

# GENDER CONSTRUCTION ON BANYUWANGI'S LEGEND

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## *Abstract*

*Legend is a folktale that has a historical root or ground. It is interesting to investigate a legend since it is closely related with culture. Banyuwangi has a very nice legend that tells about the origin of its name. The legend is told in three different versions and each of them shares the same ending by the death of the woman in each story caused by her own husband.*

*Suspiciously, a legend may be loaded with the gender construction that influences the society. It pictures a tangible differentiation between the image and the role from women and men. This paper aims to compares the three versions of the legend and analyses them using feminism point of view. Feminism movement nowadays is widening its movement to investigate the text which is suspected to support the patriarchy power. This paper uses literature research as its method and meets the result as follows: 1) In the legend's first version, woman was stereotyped as the domestic worker, 2) In the legend's second version, woman was portrayed as the second sex, 3) In the legend's third version, woman is seen as a sexual object.*

*Keywords: Banyuwangi legends, gender construction, feminism.*

## **A. Introduction**

Banyuwangi is a name of a district located in the province of East Java, Indonesia, located in the easternmost part of the island of Java, near to Bali. According to the history, Banyuwangi was formed on the 18th of December, 1771, prior to Puputan War in Blambangan region.

During colonialization era, Banyuwangi was ruled by Blambangan Kingdom, commanded by a king named Raden Banterang. Based on this root of history, Banyuwangi people has their local folktale related to the origin name of Banyuwangi. There are three different stories with the same purpose, which is trying to explain about how Banyuwangi gain its name from.

This paper attempts to propose a gender issue relating to the construction of femininity and masculinity on local narration by comparing the three versions of Banyuwangi's legend. The framework for the discussion will apply the perspective of feminism. It then sets a

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question to be explored, which is: Based on its three versions, how does the legend construct the gender image through its indigenous narration?

## **B. The Three Versions of Banyuwangi's Legend**

### **1. Version 1**

Patih Sidapaksa lived in a land called East Java. He was a *patih* from Blambangan kingdom. Patih Sidapaksa fell in love with Sri Tanjung, a beautiful girl from a village. Sidapaksa's mother did not agree with his son's lover. Apparently, his mother hated her because Sri Tanjung was not an aristocrat. It is a very important status in her society. But love is love, isn't it? Nothing can't stand its way. Sidapaksa did not care about his future wife status and married her. A couple months after the marriage, the wife got pregnant. They were very happy waiting for the childbirth.

One day in the morning, the king called Patih Sidapaksa. He ordered his *patih* to get a flower at Mount Ijen for his queen. The flower was believed could make younger the person who bathed with it. Therefore, Sidapaksa went to Mount Ijen, left his wife and his mother for couple of months. Meanwhile the baby's birth was getting closer. Sri Tanjung stayed with her mother in law. When the baby boy was born, her mother in law helped her took care the baby. The reason she did that was not that she cared about her grandson. Instead, she wanted to get rid of the child and his mother.

And that night must be a very misfortune night from all Sri Tanjung's nights. She went to a bath and left the baby in the room. Her mother in law entered the room. When she saw the baby slept, her evil's mind was working. Slowly and carefully, she took the baby and brought him to the river. Without thinking any further, at the edge of the river, she threw the baby. The crying of the baby did not change her mind. The water was so fast. It drowned the baby and made his voice silent just in a few second.

When Sri Tanjung finished her bath, she was shocked knowing her baby was gone. She look for everywhere for the baby but she could not find him. She felt powerless in her room thinking about her baby. When her mother in law came home, the mother pretended knew nothing about it.

Sidapaksa came home from his long journey. In front of his house, his mother was standing. When she saw Sidapaksa arrived, she ran to him and cried. She said, "Oh my son, I am sorry. I am useless. I couldn't stop your wife killing the baby". "What? Why she did that?" Sidapaksa yelled. "She was afraid that you found out that the baby was not your son," she explained. Sidapaksa was very angry. He felt like got a

stroke by lightning in the middle of the day. He went to the house looking for his wife. When he entered his room, he saw his wife was sleeping. He woke her up and dragged her out the room. Sri Tanjung was surprised knowing her husband came home with anger. "What's going on?" she asked. "You're having affair and killed the baby." Sidapaksa accused her. His hand pointed his *keris*<sup>2</sup> to his wife. "For the sake of Gods, I did not having affair and killed the baby." She argued. "I don't believe you," Sidapaksa said. He dragged her wife to the river and said, "You threw him to the river". "I did not do those things," Sri Tanjung kept her argue. But it seemed she could not persuade her husband anymore. So she said "if you don't believe me, you can kill me and throw my body to the river. If the water smells fragrant, it means I am innocent. Let Gods be my witnesses".

Sidapaksa stabbed his keris to her chest until she died then he threw her body to the river. But strangely, the water did not turn to red and smell fishy when her blood got in to it. Instead, the blood cleaned the river and smelt fragrant. Sidapaksa was shocked and yelled like a crazy person "fragrant.. water.. fragrant.. water.. fragrant..". Suddenly in the middle of river, two flowers showed up, the big ones and the small ones. The big flower was incarnation of Sri Tanjung and the small flower was incarnation of her baby. Then the small one talked to Sidapaksa "Father, I am your son. My mother was innocent. Grandmother drowned me to this river". Sidapaksa felt stood. He realized he had made a huge mistake. However, his wife and his child would never live again. And he could only cry and regret. After the incident, the area around the river called Banyuwangi. In Javanese language, Banyuwangi means fragrant water<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. Version 2

Long time ago Banyuwangi was called Blambangan. It was a kingdom under a wise king who had a handsome and smart son. Raden Banterang was his name. He liked hunting very much. He often went to forest around Blambangan to hunt for animals. One day when he was in a forest he saw a deer. He chased it and the deer ran deeper into the forest. His horse was so good and strong that he left his guards behind. Unfortunately he lost the deer. As he took a rest under a big banyan tree suddenly a lovely lady appeared in front of him. Raden Banterang was very surprised to see a beautiful girl alone in the forest.

He was suspicious that she was not a human being. So he asked her. 'Excuse me lovely lady, do you live around here?' 'No, I don't. I'm from Klungkung, Bali. My name is Surati. I'm a princess, the daughter of the king of Klungkung. I need your help' 'I will gladly help you, but please

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<sup>2</sup> Keris is a local weapon for Javanese people, shaped like a little sword, sculpturally curve in form.

<sup>3</sup> "Banyu" means water. "Wangi" means fragrant.

tell me what your problem is'. 'I'm in danger. There was a rebellion in Klungkung. The rebel killed my father but I could escape. My guards took me here but I lose them. Now I'm alone. I don't know where to go. I have no relative here. Please help me'. 'You are coming to the right person. I'm prince Banterang from the kingdom of Blambangan. I will protect you. Please come with me.'

Then Raden Banterang took Surati home. He fell in love with her and then several months later he married her. One day when Surati was in the street he met a man. The man called him. 'Surati, Surati' She was surprised to realize that the man was her brother Rupaksa. Rupaksa told her that it was Raden Banterang who killed their father. He came to Blambangan to take revenge and asked Surati to join him. Surati was shocked but she refused to join. 'I'm really shocked to hear the news. But I'm not sure. Raden Banterang is now my husband. He's very kind to me. He never hurts me. He's protecting me. As a good wife I will never betray him. It is my duty to serve him.' 'But he killed our father'. 'It is hard for me to believe it. When I met him he was here, not in Klungkung'. Rupaksa was disappointed with her sister. He was also very angry to her. 'OK then. I have to go now. But please keep my head dress. Put it under your pillow' Rupaksa gave his head dress to his sister Surati. To respect her older brother Surati put it under her pillow.

Several days later Raden Banterang was hunting in a forest when he met a man that looked like a priest. The man greeted him politely. Then he said something. 'Your life is in danger. Someone has an evil intention to you' 'Who is he?' 'Your wife Surati'. 'Surati? How do you know?' 'I am a priest. I have clear spiritual vision. I just want to save you. Search her room. If you find a head dress under her pillow then my words are correct. It is from a man who will help her kill you' 'Thank you your Holiness'

Raden Banterang was shocked. He was very angry to his wife then he immediately went home. When he got to the palace he immediately searched Surati's bed room. As he found the head dress under her pillow he was sure that the priest was right. 'You are unfaithful wife. I know that you want me dead. This is the evidence. This is from a man who will help you kill me. Tell me who he is' Surati was shocked and cried. 'It is my brother's head dress. I met him several days ago when you went hunting. He gave me his head dress and told me to put it under my pillow. So I put it there to respect him. It is him who want to kill you, not me'

But Raden Banterang did not trust her. He gave her a death sentence. He took his wife to a river bank as he would stab his wife and throw her body into the river. 'Before I die, let me say a few words'. 'Please do'. 'After I die, just throw my body into the river. If the water

becomes dirty and smelly, it means that I am guilty. But if the water become clear and fragrance come out of it, it means that I am innocence'. Then as Raden Banterang would stab her wife with a keris, Surati threw herself into the river. Amazingly the water became clear and fragrance came out of it. Surati was innocent! Raden Banterang regretted his emotional behavior. Since then on he changed the name of his kingdom into Banyuwangi.

### **3. Version 3**

Once upon a time in Sindureja Kingdom, King Sidareja was talking to his vice regent, his name was Patih Sidapaksa. The King asked Patih Sidapaksa to give him the flesh of a young deer. Patih Sidapaksa took the mission. When he arrived at the jungle, he saw a young deer. He pointed his arrow to the deer. Unfortunately, he missed the target. He ran after the deer. He was running and running until he arrived at a hut. Patih Sidapaksa knocked the door. A young and beautiful girl opened the door. She was very beautiful. Patih Sidapaksa fell in love at the first sight. "How can I help you Sir?" asked the girl. "I...I...am looking for a young deer", Patih Sidapaksa was speechless. You can find a lot of deer in the jungle. But it is already late and it will be dark soon. You can continue hunting tomorrow morning. You can come and spend the night here. Both my father and I are happy to welcome you, said the girl.

Patih Sidapaksa accepted the offer. He introduced himself. The girl's name was Sri Tanjung and her father's name was Ki Buyut. In the morning, Patih Sidapaksa continued his hunting and after he got a young deer he returned to the hut. He came back because he wanted to marry Sri Tanjung.

Luckily, Sri Tanjung also loved him. Later Patih Sidapaksa asked them to join him to the palace. The King was very happy Patih Sidapaksa brought him a young deer. However he was also amazed by the beauty of Sri Tanjung. The King also fell in love with her. The King had a bad plan. He wanted to marry Sri Tanjung. So he gave Patih Sidapaksa a very difficult mission.

The King asked Patih Sidapaksa to give him three golden rings from Indran Kingdom. Patih Sidapaksa knew the mission was more difficult than hunting a young deer. Indran Kingdom was not an ordinary kingdom. It was a kingdom of criminals! No one ever came back after going there. However he still accepted the mission. And before he left, he asked Sri Tanjung to wait for him. After Patih Sidapaksa left, the King approached Sri Tanjung. He proposed Sri Tanjung to marry him. He promised Sri Tanjung to be a queen. She did not accept the proposal. She loved Patih Sidapaksa and she already promised to wait for him. The King

was angry and put her in the jail. Luckily, Patih Sidapaksa could do the mission and came back to the palace. Sadly he could not meet Sri Tanjung. The King lied. He said Sri Tanjung was in jail because she asked the King to marry her. The King said Sri Tanjung wanted to be a queen. At first Patih Sidapaksa believed the King. But Sri Tanjung then said, "Throw me to the river. If the river smells good, it means I'm innocent. However if the river smells bad, then the King is lying". Patih Sidapaksa then threw her into the river. Amazingly, the river smelled good. Patih Sidapaksa was very sorry. Sri Tanjung died. He regretted not to believe her. When the river smelled good, people instantly said Banyuwangi. Since then the place is named Banyuwangi.

### **C. Construction of Gender Image in the Three Versions of Banyuwangi's Legend**

Generally, the three versions of Banyuwangi's legend convey main resemblances on their story. They were all started with a man unintentionally assembled a woman. Both were falling in love and they lived together as husband and wife. Their life didn't run smoothly since there were other persons who wished to ruin their happiness. The story ended tragically with the death of the wife murdered by her own husband. The murder was considered to be the best decision to make since the wife is suspected to be unfaithful to her husband.

The stories then raise the main issue for feminist movement in which investigates the differentiation role and image between men and women. Within feminism (and also gender studies), the body has occupied a key position in a wide range of debates, including: men's control of women's bodies as a key means of subordination; critiques of dichotomous thinking; and in debates about essentialism and the theorizing of difference and diversity. Feminists have long recognized that bodies matter in social relations, but over time, there have been shifts in conceptions of what the body is, especially in relation to nature and to culture (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004: 23). A legend is a part of local belief which also plays an important part to construct society and their culture. Some feminist may argue that media and literature often shape the image of woman and man and brings that into the social reality. It constructs the patriarchy culture and the mainstream to define what a woman and what a man is. From these stories, it can be examined the gender image that was embedded within the local legend by elaborating two factors: the description of woman's and man's characteristic and the social role that each holds. The difference of two factors that are found in the stories may be helpful to understand about the gender construction that also appears in nowadays society. Here is a table to classify the difference image on women and men showed in the three versions of Banyuwangi's legend:

<b>The Legend</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Social Role</b>
<b>Version 1</b>	Woman	Sri Tanjung	Faithful, but being accused to be unfaithful by her husband. Willing to sacrifice to prove her faithfulness.	Domestic; wait for her husband in home.
		Sidapaksa's mother	Having personal judgment on her daughter in law. Implicitly drive her son to do what she wants.	Domestic; stay in home with Sidapaksa's wife.
	Man	Sidapaksa	Brave (to execute King's command immediately). Rational (act based on logic) Has high pride, choose to kill his wife than has to have an unfaithful wife.	Public; do a job as a chief minister to a king.
<b>Version 2</b>	Woman	Surati	Weak (by asking protection to Raden Banterang). Faithful to her husband, but being accused to be unfaithful by her husband. Obedient with her husband. Willing to sacrifice to prove her faithfulness.	Domestic; wait for her husband in home.
		Man	Raden Banterang	Protective (by offering guard to Surati). Brave (go to forest and hunt). Aggressive. Has high pride, choose to kill his wife than has to have an unfaithful wife.
	Rupaksa		Aggressive (involve on a war) Rational (Conduct a strategy to perform war)	Public; a prince and an army in war.
<b>Version 3</b>	Woman	Sri Tanjung	Faithful to her husband, but being accused to be unfaithful by her husband. Obedient with her husband. Willing to sacrifice to prove her faithfulness.	Domestic; move from parent's house to husband's palace and wait for her husband in home.
		Man	Sidapaksa	Brave (to execute King's command immediately). Rational (act based on logic) Has high pride, choose to kill his wife than has to have an unfaithful wife.
	Sidareja		Ambitious and dominant, his words are command. Has high pride, choose to send Sri Tanjung to jail than has to accept the fact that he was rejected.	Public; a King who leads a kingdom.

The table clearly shows the divide between women and men, related to their constructed characteristic and their social role. Based on the table above, it can be indicated that women is a weak and dependent creature. Meanwhile, men are described in the opposite way; strong and independent. Hunting to the forest and exploring the mountain, such an aggressive and active activities to symbolize the braveness and the strength of a man conquering the nature. Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. It can be identified in six structures of patriarchy: household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality, culture (Walby, 1990: 201). Patriarchy culture use the gender-based role to ensure that women are passive (loveable, obedient, responsive, nice, and cheerful) and men are active (strong, aggressive, curious, ambitious, strategic, competitive, and original) (Tong, 1998: 72-73). Man act based on their logic and woman commit some act based on their emotion. Woman is willing to sacrifice and gives everything that she has to her husband; meanwhile, man is the ruler and the conqueror of the woman. In social life, the woman holds a minor role and doesn't give any tangible contribution to the society. The role of woman is invisible. In the contrary, man holds a major role by commit an actual action in public space as well as run a role as a leader. The man's role is visible, obviously be seen by the society.

The legend's three versions principally deliver a chief issue related with the indigenous norm that the local people hold. They construct the value on how a woman should do in her daily life; as well as the definition about what a good woman is. A woman is treated like a thing, belongs to a man. The notion of 'pure' as well as 'virgin' controls the woman's act and even her sexuality (Baiya&Wieringa, 2007: 23). It becomes the most important aspects for a good woman to have.

The third version of the legend strongly presents that issue. Patih Sidapaksa felt so irritated with his wife, Sri Tanjung, because he suspected his wife to be unfaithful: offering her body to another man. It was better for him to kill the wife than had to accept the fact that his wife was no longer him. His action showed that he held patriarchy norms which required a woman to keep her body exclusively. His high pride made his emotion controlled his mind until he finally decided to kill his wife. Since Sri Tanjung was an obedient wife, she accepted her husband's will and had to face the death in the end of the story. The same ego was also shown by King Sidareja. He saw Sri Tanjung as an object that could be taken from her master (husband). He offered Sri Tanjung to 'betray' her husband and change her status to be King's. But when Sri Tanjung rejected his offer, Sri Tanjung had to face her faith to be jailed in a prison. From this scene, it is seen that man tend to see the sexual act as a power,



women who refuse to respond or submit to sexual advance sometimes face horrible consequences (Baiya & Wieringa, 2007: 32).

The unequal role of gender in basis activity also becomes the main issue in feminism discourse. The example from this can be seen on the legend's first version that pictures the role of woman as the caretaker : works in domestic space. It is said that Sidapaksa, after having a long journey to work, felt so angry with his wife, Sri Tanjung, since he assumed that his wife was so careless to let their son die. It was the obligation of the wife to handle all the housing matter and solve domestic problem. Public sector belongs to men. The duty between woman and man in household is clearly separated. Meanwhile, in the same line, Sidapaksa's mother was also presented as a provocative agent, working in domestic area, whose words were incited Sidapaksa to finally kill his own wife. A woman can only become a passive agent; giving suggestion, support, and motivation to the working-in-public man. The woman's role is unseen, although it may create a perceptible impact too. However, it is not so common for woman to work in public area and perform her action in front of the society. Domestication, from feminist perspective, is the form of sexual-politics, which employs the divide of working fields and responsibility between man and woman solely based on their sex. This generates a subordinate image for woman and gives a superior image for man in the society (Agger, 2009: 207). In private patriarchy, the oppression of women is based around the household and involves individual man exploiting individual woman. Under this form of patriarchy, women are excluded from participation in wider society (Walby, 1990: 201).

In patriarchal culture and society, women are considered as the other, the second sex (*deuxieme sexe*) which gains lower position according to their faith (sex). Woman is simply defined as what man is not, most often, biologically. Males and females are two types of individuals which are differentiated within a species for the function of reproduction. Woman is 'tota mulier in utero'; woman is a womb (Beauvoir, 1949: 1). Based on the sex, gender is constructed. This perspective of women as the second sex also influences women's existence, socially and culturally (Cavallaro, 2004: 202). As the second sex, a woman is often considered as only the complementary aspects from man. The legend's second version shows another issue on this gender construction. Based on the story, woman is defined as the companion of the man. It is presented as Raden Banterang proposed Surati as his queen and lived with him in his palace. A queen is the mate of a king. As a queen, Surati was tied by the rule of the kingdom and might place herself as the adherent of her king. One time, Surati met her brother who asked for her help to kill the king. Being bound by norms as a queen, Surati refused her brother's request and preferred to stand behind her husband. Nevertheless, the king still

accused Surati as an unfaithful wife by betraying his trust and helping the enemy to destroy his kingdom. He trusted the priest more than he trusted his wife. Surati, finally met her death.

In Banyuwangi's legend, the definition of a good woman is grounded on her faithful to her lover. From those three versions of the legend, explicitly, all the stories were closed with the same ending: a killed woman. Implicitly, all the stories close with the same accuser; whether the woman is being faithful or not. It also gives a deep discourse on the definition of what a good woman is. Based on the stories, a good woman is the one who holds her faithfulness to her husband. In the first version, a faithful woman means that a woman should keep the household work and responsibility well, since there had been a divide work between wife and husband. Then, in the second version, a faithful woman means that a woman should be the supporter and companion for her husband, since the essence of woman is the second sex from man. Next, in the third version, a faithful woman means that a woman should only dedicate her body to her husband, since a man has a power to control the woman. Interestingly, the demand to be faithful was not charged to man.

From the feminism perspective, it can be perceived that on those stories, masculine characters tend to predominate and to be depicted in a wide range of roles, while the female characters tend to be stereotyped in domestic settings. Women are stereotyped as sexual objects, as housewives or in jobs which were reflections of their domestic/caring role. The stories constricting representations as amounting to the 'symbolic annihilation of women', in that they failed to accurately reflect the range of women's lives in reality. Women is portrayed as weak, passive, more likely to be shown as married, and less likely to be shown in work, or paid employment (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004: 184). The unequal role and image to the gender construction is occurred here.

#### **D. Conclusion**

A legend shares a concept of norms that one society may hold. Banyuwangi legend which has three different versions also shares a norm that the people believe in. In each version, it narrates the same story ending about a woman who's killed by her husband with the reason that her husband didn't believe to her faithfulness. The body of the death-woman made the river water smelled fragrant. From those stories then the people of Banyuwangi get their place's name from.

Based on feminism perspective, those three story versions of the legend portray a gender issue related with the image construction of woman. In the first version, the woman was accused to be unfaithful because she didn't do her domestic responsibility well. It raises a matter about the unequal role between women and men. Woman was stereotyped as a housewife, works in domestic area. In the second version, the woman

was accused to be unfaithful because she failed to give her dedication to support her husband's career. It raises a matter about sexual-politics. Woman was stereotyped as the second sex, subordinate one towards man. In the third version, the woman was accused to be unfaithful because she gave her body to another man. It raises a matter about women's body related to power. Woman was stereotyped as a sexual object, obedient to man's power.

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