

# The Position and the Role of Women in Local Minangkabau Novels

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**Abstract.** A woman in Minangkabau society is called by *bundo kanduang*. *Bundo kanduang* is a call to a group of women according to Minangkabau custom. Meaning *bundo* is mother, *kanduang* is true. So, *bundo kanduang* is a true mother who has motherhood and leadership. Description of a *bundo kanduang* can be seen in some novels from time to time. First, the position and the role of women in Minangkabau's novel in the long period namely; as wife, mother, and singer in the people. Second, the position and the role of women in Minangkabau's novel in the New period, namely; as wife, mother, and singer of members of the community and members of the community. Third, the position and the role of women in Minangkabau's novel in the reform period namely; as wife, mother, and singer of members of the people and can be involved in the community and government.

**Keywords:** role of women, minangkabau novels, local wisdom

## 1. Introduction

Women in Minangkabau society have different positions and roles with women in any cultural ethnicity in the world. The differences can be seen from various aspects. First, for Minangkabau people who adhere to the matriarchal kinship system, lineages and tribes are drawn based on the maternal line. Second, power should also be fully held by the mother. Third, inheritance rights are inherited to women.

As special as women in Minangkabau, many writers, especially those from Minangkabau, talk about women in their novels. They talk about Minangkabau women from the perspective of culture, idealism, facts, and realities that develop in society from time to time. Novel as a literary work provides an opportunity for authors to convey various problems that are observed, discovered, and felt. This is caused by the existence of the author as a social creature. Esten [1] explained that the existence of an Indonesian's writer is an artist from two worlds; the world of regional culture and the new world of Indonesia. His works will never be separated from the influence of the cultural value system of the area where the writer came from.

It is not surprising that in the realm of Indonesian's literature there are emerging Minangkabau' writers who talk about women's issues in the Minangkabau tribe, even though they obtain education outside the Minangkabau area. Even the Minangkabau people who get education in the cultural centers outside of Minangkabau are what bring progress and creative reflection. Indonesian' writers who made the wealth of Minangkabau's culture as a source of creation were Marah Rusli (*Siti Nurbaya*), Sutan Sati (*Sengsara Membawa Nikmat*), Hamka (*Tenggelamnya*

*Kapal Van Der Wijck*), A.A. Navis (*Kemarau*) and Wisran Hadi (*Orang Orang Belanti*), as well as many other authors who created the work that has the power of Minangkabau.

Many novelists have discussed the Minangkabau's problem as a matrilineal society. They also talk about women as people who are taken into account in Minangkabau culture. *Siti Nurbaya* and *Salah Asuhan* are two novels that have big names whose main characters are women. That two novels talk about the controversial Minangkabau women, causing debate. By reading the novel, there will be a change in the mindset and cultural orientation of the reader in a more open direction towards the position, rights and obligations of women in the customs and culture of the Minangkabau. This proves that the novel is not only based on the imagination of the author, but also rests on the reality that develops in society.

Many literaries work to discuss women in the Minangkabau's culture have been published and get various awards. Starting from that, the researcher feels need to examine the position and the role of women as a *bundo* figure in the novels. The selection of novels are based on cultural problems raised by the author. Analysis of novels with local Minangkabau's nuances are written from time to time with the aims to find the position and the role of women as a *bundo kanduang*.

## **2. Methods**

This research aimed to describe systematically, factually, and accurately regarding the position and role of women in local Minangkabau' novels from time to time. The research data was in the form of sentences related to research problem. Data was collected by using the technique identify according to the research objectives. Finally, it is continued with classified data and interpreted based on selected theory.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

Based on the findings and consultation, it can be concluded that there are three things conclusion. First, the position and role of women in Minangkabau' novels in the long period namely; as wife, mother, and singer in the people. Second, the position and the role of women in Minangkabau novels in the New period, namely; as wife, mother, and singer of members of the community and members of the community. Third, the position and the role of women in Minangkabau novels in the reform period namely; as wife, mother, and singer of members of the people and can be involved in the community and government.

Culture can be seen broadly and narrowly. Koentjaraningrat [2] explains that in the narrow sense of culture is a thought, work, and human work that fulfills the desire for beauty. The definition is said to be narrow because beauty is only one aspect of culture. In contrast, in a broad sense, culture is a total of thoughts, works, and human works that are not rooted in their instincts. Therefore, culture can be triggered by humans through the learning process.

Louis formulated five characteristics of culture. First, culture is a way of life. Second, culture is the whole of the plan or design of life. Third, functionally the culture is organized in a system. Fourth, culture is obtained through the learning process. Fifth, culture is the way of life of a group or social group, not the way of life of individuals or individuals.

Maran [4] explains that culture is a unit that is composed of different parts. The parts that make up culture are integrated and interconnected. Changes to one part of the system will change

the relationship between the other parts and will affect the whole system in question. Values are an idea of something good, which is expected. These ideas are the basis for the formation of social norms, namely the rules of how one should behave. These values and norms differ from one culture to another.

Cultural analysis is essentially an analysis of the forms of values that are adopted and used by a particular group of people. Literature as a product of culture cannot stand alone. Among these cultures there are interrelated relationships [5]. The intersection of literary and cultural works that prevail in Minangkabau society will be seen in the novel.

The novel created by the author comes from the reality that is in the midst of people's lives. Aside from being entertainment, a novel is expected to provide valuable values to its readers, especially those related to life problems. Thus, the novel as a literary product is expected to be used as a mirror in behaving and behaving for its people. If the function has been achieved, the literary work will automatically become a useful and valuable work for the reader.

### **3.1 The Position and The Role of Women in Minangkabau**

Based on Minangkabau customary law, women are also referred to as *bundo kanduang*. *Bundo kanduang* is a call to a group of women according to Minangkabau's custom. Meaning *bundo* is mother, *kanduang* is true. So, *bundo kanduang* is a true mother who has motherhood and leadership. Gouzali [6] states that *bundo kanduang* is scientifically a mother who gives birth or a biological parent.

Furthermore, Idrus [7] argues that women as *bundo kanduang* are a place of interest for the descendants of the Minangkabau's society. It was compiled in a phrase that sounded, *Bundo kanduang, limpapeh rumah nan gadang, umbun puruak pagangan kunci, umbun puruak aluang buniang, pusek jalo kumpulan tali, sumarak di dalam kampuang, hiasan dalam nagari, nan gadang basa batuah, kok hiduik tampek banasa, kok mati tampek baniaik, kaundang-undang kamadinah, kapayuang panji ka sarugo* (women or biological mother, the main pillar of a house, the main key holder, the main center of survival in the household, decoration in society, a place for all solutions, a carrier to the path of truth, a role model for eternal life in heaven.)

Based on the statement above, it was concluded that a woman in Minangkabau had a dual duty. First, a woman acts as the center of all strength in the people. Second, a woman must be able to carry out her role of being a good wife for her husband. Third, a woman plays a role in managing all household needs and are role models for members of their people. Fourth, a *bundo kanduang* is a person who is able to socialize in the community where he lives. Fifth, a woman is a symbol of pride and glory that is the intermediary of offspring who is raised and respected so that they are required to have a good personality. Sixth, a *bundo kanduang* is required to direct members of the people towards a happy life of the world and the hereafter.

Furthermore, Idrus [6] states that a woman called *bundo kanduang* must have the characteristics of leadership and a true mother such as being righteous, honest, smart, good at speaking, and shy.

### 3.2 The Position and The Role of Women in Minang Kabau Novels Last Time

The novels which are written in last time and considered to represent this research are entitled *Warisan* by Chairul Harun [7] and *Warisan* by A.A. Navis [8] The presentation of the position and role of women in Minangkabau can be seen in the following explanation.

#### 3.2.1 As a wife

A woman in Minangkabau must be able to be a good wife for her husband. As a wife, she should accompany her husband in a state of joy and sorrow until death separates them. This is different from what the author said in the following novel quote.

*"Last night your husband shouted for you. Where are you?  
"Mak asked As to go home" [7].*

Through the quote, it is known that the actor in the novel is not beside her husband when needed so that her husband Murti is calling his wife, even Murti's father-in-law tells to As to go home. In the same novel, there are also women who carry out their duties as good wives. The woman in question is carrying out this role seen when Rafilus's stepmother. This can be seen through the following quote.

*"If she becomes a widower because I died, then her good name  
will be preserved. She will be considered a woman who is  
polite to her husband, not leaving her husband in trouble" [8].*

Through the quotation it is known that if a wife only accompanies the husband in a happy state and leaves him in a difficult situation, the community will label the woman as not good. Conversely, if you can accompany your husband until the end of your life, then your good name will be maintained.

Next, the woman figure in the novel *Kemarau* by Navis is described as an independent wife, not dependent on other people, especially husbands. The women are used to life that is hard and challenging.

*They are not afraid to face life instead of suffering from the  
pain of the heart. It is not necessary to publish mercy. Aside  
from the fact that the incident happened naturally in the  
village, the women there never depend solely on their  
husbands. They will be able to live alone. In fact, the divorce  
was a whip for him to achieve glory in living with his children.  
[8]*

Through this quote, Navis describes a strong woman figure who does not depend on her husband fully. They prefer to divorce their husbands rather than live in a union suffering from heartache. For them divorce is a whip to live more independently with her children.

### 3.2.2 As a mother

As a mother for children, *bundo kanduang* is required to direct her children to a happy life in the world and the hereafter. Novel *Warisan* by Chairul Harun also shows the role and the position of women as mothers in the family. As stated in the following quote.

*When leaving, his mother has warned not to discuss and involve himself in matters of wealth, both high heirlooms and low heirlooms. "Raf, we never expect your father's inheritance," said his mother [7].*

Through this quote, it can be seen that a mother does not teach greed to her child. Mrs. Rafilus reminded her child not to question inheritance, both high heirlooms and low heirlooms. Mrs. Rafilus only wanted her son to bring his father to seek treatment in Jakarta. As a mother, she only wants the father of her child to be healthy.

Furthermore, Navis also described a woman who surrendered in her life. She accept what has become her habit. Beside being weak, she is also lazy to explore the potential within herself. She lives surrendering without the best hope. Many things she can do to get a better and more decent life. However, in general feel enough with what is and what is destiny. This can be seen at the following point.

*He was rightly looking at the woman's face one by one. He wants to capture their thoughts, desires, and the willingness of their lives. But their faces just seemed to be. As weak, as lethargic, and just as stylish. Generally they are already elders, people who feel themselves almost to the grave. Young women who still have a future, not many people. Most of them are widows. It doesn't change with the village anywhere, only parents who diligently come to Surau to hear the teacher explain religion. Whereas young people think that at some time they will come anyway [8].*

When these women get a role model that will bring them in a better direction, it turns out they only focus on their people, not the teachings or knowledge they bring. They live in a long way and don't want to change in a better direction for tomorrow. As seen through the following quote.

*The women in the village are only followers, not followers of their teachings. He did not like the worship of people, she did not like the old system of the fatherhood [8].*

### 3.2.3 As a Singer in the People

The position and role of women in novels written in the old era period were not found. Even women do not have voting rights in her people, including determining her own way of life. Women are portrayed as a person who has to live a life that has been determined by men, both men in her families and her own husbands. For example in terms of marriage, women are not

given the opportunity to determine her soulmate, but when there is a problem, that woman is considered to bring bad luck. As revealed in the following quote.

*Last time, when I was married to Mr. Acin, nobody needed to ask me questions, did I like to know or not. But after my second child was born, I was divorced, all of them blamed me as an unlucky woman, who was not very good at running. In the aftermath of our lives of three children, no one loved him, let alone help. And now, while I am destitute, everyone agrees to insult me, hurt me. O, they are embarrassed, oo they feel insulted by that event? What is their right to feel ashamed, to feel insulted? [8]*

By looking at some of the quotes that have been described previously, it can be seen that women in carrying out their duties are not as expected from a *bundo kanduang*. Only a handful of people understand the duties and obligations they must do. There are still women who are only concerned with their own affairs, selfish, do not care about the family, and justify any means to achieve the desired goal.

### **3.3 The Position and The Role of Women in Minangkabau-based Novels in the New Era Period**

The novels that written in the new era period and considered to represent this research entitled *Tambo* by Gus Tf. Sakai [9], *Bako* by Darman Moenir [10], *Orang Blanti* by Wisran Hadi [11], and *Negeri Perempuan* by Wisran Hadi [12]. Based on Minangkabau customary law, the role of women will be explained in the following description.

#### **3.3.1 As a wife**

Apart from being a companion to her husband in a state of joy and sorrow, women in Minangkabau were also described by the author in his work as a member of the clan when he was in the members of her husband, as revealed in the following quote.

*For a woman, or a wife, marriage is not only to become a wife and give birth to children from her husband, but also to be a representative in her husband's family [9].*

The next quotation also shows that women have the same place as men without any discrimination of their rights and obligations.

*But what I want most is something that has been felt since the beginning of the marriage, namely the position of women who are put in place is no less important than men. Even as an owner, women can be very decisive [9].*

Through this quote, it appears that there is a desire from *Sutan Balun* as a man and the leader wants to put women in Minangkabau adat as calculated people. Even more than, namely as the owner. As owners, women will not be wasted. She has a strong position in determining decisions so that women are not treated arbitrarily, both by power and men.

Furthermore, in the *Bako* novel, the role of *bundo kanduang*, played by the character Ummi, is clearly visible. The female characters from the three novels have given good examples and examples to children and members of their people. They not only struggle with household affairs, but also can defend their families and people. The Ummi character participated in the continuation of the school of her brother's children, both materially and in-person. In fact, she is willing to mortgage her fields for the education of her children.

### 3.3.2 As a mother

In the *Tambo: a Meeting*, the author describes *bundo kanduang's* role and position as a mother. This can be seen from the picture of “mother” from the character Rido. For more details, the role and position of the candidate can be seen in the following quote.

*I love mother and mother loves me. My mother is a mighty person ... [9]*  
*How are you doing, baby? Mother in the village is always healthy and happy. So it should also be with you here. Always mother prayed, hopefully you will be overflowing with Allah's energy and intelligence [9]*

Through quotations that have been explained that a mother gives love and affection to her child wholeheartedly. Even though her child is an adult, she will continue to pray for her child so that she will always be in the protection of the Almighty God and hope that her child will gain strength and kindness. No matter how hard a mother will still say fine and always happy so that her child is not worried. This can be seen from the mother's statement to her son Rido that she is in good condition and happy in the letter she sent. Even though the situation is not necessarily what she said.

A woman carrying out her role as *bundo kanduang*, *Bundo* is usually assisted by her daughter named Reno. Reno works outside the city. If *Bundo* needs Reno, *Bundo* will tell Reno to go home. That is, *Bundo* cannot work alone in carrying out functions so she needs other people who are still one people. That is as seen in the following quote.

*Because the situation was getting worse, Bundo always tried to persuade Reno to go home. Beside helping to manage the results of the fields and fields, it is especially important to participate in carrying out the main functions in the community, as the culmination of adat. [11]*

Through this quote, it can be seen that *Bundo* also gives Reno full authority to decide a case. *Bundo* never regrets and blames every decision Reno has made. If Reno has decided on a case, that decision is a *Bundo* decision which must also be obeyed as well as obeying *Bundo's* decision.

### 3.3.3 As a protector for her community

Aside from being a mother, *bundo kanduang* is also a brave man to defend herself, her family, and her people. Sometimes a *bundo kanduang* must also be able to be a single parent. It can also be seen in the following quote.

*... my mother was the only woman in our village who dared to bring a message from someone to someone else during the PRRI period. My mother was the only widow in our village who did not need another man after her husband died, even though at that time she was still young, beautiful and radiant [9].*

*And from my mother, Bundo, I found a firmness wrapped in tenderness. It was really the most amazing woman ever. History and life have forged themselves in such a way, made him different, more than any woman [9].*

Based on the quotation, it can be understood that a *bundo* besides being a mother, she can also play a role as a hero for her people. To be a hero in defending her people, demands courage and intelligence. Even in the novel it is illustrated that women as mothers can also maintain survival without having to depend absolutely on her husbands. That is, she can be a savior in the family when her husband dies or sick. She can be tough to face the problems faced in running life as an independent person. Women also accept problems faced by children and people, before she tells men or *mamak-nya* to be resolved.

In the novel *Orang Blanti*, *bundo kanduang* should also be considered a figure in adat. However, the position of *bundo kanduang* is not as it should be. This is because men as the head or *mamak* are more powerful than *bundo kanduang*. This can be seen in the following quote.

*... there is no word she can say. How great a fight between grandma and her own younger brother Datuk Tuo, to seize the inheritance. Grandma relented to avoid division. Just accept what was decided. Heritage land must be shared. Islanders who work are also divided [11].*

Through the above quotation, it can be seen that grandmothers as women in the people who do not have the power to defend the land of *pusako*. As a woman in the community, grandmother has the power to defend the *pusako* land so that it is not divided and sold. This was due to the power possessed by Datuk Tuo as a man who should have maintained that the inheritance remained the rights of women or *bundo kanduang*.

### **3.3.4 As Community Members**

Aside from being a person who carries out the household and family needs, women in the novel *Bako* have tasted formal education and are involved in the activities of the organization, both political and humanitarian. Thus, the mindset depicted through the Ummi figure is more advanced than the role of other women who only take care of the household without prioritizing education and knowledge, such as the Ummi figure presented through the following quote.

*The women in my village, to say a few ancient stories, but still often actual, after her menstrual period came her husband's immediate search ... and she was not surprised if she was made*

*second, third, and so on, she was only at home cooking and giving birth. At least, my ummah is not willing to take these methods. She ventured to take a role in the community which is usually done by men [10]*

Women as *bundo kanduang* figures not only as ordinary or "home-made" women. Aside from being a mother to the children of her relatives, Ummi also cares about education, both for herself and her family. Ummi also participates in the community to fight for women's rights. Even a *bundo kanduang* must be able to attend to all the problems faced by people around the people and nagari. He does not only think of himself and his own family, but also must care for the people around her. *Bundo's* attitude can be seen in the following quote.

*... While Bundo is busy with the Nagariko community. All problems, ranging from the lack of rice to be cooked daily to the affairs of law-in-law, divorced marriage, child birth and all the affairs of the dilation of the diladan with affection. Bundo cannot avoid because she is the mother, mother of all residents of Nagariko ... [11]*

*Bundo* acts as a parent in *Nagariko* society. *Bundo* takes care of all the problems with compassion, starting from the procurement of rice, daughter-in-law, divorce, and so on.

#### **4. Conclusions**

A woman in Minangkabau's society has a position and the rule as a *bundo kanduang*. As a *bundo kanduang*, a woman must have a good characteristic. She can act as a wife, a mother from her children, a singer from her community. The position and the rule of a woman as *bundo kanduang* is described in some novels by Minangkabau's author. They divide the novels into three division. They are the position and the rule of woman as *bunda kanduang* in long period, the position and the rule of woman as *bunda kanduang* in new period and the position and the rule of woman as *bunda kanduang* in reform period.

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