

## *The Sociology of Literature Analysis on Belis Imammat Novel, a Work by Inyo Soro*

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### **Abstract**

*Belis Imammat*, a novel by Inyo Soro in this study is a literary expression of the social condition of the bride pricing tradition 'belis' in the marital custom of the East Nusa Tenggara society. The discussed issues pertain to the structure builder of a story figure "Aku, an Indonesian term for 'I or I am' through sociology of literature approach. This study aimed to describe; (1) the social and cultural background of the East Nusa Tenggara society in the Novel of *Belis Imammat* (priesthood as an object change for bride-price). (2) The influence of the author's social backgrounds to the recounting story process of the novel (1) the socio-cultural background of the novel *Belis Imammat* reflected in the attitude of the society strictly holding the hereditary marital tradition. The novel recounts a personal experience of the writer seeing the bride-pricing tradition as a serious life concern. The relationship built upon the figure of *Aku*/'I' with the communities' moral sanction to his parents' marital status for their unpaid bride-price, engaged both social and self-criticism. The story seems to evoke readers to enlightenment and awareness towards the customary practices which had been almost untouched by criticism, (2) the most basic things affecting the social background of the author on the creative process of the literary work *Belis Imammat* is that the figure 'I' was born and raised by parents whose *belis* 'bride price' was unpaid. Setting of the recounted story is critical assessment to the marriage customs of the East Nusa Tenggara people in Indonesia.

Keywords: Novel, literary reception, Sociology of Literature, *belis*, *Imamat*

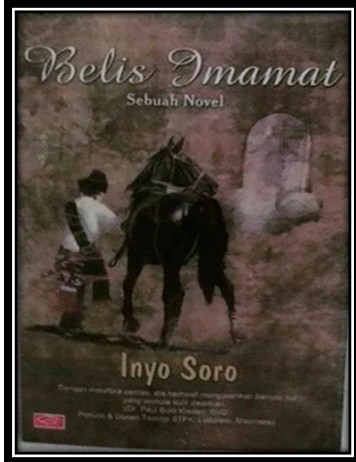
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## 1. Introduction

Novel as a kind of literary work presenting a world that packs an idealized life model, imaginative world, building through its intrinsic elements such as events, plots, figures (and characters), backgrounds, points of view etc., all of which are imaginative (Nurgiyantoro, 2007). Some novels may be drastically popular because many of them highlighting themes that are close to their readers, which basically not to try escaping from the extrinsic elements in addition to intrinsic elements should be synergized to create a unified story.

The phenomena raised by a writer in literary works cover almost all aspects of life experienced by society. This is in accordance with what was expressed by Waluyo (2002) who states that the backgrounds are presented including: life procedures, customs, customs, attitudes, ceremonies and religions, in the way of thinking, way of looking at things, etc. The selection of Inyo Soro's novel "*Belis Imam*" as an object of this study lays on a reason that the novel reveals about a religious life, and socio-culture of society, especially the East Nusa Tenggara people. Inyo Soro managed to peel the life side of *Belis* not only the positive side but also the negative one. *Belis* which is a rule that must be fulfilled by all people of the East Nusa Tenggara in holding a wedding ceremony and is becomes a taboo for the whole community to talk about "the negative side of its implementation" which was not reluctantly discussed in detail by Inyo Soro.



The novel entitled "*Belis Imam*" by Inyo Soro much of its story raises a socio-cultural aspect of the East Nusa Tenggara society is which in this article is going to be analyzed through a perspective of the sociology of literature approach to the contents of the novel. In principle, there are three perspectives concerning the sociology of literature, namely: (1) a study which sees literary works as social documents in which the reflection of the situation in the literary period is created, (2) a study that reveals literature as a mirror of the writer's social situation, and (3) a study that captures literature as a manifestation of historical events and socio-cultural circumstances (Laurenson and Swingewood in Endraswara, 2008).

This review discusses the author's world view regarding marital system of implementing *Belis* in the novel "*Belis Imam*" by Inyo Soro, the socio-cultural circumstances of the author in the novel, and the educational value are illustrated in the novel. Considering the importance of the educational value as one of the most highlighted issues in this novel, apart from any work of literature should contain the life values that intentionally educate the readers. A review of the educational value is indeed a plus point as absorbed by the readers.

This study employed qualitative method as the research design. Qualitative research methods produces a descriptive data of written or oral narration of the observable aspects to describing an individual, circumstance, symptoms of a particular group (Moleong, 2008). The descriptive method can be interpreted as a problem-solving procedure by describing the state of the subject or object (someone, institutions, society, etc.) at present based on the appearing facts or as it is (Hadari Nawawi in Siswanto, 2005). This case, the writer described qualitatively on the problems raised in this study. The document in this study is the novel entitled *Belis Imamat* a work of by Inyo Soro. Things that are described in this study concern the social culture narrated by the author, the author's world view, and the educational values reflected in the novel. Data collection techniques in this study concern the document analysis, beginning from the reading stage, document recording, to document analysis. In the analysis of the sociology of literature this study adopts a model introduced by Umar Junus; this model sees literature as a sociocultural document that records the sociocultural reality of a society at a given time.

## **Theoretical Underpinnings**

### **The Sociology of Literature Study**

Sociology of literature is a branch of reflective literary studies. This study is much in demand by literary observers who want to see literature as a mirror of community life. The arena, the basic assumption of the study of sociology of literature is the birth of literature not in the social void (Endarswara, 2008). According to Jabrohim (2003), the approach to literature that considers societal aspects by some writers is called the sociology of literature. This term basically has no different understanding with the socio-cultural, or sociological approaches to literature. This theory covers a variety of approaches, each based on certain theoretical attitudes and views, but all of these approaches show a common feature of having literature as a social institution created by writers as members of society (Sapardi Djoko Damono in Jabrohim, 2003). The important point to be raised here is that the sociology of literature stands for a conceptual mirror (Endraswara, 2008). In this regard, literature is regarded as *mimesis* (life reflection) of the society. Nevertheless, literature remains recognized as an illusion or illusion of reality. Literature will not merely offer raw facts. It is not just a copy of reality, but a fact that has been interpreted.

A more detailed opinion by Junus (in Sangidu, 2004) who reveals that in the study of sociology of literature there are two features, namely (1) a sociology of literature approach and seeing social factors that produce literary works at a certain time. Thus, this approach sees social factors as major part and literature as the minor one; (2) the sociology of literature approach literally moves from the social factors that reflect in the literary works and was then used to understand the existing social phenomena outside the literary texts. Thus, this approach sees the world of literature or literary work as its major and social phenomena as its minor. Furthermore, Sangidu (2004) explains that the techniques necessary to perform the dialectical method (interrelationship) between social factors present in a literary work with the existing social factors within society. In such a description, that the sociology of literature is

an approach that examines the relationship between social reality that exist in society with literary reality that exist in literary texts without neglecting the mirror of the author's situation.

According to Laurenson and Swingewood (in Endraswara, 2008), there are three perspectives concern the sociology of literature, namely: (1) research which views literature as a social document in which a reflection of the situation in the literary period was created, (2) Literature as a mirror of the writer's social situation, and (3) research that captures literature as a manifestation of historical events and socio-cultural circumstances. Edraswara (2008) argues that essentially literary sociology is the study of: (a) human and society objective scientific studies, (b) the study of social institutions through literature and vice versa; (c) the study of social processes, ie how society works, How society might be, and how they live their lives.

## **Novel**

From the art point of view, Waluyo (2002) argues that novel is a new symbol of art in accordance with the factual life and experiences of the author. The arrangement that the novel describes is a realistic and reasonable one. The life depicted is not only the greatness and strength of the character (for the adored figure), but also the defects and shortcomings. Furthermore, he stated that a novel is not only a means of entertainment, but also as an art form that studies and sees aspects of social excellent values in social lives leading the readers towards acting and thinking in good manners and noble minds (Waluyo, 2002).

Abrams (in Nurgiyantoro, 1994) states that novel comes from the Italian language *novella* (in German: *novelle*). Literally *novella* means a small novelty and then translated as "short story in prose form". Today the notion of novella or novelle contains the same meaning as the Indonesian term novelet (English: *novellette*) which means a proxy of fiction work that long enough, not too long, but also not too short. The literary work called *novellette* is a work of shorter than a novel but longer than a short story; say in the middle of both.

## **2. Results and the Discussion**

### ***Belis Imam***

*Belis Imam* (BI) is a novel by an NTT writer published in late 2010. BI tells about the life journey of a future priest (Iting) from a High Seminary until to be ordained. In contrast to the story of the santri's pious life, as Habiburrahman El Shirazy shows in the novel 'Ayat-ayat Cinta', for example, Inyo Soro in a plain, witty, critical and often unimpressive style, featuring the lives of young brothers Their delinquencies are often just personal consumption.

Iting (described in personal figure 'I' (Indonesian, *Aku*)) is a serious person who aspires to be a Catholic priest living in seminary with extra strict dormitory discipline.

The daily rule of the seminary, following a given description by Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>, is a small foreman who inherits the role of panopticon, the stalker in a prison that always spread terror. All this, it is said, for the sake of preparing reliable pastoral candidates. Counting as a gray dweller, Iting had successfully run the dormitory life into a certain priesthood practice in the society.

Even though living a life as a priest whose life was somewhat isolated, the challenge might come from anywhere. The Iting dialogue with his companion friend, *zet\_of\_zonder* (pp. 9-12) is an example of a critical attack that directly pierces the core of the monastic life. For some, the choice of being a priest is far-fetched, but not infrequently poverty, purity and obedience are ideal that soon becomes irony outside of the Catholic worship.

Common challenges hit the prospective pastor told by Inyo Soro was narrated with a chewy sense of humor. One day, Iting meets the fallen Bintang (in Eng. Star), a creature turned the Iting's blood spell runs so fast. It is the love a future pastor. If the love story of Bintang jatuh (the fallen star), however, the Iting's feeling was not responded and kept hanging by the girl. In the other story it tells about the love between Pit and Ros, Iting's parents is the story of a marriage between a male of Flores grassroot with Sumba noble girl who was caught pregnant out of wedlock. Pit and Ros finally escaped to Timor because Pit could not afford *belis*. In this case, the shackles of *belis* turned the hearts of both lovers longing and grudge. This novel is in addition to socio-culturally descriptive, is also quite optimistic aspiring to a more effective solution to alleviate the tyranny of *belis* which became the source of various social problems at the grassroots. Against this social issue, one cannot rely on what Inyo Soro called 'factor X' alone.

### ***Belis Imamat* Novel as Personal Reflection of the Author**

Inyo Soro, is an alumnus of St. Paulus Ledalero Catholic Theological School in Maumere, East Nusa Tenggara. The story in this novel is the life background of a story figure called “Aku” (personal reference for ‘I’ in Bahasa Indonesia), who was living in the education of the priest candidate, Ledalero. The twists and turns of a candidate's life are described in detail in this novel. The interesting thing described in the story is when the figure I feels the contradiction in himself against his customary system where he often fulfils a duty as a marriage counselor, meanwhile he is a person who never or even cannot live in a marriage at all.

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<sup>1</sup> For Foucault, power is always expressed through knowledge, and knowledge always has an effect of power. The organizer of power, according to Foucault always produces knowledge as the basis of his power. Power could almost impossible without getting sustained by a political economy of truth. Knowledge is not a vague expression of power relations but knowledge is within the power relations themselves. The power in producing knowledge not only because knowledge itself is useful for power, there is no knowledge without power, and vice versa, there is no power without knowledge. The concept of Foucault brings consequences, to know the power needed research on the production of knowledge underlying power. Because every power is organized, established, and manifested through certain discourse knowledge. Certain discourse produces certain truths and knowledge that give up an effect to power (Foucault, 1982:787).

***..tapi segera aku sadari, membuat khotbah seperti nasehat mereka memang tak mudah. Apalagi untuk mengkhobahkan pernikahan pasutri (pasangan suami istri) alias memberi kesaksian hidup tentang pernikahan yang padahal aku dan teman-temanku dinaruhkan untuk tidak menikah. Sungguh sebuah kegelisahan yang salah huruf bisa dibaca sebagai Ironi (BI, hal.7) [...] but soon I realized, making sermons like their advice is not easy. Especially to preach married couples, in other words to give life testimony about the marriage despite the fact that I and my friends directed not to marry. Really an anxiety can be misread to be an Irony (BI, p.7).***

The anxiety afflicted the life figure “I” in the novel was not only due to his duties as a candidate for priesthood, but also his experience as a child born from a couple of parents convicted by society because of unable paying for *belis*. His father was a man from an ordinary family named Pit, his mother named Rose, a Sumbanese woman of a nobleman with a title Rambu. In Sumba, an area in the East Nusa Tenggara still strictly measured by social stratification. *Rambu* entitled to a noble title for women and Umbu, for men. *Belis*, or dowry in Sumba was/is very high let alone the status of women nobility, *belis* can reach dozens of buffaloes, horses, gold and ivory. *Belis* has been a fixed price because it is considered as a substitute for breast milk. This is reflected in the expression of the story in the novel *Belis Imam*:

***Sebagai laki-laki Timur, kami di ajari kalau melunasi belis merupakan kewajiban terhadap kaum keluarga wanita. Tidak melunasi belis sama artinya tidak menghargai wanita beserta kaum keluarganya (BI, hal.46) [As Eastern men, we are taught that paying off *belis* is a duty to the female family. Not paying for *belis* means disrespecting the women and their families (BI, p.46)]***

***Belis bagi orang timur memiliki nilai yang tinggi. Belis melambangkan penghargaan pria terhadap wanita. Belis merupakan penghargaan pada orang tua wanita yang telah mengasuh dan membesarkan wanita pinangan pria. Secara metaforis belis dianggap sebagai “balas air susu mama” (BI, hal.45) [Belis for the East Nusa people reflects a high value. *Belis* symbolizes men’s appreciation to women. *Belis* is a tribute to the elderly woman who has nurtured and raised the future wife of the man. Metaphorically *belis* considered as “to return the virtue of mama’s milk” (BI, p.45).]***

*Belis*, for people in the East Nusa Tenggara, especially the Sumba society, is a manifestation of the male’s self-esteem. However, it is important to note concerning the way and effort of making *Belis* as an obligation, so that men's honor will not be undermined. The social-educational values reflected in *Belis Imam* novel positioned *Belis* as a form of appreciation to the bride and her family who are considered to have a great role in raising the man’s future wife from childhood to adulthood. The existence of *Belis* along with the social function and meaning for the people of East Nusa Tenggara, particularly the East Sumba society is a statement of social norms. *Belis* reflects prestige and self-esteem for both women and men; either getting paid or not, *Belis* shows the social norm and economic ability of each family. The social

value implies a lot of mutual cooperation in the family because the affair of *Belis* in repayment often involves a large family of men. Having respect for women and the family of their parents is a form of social value taught in *Belis* tradition.

***Karena itu suatu saat, kembalilah kesini. Antarkan belis buat keluarga Ros, biar kau di anggap lelaki terhormat. Belismu adalah hutangmu dan juga harga dirimu. Jangan rendahkan harga dirimu dengan tidak melunasinya (BI, hal.45)*** [Therefore, someday, come back here. Send the *belis* for the Ros family, let you be regarded as an honorable man. Your belief is your debt and also your pride. Do not lower your price by not paying it off (BI, p.45)]

Due to having problem with *belis*, my parents, Pit and Rose were evicted from their hometown and family and community in Sumba. They went to Kupang, the capital of East Nusa Tenggara province. They settled and lived in Kupang, being afraid of going back returned to Sumba, until they gave birth to two children, one of whom was the figure story “I” or Aku (in Indonesian).

The figure “I”, in his journey through life as a candidate for an *Imam*, finally received his final assignment that took place in Sumba, the birthplace of his parents, where his relatives and his family live. The presence of the figure I, as a priesthood candidate within the relatives' circle in Sumba, slowly but surely melts the coldness of the relationship and the isolation that wakes up between him, his parents and his extended family as a result of a disregard/unlawful marriage of his parents. The disregard marriage was primarily due to the *belis* tradition, which sets the two families apart and started not knowing each other.

In the end the figure “I”, could finally reunite his family, his father and his mother and his relatives at the time the ordination of the figure “I” as a priest. Both families could gather together in the event. The issue of *belis* between his parents' family ends with the statement of the figure “I”, that the priesthood and ordination as a pastor is a *belis* dedicated to his family, *belis* to his mother, *belis* from his father. The story ends here.

***Di depan nenekku, di depan kaum keluarga yang pernah menolak ayah-ibuku, kupersembahkan iamamatku sebagai belis bagi mereka. Belisku adalah belis ayahku. Belis bagi keluarga ibuku. Meski bukan dengan ternak. Bukan dengan gading. Bukan dengan perhiasan emas, intan dan berlian. Ku persembahkan sesuatu yang sederhana untuk mereka yang mana kesederhanaan itu ternyata amat berharga di mata nenek, tante, kaum kerabatku, ayah dan bundaku. Ya, imamat tak lain tak bukan adalah belis kehidupan. Belisku untuk nilai kehidupan yang terlampau luhur (BI, hal.246)*** [In front of my grandmother, in front of the families who once rejected my mother and father, I offered my savior as a *belis* to them. My *belis* is my dad's *Belis*. *Belis* for my mother's family. Even though this is not paid with livestock. Not with elephant tusk. Not with gold jewelry, diamonds and diamonds. I dedicate something simple to those whose simplicity is very precious in the eyes of my grandmother, aunt,

relatives, father and mother. Yes, the priesthood is nothing but a life *belis*. My *belis* to the value of life that is too sublime (BI, p.246)].

### **The Resistance against the Restraining Indigenous Systems through Literary Writing**

Inyo Soro grew up amid the academic situation of a faithful seminary in fight against his chronicle. Buletin Sastra Sandal jepit, a discussion forum of Republik Sharung and Teater Aletheia were the atmosphere around the author who has successfully contributed to the building of his novel story. Referredly, the spinning tangles of the story may soon be based on historically valid facts, and may still be preserved until now in Ledalero, as a setting of this novel. Regardless of the mimetic to his past experience, the semantic autonomy of this novel text in my reading offers a symbolic meaning that is not cheap. Like Santo Paulus who sheathed swords and used pens as a weapon, for Inyo Soro, writing is a weapon to fight for human values and embrace the truth.

Before writing can be used as a weapon, one must first struggle to learn it. Like the first time to pedal a bike, people must fall awake in search of body balance. Not surprisingly, Inyo Soro gave up 5 chapters of his novel to tell stories about the writing experience. In some parts, the writing is a unique experience, and on Iting the experience is always thrilling. The experience of preparing sermons for couples celebrating *perak pernikahan* (silver marriage) (p. 3). The duty of lecturers to abstract the ideas of the philosophers from the Plato era to the Postmodern era in a single page of HVS (p. 87-90); The task of preparing the theater script (pp. 106); The experience of writing poetry for falling in love (p. 127-128); Writing thesis (pp. 186-189); And which is not explicit in the text is the success of the Iting, either the personification of the author himself (?), bringing his oldest novel into existence.

The repetition of writing experience in some parts is always flanked by the same refrain. Writing can cause somatic effects. Head dizzy, hungry disappear, eyes dreamy, waterproof or spoiled (bath rare), even, insomnia. This experience is similar to the result of each encounter with the Bintang jatuh 'the fallen star'. Here we sniff out the similarity of the experience of falling in love with the writing experience.

Arriving at the last page of the novel, a question directly touched my head. Is it the commitment of the Iting and Bintang which at the end turned her as a sister will last? As for love, Inyo Soro writes, "... A reasonable instinctive change attacks every man and woman's proximity." (p. 25). The closeness between men and women is a fire in a novel that will have a double effect when the closeness involves a priest, who is said to have been promised not to marry for the rest of their lives. Open ending on BI as a local literary novel of the homeland has become a distinctive story, for example, other well-known writers such as the novel Saman' (Ayu Utami) and 'Lembata' (F. Rahardi), for example. Does the two previous novels inspire the birth of BI 2?.



## The Structural Analysis of *Belis Imam* Novel

### 1. The author's World View to the Existence of Belis in Novel *Belis*.

Inyo Soro's view on the existence of *Belis* in the East Nusa Tenggara community customs as outlined in *Belis Imam*'s novel reveals that *Belis* is indeed a tradition that reflects a very burdensome marriage custom, even more than that, *Belis* often erodes the value of love and humanity as the basis of a relationship in marriage. The strong and inevitable tradition of a member upholding *Belis* society holds an alternative view of *Belis* to replace *Belis* with a value higher than the material in *Belis*, that is, religious values. The priestly offering as the supreme sense of commonality, was a substitute for *Belis*, which equally measured the essence of *Belis* itself. It is possible that this leads an opinion towards the community holders of tradition who concern preserving *belis* making the religion as an intermediary for the impasse of a customary tradition.

### 2. Backgrounds

A reflection of the Socio-Cultural life in Novel *Belis Imam* by Inyo Soro was strongly based on the customary life or adat and the belief of Marappu, which is a custom held hereditary by the ancestors of the East Sumba people. The custom is contained in the novel *Belis Imam* is a tradition in the tradition in regard of marriage, the tradition of giving up for *Belis*. This tradition assumed to be the basic determinant in marriage, whether or not payment of *Belis* determines the validity of marriage and marital status of the offspring later. The amount of *Belis* depends on the status of women, usually the number of items for *Belis* girls should not be less than the amount ever received by the mothers, at least the amount should be the same. *Belis* can be a model payable or paid off with consequences, if it is indebted, the men must participate in the family of women until the *Belis* paid off. For the people of East Sumba as described in the novel *Belis Imam*, the numbers of cattle become reasonable payment method for *Belis*.

### 3. Occupations

The occupation that grows and develops within the lives of the East Sumba society as was told in *Belis Imam* novel is mostly traditional works. The work that many people cultivate is farmers and livestock. It is in accordance with the natural conditions of the East Sumba land which is dominantly covered by savanna fields.

### 4. Settings

The setting in this novel is located in the East Sumba, a region of the East Nusa Tenggara which consists mainly of savannah and dryland farms. Another setting is the Flores region, which is one of the areas in the East Nusa

Tenggara consisting of coastal and mountainous areas. The building is described in the dormitory life of the Ledalero Catholic High School of Philosophy.

## 5. Education

Education in the novel *Belis Imamat* was described in the lives of prospective priests or pastors at the Catholic High School of Philosophy in Ledalero, Flores.

## 6. Religion

The participants recount on the novel *Belis Imamat* are Catholics. This is evidenced from the background that all the Catholic nuances was at the very concern, the life school of the Ledalero pastor STFK, the description of the building, stages of a priestly candidate, the duties of a priest etc. .

## 7. Language Use

The language used in recounting every part of the story and event in *Belis Imamat* novel in addition to Indonesian language as the main language, Inyo Soro also recounted the story with a little bit mix of Malayic Kupang, Latin and also English. This is inevitable given that a pastor has much to do with philosophical literature, liturgy, prayers taken in the book by using the Latin in it. The Malayic Kupang language is a social language used by almost all inhabitants living in the East Nusa Tenggara areas in a social conversation between different regional languages owned by each region or tribe of the East Nusa Tenggara.

## 3. Conclusion

Conclusion that can be derived from the review on the results and discussion of this study, described in the following statements. The author's world view of *Belis* as was highlighted in *Belis Imamat* novel by Inyo Soro is that the people of East Nusa Tenggara generally, both educated and uneducated view *Belis* as something beyond their natural limits as human. The existence of *Belis* in social class of the East Nusa has become a legitimate parameter in to the social structure of the people. The socio-cultural background of the community reflected in the novel *Belis Imamat* cocern the customs and beliefs, religion, language, ethnicity, occupation, education, and residence of the East Nusa Tenggara people as cultural conductors of the tradition.

Inyo Soro's view on the existence of *Belis* in the East Nusa Tenggara community customs as outlined in *Belis Imamat's* novel reveals that *Belis* is indeed a tradition that reflects a very burdensome marriage custom, even more than that, *Belis* often erodes the value of love and humanity as the basis of a relationship in marriage. The strong and inevitable tradition of a member upholding *Belis* society holds an alternative view of *Belis* to replace *Belis* with a value higher than the material in *Belis*, that is, religious values. The priestly offering as the supreme sense of commonality, was a

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