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Gender inequality and women's resistance in *Saman* and *Jalan Bandungan*: A comparative feminist analysis

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Abstract: *This thesis offers a dialetically comparative map of gender oppression and female agency in two canonical Indonesian novels: Saman by Ayu Utami (1998) and Jalan Bandungan by Nh. Dini (1989). Operating under a geo-historical framework that assumes the socio-political hegemony of the New Order state, the texts serve as both mimetic histioriographies and textual counters-archives which index the pervassive power of "State Ibuism" as a gender ideology that relegated Indonesian women to reproductive-domestic roles while expunging them from political strategy. Applying the combined perspective of Feminist Literary Criticism and Sociology of Literature, I delineate how each instance of oppression is articulated simultaneously in both visceral-sexual taboos and institution-bureaucratic configurations. There are two specific types of women's resistance operating in the two books: Saman offers personal-existential-body level resistance that subverts thepatriarchal censorship of bodies and religious texts,whereasJalan Bandungan utilizes institution-economic-bureaucratic resistance which relies on professional independence,de-stigmatization, and legalsubjectivity. This work underscores the 'novelty' in comparing the two by demonstratingshow the need to subvert the body ("skin") of the stateand its corresponding structure ("bone" of law and economics) in order for self-release or emancipation to achieve institutional legitimacy and endurance.*

Keywords: *gender injustice, women's resistance, comparative literature, feminist literary criticism*

INTRODUCTION

The New Order regime under Suharto (1966–1998) extended its authoritarian influence beyond formal political institutions and economic structures into the regulation of gender relations and domestic life. One of the ideological mechanisms through which women's roles were constructed and regulated was *State Ibuism*, a concept developed by Suryakusuma (2011) to explain how the state institutionalized a gender ideology that positioned women primarily as wives, mothers, homemakers, and supporters of their husbands and the nation. This ideology reinforced patriarchal hierarchies by associating women's social value with domestic responsibilities while restricting their opportunities for independent political participation and self-determination. State-sponsored women's organizations, including Dharma Wanita and Persit, operated within institutional frameworks that linked women's public identities to their husbands' positions and responsibilities. Consequently, the relationship between the state, patriarchy, and domesticity provides an important framework for examining how gender inequality was reproduced and how women negotiated or resisted its constraints in Indonesian society (Suryakusuma, 2011).

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Literature provides a productive means of examining these gender relations because novels represent social norms, power structures, and individual experiences through narrative, characterization, and conflict. Rather than treating literary works as direct historical records, this study approaches Ayu Utami's *Saman* and Nh. Dini's *Jalan Bandungan* as literary representations through which the social and political conditions of the New Order can be critically examined. Although the novels differ in narrative emphasis and the experiences of their female characters, both offer opportunities to investigate the relationship between patriarchal authority and women's struggles for autonomy. *Saman*, published in 1998, portrays women negotiating sexuality, personal freedom, and institutional power amid the political and social tensions surrounding the end of the New Order. In contrast, *Jalan Bandungan* foregrounds Muryati's experiences of family expectations, marriage, motherhood, education, and economic independence. Reading these novels comparatively makes it possible to explore how gender ideology operates across both intimate relationships and wider social structures.

Previous studies have examined gender, female identity, and resistance in the two novels, but they have approached these issues through different theoretical and analytical emphases. Nuri and Machdalena (2020), for example, investigated the formation of women's social identity in *Saman* during the New Order, drawing on Henri Tajfel's social identity theory and discussing the influence of family socialization and the state's gender policies. Their findings provide a useful foundation for understanding how women's identities are shaped by ideological and social environments. Research on *Jalan Bandungan* has likewise explored women's representation, patriarchal oppression, and resistance. Devita et al. (2019) examined forms of injustice against women and feminist perspectives in the novel, while Afdholy and Tjahjono (2020) analyzed Nh. Dini's literary subjectivity in relation to domestication and feudalism. Other comparative research has investigated women's resistance to patriarchal culture in *Jalan Bandungan* and another Indonesian novel, *Geni Jora* (Wahyuli Martha et al., 2018). These studies demonstrate that women's subordination and resistance are established concerns in Indonesian literary scholarship.

Nevertheless, the existing studies identified above approach the novels through distinct theoretical frameworks and research objects. The present study addresses a more specific comparative question: how can *State Ibuism* provide a shared analytical framework for understanding the construction of gender inequality and the forms of women's resistance represented in both *Saman* and *Jalan Bandungan*? Rather than assuming that previous scholarship has overlooked women's oppression or agency altogether, this study identifies a more focused analytical gap in the literature reviewed: the need to examine how state-supported gender ideology, patriarchal relations, and women's resistance intersect across the two novels. In particular, the comparison considers four interconnected dimensions: the regulation of female sexuality, expectations surrounding marriage, access to education, and economic independence. These dimensions allow the analysis to move beyond identifying instances of gender discrimination toward explaining how gendered power operates differently across the characters' personal, familial, and social experiences.

The theoretical framework brings together *State Ibuism*, patriarchy, and women's resistance as related but distinct analytical concepts. *State Ibuism* refers to the institutionalized gender ideology that defines women primarily through their

relationships to husbands, children, domestic responsibilities, and national development (Suryakusuma, 2011). Patriarchy, by contrast, refers to the broader social relations and institutional practices through which male authority and gender hierarchies are maintained. In this study, *State Ibuism* helps explain how idealized roles of wifehood and motherhood may legitimize women's subordination, while patriarchy provides a framework for examining how such expectations are reinforced through family structures, marriage, moral norms, and unequal access to resources. Women's resistance is understood as the range of actions through which female characters negotiate, challenge, or attempt to transform these constraints. Such resistance may take the form of asserting sexual autonomy, questioning marital expectations, pursuing education, entering paid employment, or seeking financial independence. These actions are not necessarily presented as complete liberation; rather, they reveal the possibilities and limitations of female agency within unequal social structures.

A comparative reading of *Saman* and *Jalan Bandunga** is particularly valuable because the novels foreground different, although potentially overlapping, configurations of gendered power. In *Saman*, the analysis examines how women's sexuality and personal choices intersect with religious morality, economic interests, and institutional authority. The characters' challenges to conventional expectations of femininity reveal tensions between individual autonomy and socially sanctioned gender roles. In *Jalan Bandungan*, the analysis focuses on how family expectations, marital relationships, motherhood, and educational and occupational opportunities shape Muryati's capacity to establish an independent life. Her pursuit of education and economic self-reliance can be examined as a process of negotiating domestic expectations rather than as an uncomplicated rejection of family responsibilities. The comparison therefore asks not only how women experience oppression but also how the forms, consequences, and possibilities of resistance differ between the novels. These differences may reflect distinct narrative strategies and social contexts, which must be demonstrated through close textual analysis rather than assumed in advance.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how *State Ibuism* and patriarchal relations are represented in *Saman* and *Jalan Bandungan*, and how female characters negotiate or resist gendered constraints in their personal and social lives. It addresses three research questions: (1) How are *State Ibuism* and patriarchal norms represented in the regulation of women's sexuality, marriage, education, and economic independence in the two novels? (2) What forms of resistance do the female characters employ in response to these gendered constraints? and (3) What similarities and differences emerge in the representation of gender inequality and women's resistance across the novels? By addressing these questions, the study contributes a comparative perspective that connects state-supported gender ideology with everyday patriarchal relations and literary representations of female agency. Its contribution lies not in claiming that the two novels provide transparent accounts of historical reality, but in demonstrating how literary narratives can illuminate the tensions between ideological prescriptions of womanhood and women's efforts to negotiate or challenge them in the social and political context of the New Order.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study combines Feminist Literary Criticism and the Sociology of Literature to examine women's resistance in Ayu Utami's Saman and Nh. Dini's Jalan Bandungan. The two approaches are complementary because they connect textual representations of women's experiences with the broader social and political structures that shaped gender relations during Indonesia's New Order. Feminist Literary Criticism examines how literary texts construct women's bodies, sexuality, marriage, and agency within patriarchal discourse (Showalter, 1985; Sugihastuti & Suharto, 2016; Wiyatmi, 2012). The Sociology of Literature, meanwhile, situates these representations within historical conditions, including state ideology, class relations, militarism, and capitalist exploitation (Faruk, 2012; Ratna, 2013; Budianta, 2008). Rather than treating literature as either a direct reflection of society or a purely autonomous aesthetic object, this combined framework understands novels as narrative representations through which social power and ideological tensions become visible.

The integration of these approaches provides the analytical framework for this study. Feminist Literary Criticism identifies how female characters negotiate patriarchal expectations surrounding sexuality, marriage, motherhood, and personal autonomy, while the Sociology of Literature explains how these negotiations are conditioned by class position, political authority, economic structures, and institutional power. Together, they allow women's resistance to be understood not merely as individual acts of defiance but as responses to intersecting systems of domination operating within the social context of the New Order.

This integrated perspective is particularly relevant because the four analytical dimensions of this study—sexuality, marriage, education, and economic independence—operate simultaneously at personal and structural levels. Sexual autonomy, for example, is examined not only as a private experience but also as a site where patriarchal morality intersects with state ideology. Likewise, education and employment are analyzed as forms of agency whose meanings are shaped by unequal access to social resources and institutional recognition. The combined framework therefore enables a comparative analysis of how female agency develops differently across distinct social positions represented in the two novels.

Previous scholarship has established that both *Saman* and *Jalan Bandungan* portray women's struggles against patriarchal structures, although researchers have generally examined these novels through separate analytical priorities. Studies of Saman predominantly emphasize women's sexual autonomy, the disruption of bodily taboos, and resistance to authoritarian control, while also highlighting the novel's engagement with humanitarian activism and militarism (Sudiati, 2016; Nuri & Machdalena, 2020). In contrast, research on Jalan Bandungan consistently foregrounds domestic resilience, the experiences of the post-1965 priyayi middle class, and women's pursuit of education and professional identity through teaching (Hasanah, 2022; Wibisono, 2015). Other studies further demonstrate how Muryati's experiences reflect patriarchal structures through stereotyping, subordination, sexual violence, and existential struggles for autonomy (Bernadeta et al., 2015).

Taken together, these studies reveal an important pattern. Research on *Saman* tends to interpret resistance primarily through sexuality and political activism, whereas scholarship on *Jalan Bandungan* emphasizes education, employment, and domestic

endurance. Although both bodies of scholarship recognize women's agency, they rarely examine how bodily autonomy, class inequality, political authority, and economic independence operate as interconnected dimensions of resistance across the two novels. As a result, the relationship between urban women's struggles over sexuality and rural or socially marginalized women's negotiations of economic and institutional constraints remains insufficiently explored within a single comparative framework.

This study addresses that gap by examining women's resistance across four interconnected dimensions: the regulation of sexuality, marriage, education, and economic independence. Rather than treating these themes as separate issues, it investigates how they intersect with class position, political conditions, and institutional power under the New Order. In *Saman*, resistance emerges through challenges to the regulation of female sexuality, humanitarian engagement, and opposition to authoritarian structures. In *Jalan Bandungan*, resistance develops through education, professional work, financial self-reliance, and the reconstruction of identity after political stigma. Comparing these trajectories makes it possible to identify both shared patterns of patriarchal control and distinct forms of female agency shaped by different social locations.

The novelty of this study lies in its comparative literary approach, which integrates Feminist Literary Criticism and the Sociology of Literature to explain two complementary patterns of resistance within the same ideological context. Following comparative literary perspectives that emphasize the analysis of similarities and differences across texts (Remak, 1971; Wellek & Warren, 2014), this study argues that *Saman* predominantly represents personal, bodily, and political resistance, while *Jalan Bandungan* foregrounds institutional, educational, and economic resistance. By bringing these forms of agency into a single comparative framework, the study demonstrates how gender, class, politics, and economic autonomy interact in shaping women's resistance within literary representations of the New Order.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative method and a comparative literary approach to examine the representation of gender injustice and women's resistance in Ayu Utami's *Saman* and Nh. Dini's *Jalan Bandungan*. The qualitative method is appropriate because the study focuses on interpreting meanings, values, and ideologies represented in literary texts rather than quantifying textual features (Endraswara, 2011). The comparative approach examines similarities and differences in the representation of gendered power and female agency across the two novels, taking into account their respective narrative contexts and the social and political conditions associated with Indonesia's New Order.

The primary data consist of words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and narrative passages from the two novels that are relevant to gender injustice and women's resistance. Data were collected through documentation and repeated close reading. Each novel was read initially to establish familiarity with its plot, characters, setting, and narrative development. Subsequent readings focused on passages potentially related to the research questions. A passage was selected when it met at least one of three criteria: (1) it represented a gendered restriction, unequal relationship, or discriminatory practice affecting a female character; (2) it depicted a female character's response to,

negotiation of, or challenge to patriarchal authority; or (3) it connected gender relations with broader social structures, including class inequality, political power, institutional authority, or economic dependence. Each selected passage was recorded with its page number, character or narrator, narrative context, and preliminary analytical category. Page references were checked against the editions used in the study to maintain traceability. Passages were retained only when their relevance could be established through their textual context rather than through isolated words or assumptions about the characters' intentions.

For systematic analysis, the data were classified into two principal categories: gender injustice and women's resistance. Gender injustice refers to textual representations of unequal treatment, restrictions, or power relations that disadvantage women on the basis of gender. Its indicators include (1) control over women's bodies and sexuality, including restrictions on sexual autonomy and the imposition of gendered moral standards; (2) unequal expectations and authority within marriage, family, and motherhood; (3) unequal access to education and opportunities for intellectual development; (4) economic dependence, unequal access to paid work, and restrictions on financial autonomy; and (5) institutional or political practices that reinforce women's subordination or intersect with gender and class inequalities. Women's resistance refers to actions, decisions, or strategies through which female characters challenge, negotiate, or attempt to transform these unequal conditions. Its indicators include asserting bodily or sexual autonomy, questioning marital expectations, pursuing education, obtaining employment or financial independence, challenging institutional authority, and supporting collective or political struggles against injustice. These categories are analytically distinct but may overlap: a single passage may represent both gender injustice and resistance when it depicts an oppressive condition alongside a character's response to it.

Data analysis proceeded through an integrated sequence of thematic classification, contextual interpretation, and comparative synthesis. First, the selected passages were organized according to the indicators above. Second, each passage was examined through heuristic and hermeneutic reading. Heuristic reading involved interpreting the passage at the literal and linguistic levels, including its vocabulary, sentence structure, narrative events, speaker, and immediate context. This stage established what the passage explicitly represented. Hermeneutic reading involved interpreting its deeper implications in relation to recurring motifs, characterization, narrative conflicts, gender ideology, and the broader social conditions represented in the novel. Rather than treating these readings as separate procedures, the study used them sequentially and iteratively: initial textual meanings were established through heuristic reading and then reconsidered through hermeneutic interpretation.

These reading procedures were integrated with Feminist Literary Criticism and the Sociology of Literature. Feminist Literary Criticism was used to examine how the narratives construct gendered identities, patriarchal expectations, unequal power relations, and female agency. The Sociology of Literature situated these representations within the social structures and ideological conditions depicted in the novels, particularly class relations, economic exploitation, institutional authority, and the political context of the New Order. Accordingly, interpretations of individual characters' experiences were considered alongside the social and institutional forces that shaped

their choices. The analysis did not assume that literary representations directly reproduce historical reality; instead, it examined how narrative form, characterization, dialogue, and conflict construct particular representations of gender and power.

Finally, a comparative analysis was conducted across five dimensions: (1) control over women's bodies and sexuality; (2) marriage, family expectations, and motherhood; (3) access to education and intellectual development; (4) employment and economic independence; and (5) resistance to patriarchal, institutional, and political authority. For each dimension, the analysis identified the relevant textual evidence, interpreted its meaning within the novel, and compared the forms and consequences of women's resistance across the two works. The comparison examined both shared patterns of gender inequality and differences associated with the characters' social positions, economic circumstances, and political environments. The findings were then synthesized to explain how the novels represent distinct but potentially interconnected forms of female agency. Throughout the process, interpretations were checked against the surrounding narrative, the theoretical framework, and relevant scholarly literature to strengthen their coherence and textual grounding. The analysis followed the principles of thematic interpretation and comparative textual analysis discussed by Nurgiyantoro (2013) and Pradopo (2005).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The analysis reveals that Ayu Utami's Saman and Nh. Dini's Jalan Bandungan represent women's resistance as a multidimensional response to patriarchal relations, social inequality, and political authority during the New Order. Although the novels emphasize different experiences, their representations of resistance cannot be divided rigidly into personal and institutional forms. In Saman, bodily autonomy and sexual identity intersect with class privilege, economic interests, and political repression. In Jalan Bandungan, Muryati's pursuit of autonomy develops through marriage, education, employment, and the negotiation of social and political stigma. The comparison demonstrates that women's agency emerges through the interaction between intimate relationships and broader social structures. The following analysis examines these relationships through textual evidence from both novels.

Table 1. Representations of Gender Injustice and Women's Resistance in *Saman* and *Jalan Bandungan*

Analytical dimension	Saman: textual evidence	Jalan Bandungan: textual evidence	Comparative interpretation
Bodily autonomy and sexuality	Shakuntala challenges sexual stigma and celebrates her body (Utami, 2001, pp. 118, 128).	Muryati struggles to express her feelings about marital intimacy (Dini, p. 397).	Shakuntala asserts bodily autonomy, while Muryati negotiates intimacy within marriage.
Marriage and family expectations	Laila's assertion, "saya masih perawan," highlights gendered sexual morality (Utami, 2001, pp. 4–5).	Muryati describes expectations that wives accommodate their husbands' careers (Dini, p. 430).	Both novels expose unequal gender expectations in intimate and family relationships.
Education and professional development	Yasmin's professional position and Cok's business illustrate access to professional opportunities (Utami, 2001, p. 149).	Muryati considers establishing a children's learning group and seeking financial support (Dini, p. 430).	Professional and educational opportunities can expand women's choices beyond domestic roles.
Economic independence and class	Differences in women's professional and business opportunities indicate unequal access to resources (Utami, 2001, p. 149).	Muryati relies on her career, income, and property to sustain her independence (Dini, pp. 345, 380).	Economic resources support autonomy, although class and access to property shape women's options.
Political and institutional power	Demonstrations and soldiers in Medan establish a context of political tension (Utami, 2001, p. 178).	Muryati experiences social stigma associated with her husband's political involvement (Dini, p. 148).	Political circumstances affect women through public intimidation and social repercussions.
Religion and gender ideology	Shakuntala challenges moral judgments surrounding women's sexuality (Utami, 2001, p. 118).	Muryati's reflections reveal tensions between sexual expectations and personal desire (Dini, p. 327).	Moral norms can reinforce gender inequality but may also be questioned by women.
Forms and limitations of resistance	Shakuntala resists through bodily self-affirmation and challenges to conventional morality (Utami, 2001, pp. 118, 128).	Muryati pursues professional opportunities and economic independence (Dini, pp. 345, 380, 430).	Resistance takes different forms shaped by gender norms, personal relationships, and material resources.

Comparative Analysis

As shows in tabel 1, the comparison reveals that gender injustice in *Saman* and *Jalan Bandungan* operates through overlapping forms of bodily regulation, intimate relationships, professional expectations, and institutional power. The novels differ in narrative emphasis, but both portray women negotiating the boundaries imposed on their choices. In *Saman*, Shakuntala's recollection that her father and brother call her *"sundal"* and her declaration that *"hidup adalah menari dan menari pertama-tama*

adalah tubuh" (Utami, 2001, p. 118) expose the gendered language through which female sexuality is condemned. Her later statement, *"aku sedang merayakan tubuhku"* (p. 128), signals a deliberate reorientation from external judgment toward bodily self-definition. These passages make bodily autonomy a textual issue rather than simply an abstract feminist theme.

In *Jalan Bandungan*, women's autonomy is explored through the negotiation of intimacy and marital expectations. Muryati's account of her changing sexual relationship with Handoko reveals that the ability to identify dissatisfaction does not necessarily translate into the ability to articulate it within a relationship (Dini, p. 397). Her reflection that she has repeatedly accommodated her husband in matters of work and emotion, alongside the observation that wives are expected to yield for their husbands' careers, makes the unequal distribution of accommodation explicit (p. 430). Read together, these passages suggest that gender inequality may be reproduced through ordinary interpersonal expectations as well as through overt restrictions.

Professional activity and economic resources further differentiate the characters' opportunities for resistance. In *Saman*, Yasmin's professional position and Cok's business activities indicate access to resources that can support women's mobility and independence (Utami, p. 149). In *Jalan Bandungan*, Muryati considers developing an educational initiative and exploring a bank loan, demonstrating that professional aspirations require both personal initiative and access to financial resources (Dini, p. 430). Her later statement that she stands on her own feet and continues her career and daily life independently (p. 345) gives this independence a clear narrative expression. Nevertheless, the novels do not suggest that individual determination alone removes structural inequality. Economic autonomy depends partly on employment, property, social connections, and the ability to act without subordinating every decision to a partner's preferences.

Political and institutional conditions also shape the possibilities available to women. In *Saman*, the account of demonstrations and soldiers patrolling the streets of Medan situates the characters' experiences within a climate of political tension (Utami, p. 178). In *Jalan Bandungan*, the social repercussions of Muryati's husband's political involvement demonstrate how political stigma can extend into the lives and reputations of family members (Dini, p. 148). These passages should not be treated as sufficient proof of particular historical laws or administrative policies; rather, they show how the novels represent political power and its social consequences. Claims about the historical operation of the New Order state should be corroborated separately with relevant historical scholarship.

Overall, the comparison indicates that women's resistance in these novels cannot be divided neatly into personal and institutional categories. Shakuntala's assertion of bodily autonomy, Muryati's negotiation of marital expectations, and Muryati's pursuit of professional and financial independence all involve interactions between individual agency and wider social structures. The novels also portray different conditions of possibility: the resources available to a character, the expectations embedded in intimate relationships, and the political environment influence which choices can be made and at what cost. This comparison therefore foregrounds resistance as a situated process, shaped by gender, class, intimate relationships, and institutional power.

Discussion

The Construction of Gender Injustice and Resistance in Saman Deconstructing Patriarchal Morality: The Dichotomy of the Body and Virginity

Ayu Utami uses the character of Shakuntala to dismantle the myths created by patriarchy that shackle women's bodily autonomy. From childhood, patriarchal social constructs were instilled in Shakuntala by her parents through the doctrine that virginity is the sole commodity of value to be offered to a husband in exchange for economic security—a conventional concept of marriage that the adult Shakuntala later defines as "hypocritical prostitution."

This cultural oppression is brilliantly metaphorized through Shakuntala's mother's admonition, which refers to daughters as "Chinese porcelain." This concept creates a skewed gender division: women are positioned as fragile objects that must not crack, while men are likened to ivory—whose cracks never diminish their self-worth. This dichotomy reveals that the myth of virginity is not merely a matter of private morality, but rather an ideological reproductive mechanism aligned with "state motherhood"—the female body is managed as a reproductive asset that must remain "intact" for the sake of the legitimacy of the family and the state (Suryakusuma, 2011).

Shakuntala launches a radical resistance against this moral control by celebrating the absolute sovereignty of her body. She rejects the ownership of a woman's body by the figure of the father or husband. For Shakuntala, dancing is a medium of existential liberation through which she freely explores her skin and bones. She asserts:

> *"Tubuhku menari. Sebab menari adalah eksplorasi yang tak habis-habis dengan kulit dan tulang-tulangku, yang dengannya aku rasakan perih, ngilu, gigil, juga nyaman, dan kelak ajal. Tubuhku menari. Ia menuruti bukan nafsu melainkan gairah. Yang Sublim. Libidinal. Labirin." (Utami, 2013, pp. 118–119)*
> "My body dances. For dance is an inexhaustible exploration of my skin and bones, through which I feel pain, ache, shivering, as well as comfort, and, in time, death. My body dances. It obeys not lust but passion. The Sublime. The Libidinal. The Labyrinth." (Utami, 2013, pp. 118–119)

Shakuntala also resists by refusing to use her father's last name on official immigration documents, which she views as a patriarchal ownership tying her down. This is in line with radical feminism that places the body as the primary site of liberation (Beauvoir, 1989; Wolf, 1991).

Laila, in contrast, stands for a woman trapped in the moral ambivalence between the burning sexual desire and inner repression in the form of the doctrine of sin and the value of virginity. Laila is always ridden by guilt even as she longs for the physical warmth of Sihar, a married man. Laila's decision to emigrate and meet Sihar in Central Park, New York, at the age of thirty was not merely a physical journey but an escape from the "terror of values" that constrained her in Indonesia. In New York, thousands of miles from Jakarta, Laila intended to consciously surrender her virginity consciously as an act of independent sexual agency:

"Sihar, umurku sudah tiga puluh. Dan kita di New York. Beribu-ribu mil dari Jakarta. Tak ada orang tua, tak ada istri. Tak ada dosa. Kecuali pada Tuhan, barangkali." (Utami, 2013, p.30)
"Sihar, I am already thirty. And we are in New York. Thousands of miles from Jakarta. No parents, no wife. No sin. Except to God, perhaps." (Utami, 2013, p.30)

By positioning women as subjects who desire—not merely as objects of desire—*Saman* overturns the hierarchy of desire that has long favored men and rejects the construction of the "male gaze" that positions women as objects of the gaze (Mulvey, 1975).

Structural Violence of the New Order and the Exploitation of the Lower Class's Bodies

Ayu Utami expands her feminist analysis by combining feminist literary criticism with the sociology of New Order literature. This novel demonstrates that repression against women does not occur solely in the domestic sphere but is a direct extension of state-backed militarism and corporate greed.

The character Upi embodies the most extreme form of gender injustice: double marginalization. Upi is a portrait of a lower-class woman from the Sei Kumbang transmigration plantation who has an intellectual disability. Her physically unrestrained sexual behavior leads her family—who are poor—to label her as "possessed" and confine her in a cramped, foul-smelling wooden goat pen.

This injustice is viciously exploited by the corporate power of PT Anugrah Lahan Makmur (ALM)—backed by the New Order military apparatus—to evict residents from their rubber plantations and convert the land to oil palm plantations. Upi's body is brutally raped by two company plantation security guards. The rape of Upi, as well as that of Anson's wife, was conceptualized as militaristic and corporate physical terror intended to intimidate residents who refused to surrender their land certificates :

"Dua laki-laki menjebol rantai pintu rumah Upi dan memperkosa gadis yang kini telah dua puluh satu tahun. Mereka meninggalkan pagutan-pagutan merah di dadanya." (Utami, 2013, p.90)
"Two men broke the chain on the door of Upi's house and raped the girl, who was now twenty-one years old. They left red bite marks on her chest." (Utami, 2013, p.90)

Upi's case illustrates the intersectionality of oppression: as a woman, a person with a disability, and a member of the lower class. The sexual violence she experienced was not an isolated incident, but rather the product of collaboration between state apparatus and corporations. Through an academic discussion at Columbia University, the character of Trulin Nababan presents a sociological critique that the New Order structure domesticated women through state-sponsored women's organizations (such as Dharma Wanita or Persit). This structure placed women in the shadow of their husbands' rank, reduced their roles in the sociopolitical sphere, and marginalized the issue of domestic violence as a private matter that should not be subject to legal intervention.

Upi's case demonstrates that personal-bodily resistance (the Saman model) has class boundaries: the successful liberation of the body for urban intellectuals does not necessarily extend to marginalized women like Upi. The sexual freedom of urban intellectuals does not automatically equate to protection for the bodies of poor women, who are in fact the most vulnerable to violence perpetrated by the state and capital.

Psycho-Theological Trauma and the Deconstruction of Wisanggeni Saman's Faith

Athanasius Wisanggeni's life journey—which led to his transformation into Saman—was overshadowed by deep childhood trauma, the loss of his mother, and an existential struggle regarding the existence of God. Wisanggeni grew up witnessing his mother, Raden Ayu, frequently experiencing a state of "suwung" (an empty soul). His mother gave birth to several babies who always mysteriously vanished without any bleeding. The tragedy of his younger sister's death on the third day triggered young Wisanggeni's psycho-theological rage.

> *"Jabang itu lenyap tanpa tetesan darah, seperti dihirup oleh atmosfir." (Utami, 2013, p. 51)*
> "The baby disappeared without a drop of blood, as though it had been sucked into the atmosphere." (Utami, 2013, p. 51)

This event becomes one of the earliest sources of Wisanggeni's psychological trauma. The unexplained disappearance of the baby creates a conflict between medical explanations, religious belief, and supernatural interpretations.His mother later died of uterine cancer. A sense of guilt, the trauma of losing his younger siblings, and deep empathy for Upi's misfortune were what drove Wisanggeni to become a parish priest.

> *"Ibunya tetap tak terusik, seperti arca batu di sebuah candi yang purba." (Utami, 2013, p. 66)*
> "His mother remained unmoved, like a stone statue in an ancient temple." (Utami, 2013, p. 66)

As a parish priest (Father Wis), Wisanggeni felt that dogmatic faith and the rosary alone were not enough to resolve the concrete poverty and oppression experienced by the farmers of Sei Kumbang due to the ALM corporation's monopoly. Wisanggeni formulated a new theological concept that he called "engagement" or "merging love." For him, God does not work through stone tablets containing rigid moral laws, but rather through humanity's creative capacity to love and bear the suffering of others in a concrete way. After enduring incommunicado detention and brutal physical torture at the hands of security forces, Wisanggeni went through a profound crisis of faith. When the ALM factory was set ablaze by Anson and Wisanggeni managed to escape, Anson praised him, saying,

> *"Abang pasti cepat sembuh. Tuhan menyelamatkan Abang berkali-kali," pemuda itu memegang lengannya sebelum pergi".*
> *"Tidak, Anson. Bukan Tuhan. Kalau Tuhan, kenapa dia tidak menyelamatkan Upi..." (Utami, 2013, p. 113).*

"You will surely recover soon, Brother. God has saved you many times," the young man said, holding his arm before leaving.
"No, Anson. It wasn't God. If it were God, why didn't He save Upi..." (Utami, 2013, p. 113).

For Saman, Upi's suffering—as a disabled person who died tragically amid the New Order's greed—shattered the concept of theodicy (God's justice). Saman chose to lay aside his priestly robes, leave the repressive and sluggish church hierarchy, and fight within the underground human rights movement as Saman.

The Construction of Gender Injustice and Socio-Economic Resistance in Jalan Bandungan

Socio-Political Resistance to the Stigma of 1965 Political Prisoners

In *Jalan Bandungan*, Muryati (Mur) faces systemic gender injustice in the aftermath of the 1965 political events. When her husband, Widodo, was arrested on charges of involvement in a leftist movement, Muryati immediately faced a double social punishment. The community, relatives, and even the bureaucracy ostracized her by labeling her the "wife of a communist" or a "member of Gerwani." Muryati was excluded from public spaces, her work permits were blocked, and her status as a teacher was suspended for years through an intimidating investigation by the New Order security apparatus. The stigma of being the "wife of a political prisoner" was a double gender-based punishment—Muryati was punished not for her own actions, but for her relationship with a man. Even before the resistance, marriage had reduced her identity, as the narrator emphasizes:

"Sejak pernikahanku, sedikit demi sedikit aku menyadari kebenaran kata-kata ayahku dulu. Muryati perlahan-lahan menghilang di balik bayangan Widodo. Dan aku juga menyadari bahwa aku tidak tahu harus berbuat bagaimana...." (Dini, 2009, p. 107)
"Since my marriage, little by little I realized the truth of my father's words back then. Muryati was gradually disappearing behind the shadow of Widodo. And I also realized that I did not know what to do...." (Dini, 2009, p. 107)

This sentence serves as a powerful metaphor for the loss of a woman's subjectivity within a patriarchal marriage. Muryati not only lost her name but also lost control over her life's decisions. Her husband's control over her finances and work is underscored in the following dialogue:

"Katanya, dalam keluarga, suamilah yang mengambil prakarsa. Istri harus menuruti keputusan suami..." (Dini, 2009, p. 69)
"In a family, it is the husband who takes the initiative. The wife must obey her husband's decisions...." (Dini, 2009, p. 69)

Muryati's resistance is demonstrated through her intellectual resilience and career agency. She refuses to succumb to social stigma; she fights hard to regain her teaching status, pursues higher education in English, and ultimately secures a

scholarship to the Netherlands. This strategy was a reconstruction of her identity—she proved that she was not merely an extension of her husband's ideology. This agency also manifested in a bold legal action when she filed for divorce from Widodo after her husband was sent to Nusakambangan. In accordance with marriage law, Muryati asserted her autonomy because she had not received financial or emotional support for years:

> *"Sementara itu aku ingin menikmati kesendirianku, yang rupa-rupanya juga berarti kebebasanku untuk menentukan sikap dan perbuatanku." (Dini, 2009, p. 137)*
> "I want to enjoy my solitude, which apparently also means my freedom to determine my stance and actions.´(Dini, 2009, p. 137)

This statement marks Muryati's shift from a passive object to a subject who is aware of her rights. Solitude, which was initially considered a disgrace, is instead reinterpreted as a space of freedom. This gender consciousness reaches its peak when she realizes her systemic entanglement:

> *"Dalam keadaan saya seperti sekarang, apa pun yang saya kerjakan, saya tetap terikat. Itulah ketidakadilan. Atau anggaplah sebagai tambahan ketidaksamaan nasib perempuan dan lelaki." (Dini, 2009, p. 267)*
> "In my current situation, no matter what I do, I remain bound. That is injustice. Or consider it as an additional inequality between the fates of women and men" (Dini, 2009, p. 267)

Women's Economic Independence and Class Struggle: Mrs. Muryati

Muryati tactically countered economic injustice. Faced with the limitations of her pension and the loss of financial support from her son-in-law following Widodo's detention, Ibu Muryati broke the grip of the priyayi class in her neighborhood by opening a small shop selling kitchen spices next to her house. This decision was initially viewed by her priyayi neighbors as "a stain on their reputation," and her sons felt ashamed that their mother had become a "bakul" (small-scale vendor).

Opening the shop was a symbolic deconstruction of the class hierarchy—Mrs. Muryati rejected the position of a "dependent priyayi woman" and chose to become an economic agent. This was also a critique of the notion that a woman's honor lies in the class status of her husband or father, rather than in her own productive capacity. Mrs. Muryati's resolve is reflected in her refusal to depend on anyone:

> *Jangan sekali-kali hal itu kauulangi!"....." Kita tidak boleh menggantungkan diri kepada siapa pun!" (Dini, 2009, p. 86-87)*
> "Never say that again! ... We must not depend on anyone! (Dini, 2009, p. 86-87)

This principle of self-reliance became a legacy of values instilled in her children. The spice shop successfully provided for the livelihood and education of her children and grandchildren, proving that women's economic autonomy is a tangible foundation for broader freedom.

Sri's Critique of the State's Gender-Biased Laws

The character Sri constructs a scathing legal challenge against the New Order's gender-biased laws. While handling her divorce from her cheating husband, Tom, Sri protests state regulations that degrade the legal status of adult women to that of children:

> *".....Aku bosan dengan aturan itu. Sedangkan kalau sudah sendirian, malahan bebas. Keputusan apa pun, aku tandatangani, jaminan rumah atau tanahku sendiri. Lebih leluasa. Tidak sakit hati menunggu saat dia datang atau 'berkenan' memberi tandatangannya." (Dini, 2009, p. 181)*
> "...I am sick of those rules. Whereas when you are alone, you are actually free. Any decision, I sign it myself—using my own house or land as collateral. There is more freedom. There is no heartache from waiting for him to arrive or 'graciously deign' to give his signature." (Dini, 2009, p. 181)
> *"....Lebih-lebih secara profesional, perempuan tidak diakui berhak menandatangani kertas-kertas penting jika punya suami." (Dini, 2009, p. 188)*
> "...Moreover, from a professional standpoint, women are not recognized as having the right to sign important documents if they have a husband." (Dini, 2009, p. 188)

Sri protests the New Order's biased rules, under which a wife needs her husband's signature of consent to apply for a bank loan or obtain a passport. Conversely, a husband can make financial decisions or obtain a passport without requiring his wife's consent at all. Sri's lawsuit was a critique of state laws that constructed women as second-class citizens. Sri fought this injustice by filing for a legal divorce through the legal system to gain full professional and financial independence.

Solidarity Among Female Characters as a Survival Strategy

In addition to individual resistance, *Jalan Bandungan* highlights solidarity among female characters as a crucial survival strategy. Muryati's friendships with Ganik, Sri, Siswi, and Mur form a support network that sustains her through political stigma and economic hardship. The character Ganik even voices criticism of domestic inequality:

> *"Kata Ganik, diakui atau tidak oleh masyarakat, dalam rumah tangga, selalu pihak wanita yang dijadikan kalahan." (Dini, 2009, p. 207)*
> "Whether society acknowledges it or not, within the household, it is always the woman who is made the loser." (Dini, 2009, p. 207)

This solidarity demonstrates that women's resistance is not merely individual but also collective—the friends support one another both materially and morally. This underscores that women's agency in *Jalan Bandungan* is not monolithic but multi-layered: both individual-institutional and collective-social.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of comparative literary analysis, the novels *Saman* and *Jalan Bandungan* make valuable theoretical contributions to the development of feminist literature in Indonesia. Both novels demonstrate strong female agency in deconstructing New Order-era gender oppression. Their commonality lies in their refusal to portray women as passive objects within the military regime's patriarchal system. Their differences lie in the focus of their resistance: Ayu Utami views emancipation as beginning with internal-bodily liberation, the deconstruction of sexual morality dogmas, and a theology of engagement, while Nh. Dini views liberation as something to be achieved through external socio-economic empowerment and confrontation with the state's gender-biased legal system. Both novels represent two complementary phases and strategies of emancipation. This research demonstrates that women's resistance is not monolithic but rather evolves dynamically on both personal and institutional levels.

This study indicates that *Saman* and *Jalan Bandungan* are a process of female emancipation that is dynamic and multidimensional. Saman emphasizes bodily autonomy, sexual agency, and the refusal of patriarchal moral and religious doctrines, while Jalan Bandungan emphasizes education, economic independence, legal action, and resistance to political stigma. The novels together illustrate how women's resistance operates on both personal and institutional levels and how class, political conditions, and access to social resources shape this resistance. Their comparative significance is to show that sustainable gender liberation requires not only bodily control but also structural reforms that ensure women's legal, economic and political autonomy.

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