

***SHOULD THE MODERN INDONESIAN GOVERNMENT
BE MORE ACCEPTING OF THE DIVERGENT
POLITICAL VIEWS OF ITS WRITERS?***

A Research Report



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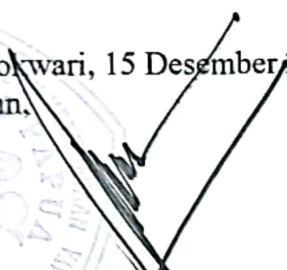
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INTRODCUTION

The freedom of writing in a democratic country is a common thing, but in some countries writers are struggling to gain it. Writers in Indonesia experience such struggle for a long time even until these recent years. The turning point happened in 1998 when the New Order under Soeharto regime was collapsed. Since then, the reformation era in Indonesia brings multiple effects to its citizens. One big change is the more freedom for Indonesian literary writers in expressing their ideas through their works. Previously, Indonesian writers were really oppressed by the government. They could not write freely, especially literary works with politics theme. This strict policy is made to prevent the publication of books that suspected containing doctrines or opinions assumed to against the government. Nowadays Indonesian government seems to give more freedom to its writers, but to what extent? This essay presents arguments whether modern Indonesian government should be more accepting of the divergent political views of its writers? It argues that modern Indonesian government should be more accepting of the divergent political views of its writers. The disintegration versus democracy and then the literature with two-side influence will be discussed in this essay.

DISINTEGRATION VERSUS DEMOCRACY

Literary works are open for various interpretation and analysis. Since they originated from human experiences and imaginations, every reader can draw their own understanding about the works they read. This kind of free interpretation and analysis can cause misunderstanding and misleading. Seaward states, “When readers read a literary text that requires interpretation and reinterpretation, the overall meaning of the writing is usually vague”. Literary works bring many messages and the readers often misinterpret them. It is a common thing since the readers of literary works come from every level of society. The gap in the level of education, understanding, and perspectives are tending to create the different understanding, and then debate. Some famous Indonesian novels such as *Atheis* by Achdiat Kartamihardja, which mainly tells about a person who does not trust in God, and *Ayat- ayat Cinta* by Habiburahman El Shirazy, a novel about polygamy, got various responses from the readers. Some of them believe that these literary works are controversial since they contain sensitive issue about religion. These are common reponse from the reader because Achdiat Kartamihardja and Habiburahman El Shirazy bring certain themes which are not commonly written in their era. The theme of their works is uncommon to Indonesian community. This can lead to a longer debate since the understandings of a literary work is put in the reader’s perspectives and opinions. Actually there many of Indonesian literary works which were assumed to spark controversy for their unusual content. This is a potential issue that can cause the disintegration between people from the different background in Indonesia.

The role of parliament is needed to accommodate the aspirations from the citizens. Dealing with this kind of response, government usually takes certain action which deals with the national interest. The threat of disintegration usually becomes a

common reason. Some literary works were banned by government in the past. The works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, a famous Indonesian literary writer were banned since the government accused him to contain Communist doctrine in most of his works. Matthews (2009), states:

“The effect upon the general sense of literary freedom caused by such individual acts of government intervention cannot be measured. But at various times actions initiated or sanctioned by governments and their agencies have made it clear that the state has disapproval of some kinds of literature”

The government can show its disagreement or disapproval by direct action in the name of national integrity. In Indonesia, this kind of action of government is sometimes acceptable since it can stabilize the controversy among the people. By doing such action the government can avoid the disintegration caused by some certain people.

However, some other readers argue that such kind of literary works are acceptable because the writers are not trying to offense one certain religion. They consider Indonesia as a democratic country that allows its citizens to express their ideas and opinions freely. Beetham (2005, p.2) states that “ Democracy can be simply understood as a procedure for taking decisions in any group, association or society, whereby all members have an equal right to say and to make their opinions count.” Beside in making decision, everyone in one group is also given rights in expressing ideas. Since Indonesia has established itself as a country that based on democracy, as implementation of this terminology, the freedom of every citizen is highly respected.

The same treatment also must be given to the literary writer who represents the condition of a country. Furthermore, Beetham (2005, p.6) says “There is freedom of expression and pluralism of independent media, contributing to energetic public

debate, as opposed to officially controlled media with censorship restrictions”. The literary writers are free to express their ideas and opinions which move the developing debate among people in society against the tight regulations of censorship in media. Therefore, the debate is something acceptable in a democratic society in order to find the more suitable role of people and government in the nation development. The freedom of expression is put together with the personal obligation to community. In this case literary writers can play their role effectively by their works.

Nowadays, Indonesian government seems to give more freedom to its writer to express their ideas and opinions, but so far literary works which contain different doctrines are hard to find. The tendency of Indonesian contemporary literary writers is to bring the spirit of equality, gender, and modernism in their works. This is actually a good climate for Indonesia which starts to improve itself as a better democratic country after the reformation. However, the government itself must consider the prospect of freedom given to the citizens and especially literary writers. There must be more affordable regulations about literary works and literary writers’ limitation of rights and obligation.

LITERATURE WITH TWO SIDES INFLUENCE

Literature can bring negative impact when it represents certain political interest/ view of certain group. Sometimes literary writer stand on a certain political interest or view. This position sometimes obscures the role of literary writer. Toer (1996) states that:

“Here we are faced with literature in its relation to the state, and its utilization by the state, functioning for the glorification of [the state's] own works. Passed down from generation to generation the result is to deny the progression of ages, to bestow an unnecessary historical burden, to make people think that the past was better than the present.”

Literary works become the tools of states to propagate their will to the citizens. In another words literature is used to represent the government supremacy. The citizens were shown good side of states and in that way deny the truth of progress and history of the nation. This can happened when literary writers position themselves in certain political interest or view. This can cause clash between groups of people, especially among the different political group. Since literary works are widely read by almost every level of society, different perceptions and responses are undeniable. Toer (1996) asserts:

“As Machiavelli put it, this kind of literature becomes an indirect instrument of Power, so that society will pay no attention to the power of the state. In short, so that society will not be political, will not care about politics. Literature of this second category brings its readers to a complete halt.”

In this stage literature can give very negative impact to society. The power of states which actually the camouflage of certain politics groups and interests has changed the pure meaning and aim of literature.

However, literature has great value. This value comes from the experiences and imagination of the writers which describe their appreciation and ideas about human's life. The experiences of human are the main theme of every literary works. Literature can give pleasure, educate, and influence the reader (*Understanding Literature*, 2009). The aspect of entertainment is very crucial in a literary work. People can enjoy literary works when they feel comfort with it. Then it gives them happiness and inspirations. In a broader sense, literature can influence person, society, and even country's way of thinking. A monumental literary works that gives big influence to a country is *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel about slavery by Harriet Beecher Stowe, an American woman writer. This novel was written in 18th century, the time where slavery was a common thing in American plantations. Stowe wrote these novels when the country was almost divided as a result of debate about the human rights,

especially slave rights. This novel later becomes an icon of slavery abolition movement in United States in 19th century. Badruddin (2007), says that: “Literature of a country is also the most easily available and most suitable material for educating the young generation of the country”. The value of educating literature can be found in many Indonesian literary works. This is very important since this country has experienced gloomy times of literary works banning. There was time where literature could not play its role in educating, inspiring, and entertaining people. But, it was something happened in the past and Indonesian citizens need to learn something from it. The history of Indonesia cannot be separated from its literary history as identity of Indonesian people. The reflection of Indonesian culture and national identity can be seen through its literary works.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian has experience great changes in literary writing freedom writers since the Reformation in 1998. The threat of disintegration of freedom in writing literary works contains political issue is a common circumstance in a democratic country like Indonesia. The government needs to be more proactive in making affordable regulations about authorship. In order to avoid the negative impact of literature, literary writers need to position themselves as the producer of works that can educate, entertain, and inspire people. In order to position its role, the literary writers must put themselves to their original function as the pure representatives of people’s condition and aspirations. As a result the government should be more accepting to the divergence of political view of its writers.

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