

SOCIAL CRITIQUE IN *MERDEKA* SHORT STORY BY PUTU WIJAYA: A DYSTOPIAN LITERATURE APPROACH

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Abstract: Changes in a society produce social critiques which in turn become a means of communicating new ideas in addition to assessing old ideas for social change, in short as a vehicle for the conservation and reproduction of a social system. Social critique can be conveyed through literary works; this is seen from the short story of *Merdeka* by Putu Wijaya. Through a dystopian literary approach and supported by related theories and concepts, it is revealed that this short story is full of social critiques as a result of the author's observations of his environment. The flow of dystopia is generally speculative, presenting a catastrophic or chaotic landscape of the future civilization of the world. Dystopian literature is always associated with socio-political discourse. Overall this research is carried out using a qualitative descriptive method with the aim of presenting a complete picture of the social setting and clarification of social phenomena in the short story of *Merdeka* and then synchronizing it with social reality. The results show that the forms of social critique conveyed by the author is lack of self-introspection, social gap and environmental damage. These three forms of social critique if uncontrolled can cause chaos in the social system because the main result is conflict, the color of dystopian literature.

Keywords: *environmental damage; self-introspection; social gap.*

INTRODUCTION

Social critique and social problems always go hand in hand as they are interrelated. Social critique arises because of unresolved social problems; while social problems exist in almost all societies. Social problems arise owing to the inconsistency of relations between individuals and groups and if not resolved can give a negative impact on social life, such as hampering peace and comfort of the community in all forms of social interaction (Merrill *et al.*, 2017). Social problems can be caused by changes in individual or group attitudes due to the development of

science and technology, social systems, cultural shock and cultural and social gaps (Mooney *et al.*, 2021). In short, the incompatibilities of social and cultural life as well as conditions that are not desired by large groups in an environment are the triggers for social problems. Poverty, crime, gender discrimination, family disorganization, environment, population, belief system and bureaucracy are problems always visible in society (Zaitov & Teshayev, 2022).

Society is the largest human group with the same traditions, customs, attitudes and feelings of unity. This shows that society consists of several

groups ranging from the smallest to the largest, having habits then forming a tradition producing rules. In social relations, a reaction arises as a result of the contact of the relationship causing individual behavior to expand then making a change or some changes in society establishing social values, social norms, patterns of behavior, organizational establishment, structure of community institutions, layers of society, power in authority, and social interaction (Capozzi & Ristic, 2018; Vestner *et al.*, 2020).

It is undeniable that in social life, friction always exists; but to reduce the size of a problem in an environment or community, the community members must voluntarily have a sense of belonging and from this, a nation can be built; a nation that can always share identities and relate to one another in harmony. The process of nation building is problematic and it tries to create a national identity. When people are not able to relate, crisis occurs (Saraswati, 2018; Wimmer, 2018; Eriksen, 2020; Heng, 2017).

To avoid a social crisis, it is necessary to have an idea to observe, follow, and evaluate the social order in a community (Roepke, 2017; Chen *et al.*, 2018). This idea can then be labeled as a social critique, an innovation that becomes a means of communicating new ideas in addition to assessing old ideas for social change. Social critique as a form of communication in society aims or functions as a control over the course of a social system or social process (Bianchin, 2019; Matamoros-Fernandez & Farkas, 2021; Lewis, Mark C. (2018). Therefore social critique is an input, refutation, satire, response, or even an assessment of something considered deviant or violating the values in people's lives and is conveyed to the community or to related parties who participate directly in the order, such as religious leaders, community leaders, and the government.

Social critique can be expressed directly or indirectly. Social actions, rallies, and demonstrations are forms of direct critique. Indirect forms of critique include critique through songs, literary works, films, theatrical actions and so on. Both forms of social critique have important social influences and impacts in people's lives. Social critique is a form of communication that can be understood both in oral and written form, aiming to control the course of the social system relating to interpersonal problems (Beauchamp *et al.*, 2019).

Social critique through literary work is the rationale for making this research, through a short

story entitled *Merdeka* by Putu Wijaya already published in the August 29 2010 edition of *Jawa Pos* Newspaper, using a dystopian literature approach. Dystopia literature is one of the genres in literature that is quite popular in the literary world, especially in fantasy and science fiction works (Seeger & Davidson-Vecchione, 2019). Although more familiar among fans of fantasy and science fiction novels, many consider dystopia to be a branch of realistic fiction. In simple terms, dystopia refers to a world that at first appears to be running smoothly or is often termed utopian but later appears to be full of imperfections due to social and economic inequalities. The state of dystopia is described as a disorder that causes a new social system that is more systematic but tends to be oppressive. However, in some works, there are also those that negate the existence of the social system and replace social and economic inequalities with equitable conditions of poverty (Campbell, 2019; Stoner, 2007).

Through a dystopian approach, a research is designed to raise the issue of anxiety about humanity and the socio-economic system in society. Social problems at the present should be discussed in preparation for handling social problems in the future. Given that literature is universal and can enter all socio-cultural domains, literature is the right choice to explore and analyze the state of society and dystopia becomes an instrument of critique and an implied warning for the ruling government and the prevailing system. Thus, dystopia plays a role in literary works to provide education and stimulate public awareness to participate in handling every problem because every problem has the potential to trigger other problems (*Jerkovic and Alihodzic, 2018; Smith, 2017*).

Merdeka short story by Putu Wijaya is full of social critiques, a description of the social life experienced by certain characters in the plot appointed by the author according to his mission, starting with the atmosphere of this nation in the early days of the struggle for independence from the hands of the colonizers. The values of struggle are illustrated through monologues and dialogues among characters. The final battle depicted in this short story is a decisive, with the meaning that they must succeed in seizing independence or they must die. With such a strong slogan, the soldiers muster all their souls to end the conflict that has been going on for hundreds years. Apart from the struggles of the soldiers acted by the characters in the short story, there are human,

social and cultural values summarized in the form of social critiques, whether directed at individuals, groups, systems, or the ruling government.

Literary works have become one of the effective means to convey social critiques in addition to the press and physical movements in the form of demonstrations and along with its development has become a cultural spirit. Literature is born from the writer's anxiety to see the condition of the people who are always involved in social problems. As a social portrait, literature can reflect various important events in society, describing the psychological state of society, and providing input for problem solving; all of this is certainly a source of thought, inspiration and community readiness to face social conditions that occur in society. Literary works also act as a medium of entertainment (Derrida, 2015; Eagleton, 2017; Attridge, (2017).

When we read *Merdeka* short story, we can see that Putu Wijaya focuses on moral messages in the form of social critiques because basically there is always an implied message behind a critique. Progress, whatever its form can be seen and subsequently realized through critiques. To understand the meaning of social critiques in a short story, we must also be able to understand all the socio-cultural phenomena implied.

Putu Wijaya's work *Merdeka* is chosen because of its uniqueness, namely the way the short story is presented using simple language so that it can be digested by all levels of society. With a storyline that is not complex and generally has a flat plot, short stories are more in demand by the reader community. Short stories are part of prose literary works other than novels. Short stories are read by many people because they provide entertainment to readers. In addition, short stories provide information about various events in society, namely about life problems. As it is a social critique, the short story of *Merdeka* is appropriate to be studied through a dystopian literary approach.

Dystopian literature generally describes inadequate living conditions due to a bad social order or a government system that does not take sides with the community, usually an authoritarian government. Social critique in postmodern literature also uses the term dystopia to describe a post-industrial society considered to have a high concept of self-interest and class. People like this tend to justify any means to meet their needs and goals, without considering the consequences of their actions on the environment

(Horan, 2018; Seeger & Davidson-Vecchione, 2019).

In most dystopian literary works, corrupt governments create or maintain a poor quality of life, often conditioning the masses to believe that their lives are worthy and fair, even perfect. Dystopia is often written as a warning, or as satire, showing current trends extrapolated into

nightmare conclusion. Dystopia in general can be said to be a bad picture of a place that includes an imaginative view of a society that focuses on critically highlighting the negative or problematic side of the ideal view of that society (Khan & Rasool, 2022; Moylan, 2020).

The term "dystopia" appears in literature as opposed to works written in the utopian genre. The first writer to launch a whole literary direction was the English philosopher Thomas More. The origin of the utopia genre usually comes from his novel *Utopia* (1516). In fact, most of his works show an ideal society in which everyone lives happily and quietly. The name of this world is utopia. In contrast to his "quiet" works, the author's works begin to emerge, telling stories about completely opposite societies, countries, or worlds. In it, the state limits one's freedom, often freedom of thought. Works written in this tone begin to be called dystopia (Beresin, and Olson, 2019).

Different from the calm utopian literature that depicts a harmonious society, dystopian literature provides a picture of people's lives that are opposite to that of a utopian society. People's mindset and personality will determine the formation of a state of utopia or dystopia; because overall even though we see a social system or government that does not take sides with the community, everything starts from the mindset and personality of the individual that develops into the mindset and personality of the group. Dystopia is characterized as a crisis of hope, the helplessness of the revolutionary struggle, an inescapable social evil. Economics is not seen as a solution to global problems and a way of building social order, but as a tool to enslave people. Everyone needs money, but that does not mean that people are slaves to money (Fitzsimmon & Wilson, 2020; Moylan, 2020).

Dystopia presents a "new world" for one who lives in it, resulting in a soulless, intolerant, empathetic state; people are made into robots, human machines with one goal, whatever the path to be taken, and at a certain moment, a natural human feeling awakens in a person, not in accordance with the existing system, built on

restrictions, prohibitions, and subordination for the benefit of the state and it is through this awareness that people will see that they have been dragged into a dystopian world. There is conflict between the individual and society. Dystopia denotes the incompatibility of utopian ideas with individual interests, revealing the absurdity of the utopian project. This clearly shows how proclaimed equality turns into leveling; state structures forcibly determine human behavior and technological advances turn a person into a mechanism (Herrero & Royo-Grasa, 2021).

A dystopian society can be recognized by the existence of a social hierarchy, class division in society, the upper, middle and lower classes and generally the upper class becomes the ruler and acts arbitrarily. The lower class people will become powerless, nothing more than slaves who must obey all the rules applied, even though they are not in accordance with humanity or justice. Then there is government propaganda voicing the concept that the government is right and must be appreciated and then there are strict regulations that limit the space for each member of society so that the nature of democracy is immersed in it. The moral crisis, in the form of indifference to the environment and the lack or absence of self-introspection, is also a highlight in dystopian literature (Moylan, 2020), which then leads to establish social critique.

Social critique is a form of communication in society that functions as a control over the course of a social system or process of social interaction. Social critique comes to the surface when the social system and the order of life of a society do not work well due to clashes among individuals, groups and social institutions (Langford, 2018). When social problems are not recognized and lead to dissociative effects in society, social critique is needed. Various media can be used to deliver social critique, such as newspapers, social media, television and one medium that is always effective in delivering social critique is literature.

The scope of social critique includes the political field, matters relating to state affairs, government policies, or authority; economics, relating to production, contribution and production; culture, relating to aspects of creation, taste and intention of humans as civilized beings; law, in relation to rules and regulations. In this study, all areas of social critique are covered because social critique does not focus on one issue (Connell, 2018; DiEdwardo, 2019). An issue remains related to all the problems facing humanity. Social critiques which become the

discussion in this research are: lack of self-introspection, social gap and environmental damage.

Self-introspection is a person's way of looking at himself or reflecting on his thoughts, emotions, and memories. Through introspection, a good and righteous personality can be formed. Everyone must do self-introspection so that their perspective on self-worth and those around them can change. Self-introspection can also increase emotional intelligence, making it easier for a person to overcome the challenges of life and social interactions can run smoothly (Kusumawardhani, 2017).

Various ways can be done to do self-introspection such as seeing and understanding the problems faced, adapting to the environment, and most importantly trying to make peace with oneself so that conflicts can be avoided. Actions like this can give the brain a chance to pause for a moment from various muddled thoughts. At this stage we can sort through various experiences that have occurred and evaluate these experiences. This evaluation then becomes a lesson for us to determine a good mindset and behavior in the future.

When there is disharmony in the social system and social institutions in a community, social inequality will occur; inconsistency between expectations and reality. Social inequality is included in social problems that have an impact on conflict. Not only from an economic perspective, conflicts can be due to legal issues, public services, bureaucracy, education, religion, and ethnicity. This form of social inequality makes it difficult for the lower class to get access to development outcomes, health and education. And all this of course will cause other social problems (Dalton, 2017; Umeanolue, 2018).

This social gap is often related to the existence of a form of difference that is real and easy to see in terms of public finances, covering the value of assets. In addition, this social gap can also be seen from the inequality in goods or services, wealth, rewards, laws, opportunities that are obtained by everyone.

The next issue is concerned with environmental damage, unlimited by space and time. This matter is getting worse day by day. The conditions have directly threatened human life. The level of natural damage also increases the risk of natural disasters. The cause of natural damage can be caused by two factors, namely due to natural events and human activities. The second cause of environmental damage is the result of

human activities. The damage caused by humans is actually greater than that caused by natural disasters. This is because the damage done can occur continuously and tends to increase. This damage is generally caused by human activities that are not environmentally friendly such as forest destruction and conversion, mining, air, water and soil pollution (Steinmann *et al.*, 2017).

Environmental damage can be interpreted as a process of deterioration or a decrease in environmental quality. This environmental deterioration is characterized by the loss of land, water, air resources, the extinction of wild flora and fauna, and the destruction of ecosystems. Therefore, prevention of environmental damage must be implemented. The environment and its surroundings must be protected. Protection and management of the environment must be in accordance with human welfare. Otherwise, it can cause various environmental disasters. The environmental damage that has occurred so far is the result of weak government supervision and public reluctance to change unnatural behavior towards nature and weak law enforcement as the last bastion to ensure the rule of law (Jargin, 2021).

METHOD

The research is conducted with a qualitative descriptive method, descriptive in nature with the concept that the data obtained are decomposed in the forms of words or pictures not in the forms of calculations or numbers. The main principle of qualitative is to process and analyze the collected data into systematic, orderly, structured, and meaningful data. This research is then done by means of a dystopian literary approach. This approach reveals that literary works as a medium of social control provide an overview of the social order of a society that is not in line with expectations so that people face various difficulties in their daily lives (Busetto, 2020; Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; Sugiyono, 2017).

The main data source is from the short story entitled *Merdeka* by Putu Wijaya, published in August 29, 2010 edition of JAWA POS newspaper and the data are from the texts of the short story referring to social critiques, among others, lack of self-introspection, social gap and environmental damage. The technique used in this research is a documentary study technique as the point studied is *Merdeka* short story document. This documentary study technique is carried out by examining literary works as a source of research data. The research instruments

used are humans and cards. The persons in question are the researchers, while the card is a sheet of paper containing notes and observations. The techniques used in analyzing the data cover reading the texts of the short story repeatedly, finding the keywords reflecting social critique, describing, analyzing and interpreting social critique in the texts, and in the final stage drawing conclusions

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Putu Wijaya, who was born in 1941, is known as a novelist, short story writer, playwright, and journalist. A number of short stories appeared in the forms of books and articles published in various magazines and newspapers. Just like his dramas and novels, Putu Wijaya's short stories reveal many streams of consciousness, triggering the readers to think about and reflect on the various social inequalities that occur around them. Wijaya is a reliable critic who uncovers various social problems through his works and one of them is the short story of *Merdeka* which is then used as the object of this research. Three points of discussion cover lacking of self-introspection, social gap and environmental damage

Lack of self-introspection

Self-introspection means that we seek to understand ourselves on a deeper level. This includes gaining a better understanding of what we have done or what we have not done yet as well as our strengths and weaknesses. Indirectly self-introspection reminds us to think before acting and also able to understand the circumstances around us. One should not take immediate action in response to an event. Everything must be considered carefully.

We must not shoot forward because the real enemy is not in front, but on the side and behind; the real enemy is within us. Another thing that needs to be seen and done is to cleanse our environment of all traitors, enemies in blankets; it is they who make this independence lose its meaning and value (Wijaya, 2021).

The essence of this quote is that any form of problem or conflict comes from within. Most people will try to claim that they are in the right and the problem is caused by someone else. People like this are usually difficult to invite for self-introspection and are always busy blaming the situation and other people. This one bad trait is of course not good and can hinder self-development. This is because those who find it difficult to introspect are too busy commenting on

other people rather than correcting their shortcomings. When a person always feels that what he is doing and saying is right, he will tend to find it difficult to realize his own mistakes. People like this are usually concerned with their own ego and are less able to think from other points of view.

The data above are in line with the concept of dystopian literature which describes the state of society and also the personalities of community members getting worse day by day and can have a negative impact on the stability of the social structure. This is a social critique conveyed by Wijaya, of course through his observations and understanding as a writer for literary works are a reflection of people's lives. Through this short story, Wijaya conveys the message that it is easier to defeat visible enemies, enemies who come or are in front of us; what often becomes a problem is that the people around us, who have been given the trust become traitors. In addition, the toughest enemy to defeat is ourselves and as long as we cannot do self-introspection, then we cannot make peace with ourselves and we shall continue to be our enemies.

The next data related to the lack of self-introspection can be seen from the words of a character whose contents state that change does not start from physical appearance, but from spiritual realm. If everything is right in the heart, then everything can go well. If the heart has not been thoroughly cleansed, then what is right can look wrong (Wijaya, 2021).

Wijaya again reminds us that happiness, independence and serenity cannot be obtained from anywhere, everything comes from ourselves. Dystopian literary works generally describe a chaotic and uncontrollable state of society with successive difficulties and all of this comes from the community. People who cannot or do not want to do self-introspection will not be calm in living life. People like this should be given input on the importance of self-introspection, should be criticized so that they can realize that they deserve to have a quiet and comfortable life and they must make changes. Changes that are not forced, but changes that are carried out with self-awareness. We cannot change a situation until we change our personality; we cannot make others happy before we make ourselves happy. Living with sincerity is the first path to peace. The point is that we must cleanse our hearts, keep ourselves away from thoughts and actions that harm others.

Social gap

Social gap is an imbalance in society. The causes of social gap are financial problems, lack of employment, poverty, to health. This social inequality results in injustice and position in society. The striking difference is in the financial ability and social status of the people living in certain neighborhoods. This gap is often associated with the existence of a very real difference that can be seen in terms of public finances, such as wealth, especially when it comes to economic disparities. Now it is very easy to see from the potential and unequal opportunities in social positions in society.

Social gap can affect all sectors of people's social life. One illustration that can be seen owing to social gap, is the existence of social jealousy towards certain groups. One group of people can meet all their basic needs, while others have to fight hard to meet their basic needs and they are still unable to do so. Thus jealousy arises, which if not controlled properly, can trigger other problems such as crime which ultimately disturbs the comfort and tranquility of all other members of society. This unstable and chaotic situation is a picture given by dystopian literature and of course it implicitly gives space to the author to convey social critique. Literature as a social control medium must be implemented and optimized.

The following data describe the social gap presented by Wijaya and also serves as a forum for conveying his social critique so that the public through the readers can understand the real source of problems in their environment.

A character in the short story says that life does not belong to people, but to leaders, party leaders, and intellectuals who become celebrities because of their incredibly intelligent humanitarian theories, but never side with humanity (Wijaya, 2021).

Democracy means government by the people with the highest power in the hands of the people and carried out directly by them or their elected representatives through a free electoral system. However, in practice democracy is no longer fully implemented, according to the character who speaks in this short story. He feels that democracy is only a name. He does not feel that he is living in a democracy because all the steps are very limited; his life is regulated by a group of people who happen to have access to the authorities. Democracy is a government by a group of people, a bad system because it is implemented by a group of people who can benefit the rulers and themselves so that they are vulnerable to anarchism.

The system of government in the name of democracy will only result in unstable political and social conditions, all of which lead to social inequality. There is no such thing as humanity or for the benefit of the people in social inequality. In addition, such a situation will trigger socio-political instability and social integration, because there is a conflict between the rulers and the people. In fact, in many cases, this causes a dishonorable fall of government power, a dystopian state, a state of disorientation and everyone in it, especially civil society, victimized and has to bear all the burdens of hardship. This is a social criticism conveyed by the author with the aim that all parties immediately realize that the direction of the government system is starting to be damaged and must be repaired immediately so that the people could live in prosperity.

The following data also relate to the problem of social gap. Independence is essentially useless; independence is only for the rich and powerful; while civilians who have nothing will remain slaves with no future. It is not people who will write history, but conglomerates, political adventurers and elites, they are considered to have the ability to see life from behind their academic theories, even though all of them are abstract (Wijaya, 2021).

The remarks are carried out by a character in the short story. The words 'make people 'rich' and 'you will still be a slave who have no future', describe an extreme social gap with the phrase 'no future.' Social gap is a condition where there is an imbalance in society, where there is social gap formed from an unfair distribution of many things that are considered important by society.

In essence, social gap is caused by differences in social, economic, and cultural status that are striking, resulting in injustice in a society. Therefore, resources and self-awareness as well as self-improvement need to be distributed evenly to everyone so that they could feel the real senses of rights and obligations. Unresolved social inequality is a phenomenon of dystopian society.

Environmental damage

Environmental damage is a significant theme in dystopian literature. Environmental damage can be interpreted as a process of environmental quality deterioration which is characterized by the loss or drastic reduction of land, water, air resources, the extinction of wild flora and fauna, and ecosystem damage. The following data describe the environmental damage caused by unmeasured and uncontrolled development.

In the next 60 years, everything related to nature will be completely destroyed. The existing trees will be cut down converted to roads and malls. Skyscrapers will pierce every inch of land throughout the city. Overpasses wrap around the city, no one will ever get to see and feel the fresh morning and the red dusk, because the sky has been destroyed by the sins of construction. On the streets there is no more space for pedestrians and bicycles, everything is taken by luxurious vehicles owned by conglomerates (Wijaya, 2021).

Furthermore, the description of environmental damage is also clearly illustrated here. Forests and mountains are barren; rivers are dry, and the seas are polluted. The rainy season is beyond the prediction. Natural disasters keep coming. Rains, floods, landslides and then forest fires keep coming; volcanoes erupt, earth wells gush, drowning cities in muddy puddles; the we find dengue fever, swine flu, drugs, poverty, corruption, religious clashes and disintegration. The people are starving while those of the upper class are busy fighting, blaming each other and inciting they deserve to rule (Wijaya, 2021).

Humans and environments are two words that cannot be separated. Both influence each other. The influence of nature on humans is more passive, while the influence of humans on nature is more active. This illustrates that humans are the trigger for the destruction of nature; especially when humans use the concept of anthropocentrism, a perspective that places humans at the center of universe system. This view contains the idea that all policies taken regarding the environment must be judged based on human interests. It is not surprising that the focus of attention in this view lies in increasing human welfare and happiness. Nature is seen as an object to fulfill human needs and interests, so that nature is only used as a tool for achieving goals. Obviously the concept of absolute anthropocentrism cannot be fully accepted, unless anthropocentrism is controlled.

Environmental damage can disturb health, cause biodiversity loss and ozone depletion as protection from the sun's ultraviolet rays and also economic collapse. We need nature to survive. Therefore, it is important to preserve nature so that it can maintain a healthy and suitable environment for living things to live in. This is the role of social critiques conveyed by the author.

CONCLUSION

Merdeka short story by Putu Wijaya is full of social critiques. Lack of self-introspection is a

significant feature of the dystopian literature reflected in the behavior and personality of individuals and groups in the text and by this any conflict is hard to resolve. The problem of social inequality described in the story is also a trigger for people's discomfort in carrying out social life and further if not well controlled, could destabilize the social structure, most likely projected to national political, social and cultural instability. Relating to environmental damage, it is predicted that in the next sixty years, everything related to nature and enjoyed by humans today will be destroyed. Trees are no longer visible in big cities and in their places, skyscrapers and greenhouses with various risks to human life thrive.

Through a dystopian literary approach, social critique is expressed from this short story with a focus on discussing the displacement of self-introspection, social gap and environmental damage. The results of the analysis of the data obtained indicate that the three forms of social critique are found in *Merdeka* short story.

Merdeka by Putu Wijaya, describes the anxiety of the people about the meaning of an independence, but no one in the community feels free in terms of social justice, morals, peace, and economy, which makes the characters question the ways how they face the issue of independence and they are all eager to get justice in this beloved country. Putu Wijaya also implicitly provides an input that there is a need of deep attention for social inequality in social life and the government or people who have more ability and income need to also understand the situation of the poor and take useful actions with the aim of protecting, serving, accompanying, and providing directions for a better life.

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