



How to be a W-o-m-e-n? : Women in the Contract of Powerlessness in Oka Rusmini's Poetry

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the poem "Pandora" by Oka Rusmini from a feminist perspective, with a focus on depicting women in a condition of powerlessness. This poem explores themes related to women and their experiences in a patriarchal society. The research method used is qualitative analysis with a literary feminism approach. In the poem "Pandora", Oka Rusmini describes women as beings who are trapped in social roles and expectations that limit their freedom and power. This poem reveals the gender injustice experienced by women, as well as the social and emotional burden they are responsible for. Oka Rusmini uses metaphorical and imaginative language to describe the condition of powerlessness experienced by women. The results of this study provide a deeper understanding of the poem "Pandora" by Oka Rusmini and contribute to the study of feminism in literature. It is hoped that this research can inspire other literary works that raise women's issues and encourage social change that is more inclusive and just.

Keywords: *Pandora; Oka Rusmini; Feminism; Helplessness; Poetry*

Introduction

In this article, I attempt to discuss Oka Rusmini's poetry, namely Pandora. Of course, the purpose of this piece is to investigate the impotence of women as expressed by Oka Rusmini, one of Indonesia's female writers. Oka Rusmini's literary work strongly supports feminism's ideals, since it clearly depicts women's weakness in the grip of patriarchy and the presence of discrimination against women. (Danerek, 2006). Oka Rusmini is a Bali-based Indonesian female writer (Made, 2015). One of his most well-known pieces is Earth Dance, which aims to disrupt the previously unfair and unbalanced debate of gender (Mandrastuty, 2010; Derana, 2016; Priyatna, 2023; Putra, 2023). Oka frequently brings up the subject of

women in his numerous works, including novels and poetry (Aveling, 2010; Widyastuti, 2020; Mu'is, 2021). *Pandora* is the title of one of her poems that stresses feminist ideas.

The problem of women is frequently mentioned and explored in contemporary creative works, including poetry, like *Pandora*. The female body is deemed "taboo" and is attempted to be resisted until its existence is eradicated (Kulick & Willson, 1995; Griffin, 1996; Akpınar, 2003; Gatrell, 2007). Despite the fact that this was included in the restricted area during the period of classical literature. However, in the age of current literature, this is exactly what is being exploited as a topic for literary works in droves. This is especially true for the enormous number of female writers that appeared in the 2000s. Oka Rusmini, a brilliant female writer, is among them.

Women are a theme that the author addresses in her poetry; yet, women and forbidden subjects emerge frequently in literary works (Matkowska, 2021; Fuadhiyah, Purwasito, & Supriyanto, 2023). Women are still chained by an established patriarchal society in Indonesia (Budiati, 2010; Lahdji, 2015; Kurniawati, Junaedi, & Sos, 2023). In Indonesia, society still believes in and trusts patriarchy to "bind" and even shackle women (Pambumdi, 2007; Firdaus, 2023). Oka Rusmini's efforts demonstrate that women are still the second class stuck in Pandora's box.

If read in one sitting, the poem "Pandora" will bring the reader to the shadow of a woman. Something to which women are attached and alive. This poem, supported by numerous words with feminine qualities, will draw readers' attention to the problem of feminism, which is one of the viewpoints given in current Indonesian literature. Set in a patriarchal culture in which women are powerless objects in a second universe where their position in comparison to males is radically different. This poem employs a variety of diction styles relating to womanhood. As a woman's soul, a type of fight within oneself.

There are many studies related to women and poetry in Indonesia, one of which was conducted by Lubarman, Dahlan and Kiftiawati, (2023). This research focuses on metaphors and the female body. Apart from that, Sahidillah and Rahaya (2019) discuss the facts of humanity in Oka's collection of Pandora Poems by utilizing a genetic structuralism approach. Finally, Sari (2019) focuses on Marxist feminism to dissect the novel *Tempurung* by Oka Rusmini. All three conducted different research with researchers, previous research shows that different approaches will produce different perspectives.

This research is important. Firstly, women are an issue that has always been associated with patriarchal culture in Indonesia and continues to exist in society today. Second, this research aims to demonstrate that, despite feminist ideals and initiatives for gender equality being debated in society, women remain powerless. As a result, the purpose of this study is to investigate the pattern of powerlessness experienced by women in Oka Rusmini's poem *Pandora*. Knowing the image of femininity contained in *Pandora* is hoped to make provisions for women, gender activists, and others to continue to speak out against gender inequality. Women are represented in literary works. In this way, this research can offer a significant contribution to society and the advancement of science, particularly in respect to the topic under consideration.

Methods

This study is qualitative in character, and the method employed is a descriptive method with a literature study approach. The descriptive approach is a research technique used to describe existing events that are occurring now or in the past. Aside from that, the descriptive approach is a means of describing or depicting an object in order to have the reader comprehend and feel what the writer experienced (Pradopo, 1995:32). Books, ebooks, articles in magazines, newspapers, bulletins, journals, organizational reports or archives, papers, government publications, and other similar resources are examples of library materials.

The library study approach is particularly frequent in research since it eliminates the requirement for researchers to go directly into the field to collect and analyze data. This study focuses on the written language employed by authors in literary works such as Pandora's poems. Because this research describes the usage of written language, particularly images of women, it is classified as qualitative research. This is consistent with the qualities of qualitative research, which represents an actual situation in which the outcomes are scientific interpretations rather than reports.

The research takes a feminist viewpoint. Feminism is a literary ideology that focuses on socio economic injustice among women. The simple idea is that critics look at literature with a certain knowledge, an understanding that there is a gender that has a lot to do with culture, literature, and life. Simone de Beauvoir's feminism is employed not just as a theory, but also as an analytical tool to deconstruct literary works, such as Oka Rusmini's poem Pandora. Pandora is the subtitle and title of Oka Rusmini's poetry book, and the collection of poems studied is Pandora. Pandora was chosen as the research object because the researcher focused on Pandora's diction, and this poetry is extremely closely tied to women's oppression in patriarchal culture. Thus, there are two steps in reading the poem Pandora by Oka Rusmini that is being studied. This study aims to unearth patriarchal dominance and discrimination disguised in literary works. Pandora's poetry reveals a plethora of other voices within the feminine body.

Result

Silent Women's Voices

Men frequently attempt to silence women's voices (Lahdji, 2014; Firdaus, et al, 2023). Oka Rusmini's poem "Pandora" incorporates various voices of silenced women. This poem's entire body becomes a patchwork of difficult-to-read pictures, yet when pieced, it forms a complete form, the woman and all the stuff that surrounds her. Women will get a severe smack after reading this poem. Women who are constantly stigmatized (Tunc, 2008; Lahdji, 2015). A woman has no right to make a decision or even to be himself. Women are expected to always be what their surroundings want them to be, to be able to ignore their conscience and to always be an object.

Pandora is a phrase from Greek mythology that refers to a woman who married Epimetheus as punishment for Prometheus, Epimetheus' brother (Lachs, 1974; Ismael, et al, 2020). He was given a lovely box that could not be opened during his wedding. Unfortunately, *Pandora*, out of curiosity, opened the box, which contained despair, bitterness, ugliness, and all manner of calamity (Thackeray, 2001). In reference to Pandora's original meaning, this poem conveys a deep impression because *Pandora* is not a simple thing that can be seen with the naked eye. *Pandora* is the deepest cavern where all evil dwells. Aside from that, the meaning of this poem is confusing because.

Pandora's diction is always filled with things that are dark, black, unpredictable, mysterious, and striving to rebel against itself. *Pandora's* extremely complex personality is then contrasted to that of a woman. Women who must maintain many things, especially the most unpleasant. Women who must be willing to repress themselves for an extended period of time without knowing when it will stop. Female figures are frequently mentioned in *Pandora's* poems. This is demonstrated by the use of the mother figure in the sentence "I am a mother." 'She who wears the maharatu's crown.' This mention is then contrasted with the storyteller's use of the term "we." The term kami refers to the tight relationship between the storyteller and the characters in the poem. In the following lines, the poem discusses how women should play a role. Being a figure who is always hesitant whether to swallow Pandora or not, and often there is no other alternative but 'yes'.

'Li, should we swallow copper acid? Or we sink the island. Pop it on the soles of your feet.'

(Rusmini, 2018)

In the following poem fragment, Li's figure, who is assumed to be a lady, is challenged to choose between eating copper and sinking an island and putting it on the soles of her feet. Swallowing copper acid entails swallowing one's own anguish, shame, and other cruelties. Women's positions are frequently like this. Whether you like it or not, you have to do something that is sometimes against your will. For example, consider the role of a mother who frequently bears the load of her family's shame. If something bad happens to his family, he is always blamed and gossiped about. As a Mother, she always frequently has to swallow all of the bitterness in the family. Positioning her husband as both a stick to which she must constantly adhere and someone who sticks colored pencils into her heart (Firdaus et al, 2023). Let go and accept some concessions. Become someone who is constantly skinned by the tongues of others. Also, offspring are born and grow up to devour his body.

The option available to women in this circumstance is well known. This means that, like it or not, women must play the role of Pandora's box. The box that has diverse bitterness inside him is constantly swallowing him. In the first paragraph, women are also offered the option of venting their rage outside. An attempt to communicate this was made in the statement Pop it on the soles of your feet. However, in the following paragraph, women's subordination to all of these positions becomes the absolute answer.

'I'm mother. Woman with Maharatu's crown'
'Perhaps you forgot a fairy tale. Pandora built a fence for the men when Jupiter entrusted us with the chest. In addition, the globe'
(Rusmini, 2018)

The poem excerpt above underlines that the figure of a woman, a mother, is crowned. This crown represents a woman's privileged position and also plays a vital function in the administration of a kingdom or house. However, the maharatu cannot be a king because he also does something' in accordance with the monarch's wishes. Because there is an idea of a more 'powerful' king behind her figure, the fact that a mother is a wife symbolizes a loss of freedom.

Pandora and The Patriarchy That Binds Women

The role of women as Pandora's boxes who must keep their bitterness within themselves corresponds to the narrative of Pandora in Greek mythology. Pandora was the first female figure established in Greek mythology. Zeus then gave Pandora a box and told her not to open it (Lachs, 1974; Ismael et al, 2020). However, Pandora, who was intrigued, eventually opened the box and discovered a slew of horrors inside. There is disease, ugliness, dishonor, and hatred in this box, which when opened spreads over the world.

'Perhaps you forgot a fairy tale. Pandora built a fence for the men when Jupiter entrusted us with the chest. In addition, the globe'
Is a handful of rags capable of removing our form, Li? People are only capable of counting their fingers through every pore in our bodies. I believe we require large seas teeming with sharks eager to tear bodies apart. Perhaps we will swallow the ocean. Alternatively, service the island.'
(Rusmini, 2018)

The sentence above depicts Pandora's role as the owner of the metropolis that holds the key to the world's sustainability. Pandora's job is therefore equated with the role of women who give blackish pandora fences from men, like Pandora does with her box, which fences off the world. Aside from that, the poetry passage above depicts the storyteller's perplexity, which he later expresses to Li with the phrase, "Is a handful of quilts capable of peeling our form?" Problems that arise when living the dynamics of life are frequently like bits of a patchwork that tear the mind apart. Women are described as being on high alert in the following line. The reason for this is that any hole in the body that can be regarded as a woman's fault constantly draws attention. Women, like the water, require patience in the

face of sharks, which frequently tear them apart. He had to swallow the ocean at times, which was far beyond his capabilities. Its body is shown as an island with various fonts.

'Li, when I lost a woman, people cut my veins'
 Even my father asked for my heart. Her children wring out beads of sweat from me.'
 'All I have is brain fluid that transforms into a new me.'
 (Rusmini, 2018)

The previous stanzas suggest implicitly about the patriarchal environment in which *Aku*-lyrics lives, that this culture honors men while emphasizing women as delicate figures capable of accommodating men's wants for numerous things, including obedience. So, in this verse, *Aku*-lyrics attempts to indicate that when he attempts to shed the femininity that he should wear in his patriarchal home, the people around him would put pressure on him again, hurting him with numerous stifling insults. This is derived from the phrase "slicing my veins," which can result in deadly anguish. It turns out that he endured similar treatment from those closest to him, particularly his own father and brothers.

When someone works hard to respond to external expectations rather than from their consciousness, they tend to lose their identity and emerge as a new figure, especially when losing one's identity has a negative impact on the development of one's soul (Suyadjid, 2010). *Aku*-lyrics discusses this by stating that the only way to survive in a patriarchal atmosphere is to be what other people highlight while being someone who is not. The lyrical 'me-new-me'. Losing one's identity means accepting the bad fate that comes with it, as mentioned in the lines 'I saw small dragons spit out from your face.' Dragons are one of the Chinese mythological ornaments that represent good fortune and goodness to those who believe in them. *Aku*-lyrics appears to reveal in these lyrics that luck disappears when one's identity is no longer tied. Aside from bad luck, someone who is depressed about their situation and identity is more likely to engage in self-harm.

According to Tang et al. (2016), self-harm is an act of injuring oneself. Injuring one's skin with razor blades or other sharp items is the most common type of self-harm. Self-harm can also take the form of burning one's body, beating oneself, picking at scars, pulling hair, or swallowing toxic substances. This is consistent with the lyrics 'Secretly you also enjoy burning your body, as we stick to each other's flesh. *Aku*-lyrics explains that, in order to escape from himself (his identity), he covertly performs self-harm to convey his pain.

The next stanza introduces your character, whose existence is shown by the lyrics. Your character is therefore interpreted as a fellow lady, similar to *Aku*-lyrics, who frequently expresses fear, worry, irritation, and her feelings as a woman. This is a reference to the lyrical 'This morning, I opened your email. diction as usual indicates information about repeat in an action, condition, or story. The dismal hues and rainfall represent grief in this case, the fire in your head represents suppressed wrath, and the raging storm in your lips represents scolding or curses that can no longer be held as forms of stories sent via email from your person to *Aku*-lyrics. Furthermore, *Aku*-lirik affirms this by the lyrics 'I also drank it' that *Aku*-lirik feels the same thing, the anguish, misfortune, and sadness that your figure suffers. This verse then concludes with your figure's fear of sexual actions that should be performed by a husband and wife, as expressed in the lyrics "Before you started having intercourse, you trembled, "that man is draining my body."

Women are still the subject of this poem's discussion in the fifth stanza. Women are portrayed as figures who battle and are fought for in the arena of feminism. Women who must accept being victims of male infidelity and being trapped with feelings and issues that force them to the periphery (Beauvoir, 2014). Males created and formed women deliberately to keep women under men's authority (Firdaus, 2023). Advocacy is used to describe a type of women's struggle in this poem. This defense is offered by describing the comparatively large role of women in this environment. Women, as the womb of civilization, who play an important role in the regeneration process, undoubtedly deserve their rights to

be respected without any action that subordinates or marginalizes them (Lerner, 1993). The following statement from Pandora's poetry provides an implied explanation of women's significant role:

'We service the entire world. I'm squeezing all the holes in my body to keep life going.'

'I don't have a wand, I often want to borrow yours.'

(Rusmini, 2018)

"We serve the world" shows the character 'We' as a group of women defending their importance in the world. This contribution is mirrored in women as mothers who give birth and care for each kid, which has an effect on the continuation of life. The phrase so that life continues' reinforces the concept of women as figures willing to make sacrifices for the continuation of life. Despite this significant role, women's rights in particular occupations are frequently restricted. Subordinate activities obtained by women are portrayed in this case by women who do not have sticks.

The stick might be seen as a symbol of the rights that women should have as well. However, it is stated in the poem that women do not have it. Aside from that, ladies are seen desiring to borrow it from another figure, most frequently a man. Rights that should not be based on gender are frequently only in favor of men. This is then raised as a form of protest as well as a formation of the feminist movement in this poem. The persistence of restrictions on fundamental rights is unquestionably unacceptable for women, who play an important role in the world. Women are saddened by this because they were born as women (Beauvoir, 2014). This melancholy can be felt since childhood, according to Pandora's poem. This remark is implied by the following quotation:

'A little girl came. His body was covered in dark fat. He is adept at swallowing the entire silence of the world.'

'I took off my little woman. I looked for thread fibers to cover my naked body.'

(Rusmini, 2018)

Darkness and silence, for example, depict the sadness felt by the 'small girl' character. Of course, this is influenced by life, which in some places frequently corners women. In this series of meanings, it can be stated that women's melancholy is a major role in the emergence of feminist movements. Even the woman in this poem isn't done with this troubling turmoil. This demonstrates that the female character still prioritizes solving her own difficulties and does not concentrate on the 'small girl's' melancholy problem.

The significance of the general dynamics depicted in Pandora's poem appears to reach a climax in the next verse. This is expressed as a question. 'Did the seas, springs, and eruptions give birth to your spirit? Or that hunger?'. According to the preceding passages, which describe women and feminism, the term spirit can be taken as the feminist movement itself. In this line, women are asked questions regarding the origins of feminism. The reasons in issue may be dynamism, grief and rage from injustice portrayed by the diction of waves, springs, and eruptions, or greed for life's joys represented by the term hunger. In the end, the effectiveness of the feminist movement as a form of resistance is reflected through the character Li. Even though there is advocacy and movement by feminists, restrictions on women's rights seem to be a wheel that continues to roll on this road of life. In this poem, 'naked' is the diction that represents the cruelty of a system of life that does not pay attention to the dignity and honor of women.

Conclusion

Women and their resistance methods in literary works to acquire rights that are still being fought for now, as well as subordination and discrimination. In Pandora's poetry, the employment of symbolic diction and the strengthening of the characters' characteristics affects the meaning, which then leads to the degree of feminism. The title of the poem, 'Pandora,' contains the most powerful symbolic diction.

"Pandora" might be regarded as a box that houses a variety of bitterness, which is mirrored in this poem with the condition of women, who frequently have to store all of life's misfortunes. These things manifest as disease, ugliness, dishonor, and hatred, which then spread across the globe. The portrayal of sadness through the diction of 'Pandora' becomes an emotional eruption of the feminine characters *Aku*, *Ibu*, and *Li*. Through advocacy discourse, the feminist movement is represented by strengthening the character of these figures. Women who are frequently expelled from civilization due to various forms of oppression must acknowledge the rage and despair that make a woman inclined to self-harm behavior. If you consider the concept of humanitarian norms, this is undeniably unfair.

Even from that, it would be unjust given the important role that women play in the continuation of this world. The defense discourse is present in the poem "Pandora" through an implied explanation of the great role of women who are supposed to "serve the world." Finally, the poem "Pandora" poses an important question concerning the origins of the feminist movement: whether it was borne solely of oppression or exactly of yearning for life's pleasures. "Pandora" is a poem that underlines the importance of gender equality in social creation. Women who have been exposed to the brutal system of life, on the other hand, have the capacity to turn the feminist movement into a product of the times. Patriarchy thrives on pressuring women to be confined to men's armpits. Pandora demonstrates that oppressed women are still prevalent in society, even if feminism has begun to emerge. However, patriarchy continues to oppress women.

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