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## The Caste System in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Novel *Bumi Manusia*

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### Abstract

This study examines the portrayal and implications of the caste system in *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Set during Dutch colonial rule in nineteenth-century Indonesia, the novel presents a nuanced depiction of how hierarchical social structures shape individual identities, relationships, and broader societal interactions. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, this research focuses on close textual analysis to explore key aspects of the caste system within the narrative. These include its structural elements, the positioning of characters within different social strata, and its role in sustaining inequality and power relations. The findings show that colonial practices imposed rigid hierarchies that dehumanized indigenous people by constructing them as inherently inferior. Such conditions not only reinforced social divisions but also influenced how individuals perceived themselves and others within the colonial order. In response, the colonized developed forms of resistance that extended beyond physical confrontation. They utilized intellectual, moral, and cultural strategies to challenge colonial authority and assert their dignity. In other words, this study demonstrates that the novel not only reflects the socio-cultural realities of colonial Indonesia but also offers a critical perspective on the lasting impact of caste and colonial hierarchies, particularly in shaping resistance, identity, and emerging nationalist consciousness.

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## 1. Introduction

Literature, as a form of artistic and intellectual expression, reflects human experiences, emotions, and social realities through language. It encompasses diverse genres such as fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and drama, all of which serve as mediums for exploring cultural, historical, and ideological contexts. Among Indonesian literary works, *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer stands out as a significant narrative that portrays the complexities of Dutch colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Set in the era of the Dutch East Indies, the novel presents a profound exploration of socio-cultural, political, and ethical issues, particularly the operation of a rigid caste system. This system functions as a central theme that shapes the lives, identities, and social positions of the characters. It highlights hierarchical divisions among groups such as the priyayi (native aristocracy), common indigenous people, Europeans, and mixed-race individuals, who often occupy ambiguous and marginalized positions within colonial society. Through these portrayals, the novel reflects the inequalities and tensions embedded in colonial social structures (Toer, 2005; Said, 1978).

The caste system depicted in the novel is closely tied to the broader framework of Dutch colonialism, which significantly influenced the social, economic, and political organization of society in the Dutch East Indies. This system reinforced social stratification,

limited mobility, and determined access to power and opportunity, thereby influencing both institutional structures and interpersonal relationships.

As part of the Buru Tetralogy, *Bumi Manusia* represents Pramoedya Ananta Toer's critical engagement with colonial injustice and social inequality. His work serves not only as a literary achievement but also as a reflection of historical realities, offering insight into the lived experiences of individuals under colonial rule. The theme of caste remains relevant in literary and historical studies, as it enables a deeper understanding of how systems of inequality are constructed, maintained, and challenged.

This study aims to analyze the representation of the caste system in the novel using a qualitative descriptive approach. It seeks to examine the structural aspects of caste, the positioning of characters within social hierarchies, and the socio-political conditions that sustain such systems. Furthermore, the research investigates the extent to which the novel reflects the historical realities of colonial Indonesia.

To guide the analysis, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is the caste system represented in *Bumi Manusia*? (2) How does the caste system affect individual rights and social mobility? (3) How do the characters resist colonial social stratification?

By examining the caste system in *Bumi Manusia*, this study contributes to a broader understanding of Indonesian literature and colonial history. It also highlights issues of social stratification, discrimination, and resistance, encouraging further reflection on the enduring impact of hierarchical systems on society.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Sociology of Literature

The sociology of literature is an interdisciplinary approach derived from the combination of sociology and literature. Sociology, originating from the Greek word *socius* (companion or society) and *logos* (study or discourse), refers to the scientific study of social relationships and structures. Meanwhile, literature, derived from the Sanskrit root *sas* (to instruct or teach) and the suffix *tra* (tool or instrument), can be understood as a medium that conveys ideas, values, and experiences. Thus, the sociology of literature focuses on examining literary works in relation to human behavior and social life, viewing literature as a reflection of societal conditions and dynamics (Endraswara, 2013).

One important perspective within the sociology of literature is the reflection theory proposed by Georg Lukács. Lukács argues that literature reflects social reality, particularly the economic structure and class relations within society. According to him, high-quality literary works are those that successfully portray social totality, including class conflict and social change (Lukács, 1971). For instance, realist novels such as those by Charles Dickens illustrate social inequalities within capitalist societies. Through this lens, literary texts can be analyzed as representations of broader social dynamics, including hierarchical systems such as caste.

In addition, the Marxist approach further develops the sociological analysis of literature by emphasizing the relationship between literature and the economic base of society. From a Marxist perspective, literary works often reflect the ideology of the dominant class, while also holding the potential to raise awareness among oppressed groups about social injustices. As explained by Terry Eagleton, literature can function both as a tool of ideological reinforcement and as a medium of critique against inequality (Eagleton, 1976).

Within this framework, the caste system can be understood as a form of social stratification that perpetuates inequality and power imbalances. Therefore, analyzing literary works through the sociology of literature—particularly using Lukács' reflection theory and

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Marxist perspectives—enables a deeper understanding of how social hierarchies are represented, maintained, or challenged within literary texts.

## **2.1 The Caste System**

The caste system represents a form of social organization that differs significantly from many modern social systems, particularly in its underlying ideology. As noted by Louis Dumont (1980), the complexity of caste often discourages modern readers from examining it in depth. Rather than simply viewing it as an unjust system that should be abolished, Dumont observes that even Western observers in India—ranging from reformers to missionaries—rarely advocated its complete elimination. This hesitation was partly due to an awareness of the functional role caste played in society and partly because its abolition appeared impractical within its cultural context.

In general terms, caste refers to a social grouping based on distinctions such as wealth, rank, occupation, and rights. The American Heritage Dictionary (2009) defines caste as a division of society into hierarchical groups, while broader explanations, such as those found in the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1980), trace the term to the word *casta*, meaning class, race, or lineage. Similarly, the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI, 2024) defines caste as a level or group within a religious or social community.

Scholars have approached caste as a form of structured social stratification. Fredrik Barth (1969), for instance, describes caste as a hierarchical system with clearly defined social levels, as seen in his study of the Pathan community. A related perspective is offered by Max Weber (2006), who considers caste as one aspect of social structure. However, Dumont challenges this view by arguing that caste should not be reduced to mere stratification. Instead, he emphasizes that caste must be understood as an integrated socio-cultural system, deeply embedded in the values and worldview of a particular society.

Dumont's major work, *Homo Hierarchicus*, further develops this perspective by presenting caste as a system rooted in the ideology of hierarchy, particularly the distinction between purity and impurity. Drawing on earlier sociological and anthropological thinkers such as Émile Durkheim and J. H. Hutton, Dumont argues that caste is not simply about economic inequality but about a broader cultural logic that organizes social relations.

Etymologically, the term “caste” originates from the Latin *castus*, meaning pure or noble, which later evolved into the Portuguese word *casta*, referring to lineage or race. As explained by David G. Mandelbaum (1970), European observers adopted this term to categorize and describe the social divisions they encountered in India.

In contrast, the concept of social class, as discussed by Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), has different historical roots. Originating in ancient Rome, class was initially used to categorize citizens based on economic capacity, dividing society into groups such as the wealthy (*assidui*) and the poor (*proletariat*). This distinction highlights a key difference: while class systems are often based on economic factors and allow for mobility, caste systems tend to be rigid, hereditary, and culturally embedded.

Therefore, the caste system can be understood as a hierarchical and culturally grounded form of social organization that shapes identity, social relations, and access to power. This conceptual framework is essential for analyzing how caste operates within literary works, particularly in representing inequality and social dynamics.

### **2.1.1 The Influence of the Caste System**

The caste system exerts a significant influence on multiple aspects of life, particularly in shaping social, economic, and cultural structures. Its impact can be observed in the following areas:

### **a. Social Stratification**

The caste system establishes a rigid social hierarchy in which individuals are assigned a status by birth. This inherited position strongly determines social identity, interaction, and mobility. As argued by Louis Dumont in *Homo Hierarchicus*, caste is a hierarchical system grounded in inequality and closely tied to religious and social order.

### **b. Economic Structure**

Caste significantly influences occupational roles and economic opportunities. Higher castes, such as Brahmins, traditionally have access to prestigious and well-paid professions, whereas lower castes, including Sudras and Dalits, are often restricted to low-status and low-income work. Susan Bayly (2001) highlights that during the colonial period, the caste system was also instrumental in reinforcing economic control and social divisions.

### **c. Access to Education**

Educational opportunities are unequally distributed across caste lines. Higher castes tend to benefit from better access to quality education, while lower castes frequently encounter barriers and discrimination. Rosalind O'Hanlon emphasizes that caste plays a crucial role in limiting educational access and, consequently, social mobility.

### **d. Discrimination and Marginalization**

The caste system contributes to systemic discrimination, particularly against marginalized groups such as Dalits. These communities often face exclusion and unequal treatment in employment, housing, and social relations. As discussed by S. M. Michael (1999), such discrimination continues to shape the lived experiences of Dalits in modern society.

### **e. Cultural Practices and Traditions**

Caste norms also regulate cultural and religious practices. Ritual roles, customs, and social behaviors are often determined by caste affiliation. Herbert Hope Risley (1915) notes that caste plays a central role in organizing participation in religious ceremonies and maintaining traditional social order.

### **f. Marriage and Social Relationships**

Marriage practices are strongly influenced by caste, with endogamy (marriage within the same caste) being the dominant norm. Intercaste marriage is frequently discouraged or stigmatized. According to Surinder S. Jodhka (2015), inter-caste marriage remains a sensitive and contested issue, reflecting the persistence of caste boundaries in contemporary society.

Overall, the caste system functions as a comprehensive framework that shapes not only social hierarchy but also economic opportunities, cultural norms, and interpersonal relationships.

## **2.1.1 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.

### 2.1.2 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 managing and controlling 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 in plantations, mines, and infrastructure projects. This greatly benefited the colonial economy that 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.

### 3. Research Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the representation of the caste system in *Bumi Manusia* by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Research design refers to the overall plan and procedure for conducting a study, including methods of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative descriptive approach is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to interpret and describe social phenomena as reflected in literary texts. As stated by Hadari Nawawi (1993), qualitative methods focus on describing observable facts, while Patricia Leavy (2017) emphasizes their role in understanding meanings, values, and social processes.

The primary data source of this study is the novel *Bumi Manusia*. The data consist of textual elements such as dialogues, narration, and descriptions that reflect the caste system and its influence on characters and society within the story. Supporting data may include relevant scholarly works related to sociology of literature and caste theory. The unit of analysis in this research includes words, phrases, sentences, and passages from the novel that

illustrate the structure and impact of the caste system. These units are selected based on their relevance to themes such as social hierarchy, discrimination, power relations, and resistance.

Data are collected through close reading and documentation techniques. The researcher carefully reads the novel multiple times to identify and record relevant excerpts. These excerpts are then categorized according to themes related to the caste system, such as social stratification, inequality, and resistance. Then, the data are analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This involves interpreting the selected textual data by identifying patterns, themes, and meanings related to the caste system. The analysis is guided by the sociology of literature approach, particularly reflection theory and Marxist perspectives, to understand how the novel represents social reality and power structures.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies are employed, including careful data selection, consistent categorization, and theoretical triangulation. The use of established theories in sociology of literature strengthens the validity of the interpretation. In addition, repeated reading and cross-checking of data help maintain accuracy and reliability in the analysis.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 The Impact of the Caste System on Individual Rights and Opportunities for Social Mobility

The impact of the caste system occurs due to the construction of the caste, they are higher than the natives, as well as the existence of superiority that constructs social disparity. Thus, behavior or attitude is also one of the determinants in forming caste differences.

“Derai tawa semakin meriah, mengejek, lebih demonstratif juga jaksa, tersenyum senang dapat melakukan siksaan batin atas diri perempuan pribumi yang banyak diiri oleh perempuan-perempuan Totok dan Indo Eropa itu.” (Toer, 2005: 425)

The quote above tells how the trial of Mr. Mellema's death went. *Nyai Ontosoroh* was embarrassed by the questions asked of her at the trial. They mocked, humiliated, and laughed at *Nyai Ontosoroh*. According to Pramoedya, this event was caused by the disapproval of the European community in Surabaya at the time because *Nyai Ontosoroh*, as a mistress, received many privileges on the property of the Mellema family. In those days, it was unusual for native women to become mistresses or *Nyai*.

In the quotation above, the author shows the impact of caste differences that are evident in the interactions between characters. *Nyai Ontosoroh* is considered a symbol of threat or resistance to European domination and hegemony, consisting of four layers of minorities: women, *Nyai*, natives, and Javanese. The collective rejection of the Europeans also symbolizes the dominative and hegemonic attempt to "fight" *Nyai Ontosoroh*. The events in court also show her position as a representative of the natives, who are socially subordinate to the Europeans.

*Nyai Ontosoroh* is naturally positioned at a subordinate level due to her status as a *Nyai* or mistress. She also has various attributes of her given status.

In a democratic society, agreement on justice is the basis for distributive justice. The anticipated fairness in the system of class conflicts that emerged from the novel *Bumi Manusia* became the basis for Rawls' distributive theory. Rawls proposes the concept of "justice as fairness," which is based on a hypothetical situation called the original position. In this thought experiment, individuals decide the principles of justice behind a "veil of ignorance," meaning they do not know their own social status, class, abilities, or background.

Because no one knows their future position in society, they are motivated to choose fair and impartial principles (Rawls, 1971).

Rawls constructs a general idea based on these arguments: first, everyone has the same basic freedoms that are granted to everyone; second, to care for those in difficulty; and third, to allow for fair equality. Based on this understanding, quoting texts from *Earth Men* that discuss rights and duties would be contrary to Rawls' principles.

“Abangmu dan kau tetap dianggap anak tidak sah, hanya diakui sebagai anak Tuan Mallema dan punya hak menggunakan namanya. Dengan campur tangan hukum justru tidak mengakui abangmu dan kau sebagai anakku, bukan anak-anakku lagi, walau mama ini yang melahirkan. Sejak pengakuan itu kalian, menurut hukum, hanya anak dari Tuan Mallema. Menurut hukum, Ann, hukum Belanda di sini, jangan kau keliru. Kau tetap anakku. Pada waktu itu baru aku tahu betapa jahatnya hukum. Kalian mendapat seorang ayah, tapi kehilangan ibu.” (Toer, 2005: 136)

Indeed, *Nyai Ontosoroh's* story to her daughter, Annelis Mallema, shows the injustice of Dutch law. When a woman, even a mother, was confronted with the law, their rights had to be revoked. Although the punishments actually helped people, they were more focused on benefiting Dutch interests. Because the colonizing country had total control at the time. In addition, *Nyai Ontosoroh* was just a mistress.

Rawls then also addresses this condition, as *Nyai Ontosoroh* is already considered a mistress based on circumstances. Justice always favors the larger class when there is a smaller class. Since justice, according to Rawls, is the granting of basic freedoms to everyone, rules that use ratios are needed to find justice in assessing this situation.

Another impact of the caste system was that colonial rule over colonized nations, such as forced labor and control of indigenous land, was common. One of the colonial goals of a colonizing nation is to control the territory of another nation; by conquering a territory, the colonizing nation can carry out all its colonial goals.

“Mari pergi ke kampung-kampung. Di atas tanah kami ada empat buah kampong. Semua kepala keluarga, penduduk pekerja pada kami.”

“Jadi berapa hektar saja tanah mu ini ?” tanyaku tak acuh.

“Seratus delapan puluh”,

“Sawah dan ladang. Hutan dan semak-semak belum termasuk.”,

“Hutan untuk sumber kayu bakar” lanjutnya.

“Rawa juga punya, barangkali?” “Ya. Ada dua rawa kecil” (Toer, 2005: 53)

According to Ania Loomba, colonialism is the conquest or control of the land and property of others (Loomba, 2016: 3). This data excerpt is in line with her opinion. Minke and Annalise's conversation shows that the Dutch colonial nation has controlled the land of the indigenous people. They also control the indigenous people who live there. Not only did the Dutch have a lot of land, but they were also successful in implementing the forced planting policy. The natives were supposed to enjoy their land and property, but the Dutch colonials took everything from them, even making them slaves in their own land.

European colonial powers were eager to dominate their colonized nations. Not only did they take over their colonies, but they also took away the rights of the colonized people. They used the highly respected indigenous people to achieve their goal of removing their rights and controlling their entire lives.

“Seluruh perusahaan, kekayaan, dan keluarga akan diatur oleh curator yang ditunjuk oleh hukum. Mamamu hanya seorang pribumi, akan tidak mempunya*nyai* hak atas semua, juga tidak dapat melakukan sesuatu untuk anakku sendiri. Kau, Ann. Percuma saja akan jadinya kita membanting tulang tanpa hari libur. Percuma aku telah lahirkan kau, karena hukum tidak pernah mengakui keibuanku, hanya karena kau pribumi dan tidak di kawin secara syah. Kau mengerti? (Toer, 2005: 112)

The colonials not only took away the land and property of the natives, but they also took away their human rights. The Dutch even controlled the laws of the natives. Because the colonizers had taken over the entire lives of the natives, *Nyai Ontosoroh*, Annalise's biological mother, could not even obtain custody. European countries have violated human rights tremendously. The hard work of Annalise and her mother would be exempted because of the laws set by the colonial government, which took away all the rights of indigenous people. Even if *Nyai Ontosoroh* married a Dutchman, she would not receive her rights because she was a native.

“Pribumi sama dengan anak gundik yang tidak diakui sang ayah. Ia juga mengecam pengungkapan perkara pribadi. Kommer menilai jaksa dan hakim itu tidak berbudi Eropa, lebih buruk dari pada pengadilan pribumi yang dilakukan di Wonoguro atas diri Pronocitro, barang duaratus lima tahunan yang lalu” (Toer, 2005: 430)

The data cited shows that during the colonial period, human rights were often abused, and the indigenous population only had to follow Dutch laws that applied in their country. In addition, injustice was also common. Considered as indigenous by Dutch colonialism. Their daughters were sold to the Dutch to become mistresses, and their illegitimate marriages that were not recognized by law were also human rights violations. From the data excerpt, it is clear that when indigenous people had children with Dutch people, their children were also disadvantaged. An Indo child recognized by the father would be considered European, and if not, the child would be insulted, harassed, and even degraded like the mother. It is very clear that the actions of the prosecutors and judges did not give the natives a sense of justice; even the natives who made a defense were considered useless, and the natives' human rights to defend themselves and their children were taken away.

Berhubung Robert Mallema dinyatakan belum ditemukan baik untuk sementara ataupun untuk selama-lamanya, warisan yang akan jadi haknya akan dikelola oleh Ir. Maurits Mallema. Pengadilan Amsterdam telah juga menunjuk Ir. Maurits Mallema menjadi wali bagi Annelise Mallema karena yang belakangan ini dianggap masih berada dibawah umur, sedang haknya atas warisan, sementara ia dianggap belum dewasa, juga akan dikelola oleh Ir. Maurits Mallema” (Toer, 2005: 485).

The quotation shows that N *Nyai Ontosoroh* and her children received a power of attorney from the Amsterdam court and gave it to the white court. The power of attorney indicated that all property belonging to Mr. Herman Mallema would be replaced by Mr. Maurits Mallema. Maurits Mallema, her legitimate son, would replace Herman Mallema. This shows the injustice and violation of *Nyai Ontosoroh's* rights. There was no intervention from Mr. Herman Mallema, and the property and farms that had been owned by *Nyai Ontosoroh* and Annalise remained theirs. One perspective of injustice is that Mr. Maurits Mallema will receive Annalise's guardianship rights while her biological mother is still alive. This shows

the injustice of the white court of law to the indigenous people, the court of law only approved the power of attorney from the Amsterdam court. Even the *Nyai* could not challenge this because she was not the legal wife and was only a native.

#### 4.2 The Character's Rejection of the Established Social Order

Because of the European colonialism against the indigenous people, who controlled them politically, economically, socially, and culturally, the indigenous people fought back. Jean Marsis' explanation to Minke about the Acehnese. Jean Marsis is a former European colonial who committed acts of colonialism against the Acehnese, and he knows that the Acehnese are very nationalistic. This shows that the Acehnese resisted colonialism in an unusual way.

“Ucapan yang hanya patut didengarkan di rumah Malemma-Hammers dan anaknya!” tangisku dalam Belanda “Tak ada hak padamu bicara tentang keluargaku!” “Tak ada utusan dengan kowe, *Nyai*,” jawabnya dalam Melayu, diucapkan sangat kasar dan kaku, kemudian ia tidak mau melihat kepadaku lagi. “Ini rumahku. Bicara kau seperti itu di pinggir jalan sana, jangan di sini” (Toer, 2005: 145)

According to the data quoted, there was an argument between Nyi Ontosoroh and the legitimate son of Mr. Herman Mallema. Nyi Ontosoroh fought the European totok very bravely because she could no longer stand the humiliation by the legitimate son of Mr. Herman Mallema. This shows a strong sense of nationalism from *Nyai* Ontosoroh, which makes her dare to oppose Europeans for the honor of herself and her family.

During colonialism, natives were always looked down upon by Europeans, even when they did good things, Europeans still looked down on them. It can be seen from the quote above that Minke was always looked down upon by Robert Mallema because she was a native. The sense of nationalism instilled in her made Minke fight back against Robert Mallema. This shows Minke's act of resistance to Robert Mallema to fight the form of humiliation that Robert Mallema did to Minke.

“Minke kita akan melawan. Berani kau, nak, nyo?” “Kita akan berlawanan, ma, bersama-sama” “Biarpun tanpa ahlihukum. Kita akan jadi pribumi pertama yang melawan pengadilan putih, nak, nyo. Bukankah itu suatu kehormatan juga?” “Berlawanan, mama, berlawanan, kita melawan.” “Kalau Annalise bisa kau bikin bangun untuk melawan, dia takkan jatuh bangun dalam kesakitan dan ketidakmampuan. Dia akan menjadi teman hidup yang terbaik bagi seorang suami seperti kau” (Toer, 2005: 494)

The data cited shows that it was the acts of injustice against the natives in Europe during the period of colonialism that drove *Nyai* Ontosoroh and Minke to act against the European countries. Although they were only natives who were considered weak and often humiliated, they had a strong spirit of nationalism that drove them to fight the Europeans and defend their rights and honor, not only for themselves, but also for all the natives and their nation. This shows the strong nationalism of *Nyai* Ontosoroh and Minke against European countries that would persecute them, even the highest court, even though they do not know the methods, what they are fighting against, who and how, and their goals. They will still perform acts of resistance to obtain justice from the laws of the Dutch East Indies, whether they can or cannot do so.

The quote above shows the power of the Europeans in the native land; even the government laws do not protect the natives and side with them. This triggers *Nyai*

Ontosoroh's awareness to oppose the injustice done to her people, as shown by *Nyai* Ontosoroh's actions that encourage Minke to act against the Europeans and those who side with Europe. *Nyai* Ontosoroh's awareness arises as a result of government laws that favor Europeans over indigenous laws, even the injustices that happen to indigenous people. The laws that favor Europeans will be defeated if all indigenous people realize the injustices that happen to them. This shows the strong sense of nationalism that *Nyai* Ontosoroh and Minke have to oppose the European country and the white court laws that are unfair to them, including *Nyai* Ontosoroh and Minke.

In a society that has experienced a long period of colonialism. Because of their awareness that they are a nation that has always been colonized, the indigenous people will act to fight for their rights as natives. Many struggles of the indigenous people to maintain their rights as human beings who are equal to Europeans.

“Segala apa yang telah mereka lakukan untuk bangsamu pada akhir abad 19 ini sudah termasuk gaya lama, sekarang ini pribumi sendiri yang harus berbuat sesuatu untuk bangsanya sendiri” “Sukalah kami mendengarkan uraiannya tentang nasib bangsamu, yang pernah melahirkan beratus dan beribu pahlawan dan pemimpin dalam usaha menghalau penindasan Eropa. Seorang demi seorang dari mereka jatuh, kalah, tewas, menyerah, gila, mati dalam kehinaan, dilupakan dalam pembuangan. Tak seorang pun memenangkan perang” (Toer, 2005: 248)

In the excerpt, Annalise tells Mienke about Indonesia and says that the country has many heroes. Until they were killed, lost, or forgotten, the heroes fought and defended their country from the Dutch colonialists. By looking at the actions of the deceased heroes, they strongly fought for their nationality and their position as indigenous people. They don't care if the next generation forgets them. This clearly shows the actions of Indonesian heroes to defend their nationality and fight for their position as citizens and hosts.

“Mienke, telah lama kurenungkan keanehan hidup ini. Kalau aku tak berhasil menyelamatkan perusahaan ini, aku akan merosot jadi *Nyai-Nyai* biasa yang boleh dihinakan semua orang, dipandang dengan sebelah mata. Annalise akan sangat menderita. Percuma nanti aku sebagai ibunya. Dia harus lebih terhormat dari pada seorang Indo biasa. Dia harus jadi pribumi terhormat di tengah-tengah bangsanya. Kehormatan itu bisa didapatnya hanya dari perusahaan ini. Memang aneh nak. Begitulah maunya dunia ini” (Toer, 2005: 431)

The natives were physically humiliated and regarded as underlings during the European colonial era. Such factors would encourage the natives to resist European colonialism. Just as above, *Nyai* Ontosoroh is determined to maintain her dignity as a native by maintaining her company, because that way the Dutch will respect her. During the Dutch colonial occupation, the natives of the country were looked down upon unless they were upper class, educated, and rich. This was all done so that they could achieve their goals in the colonies. This way, it would be easier for them to control the region and the local people.

“Aku belum sampai bicara tentang pembagian peninggalan yang sama sekali tak menyebut-nyebut tentang hakku. Memang tak mencukupi surat-surat padaku yang membuktikan perusahaan ini milikku. Aku hanya mencoba mempertahankan Annalise. Hanya dia yang teringat” (Toer, 2005: 489)

The quote shows a mother's struggle to keep her child. The decision made by the White court and the Dutch court was that the property of *Nyai* Ontosoroh's property went to the legitimate child of Mr. Herman Mallema, and even Ir. Maurits Mallema had guardianship rights over *Nyai* Ontosoroh's biological child because his father recognized Annalise Mallema as his biological child. *Nyai* Ontosoroh did not care about her property, all she thought about at that time was her daughter, Annelise.

Playing the role of *Nyai* Ontosoroh, Mienke learns about her status as a native and son of Indonesia. Prior to this, due to the Western education she received, Mienke always positioned herself differently from the natives. However, Mienke's introduction to *Nyai* Ontosoroh changes his perspective. Since talking to *Nyai* Ontosoroh, she has become more passionate and strives to fight for her people. All these quotes clearly show that Mienke was a literary expert who wrote a lot in Dutch. This was done solely to let everyone know about his passion. However, *Nyai* Ontosoroh told Mienke to change her gagaasan into Malay so that other indigenous people would know about Mienke's struggle for her people.

“Tutup mulut!” bentak *Nyai* dalam Belanda dengan suara berat dan kukuh.

“Ia tamuku” (Toer, 2005: 258)

The quote above is a snippet of dialog in the narrative of *Nyai* Ontosoroh's courage as a native woman who dares to yell at her husband, Mr. Mellema, a Dutchman.

Their company, Boerderij Buitenzon, went bankrupt because Mr. Mellema was often drunk and rarely came home. *Nyai* Ontosoroh took it upon herself to rebuild the Boerderij Buitenzon company to restore the situation so that she could be successful. As such, some people respected her and feared her, including Mr. Mellema and his two children. Because of *Nyai* Ontosoroh's determination and struggle, Mr. Mellema, a Dutchman, now fears *Nyai* Ontosoroh, who is only a native.

In this context, the author tries to portray *Nyai* Ontosoroh's character by changing her attitude towards Mr. Mellema, as well as reversing the image and status of the natives represented by Ontosoroh in the caste layer that places her with Mellema. Through the character of *Nyai* Ontosoroh, the author shows indigenous resistance to the Dutch as a form of effort to achieve the caste that has been achieved. The author tries to show the character of *Nyai* Ontosoroh, who is very struggling to have a wise mind, even though she is in the lower caste. She gained authority after successfully turning a bankrupt company into a profitable one.

This is a symbolic resistance and shows that hard work, earnest effort, and discipline are important factors in creating the caste status achieved. In this context, it also represents a kind of opposition to the stigmas that previously shaped the status given to *Nyai* Ontosoroh. Therefore, economic and social capabilities can be acquired through effort, hard work, and discipline. These social capabilities, in turn, solidify one's position culturally in one's resistance and struggle to gain status and change one's position in the caste system. The textual fact of Mr. Mellema's failure implicitly and symbolically illustrates the failure of Western superiority, which may experience paradoxical failure and destruction, while the East, represented by *Nyai* Ontosoroh, can save the situation.

These facts seem to indicate a symbolic attempt to reverse cultural, social, and economic superiority while changing the caste system repeatedly: Mellema is economically, socially, and culturally ruined, while *Nyai* Ontosoroh, who represents the previously lower class of natives, gains a better status and position in the caste system.

“Dia tidak menulis, tapi ahli mencekam orang dalam genggamannya. Dia mengurus perusahaan besar secara Eropa! Dia menghadapi sulungnya sendirian, menguasai tuannya, Herman Mellema.” (Toer, 2005: 106)

The quote above explains the figure of *Nyai Ontosoroh*, who is recognized by Minke as one of the outstanding native women through her hard work taking care of a big company, facing the resistance of Mellema's eldest son, and mastering his master, Herman Mellema.

*Nyai Ontosoroh* is described by the author as an extraordinary native woman. Through *Nyai Ontosoroh*'s character, the author shows that the natives not only submit to the Dutch but also resist the caste system, which has become a kind of "myth" at that time. The author symbolically shows that one of the factors that can change one's caste is the hidden resistance to the representation of power.

In the context of colonial power, factors such as ability, effort, and hardship still play a role in determining caste. The image of *Nyai Ontosoroh* as resilient, resilient, and hardworking is a transformation from an undervalued caste status as a native to a status that can be looked up to.

In the novel *Bumi Manusia*, the side of human existence can be depicted through Minke. He is the one who declares his alignment with *Bumi Manusia*, which is the problem. The form of resistance to tradition is very visible. But on the different side, this is the human voice. The existence of oppressed humans is a resistance against the "boundary situation". Hence, in the quote from *Bumi Manusia*, Minke says;

“Tidak ada urusan! Kepriyayian bukan duniaku. Peduli apa iblis diangkat jadi mentri cacar atau diberhentikan tanpa hormat karena kecurangan? Duniaku bukan jabatan, pangkat, gaji dan kecurangan. Duniaku Bumi Manusia dengan persoalan” (Toer, 2005: 186)

He has this conversation in defiance of his father, who demands that he follow the traditions of feudalism that must shape his existence as a student. However, Minke has a nature that defies such beliefs. For him, tradition is the suppression of human values.

Feudalism is a structure of power delegation in society based on the royal system or noble power in a certain area. Meanwhile, liberalism is an ideology that prioritizes the equal rights of every individual. The conflict between these two ideologies is an event that has occurred in a particular culture. Which, in the framework of feudalism, is formed in a power to form uniformity and override freedom.

Nonetheless, liberalism does not eliminate flaws. In societal situations, excessive freedom can be dangerous. In short, every ideology has its weaknesses and strengths. As depicted in the novel *Bumi Manusia*, these two ideologies are meant to portray feudalism as a moral system that oppresses people, while liberalism protects people from oppression. Decisions made by those in power should stop freedom from flourishing.

With the rise of liberalism, Javanese morals entered a new phase in which the king's power was not a single choice but a unilateral decision. This situation has shaped Javanese culture to respect each other's power. According to Sense Hofstede (2018), this shift shows that "in *Bumi Manusia*, the most stirring story is the evolution of Minke's personality." This shows that feudal society became more modernized with the adoption of liberalism. Therefore, as written in the novel *Bumi Manusia*, culture will become more relevant to the context as a result of the new intellectual dawn.

“Aku terdiam. Hanya hati meraung: jadi kau sudah menghina aku, darah raja! Suami ibuku! Baik, aku takan menjawab. Teruskan, ayoh, teruskan, darah raja-raja Jawa! Kemarin kau masih mantri pengairan. Sekarang mendadak menjadi bupati, raja kecil. Lecutkan cambukmu, raja, kau yang tak tahu bagaimana ilmu dan pengetahuan telah membuka babak baru di bumi manusia ini! (Toer, 2005: 184)

Minke's dialog is one of the stepping stones described by Pramoedya Ananta Toer as a way of resistance to the periodic feudalism that occurred during the colonial period.

The caste system has an impact on the legal justice system that The legal justice system in the Dutch East Indies favored white or Dutch people. Pram's distortion of history in *Bumi Manusia* is a concrete form of "injustice and abuse of humanity due to abuse of power". This class conflict is the impact of the abuse of power to oppress ordinary people. Therefore, *Bumi Manusia* depicts the plot of the beginning of the rebellion of the natives to gain independence. Although the struggle of the natives was so aggressive against the Dutch law, it brought results that were not much different from losing. As told in a letter written by Miriam de la Croix, Minke's best friend.

“Bangsa besar dan gagah-perwira itu terus juga mencoba mengangkat kepala dari permukaan air, dan setiap kali bangsa Eropa memerosokan kembali ke bawah. Bangsa Eropa tidak rela melihat Pribumi menjengukan kepala ke udara melihat keagungan ciptaan Allah. Mereka terus berusaha dan terus kalah sampai tak tahu lagi usaha dan kekalahannya sendiri.” (Toer, 2005: 285)

Indonesia continues to fight against colonialism, as it is described as a great country. Fighting against Europeans or colonials will accomplish nothing. Indonesia can only recognize oppression as a result of its status as a colonizer. Therefore, Miriam de la Croix's letter aims to recount her father's experiences with the Indigenous people, believing that intellectuals can fight colonialism in a new way. Because Minke's presence gave a new spirit to the natives to fight for independence.

“Jangan sentuh ini. Siapa kasih kau hak untuk membukanya? Kau! Begini sekolahmu mengajar kau?” ia berdiri mendelik kepadaku “Memang bukan Jawa lagi” “Apa guna jadi Jawa kalau hanya dilanggar hak-haknya? Tak pernah gurumu mengajarkan ethika dan hak-hak perseorangan?” (Toer, 2005: 191)

It shows the conversation between Minke and her brother in the quote. Minke's brother opened Minke's diary secretly and read it. When Minke found out that her brother was reading her diary, he abruptly pulled the diary out of her hands. After Minke's brother realized that her sister was not like the Javanese, Minke began to be brave towards her brother. Minke may have forgotten about the Javanese customs of respecting and being filial to their parents. This happened because Minke was educated in a European way at HBS and mingled too much with Europeans. As a result, her attitude no longer shows that she is Javanese.

The White Court did violence to the natives, and they did not even want to defend each other and favored the Dutch. This is shown by the attitude of the judge in court when *Nyai Ontosoroh* wants to defend her rights as Annalise's mother. Because she is Indigenous, Indigenous people cannot speak in front of the judge because they do not have the power to go against the law. This shows that the judge uses power when acting against the natives. The Europeans had a strong dominance over the natives of the colonies; not only did they colonize their land and property, but they also had the power to use the existing laws of the colonies to carry out their actions against the natives.

#### **4.3 The Caste System in the Social Structure of Dutch East Indies Society**

Broadly speaking, the character of Minke, a native, is told in the novel *Bumi Manusia*, who has knowledge of Europe. The novel also nicely illustrates how power relations emerged during Dutch colonialism, which portrayed Europeans as first-class citizens, subordinate to

other ethnic groups. "Indigenous" is a term used not only to describe the affiliation and subordination of certain ethnic groups but also as a sociocultural consequence of the caste system that emerged at the time.

The novel also addresses the issue of social inequality related to the caste system, as shown in the following fragment of text:

“dan barangkali seperti itu juga tingkah orang orang Yahudi dengan kewarganegaraan Romawi. Ia menganggap dirinya lain dari saudara-saudara sekandung. Ia menganggap diri bukan Indo” (Toer, 2005: 21)

The monologue clearly illustrates how certain groups of society are segregated. The monologue clearly illustrates how certain groups of society are segregated in the relationship between different tribes, thus forming a dichotomy in its various forms. People of European descent, as a sociocultural force, are always seen as superior to indigenous people. Although in the past, the term "indigenous" was reduced to "the oppressed, marginalized, colonized, and disenfranchised", to refer to groups of people who come from a particular region or country.

Communication between characters in the context of choice is another example of the caste system in *Bumi Manusia*. Language as a symbol of social status and power relations. The choice of Dutch language varieties in native communication as a result of the caste system with oppressive implications, among other things, can be seen in the following dialog:

“Kowe kira, kolo sudah pake pakean Eropa, bersama orang Eropa, bisa sedikit bicara Belanda lantas jadi Eropa? Tetap monyet!” (Toer, 2005: 64)

The statement of Mr. Mellema, a Dutchman, addressed to Minke, is part of a dialogue excerpted from the novel *Earth Man*. The protagonist of *Bumi Manusia* is Minke, a native who is portrayed by the author in a way that combines the symbolism of the European mind and lifestyle.

The description clearly shows that the novel *Bumi Manusia* has the potential to raise sociological issues related to various types of caste systems and their impacts. The novel *Bumi Manusia* is so relevant and useful to be reviewed from this perspective because it can be used as a vehicle to identify social problems at a certain time so that it can be used as material for reflection and contemplation, as well as comparison, to form awareness about social relations that animate and encourage universal human values.

Ultimately, this study focuses on the caste system, which is based on the division of groups or levels of people according to their social status. The element of social status is treatment of one's position in a group of people.

“Siapa kasih kowe izin datang kemari, monyet! Dengusnya dalam Melayu-pasar, kaku dan kasar, juga isinya. (Toer, 2005: 64)

In this part of the novel, *Nyai Ontosoroh's* husband, Tuan Mellema, appears suddenly and scolds Minke for coming to his house. It is very clear that Mr. Mellema uses the rough and rude language of market Malay, addressing people with the greeting "kowe", which is a rude greeting towards people of lower caste. In addition, referring to Minke as a monkey shows that he is naturally considered a Dutchman who should not visit, despite his attempts at Dutch-like social mimicry.

In the quotation, the existence of a caste system is shown by the difference in Minke's position compared to Mr. Mellema and his family, which is described as a natural status, and the use of language as a tool to express this status. Mr. Mellema scolds Minke harshly, using the word "monkey" as a metaphor, because Minke is a native, and he is Dutch. Mr. Mellema

thinks Minke does not deserve to be invited to his house because he is a native. The Dutch have a much higher status than the natives. Tuan Mellema's behavior towards Minke shows the difference in caste by using unequal language to emphasize the natural status of each party.

In addition, Pramoedya tried to illustrate the paradoxical caste system problem that occurred during the Dutch colonization of Indonesia through the characters' words. In other words, Europeans looked down on natives because they were better than whites or Europeans. As a result, they usually behave and act condescendingly towards the natives as the original masters of the Dutch East Indies land. Therefore, attitudes and behaviors play an important role in determining caste differences.

“Kowe kira, kalo sudah pake pakean Eropa, bersama orang Eropa, bisa sedikit bicara Belanda lantas jadi Eropa? Tetap monyet!” (Toer, 2005: 64)

This quoted section of the novel tells how Mellema deliberately insults Minke. Despite Minke's efforts to make himself look like a Dutchman, he states that Minke does not deserve to be and could never be European.

Mellema's words are at once detrimental to Minke's attempts to construct an image of himself, attempting to change his social status from one that is natural to one that is formed or acquired through his efforts.

Paradoxically, Mr. Mellema's words show the failure of Minke's attempt to rebrand himself as European culturally rather than genetically. Mr. Mellema's treatment of Minke is a kind of legitimization of his caste as Dutch/European; his statement indirectly suggests that the natives remain inferior, contemptible, uncivilized, backward, and unworthy of being "human" as a cultural force that dominated society at the time and was at the top of the caste system.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that colonialism, as depicted in *Bumi Manusia*, not only imposed systems of domination but also triggered the emergence of nationalist responses among the colonized. Colonial practices are portrayed through acts of humiliation and dehumanization, in which the colonizers degrade the dignity of indigenous people and position everything associated with them as inferior. Within this system, being native is constructed as a disadvantage, reinforcing social inequality and limiting opportunities.

Furthermore, the study reveals that indigenous people gradually realized the limitations of armed resistance against colonial power. As a result, they developed alternative forms of struggle by employing intellectual, moral, and cultural strategies to defend their rights and dignity. These forms of resistance reflect a persistent effort to challenge both colonial domination and caste-based discrimination. Despite various constraints, the colonized continue to assert their identity and honor, demonstrating resilience and determination in confronting oppression.

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