through the existence of the character Grandfather. The drama results from social awareness so that it is a pathway towards better social awareness. Through the values offered, the author's Grandfather invites the readers to reflect on the importance of the meaning of transcendental values as a counterweight to the rampant spirit of materialistic values in modern life. This is actually the moral education that the author wants to convey to the readers. The moral education is quite relevant to the historical, social conditions of our society in this third millennium. Even though *Kapai-kapai* was written 39 years ago, but its significance is still relevant to today's conditions.

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