

**PROSTITUTION PHENOMENA REFLECTED AT HARUKI  
MURAKAMI'S *AFTER DARK* NOVEL (2007): A FEMINIST  
APPROACH**



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**ABSTRACT**

*The major problem in this research is the existence of prostitution phenomena in Japan as reflected in Haruki Murakami's After Dark novel. The research analyses Haruki Murakami's After Dark novel to find out the structural elements of the novel, and also to understand the existence of prostitution phenomena in modern Japanese society based on feminist approach. In analysing the novel, the researcher uses qualitative method. The data are divided into two kinds data, namely primary data and secondary data. The primary data sources is the novel entitled After Dark by Haruki Murakami which is published in 2007. And the secondary data is the sources which is related to the issue taken by researcher, such as the book of the theory namely feminism approach and other resources about Japanese society during in the early of twenty one century. The method of getting data is library research. However the descriptive analysis is the technique of data analysis. The outcome of the study draws the following conclusions. Firstly, the existence of prostitution phenomena in modern Japan society is placing women in the second position under the man. Secondly, there are four factors that involve the existence of prostitution in Japan .They are the men who buy commercial sex acts, the exploiters who make up the sex industry, the states that are destination countries, the culture that tolerates or promotes sexual exploitation. It also reveals the perception of Japanese society about sex which is changing following the modernity and making sex not taboo anymore.*

*Keywords: Prostitution, Japanese society, Feminist Approach*

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

### **1. Background of The Study**

Nowadays, the humanism phenomena such as human trafficking and prostitution have become a massive problem in the world which need to be concerned about. One of the reasons that prostitution is an issue of public concern is that the sale of this love/service represents a challenge to our social norms regarding exchange and sexuality by redefining the sexual use of the body as a commodity available for exchange (Monto and Julka, 2009).

We must confess that the commercial sex industry has also reached Asia. In Japan itself, sex and prostitution have become common issues since long time ago. The fact about the sexual modern prostitution slavery in this area which has ever been published is the forced recruitment to more than 100.000 women by Japan government during the second World War. They were mostly from Korea, and recruited to be whore in the military whorehouse (Hicks, 1995).

Officially, this country has made prostitution forbidden after the Anti-Prostitution Law in 1956 which stated "No person may either do prostitution or become the customer of it". But, of course it is almost impossible to remove prostitution in Japan, a country with a big pornography industry that gives their government big number of income. Now, Japan has become one of the biggest economic countries in the world, so they are not exporting their women, but importing the poor women from the other countries (Brown, 2000).

*After Dark* by Haruki Murakami was firstly appeared in 2004 and published by Kodansha, a publisher from Japan. Here, Haruki Murakami has delivered many issues inside the story, such as family, human trafficking, until the unique phenomena of health like Klein-Levin syndrome.

The story is begun on the midnight when Mary was spending her time by reading a book in the corner of Denny's cafe in the middle of Tokyo. A place where she suddenly meets Tetsuya Takahashi, Eri's friend who spent holiday with them several years ago. Takahashi studies law in his university,

but he also plays music with his band in the spare time as a hobby (Murakami, 2007).

The story is getting more interesting after Takahashi leaves and goes back to practice with his band. No longer after that, a woman comes to the cafe and talks to Mari. Her name is Kaoru, a friend of Takahashi. Kaoru works in Alphaville, a love hotel in Tokyo as a manager. Kaoru knows from Takahashi that Mari is able to speak in Chinese, so she decides to meet her asking for help because she needs a translator urgently. A Chinese prostitute has become a violence victim by her customer in her hotel. Together, they leave Denny's and try to get some information from the prostitute to help her. From here, they know that the prostitute is working under the Chinese gangster which owns the prostitute business on that area. (Murakami, 2007).

Based on the description which is mentioned above, the writer analyzes the *After Dark* novel by using the feminist approach to find the illustration of prostitution reflected on the novel entitled **Prostitution Phenomena Reflected at Haruki Murakami's *After Dark* Novel (2007): A Feminist Approach.**

## **2. Literature Review**

The first research is written by J.P.Dhil in 2007 from University of Canterbury with title "*Haruki Murakami and The Search of Self-Therapy*". On that research, J.P.Dil concerns about the psychological relationship between of the author (Haruki Murakami) and his novels (including *After Dark*).

The second research is written by Masayu Oda in 2011 with title "村上春樹「アフターダーク」の空間的読解 : 「闇」と出会う場所としての深夜の街" (Spatial Analysis of Murakami Haruki's *After dark*: Midnight Town as A Place Where We Encounter The Darkness) which described the midnight life in the Tokyo reflected at the novel.

The third research is made by Tutut Dwi Desiningtyas in 2013. Here, she focused on the reaction and opinion of Mari and Takahashi (the characters of the novel) about the modernism paradigmatic in Japan.

### **3. Underlying Theory**

#### **a. Notion of feminism**

Feminism is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between women and man in society (Mandell, 1995:4). There are four major principle of feminism theory, they are:

1. Woman's Position

Woman was oppressed by a specialist form of life called patriarchy thought which man appropriates all superior social roles and keeps woman is subordinated and exploited position (Mandell, 1995:54).

2. Women's Role

According to Mandell (1995:54), women are traditionally denied by their roles as daughter, wives, and mother. Women with disabilities are assumed unable to full care taking and partnership roles.

3. Women's right

Feminists attempt to gain democratic right, the right to have education and occupation, the right to be the Member of Parliament also the right to divorce (Humm, 2002: 53)

4. Women's Participation

By improving their capability and capacity they can fully express their own experience in all public life because, "Feminism is both way of thinking and a way of acting so women needs to actualize themselves as an actor in social institutions" (Humm, 2002:233).

#### **b. Notion of Prostitution**

Prostitution and sexual exploitation are highly gendered issues with in most cases women and girls selling their body, either by coercion or consent, to men or boys who pay for this service. Accordingly, the majority of those trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and girls (Schulze, 2014). According to Hughes (2004), there are four components that make-up the demand of prostitution:

1. The men who buy commercial sex acts
2. The exploiters who make up the sex industry

3. The states that are destination countries
4. The culture that tolerates or promotes sexual exploitation.

## **B. Research Method**

The research belongs to descriptive qualitative research which is conducted to interpret the findings. Object of the study is the novel entitled *After Dark*. The data are divided into two, the first is the novel itself and prostitution theory which is taken from the book and another sources.

## **C. Discussion**

### **1. The Structural Elements of The Novel**

The novel is written with “Human’s life is never perfect” as the main theme. Here, the author explores the theme into a story by comparing the life of Mari, Eri, and also the other character’s. The author uses Mari Asai as the main character of the novel, with the character of Eri Asai, Tatsuya Takahashi, Guo Dongli, Kaoru, Komogi, Korogi, and Shirakawa as the minor character.

The story is taking place in the Tokyo with a very dense time. The overall story is started from 11.55 p.m. until 06.52 a.m. The unity of the plot can be seen from the exposition, complication, climax, and resolution.

The novel uses the non-participant point of view. That means, the author uses third person narrator who does not involve to the story and does not appear as one of the characters of the novel. In making the novel, author uses the modern standard sentences. The use of simile, hyperbole, and personification appears in many parts of the novel.

The use of Mari and Eri is to symbolize the irony between two different woman’s life. Mari appears as an introvert girl. She always lives under the shadow of her sister, Eri. People always compare her with Eri since they were little. It makes Mari feel ugly and jealous of her sister. In her perspective, Eri life is better than hers. Eri appears with her unhappiness which is caused by her beauty and popularity. She always get depressed and stressed with her job and social life.

## **2. Feminism Analysis**

### **a. Women's Position**

The prostitution concept also put the position of the woman into the second place. Prostitutes are selling their body for money to everyone who able to pay them. It makes many of their customers think that they have the power to do everything they want to do instead of the money they have paid.

"I'll think about that when the time comes," says Kaoru. "It's just the way I'm made: I can't stand by and let a son-of-a-bitch like that pull shit like that. He thinks 'cause he's stronger he can beat up a woman, strip her of everything she's got, and walk away. And on top of it he doesn't pay his damn hotel bill. That's a man for you—a real scumball."  
(AD, 2007:70)

As a woman, Guo Dongli is treated badly. She got a terrible violence from Shirakawa to release his anger. As a prostitute, Guo Dongli is not worthy enough to him, and her weakness and powerlessness makes Shirakawa increasingly uncontrolled.

### **b. Women's Role**

The role of women which is represented by Guo Dongli in this novel is not only in domestic role. She does not only have a role as a children in her family, but also supporting her family financial problem by working as a prostitute outside the country. She moves from China to Japan.

"She tells me it's just over two months since she came to Japan," Mari says.  
"She's here illegally, I suppose?"  
"I didn't ask her about that. Judging from her dialect, she's from the north." (AD, 2007:43)

### **c. Women's Right**

As a prostitute who entries the country illegally and working in a undercover industry, Guo Dongli can not get her rights as a woman. She is working under the Chines gang control and can

not live freely. She must live and work under the rule of Chinese gang. The only thing she can do is working and make money.

Kaoru shakes her head. "No, no. I was a professional wrestler a long time, and we used to do these national tours, so I got to know a few yakuza. Let me tell you, compared to these Chinese gangsters, Japanese yakuza are sweethearts. I mean, you never know what's coming with them. But this kid's got no choice: if she doesn't go back to them, she's got no place to go." (AD, 2007:43)

Prostitution is an illegal business in Japan. With the fact that she enters the country illegally, she can not get the law protection or calling the police for the sadism she gets from Shirakawa.

#### **d. Women's Participation**

The participation of Guo Dongli to manage and fix her family problem like financial problem is shown from her decision to move to Japan and work.

"I suppose so. But she won't be pretty for long, living like that. She'll get old and ugly overnight. I've seen tons of them." (AD, 2007:55)

But, the participation of Guo Dongli to support her family financial problem can not last forever. She realizes that prostitution is not the thing she can do for long.

### **3. Prostitution Analysis**

#### **a. The Men Who Buy Commercial Sex Acts**

"Customer? She's a prostitute?"  
"Yeah, we mostly get pros at this time of night," Kaoru says. "So sometimes we have problems. Like they fight over the money, or the guy wants some perverted stuff or something." (AD, 2007:37)

In the story, Shirakawa takes role as the customer of the prostitute. He orders Guo Dongli from the Chinese gang which manage the industry. He brings Guo Dongli to the Alphaville in the rest of his night work

b. The Exploiters Who Make Up The Sex Industry

Inside the story the Chinese gang is having responsibility for the existence of the Chinese prostitute, in this case is represented by Guo Dongli. They bring her from her hometown in China to Japan and make her become a prostitute.

"A Chinese gang," Kaoru says. "They run prostitution around here. They sneak women in by boat from the mainland and make them pay for it with their bodies. They take phone orders and deliver the women to hotels on motorcycles—hot 'n' fresh, like pizza. They're one of our best clients." (AD, 2007:43)

Because of the Japan regulation which forbid the prostitution, the Chinese gang makes this industry undercover. They manage this business illegally.

c. The States That Are Destination Countries

It is explained that Guo Dongli is leaving her homeland in China to help her family's financial problem. In Japan, she works as a prostitute.

"She tells me it's just over two months since she came to Japan," Mari says.  
"She's here illegally, I suppose?"  
"I didn't ask her about that. Judging from her dialect, she's from the north." (AD, 2007:43)

Guo Dongli is moving from China two months before. She enters Japan with the help of the Chinese gang which owns the prostitution business around the Alphaville hotel.

d. The Culture That Tolerates Or Promotes Sexual Exploitation

Today Japan is a country with the big sex industry which makes sex not taboo anymore. Some conversation between the characters have shown that the Japanese youth opinion about sex is changing to be an ordinary phenomena.

**D. Conclusion**

As a prostitute who sells her body to get money, Guo Dongli's position can not be equal with the man especially her customer. She must do

everything that her customer wants as the compensation for the money they have paid. The young lady does not only take a role as a children, but she also has role in helping her family's financial problem. She is treated as a commercial object that can be used to get money.

As a prostitute, she is breaking the regulation of Japan which forbids prostitution. That is why she avoid the police even she is becoming the victim of violence. The participation of Guo Dongli in supporting the financial of family can not last forever. It is limited by her age and physical appearance. She can not be a prostitute forever. When she is getting old and ugly, she will not get any customer anymore and will be replaced by the new and fresh one.

Based on the prostitution theory which is developed by Hughes (2004), there are several factors which cause prostitution phenomena with the immigrant women as the sexual object. They are the men who buy commercial sex acts (in this novel is represented by Shirakawa), the exploiters who make up the sex industry (in this novel is represented by the Chinese gang), the states that are destination countries (Guo Dongli is moving from China to Japan), the culture that tolerates or promotes sexual exploitation.

It is clear that prostitution appears as the result of the Japanese society behavior and culture which does not see sex as a taboo phenomena. The condition like this makes big opportunity for the people who trying to manage or create business which is related to the sex. Prostitution appears because of the chance and request.

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