

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature is a broad and complex term that can be understood in many ways, but it generally refers to written or spoken works of art that express ideas, emotions, and experiences through language. Literature encompasses a wide range of creative and intellectual expressions, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, drama, essays, and more.

Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel "*Bumi Manusia*" is a celebrated literary work that offers a poignant portrayal of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia during the 19th century. Against this historical backdrop, the novel delves into various socio-cultural, political, and ethical aspects of the time. One of the central themes that underpins the narrative is the caste system, which plays a pivotal role in shaping the lives and destinies of the characters within the story.

The caste system as depicted in the novel is not only a reflection of Dutch colonial rule but also a commentary on the tensions, divisions, and aspirations of the Indonesian people during this period. It highlights the rigid social hierarchy, the privileges of the priyayi (aristocracy), and the struggles of the non-priyayi and native population. Furthermore, it explores the experiences of mixed-race individuals who occupy an ambiguous space within this societal structure.

Understanding the caste system's implementation within the novel is crucial for gaining insights into the historical and socio-cultural context of Dutch colonial Indonesia. Pramoedya Ananta Toer's work not only serves as a literary

masterpiece but also as a historical document that sheds light on the complexities of colonialism, social hierarchies, and the struggles of individuals navigating a system that determines their opportunities and limitations. As such, the background of the study encompasses a recognition of the novel's historical and literary significance, making it a valuable subject for in-depth analysis and exploration.

The application of the caste system in the novel "*Bumi manusia*" by Pramoedya Ananta Toer involves a deep understanding of the historical, social, and cultural context of the Dutch East Indies at the beginning of the 20th century, as well as the significance of this theme in Indonesian literary works.

1. Dutch colonialism in the Dutch East Indies

The Dutch East Indies was a Dutch colonial colony that had a deep impact on the social, economic, and political structure of its society. This colonialism not only affected people's daily lives but also created strict class hierarchies, including the implementation of the caste system.

2. Javanese Caste System

The caste system was the main basis for the social division of Dutch East Indies society at that time. This created significant social gaps between various classes, such as priyayi, aristocrats, and ordinary Javanese. This system influences all aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships, individual aspirations, and opportunities in society.

3. Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Literary Influence

Pramoedya Ananta Toer is known as one of the great Indonesian authors who consistently raises social and political issues in his work. "*Bumi Manusia*" is part of his Buru tetralogy, which is a critique of the

injustices of the colonial system and the existing social structure. An understanding of the colonial context and caste system in these literary works will help open the door to in-depth analysis.

4. Theme's Relevance to Literary and Historical Studies

The theme of the application of the caste system in "*Bumi Manusia*" is still relevant to study in the context of Indonesian literature and history. Through analyzing this novel, researchers can understand how the caste system was understood, implemented, and maintained in Dutch East Indies colonial society, as well as how this is reflected in the experiences of the characters in the novel.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the description above, this study concerns the caste system in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel "*Bumi Manusia*". The statements of this problem are formulated as follows:

1. To what extent does the caste system influence individual agency and opportunities for social mobility?
2. How do characters resist or challenge the established social order?
3. How is the caste system reflected in the social structure of the Dutch East Indies society depicted in the novel "*Bumi Manusia*"?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study constitute the answers to the above statement of the problem. They are as follows:

1. To find out to what extent the caste system influences individual agency and opportunities for social mobility.

2. To find out how characters reject or challenge the established social order.
3. To find out the description of the caste system in the social structure of Dutch East Indies society as depicted in the novel "*Bumi Manusia*"

1.4 Scope of the Study

This research describes the caste system in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel "*Bumi Manusia*". This research was made to investigate the historical accuracy of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's depiction of the caste system in colonial Indonesia during the 19th century. Also to examine the socio-political conditions that contributed to the establishment and perpetuation of the caste system in the novel.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study on the caste system in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel "*Bumi Manusia*" holds significant academic and societal relevance, such as contributing to a deeper understanding of the historical context of colonial Indonesia by examining the portrayal of the caste system in the novel and shedding light on the social structures and dynamics of the time, highlighting the injustices inherent in caste-based societies, and fostering awareness and discourse on issues related to social stratification, discrimination, and the struggle for equality.

It is hoped that this research will provide a deeper understanding of the caste system in the context of Dutch East Indies colonial society and its impact on individuals and social relationships. The results of this research can also contribute to the study of Indonesian literature and an understanding of the socio-political dynamics of that period.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The Caste System

The caste system is so different from our own social system in its central ideology that the modern reader is doubtless rarely inclined to study it fully. If he is very ignorant of sociology or of a very militant turn of mind, his interest may be confined to wanting the destruction or disappearance of an institution, which is a denial of the rights of man and appears as an obstacle to the economic progress of five hundred million people. It is a remarkable fact that, quite apart from the Indians, no Westerner who has lived in India, whether the most fervent reformer or the most zealous missionary has ever, so far is known, attempted or recommended the abolition pure and simple of the caste system, either because of an acute consciousness of the positive functions fulfilled by the system, as in the case of the Abbe Dubois, or simply because such a thing appeared too impracticable (Dumont, 1980).

Caste in the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (2009) is called: Caste is a group resulting from division of society based on class differences of wealth, rank, rights, profession, or job. A more extensive description is found in Encyclopedia Americana (1980), Volume 5, page 775; the origin of the word is "Casta", which in Spanish and Portuguese means class, race, descent, class, separation, wall, or boundary. Meanwhile, in the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI, 2024), caste is a group (level or degree) of people in a religious society.

According to Barth (1969), caste is a form of social stratification described by him in his research on the Pathan people of the Swat valley in northern Pakistan. Where caste has a certain form of strata or levels hierarchical. Another similar view regarding caste was also put forward by Weber (2006) as one aspect of social structure, but was denied by Louis Dumont. According to him, “In order to understand caste, we must see it as an integrated part of a social and cultural totality; hence, we cannot speak of castes in isolation from the specific cultural contexts in which they emerge. Caste is one aspect of Indian culture and must be understood in a way that respects Hindu socio-cultural totality”.

Louis Dumont (1980) expanded his fieldwork at Pralayai Kallars in South India in 1949 (*Une sous-caste de l'Inde du Sud*) and the ideological literature on caste to produce a theoretical study of caste and hierarchy, *Homo Hierarchicus*. Dumont engaged with Indian historiography and the sociological theories of JH Hutton, MN Srinivas, McKim Marriott, Emile Durkheim, and Eugene Weber, with the question of “caste” as the main problem. Dumont argues that “caste is not social stratification but rather a hierarchical system based on inequality”. Here, Dumont tries to move from exotic Western concepts of social class to understanding caste as a social fact. In total, Dumont attempted to isolate, study, and develop new theories about hierarchy and, essentially, what pure and impure concepts are believed to be major ideological aspects of the Indian caste system.

The term caste comes from Latin *castus*, which means main, holy, immaculate, pure, chivalrous, and honorable. Then the word *castus* in the Portuguese language turned into *casta*, which means descent or race. The

possibility of understanding casta according to the Portuguese language is then used by Westerners to distinguish or classify social groups that exist in India. (Mandelbaum, 1970)

According to Dahrendorf (2001), the term class was first introduced by the rulers of ancient Rome, and throughout its history, this term has undergone a shift in meaning. The ancient Romans used the term in the context of classifying taxpayers. They divided Roman society into two groups: the *assidui*, or the rich, and the *proletariat*, or the poor.

2.1.1 The Caste System Influence

The caste system has a wide influence on various aspects of life, including social, economic, and cultural stratification.

a. Social Stratification

The caste system creates a very rigid social hierarchy where individuals are grouped based on caste inherited from birth. It affects a person's social interaction and social status significantly. According to Louis Dumont in his book *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, caste is a hierarchy based on inequality that is integral to the religious life of society.

b. Economy

The caste system determines the type of work that a person can take on. Higher castes, such as Brahmins, have access to better and more economically valued jobs, while lower castes, such as Sudra and Dalit, are often limited to undervalued and low-income jobs. In research by Susan Bayly in *Caste, Society, and Politics in*

India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age, it is described how the caste system was used to strengthen social and economic control during the British colonial era.

c. Education

Access to education is also greatly influenced by caste. Higher castes tend to have better access to quality education, while lower castes face discrimination and difficulties in accessing a good education. An article by Rosalind O'Hanlon in *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology* shows how caste affects educational opportunities and social mobility.

d. Discrimination and Marginalization

The caste system leads to the discrimination and marginalization of certain groups, especially Dalits. They often experience unfair treatment and marginalization in various aspects of life, including work, housing, and social interaction. The book *Untouchable: Dalits in Modern India* by S.M. Michael provides an in-depth insight into the experience of discrimination experienced by Dalits in India.

e. Culture and Traditions

The caste system also influences culture and tradition. Religious rituals, customs, and social customs are often governed by caste norms. According to research in *The Caste System of Northern India* by Sir Herbert Risley, the caste system plays an important role in determining the role of individuals in religious ceremonies and customs.

f. Marriage and Social Relationships

Intercaste marriage is often considered taboo or not allowed, and individuals are expected to marry people of the same caste. The book *Caste in Contemporary India* by Surinder S. Jodhka discusses how intercaste marriage is still a sensitive and controversial issue in India.

2.1.2 The Structure of the Caste System during the Dutch Colonial Period

The caste system in Indonesia during the Dutch colonial period had unique and different characteristics compared to the caste system in India. During the Dutch colonization, the social structure in Indonesia was based more on ethnic grouping, social status, and roles in colonial society. The following is an explanation of the structure and function of the caste system during the Dutch colonial period:

a. Ethnic and Social Grouping

The Netherlands implemented an ethnic grouping system known as the "racial" or "nation" system that divided the community into three main groups: European, Foreign Eastern (mainly Chinese and Arab), and Indigenous. Each of these groups had different rights and obligations in colonial society.

b. Colonial Social Structure

In this structure, Europeans occupy the highest positions with privileges and access to better education, jobs, and facilities. The Foreign Eastern Group, especially the Chinese, had an important role in trade and economics but remained below the Europeans in

the social hierarchy. Indigenous people are at the bottom, with very limited access to education and decent work.

c. Hierarchy in Indigenous Peoples

Among the natives themselves, there was a social stratification based on social status and traditional roles, such as nobility, commoners, and slaves. Local nobles or elites often worked with the Dutch to manage and control the common people, strengthening their position in the social hierarchy.

2.1.3 The Function of the Caste System during the Dutch Colonial Period

a. Colonial Control and Management

This system of ethnic and social grouping helped the Dutch in manage and control the large population in Indonesia. By dividing society into separate groups, the Netherlands could more easily supervise and control social and political activity.

b. Economic Exploitation

This caste system also functions to exploit human and economic resources. Indigenous groups, especially those at the bottom of the list, are often employed in low-wage menial jobs on plantations, mines, and infrastructure projects. This greatly benefited the colonial economy, which depended on cheap labor.

c. Restrictions on Education and Social Mobility

Access to education and social mobility is severely restricted based on ethnic and caste groupings. Europeans had access to high-

quality schools and universities, while natives had very limited access, which reinforced social and economic inequalities.

d. Social and Political Mapping

The system is also used to map and segment populations based on political and social loyalties. Local nobles and elites loyal to the colonial government were granted rights and privileges, while those deemed rebellious or disloyal were exiled or punished.