CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TRADITIONAL AND MODERN CULTURES IN KHALED HOSSEINI’S A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS NOVEL (2007): SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT
The objectives of the study are to: identify the characteristics of the traditional and modern cultures that is reflected in the novel, describe the type of conflict between traditional and modern cultures that is reflected in the novel, and reveal the underlying reason of the production of the novel. The type of the study is qualitative. The representations which are fitted to the characteristics of the modern and traditional cultures and the conflicts between the two are found and described in the novel. The novel production correlates to the social reality which is the openness of American society in allowing the authors from the third world to write about their homelands or to respond the events which occur in it.

Keywords: cultural conflict, A Thousand Splendid Suns novel, sociological approach.

A. Introduction

A Thousand Splendid Suns is one of Khaled Hosseini’s novels which have many points of interest, such as the characters, the setting, the plot, and the author’s style of writing. In addition, the novel has some interesting subject matters, such as: friendship between two women, the salvation in love, oppression, and conflict between traditional and modern culture.

As a result of its attractiveness, there are some people who make this novel as the object in their researches. For example is the study which was conducted by Dina Rezdha (Sebelas Maret University, 2010), entitled “A Humanistic Approach on the Main Character, Mariam in the Novel ‘A Thousand Splendid Suns’”. The aim of the study is to show what the characteristic of the main character in the novel and to find out the humanistic value by using Maslow’s theory hierarchy of needs. She analyzed Mariam’s character and her needs which cannot be met and caused she killed her husband. Not only Rezdha, Laili Agustina (Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, 2012) was conducted a study with the same novel also. It
is entitled “Against Patriarchy in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007) Novel: A Feminist Approach”. The major problem of this study is how against patriarchy is reflected in the novel. Different from the previous studies, the writer has different perspective in analyzing the different issue of the novel. The writer uses sociological approach in analyzing the conflict between traditional and modern cultures that is reflected in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel. In this study, the writer considers the novel as the social document and the author’s situation (Laurenson and Swingewood, 1972: 17-21).

Conflict is a struggle that is done consciously and directly between individuals and or groups for the same purpose. Beating rival appears to be an important way to achieve the goal (Theodorson and Theodorson, 1979: 71). Munawaroh (2009: 33) defined the social conflict as a form of interaction between two parties (people) or more which happens in the society. It is marked with the atmosphere of hatred and hostility. Conflict can be classified into several categories which are based on: the number of participant, the position of conflict participants, the impact which the conflict brings, and the aspects of life which become the source of conflict (Munawaroh, 2009: 26-28).

Williams (1981: 10-11) stated that the problem which becomes the interest of “culture” is in defining the term itself. Based on sociology, Mardimin (1994: 12) stated that culture can be defined as the ways of life of the people in certain society that is shared in order to achieve the better life. According to J.J. Honigmann in Koentjaraningrat (1986: 186-188), culture is divided into three main categories: ideas, activities, and artifacts.

Traditional culture is the learned, nonrandom, systematic behavior and knowledge transmitted over several generations, especially customs and beliefs originating before the advent of modern science and technology (*http://www.eionet.europa.eu/gemet/concept?ns=1&cp=8579*). According to Sumarto (1994: 55), human is a creature that will never satisfy. They always dream the better world, or even perfect. This human’s characteristic gives a probability to human’s culture to change, since the culture and society cannot be separated. According to Susilo, modern society is the development of the
traditional society which often associated with agrarian society (1994: 60). The modern culture is proved with the rational thinking, the freedom, and the right technology using which is situated with society (Sumarto, 1994: 56-58).

Corrie van der Ven (2005) stated that there is no scheme which describes the characteristics of traditional culture (village) with its distinctive features, the modern culture (city). The scheme is dichotomous, or on the other word, modern characteristics are the opposite of the traditional characteristics (http://www.oaseonline.org/artikel/corrieBudaya.htm).

There are always three kinds of point of view which are related to the existence of culture that confront each other (Mardimin, 1994: 144). Since both traditional and modern cultures have some good sides and bad ones, people have to be critical and creative in filtering the positive things of both the local and foreign culture which exist and shape the ‘new’ (modern) culture (Darmanto, 1994: 110-111). The conflict between the traditional and modern cultures is an issue in society which has the relationship with sociology. Sociology is a study which deals with society, as Mansyur said, sociology is the study of society which is divided into several sections, including race and culture (1998: 10&13). The society itself cannot be separated with culture since the culture is the ‘product’ of society.

This study has several benefits. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the study of literature especially on Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel. Moreover, practically, the result of this study will increase the writer’s knowledge which is related to the cultural understanding.

**B. Research Method**

The type of this study is qualitative, since it correlates to the social science (the analysis of human’s life, behavior, etc) and deals with words instead of numbers in the explanation (Strauss and Corbin in Hakim, 2004: 312). The object of the study is Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel. The type of the data is text, which can be word, phrase, or sentence. The data are Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel (as the primary) and the data which are related to the study (as the secondary or supportive). The data are collected by
means of library research (collecting the data which is correlated to the problem of the study) and note-taking technique, to make the study easier to do in both in collecting and serving the data. It consists of steps such as: reading the novel several times, reading some related books to find out the theory, data, and information required, making notes of important parts in both primary data and secondary data, classifying the data into categories, and drawing conclusion to get the last result. The technique of the data analysis is descriptive since the result of the analysis is in the description form of the conflict between the traditional and modern cultures by using the sociological approach (Hakim, 2004: 28).

C. Research Finding and Discussion

This section is divided into three parts: the representations and characteristics of the traditional and modern culture, the conflict between the traditional and modern cultures, and the discussion.

1. The representations and characteristics of the traditional and modern cultures

<table>
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<td>burqa</td>
<td>marriage and free-form clothes</td>
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Tabel of the representations and characteristics of the traditional and modern cultures
1. Ideas

This section is including the traditional and modern ideas of: causality, education, fashion, gender, self-position, and marriage.

a. Causality

The traditional people such as Mariam (ATSS, 2007: 56) and Laila (ATSS, 2007: 126), believe in the causality under the laws of karma. They believe that God will punish them if they do something bad. On the other hand, one of the characteristics of modern culture is the causality based on science. It is represented by the character of Jalil (ATSS, 2007: 15-16) and Rasheed (ATSS, 2007: 54).

b. Education

The traditional people such as Nana, do not give much attention to the education. In contrast, the modern people such as Hakim, Laila, and Zaman, appreciate the importance of education as a tool for the development of science and technology.

c. Fashion

The traditional people are considering the norm, value, or even the applicable law in their clothing. The rise of a certain section of the society has laid down some strict norms about the dress code in Afghanistan. On the contrary, the modern people are considering the style (beauty) and comfort in their clothing. By the creativity which they have, they create various kinds of clothes.

d. Gender

The traditional people such as Nana (ATSS, 2004: 29), Rasheed (ATSS, 2004: 43, 133, 52, 58, & 60), and Fariba (ATSS, 2004: 70-71), believe that women and men have the different right and task. On the other hand, modern people such as Hakim and Shanzai (ATSS, 2007: 66), believe to the gender equality.

e. Self-position

Jalil and his family (especially the wives) are the representatives of the traditional culture since they suppose that someone’s position is determined by the
birth or rank (ascript status). On the contrary, in the modern culture, self-
position is determined by skill, wisdom, knowledge (achieved status). People do
not automatically get their status because of their births or ranks. It is depicted by
the way of Hakim gets his status.

f. Marriage

In Afghanistan, arranged or underage marriage, or even marry with
someone who has far different age is considered as something ordinary. Nana
(ATSS, 2007: 4-5), Jalil and his wives (ATSS, 2007: 27), Rasheed (ATSS, 2007:
27), and Hasina’s father (ATSS, 2007: 69&82) are agree with it. In contrast, the
modern people are considering love in the marriage. Since one of the
characteristic of modern people is the ability to plan, they will pursue their
education and career first before they decide to marry someone whom they love. It
is depicted by the character of Hakim (ATSS, 2007: 68&82).

1. Activities (social practices)

This section is including the traditional and modern ways of: childbearing,
eating, getting the education, living, communicating, travelling, and self-
positioning.

a. Way of childbearing

The traditional way in childbearing is portrayed when Nana bears Mariam
by herself, without any help from the doctor or midwife (ATSS, 2007: 5). On the
other hand, the modern way in childbearing is portrayed when Laila bears Zalmai
in Rabia Balkhi hospital with the help of doctor and nurse (ATSS, 2007:
167&169).

b. Way of eating (eating manner)

The traditional way of eating is shown by Rasheed (ATSS, 2007:
42&127). In contrast, the modern way of eating is shown by Rasheed in his early

c. Way of getting the education

The traditional way of getting an education is portrayed by Nana and
Mariam who get the informal education. They are educated by a mullah who
teaches about religion only. The mullah comes to their home once or twice a week
(ATSS, 2007: 8). Different from Nana and Mariam, Laila and Jalil’s legitimate daughters (Saideh and Naheed) get the formal education (ATSS, 2007: 9).

d. Way of living

The traditional person such as the characters of Nana and Mariam are depending themselves to the faith. They have passive and fatalistic lifestyles which are oriented to the past. As a result of having affair with her employer, Nana is fired and casted away because of something which is not totally her fault. Although she faces the unfairness which is done by Jalil and his family, Nana and her daughter, Mariam is powerless to stand for their right. Instead of fight for the acknowledgement of Jalil and his family, they prefer to give up to the injustice which is happening to them (ATSS, 2007: 10). On the other hand, the life patterns of modern people are more open than the traditional. They are considered that faith can be changed. They have active and innovative lifestyles which are oriented to the present and future. It is portrayed by the character of Hakim and Laila. With the education which they have, they are optimist in facing the future.

e. Way of communicating

The traditional way of communication (by letter) is shown by Jalil (ATSS, 2007: 180&239-240) and Tariq (ATSS, 2007: 199). Another example is shown by people around the world who disagree with Taliban’s idea to destroy giant Buddha statues in Bamiyan (ATSS, 2007: 183). On the contrary, one of the characteristics of modern culture is the right technology using (ATSS, 2007: 240, 180, &225).

f. Way of travelling

The traditional person such as Mariam only goes by her feet to reach the place in the quite long distance (ATSS, 2007: 29). In contrast, the modern people such as Rasheed (ATSS, 2007: 38), Nana’s father (ATSS, 2007: 3), and Hakim (ATSS, 2007: 89) are using the vehicle (such as bicycle, car, bus, taxi, etc.) in order to make their trip easier and faster, so they can save the time.

g. Way of self-positioning

In the traditional culture, people are positioned by their birth or rank (ascribed status). Nana and Mariam becomes the victim of the labeling. Jalil,
together with his family (especially the wives) are considering them as second-class people since they are poor (ATSS, 2007: 3). On the other hand, Hakim gets his status by his wisdom. He is being respected by his students not because he asks them to, but because he is respected them too (ATSS, 2007: 71).

2. Artifacts

This section is including the traditional and modern architecture and fashion which exist in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel.

a. Architecture

The traditional architecture is reflected by the kolba where Nana and Mariam live. It is a very simple building to live which is situated in an isolated place (ATSS, 2007: 5, 35, & 236). In contrast, the modern architecture is shown in Jalil’s and Rashed’s house (ATSS, 2007: 35).

b. Fashion

The traditional outfit, such as *burqa*, *pakol*, and *turban*, are described in the following excerpts:

Mariam had never before worn a *burqa* (ATSS, 2007: 44).

They wore boots, *pakols*, dusty green fatigues. They all carried Kalashnikovs (ATSS, 2007: 152).

He was wearing a *pakol* on his head (ATSS, 2007: 195).

…his *turban* falling on a patch of bristling buttercups (ATSS, 2007: 9).

On the contrary, the modern outfit can be seen in Mariam’s description which is relating to the women that she sees in Kabul.

The women in this part of Kabul were a different breed from the women in the poorer neighborhoods-like the one where she and Rasheed lived, where so many of the women covered fully. These women were…”modern.” … modern Afghan women married to modern Afghan men who did not mind that their wives walked among strangers with makeup on their faces and nothing on their heads (ATSS, 2007: 45).

3. Symbols

Symbols which represent the traditional culture in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel are arranged marriage and *burqa*. Arranged marriage becomes the symbol of the traditional culture since people do not have the freedom in choosing the person who they will be married with. *Burqa* symbolizes the gender inequality which becomes a sign of the traditional culture.
On the contrary, symbols which represent the modern culture in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel are love oriented or personal initiative marriage and free-form clothes. Modern people are free to choose person who they will be married with. The using of free-form clothes symbolizes the freedom and equality in gender which becomes the sign of modernity.

4. **Keywords**

Some keywords which represent the traditional culture in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel are the religiosity maintaining, the inequality in gender, and the cultures preserving. The religiosity maintaining is described by the Taliban. As the reason to maintain the purity of the religion, the Taliban demolish the great Buddha statues in Bamiyan which are considered as ‘an object of idolatry and sin’ (ATSS, 2007: 152&183). The inequality in gender and the cultures preserving is described by Rasheed who views himself as superior to his wife. In addition, Rasheed is man who wants to preserve the honor (*nang*) and pride (*namoos*) which become the values of Afghan especially the Pashtun (ATSS, 2007: 43, 49, &133).

On the other hand, some keywords which represent the modern culture in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel are the greater freedom, the equality in gender, and the hope which becomes the key of a better future. The greater freedom and equality in gender can be found in the following excerpts:

...more free now, under the communists, and have more rights than they've ever had before, ...relatively liberal and progressive... (ATSS, 2007: 82)

She did not cover and forbade the female students from doing it. She said women and men were equal in every way and there was no reason women should cover if men didn't. ...its people were all equal (ATSS, 2007: 66).

The hopes which become the keys of better futures are described in the following excerpts:

...hopes and a future (ATSS, 2007: 86).

...something eager and recklessly hopeful (ATSS, 2007: 203).

"... maybe there will be hope at the other end of this war, that maybe for the first time in a long time..." ... Maybe there *mil* be hope when Bush's bombs stop falling (ATSS, 2007: 228).
Laila has moved on. Because in the end she knows that's all she can do. That and hope (ATSS, 2007: 244).

2. The conflict between the traditional and modern cultures

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel, the conflicts between the traditional and modern cultures are shown by the issues of women’s right and education.

a. Women’s right

Mariam becomes the representative of the traditional culture, while Laila, who is nineteen years younger than Mariam, becomes the modern one. The dissimilar perspectives between Mariam and Laila are causing the different reactions when they are oppressed by their husband. Mariam prefers to be quite in order to avoid the conflict, while Laila chooses to fight for her right. For example, when Rasheed is fired from his jobs, Laila delivers her argument fearlessly. In contrast, Mariam tries to stop Laila because she knows that Laila will make him upset and his enagement will lead him to do the violence action to both Mariam and Laila. However, Laila does not pay much attention to Mariam’s warning because according to Laila, though as woman, she has a right to speak (ATSS, 2007: 179).

Based on the number of participant, this conflict is classified to the individual or a small-scale conflict since there is a little number of participant only. Based on the position of conflict participants, it is categorized as horizontal conflict since the conflict participants have the same position (both Laila and Mariam are Rasheed’s wives). Based on the impact which the conflict brings, it becomes constructive conflict since they can learn from others characteristics in order to face their cruel husband. In addition, based on the aspects of life which become the source of conflict, it is classified as cultural conflict since different values of both the participants become the source of conflict.

b. Education

As the representative of the traditional person, Nana is portrayed as the character that doesn’t really care about education. She gets irritated when Mullah Faizullah asks her permission for Mariam to have a formal education. According to her, education which can be learnt in school is no use for a daughter such
Maria (ATSS, 2007: 10). Based on the number of participant, this conflict is categorized as the individual or a small-scale conflict since there is a little number of participant only. Based on the position of conflict participants, it is classified into vertical conflict since Nana and Mullah Faizullah have different position; Nana is Mariam’s mother, while Mullah Faizullah as Mariam’s private tutor. Based on the impact which the conflict brings, it is categorized as destructive conflict since it makes Nana upset to both Mariam and Mullah Faizullah. In addition, based on the aspects of life which become the source of conflict, it is classified as cultural conflict since different values of both the participants become the source of conflict.

3. Discussion

Khaled Hosseini, the author of the novel, is an Afghan born who eventually moved to America due to the insecurity of the nation. He realizes that his nation of birth is in a chaotic condition and its citizens were facing many hardships because of it. By having the bond with his homeland, he is moved to do something through his works. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel, he depicts the condition of Afghanistan and its citizen which were being devastated by wars and the cultural conflicts.

Hosseini becomes the one who agrees in maintaining the traditional culture as well as to renew it in the perspective of modern nation. In the term of the cultural conflict, Hosseini portrayed the conflict between the traditional and modern cultures in the conflict between the characters in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* novel. Not only illustrated it, he gives a solution for the problem also. Related to the cultural diversity of their country, the author suggests that all of the Afghan society (in general), and both the traditionalists and the modernists (for specific), should not just embrace new cultural practices blindly nor stick to the old ones passively. In addition, they are supposed to stand in unite and respect the difference of each other.

In order to deliver the message, Hosseini creates characters, especially the major characters and its characterizations which are reflecting the traditional and modern person. Related to the author’s intention that someone should not just
embrace new cultural practices blindly nor stick to the old ones passively, he delivers the good side and the bad of the both cultures. He chooses to keep the good sides and eliminates the bad. The author seems to be a pro to the modernists’ opinion that women are equal to men. However, he does not agree to the secularization which emerges together with the modernity. Although Mariam (the representative of the traditional culture) is dead, her religiosity still remains in the character of Aziza. Mariam becomes important to Laila (the representative of the modern culture) (ATSS, 2007: 238&246).

All in all, the author through his novel suggests that people have to contemplate tradition that they get and situate it to the changing of era. People have to be brave to make a change to the tradition, fixing one or some aspects which are considered as the thing that is inappropriate to the present life. People at last, are expected to give a new shape by transforming the traditional cultures instead of repeating them only.

D. Conclusion

After analyzing A Thousand Splendid Suns novel which is written by Khaled Hosseini, the writer draws some conclusions: firstly, the representations of the traditional and modern cultures are classified into five categories: ideas, activities (social practices), artifacts, symbols, and keywords. The characteristics of the modern culture such as: the rational thinking, the freedom, the right technology using which is situated with society, the achieved status, and the science-based causality. On the other hand, the characteristics of the traditional culture such as: the inequality on gender, the ascribed status, and the karma-based causality. Secondly, the conflicts between the traditional and modern cultures are described by the conflicts which happen within the characters in A Thousand Splendid Suns novel. Thirdly, there is relation between the production of the novel and the social reality which is the openness of American society to allow the authors from the third world to write about their homelands or to respond to the events which occur in it.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VIRTUAL REFERENCES

