

## Readers' Response to Sundanese Popular Novel in 1960s to 1970s

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**Abstract:** *Readers' response is important aspect to measure society's acceptance or refusal to literary work. This research aims to explore readers' response to Sundanese popular novels in 1960s to 1970s and comprehend their opinion, comment and idea. Reception theory is main theory used to explore responses. Letters sent to writers and publishers are source of data. This research found several matters as their hopes and suggestions. Readers mostly like Sundanese popular novel very much. They expect publisher can produce more often for twice and three times a week. Exploring Silat stories and struggle of society are mostly preferred. Moral message is expected to educate readers because of its benefit. Happy ending stories are also hope of most readers. Then, language style of writer becomes their concern of describing how suitable the stories for all levels of age. Because of the reason, Sundanese popular novels are essential media for learning Sundanese culture especially maintaining local wisdom. In short, this not only gives entertain for readers but also education.*

*Key words:* reader's response, popular, novel.

### Sundanese Popular Novel

Indonesia is a country which consists of hundreds of ethnics and languages. With all its diversity, it is rich of culture and tradition (Rosidi. 2013: 11). To make easier understanding, Koentjaraningrat (2004) divides it into 15 big groups. It is understandable each ethnic has its own characteristics that show several similarities and differences. An important point is that those cultures form Indonesian national culture. In literature side, it is rich of ancient oral tradition and modern ones. Kinds of literature genre found in Indonesian literature, such as poetry, novel and drama.

Talking about literary work, this research explores ethnic popular novel namely Sundanese popular novel. Black (2006: 53) states that "Narrative is a basic human activity. We all tell stories – to ourselves, to others." To some extend, novel is a media for certain people to express something. For writer, she/he can tell what she/ he sees, thinks and feels in his life. Otherwise, for reader as Sudjiman (1991: 1-121) explains that people read literary work for some reasons, such as to fill spare time, get entertainment, require new experience so that enlarge knowledge in facing problem of life. In short, following Horatius's statement that literature is *dulce et utile* which means interesting and beneficial.

Sundanese popular novels are written using Sundanese daily communication. Koentjaraningrat (2004: 307) mentions Sunda language is a mother tongue of Sundanese ethnic, mostly used in West Java province (Poeradisastra, 2010: 12) at Indonesia. In West Java, besides Sundanese, it is also used Javanese in Cirebon, Indramayu and some in Banten. Sunda language is the second biggest language used in Indonesia after Java language. Sundanese literature begins since ancient time in the form of oral tradition. This oral tradition developed from mouth to mouth for hundreds year (Fang, 1991:3).

Typically, Ekadjati (2014: 1) elaborates Sundanese term covering culture, ethnic, geographic, government administration and social meaning. It is also connected with science world of Indonesia discussed about Sundanese culture and West Java area. In addition, Rosidi (1984: 8,13) explains the term “Sunda” in two meanings, that is, pure Sundanese based on heredity who live in West Java for long time, and those who are not Sundanese and live in West Java and use its social cultural norms and values.

In the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century some oral literature began to write into book. The society slowly could read them. It is important to state that the first modern literature produced in Indonesia was Sundanese novel published by Balai Pustaka. According to Rusyana & Raksanagara (1979) that Sundanese novel entitled *Baruang Kanu Ngarora* written by D.K Ardiwinata in 1914. An important point here is that Balai Pustaka is a publisher made by The Dutch. Actually, not every work could be published by Balai Pustaka. Basically, it just accepted those which are relevant with their ideology. After that, several Sundanese appeared written by Yuhana, R. Memed Sastrahadiprawira, Mohamad Ambri, and Muhamad Sanusi. The following are the example of Sundanese novel produced by Balai Pustaka such as Yuhana wrote *Mugiri*, *Carios Agan Permas*, *Néng Yaya*, *Kasuat ku Duriat*, *Eulis Acih*, *Kalepatan Putrana Dosana Ibu Rama*, *Rasiah nu Goréng Patut* published in 1920s. *Mantri Jero* novel written by R. Memed Sastrahadiprawira in 1928. The last is Muhamad Sanusi wrote *Sari Fatimah* published in 1920-1921, *Siti Rayati* and *Dibélaan Pegat Nyawa* published in 1923. The important point here is that these novels got good response from readers at that time. This means Sundanese society appreciated literature especially novel as something to read.

Because of tightness of Balai Pustaka’s requirements not many novels published. To overcome such kind of fact, there were several private publishers in Bandung, capital of West Java province. They have very big role in introducing both Sundanese and Indonesian novels. Those novels also got positive response from readers. In general, Rosidi (1989: 101) in the book “Beber Layar” explains there are two kinds of perspectives related to Sundanese literature before and after independence war. The first says that Sundanese literature was developed before independence war. Many literary works produced and got good response at that time. Otherwise, the second one states that Sundanese literature decreased than the first period. Not many works produced and only republished the former works. Also, many young writers influenced by Indonesian literature. However, short stories developed into roman and many proses made in

newspapers and magazines until 1950s.

Alemán, Byjesse & Streeby, Shelley. (2007: xv) explain the situation of popular literature dominated “marketplace of popular sentimental and sensational literature.” In line with the popular culture spreads out in the world, it also appeared in the Sundanese literature especially in 1960s to 1970s. Only some were written in 1990s until now. Sundanese popular novels produced by thirties writers from 1960s to 1980s. The following examples are Sundanese popular writers like S. Sukandar, K. Soekarna, Wahyu Adam, Tatang K.S, Ki Masram, Gandaputra, Koko S, Juda Djaja, Entang S, Achmad Rustandi, Yat R, Aan Merdéka Permana, Ki Leuksa, A. Tolib, Juda Djaja ect. For this reason, to publish novels several private publishers built in Bandung. They facilitated to publish Sundanese popular novels. Close relationship was seen in the promotion of novel written in the book regularly. Several publishers found like Tjaringin, Wargina, Matjakal, Romanato, Laksana, Saputra, DDR (Setiawan, 2007; Kurnia, 2008; Purba, 2012). Seeing many writers and several publishers appeared, it indicates that Sundanese popular novels got positive response from reader.

Relevant with those explanations, this research discusses readers’ response of Sundanese popular novels published in 1960s to 1970s. The purposes of this research are to explore out readers’ response to Sundanese popular novel and to comprehend their perception. Reader’s response is an essential issue to understand so that I can measure their opinion whether they support or refuse Sundanese popular novel. To gain data, I collect readers’ opinion, comment, idea about Sundanese popular novels in 1960s to 1970s. To guide the discussion, the main theory applied in this research is reception theory or reader’s response from Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, David Bleich and Stanley Fish. Because of limitation of data, I just chose readers’ response from two most influenced writer, that is, S. Sukandar and Wahyu Adam as data source.

### **Popular Novel In Indonesia**

Talking about Sundanese popular novels relate to discussion of Indonesian popular novel as found in the book of Cahyaning Dewojati (2010:1-14) entitled Wacana Hedonisme Dalam Sastra Populer Indonesia. Dewojati mentions that Indonesian popular novels boom since in the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. This kind of novels written by hundreds of teenager. Commonly they are women writers. Their novels divided into three categories, namely chicklit or chick literature, teenlit or teenager literature and momlit. Chicklit talks about life of single women and her modern mind in the city. Meanwhile, teenlit specifically focuses on Junior and senior high school student’s life. Momlit indicates life of common women in the city.

Two figures concern about development of Indonesian popular novels are Jacob Sumardjo and Sapardi Djoko Damono. Following Sumardjo (1982) Dewojati (2010) states that Indonesian popular novels began in 1970s. Commonly, those novels consumed by reader who were born in 1950s. There are several reasons why they read those novels. First, increasing of intellectual

students because of the need of reading. Second, women especially the householders whose spare time need to read. Third, Indonesian economic condition improved in 1970s. Society was able to buy goods including reading books, magazines, and newspapers. Fourth, printing technology developed in 1960s. It stimulated appearance of kinds of reading. Many publishers turned up receiving popular reading.

Damono as mentioned by Dewojati (2010) explains that recently popular literature much searched by university students in paper, thesis and dissertation. Besides, popular literature gives some benefits for development of Indonesian literature, such as description of society, if may be called 'uncultured', opens world view to see human world. In fact, popular literature has much reader. Popular novel is a part of popular culture. Characteristics of popular culture much discussed by Fiske (2011: 117, 121), Stanton (2012: 1, 13), Sugihastuti (2011: vii), Kayam (1982: 82-91. In Ratna, 2010: 399-400), Damono (2011: 107-108), Goldmann (Laurenson dan Swingewood, 1972: 20. In Endraswara (2011: 85). They agree that popular literature tends to entertain so that less gives meaning for reader. However, Jassin (1993: 67) regards it as important as a media of training for beginner.

### **Readers' Response to Sundanese Popular Novel in 1960s to 1970s**

Response relates to the important role of a reader as stated by Hans Robert Jauss, Wolfgang Iser, David Bleich and Stanley Fish. For Jauss in his paper entitled Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory, there is a relationship between text and reader called aesthetics as well as historical implication (Newton, 1990: 222). Meanwhile, Iser in his paper entitled Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response (Newton, 1990: 227) explains two steps in describing the relationship between text and reader. First, indicating special qualities of a literary text from other kinds of text. Second, mentioning and analyzing the basic elements that attract reader to give response. This degree of response is called indeterminacy and its various ways in text. The Subjective Character of Critical Interpretation is paper written by Bleich that explains author and reader has response to the work of literature. It is a "response to his life" for author. Otherwise, for reader it is his interpretation to "his reading experience" (Newton, 1990: 234). Fish in his paper, Interpreting the Variorum (Newton, 1990: 236-238) gives four interpretive strategies when reader responds a literary work.

Readers' response of Sundanese popular novel is categorized as critique. Following the statement of Ensiklopedi Indonesia Edisi Khusus (in Yudiono. 2009: 25-26) critique is consideration about true and untrue; lovely and bad; valuable and useless. Critique can ruin and build. It is divided into ten categories, namely: textual, linguistics, historic, biographic, comparative, stylistic-aesthetic, sociologic, ideology, impressionistic and integrative critique. Specifically, Hartoko (in Yudiono, 2009: 26-27) defines critique is a part of literature science which analyze, interpret and evaluate a literary text. Relevant with both definitions, Pradopo (in Yudiono, 2009: 28) explains that critique is literature subject to 'judge' literary work, to give

evaluation and decision of a literary work whether valuable or not.

Brown and Tomlinson (1999: 261) explain people that undergo story through three ways, namely, by listening, reading and viewing story. After that, they naturally want to express their reaction of the experience in the same way. Typically, the response can be delivered into oral and writing response. Railton (2003: i) states that our values and norms shape our lives. A novel offers people think, feel, see, do and act in their life.

In the Koropak it is found some important problems stated by readers in their letter to writer and publisher. Those problems includes content of story, publishing, background of writer, benefit of novel, character and plot, Silat or self-defense technique in fighting, struggle stories, moral message, and language style. They are categorized into two main aspects, namely intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. Many readers feel happy because of Koropak. It is a media for them to express their feeling, critique and opinion. Some of them hopes the best thing for the writer so that he can continue to write story. They also send happy fasting of Ramadhan, Idul Fitri, New year to all.

Some popular novel among readers written by S. Sukandar were *Koswara*, *Si Buntung*, *Djago Tutugan*, *Djaka Santang*, *Waliwis Bodas*, *Eulis Titi*, *Siti Muljati*, *Enok Mae*, *Balati Demit*, *Tjipanon Indung*, *Sumeren Kana Papasten*, and *Gumilar*. Sundanese popular novel consists of several topics that are close to society's life. As the result, they were attracted to read and collected the novels to build center reading. Some reader hopes that those stories could be continued into short stories, transformed into drama. They also hope the content of story does not only talk about society daily life but also kingdom's life. Because of long story divided into many series, for example story of *Waliwis Bodas* has 40 series, readers suggest the writer to separate story into other stories.

Publishing is important part of book process. Although there were several private publishing in Bandung, unfortunately the need of Sundanese popular novel was still less provided. This case is clearly stated from the confusion of reading center owner especially facing readers who wanted to read the work. Nevertheless, he should manage strategy by making lottery for the first reader. Because of this, those who could not read the story, they asked the writer to make reading of novel in the radio at Tasikmalaya, one of regency in West Java. Reading novels in many radios at 1960s to 1990s was a culture to spread out Sundanese popular novel (mentioned in my former researches in 2012). To anticipate asking of novels broadly some readers would open new reading center in their homes. Even, the active readers had never missed collected novels since in the beginning until the last novel. They always read and bought those novels.

Background of writer differs between former writers and recent writers. Yet, Sundanese popular writers considered that it was not important to state who they were. No one told about

their lives in their novels' cover. In fact, many readers wanted to know their life although it was only told briefly. Readers were eager to know much about his life, career, and writing process. They hoped that writer could give information needed. Besides, they wanted to know how he looked like so that he could produce such interesting stories. Even, they wanted to see them face to face. Because of tired to wait new series of novel, they also suggest that it was better for writer to make only a book of novel, not series novel.

Most of writer has some aims in writing novel. These aims are not stated explicitly in the novel. Reader has role to find out these writer's aims. After finishing a novel a reader could feel satisfaction, relief, curiosity, or even boring and tired. This relates to the function of story as giving education and entertainment like what Horatius says. Some readers said that they felt happy reading novels as a medicine of their sadness. In addition, a novel can give beneficial as education for society. Moral message is mostly used by writer in the past as advice indirectly. They wanted to educate, remind society in order to have good morality. This is represented in the figure of characters and in the plot. By imitating good characters, it is hoped that they can behave in good ways. Otherwise, there are some novels used to protest government's policy. This becomes a form of revolt of injustice. It is a satire to cruelty, ridiculous things happened in the society.

Figure of story or characters attracted readers in the mean of both physical appearance and personality as described by writer. Reader only imagines what he is saying. Good behavior, kind, helpful, and loyal characters are description of good characters expected by society. It becomes an ideal person needed to help weak people. Such main characters mostly loved by readers. Besides, they expected series of events ended happily. For that reason, they suggested writer to continue stories by giving happiness to the main characters after they had undergone sadness and misery.

One of popular novels among readers is Silat novel. 'Silat' novels (fighting self-defense technique stories) is a kind of interesting story. Sundanese culture has Silat as self-defense in fighting like kungfu in China. This Silat stories are very famous because it is combined with love affair, household, adventure, gambling and adultery. Combination among those problems creates Silat stories more enjoyable to read. Techniques of Silat in Sundanese culture called 'gerakan' or movement and 'jurus' or the way to beat enemy. By reading Silat novel some readers said that it inspired them to implement it in their daily activities such as in the sport. Many Silat novels were especially introduced by S. Sukandar differs with Silat story in comic. He explored Silat by observing some schools of Silat in West Java. Because of the reason, it is original and more valuable. Readers thank the writer's effort for maintaining the heritage of Sundanese Silat as a form of love. They also expected him to develop exploring stories about struggle of Sundanese against The Dutch and Japan colonial. He had succeeded to present Sundanese's heroes that never mentioned in the history. They had built peace and prosperity in the society. Hopefully,

this exploration is as the way to remind the next generation the history of his society in the past time so that they will be proud of them. Such story books are really expected by readers.

Aesthetic exploration is not the only writer's aim in telling a story. There is another important aim, that is, delivering values of Sundanese local wisdom called moral message. Historically, local wisdom is a cultural wealth of a society that continued from one generation to the next. It contains of material and nonmaterial wealth. Material wealth consists of tools used by society in his life. Meanwhile, nonmaterial thing is oral tradition as their belief. It consists of songs, poetry, values, ethics, norms and rules. Mostly, Sundanese popular novels state advice, ideas, comments and opinion based on Sundanese local wisdom both implicitly and explicitly. Reader does not feel that he or she is being advised by writer. They only enjoy what had been presented to them like its plot, setting and character that's all. Moral message found in Sundanese popular novels usually about morality of daily life, such as moral in the family, neighbor, work place, and society. Good moral needed to build peaceful life, not only in the family but also in the society. Readers expected writers to give much moral message in their stories. A reader said that S.Sukandar's novel were full of moral education.

Katz, et.all (1998: 3) says that "The creative interplay of language and thought is particularly evident in figurative language." S.Sukandar is one of the most famous writers among other. He had unique style in presenting story. His uniqueness exists in the logical fair description of character, setting, plot and diction. Reader and storytellers like Mang Jaya (a storyteller from Kuningan West Java Indonesia) and Mang Mamat Rahmat (one of storyteller from Sumedang, West Java Indonesia) admire his style. The storyline flows impressively. No rude words, phrase or sentence and pornography described in the story. As the result, his novels were not dangerous to read by children, and appropriate for all levels of age. Like Booth (1990: 61) mentions that every writer has determined the target readers. The characters were presented detailed both physically and personality. Setting of place, time and social culture expressed vividly based on the situation in the 1960s to 1970s. According to Stephen King (2004 in Meyer, 2007: vii) "Good writing teaches the learning writer about style, graceful narration, plot development, the creation of believable characters and truth-telling." This description as if the writer knew perfectly the events in the story. This implicitly shows that he was a competence writer. The choice of words performs exploration of Sundanese language that is rich of metaphorical style (Tamsyah, 2010) like 'babasan' dan 'paribasa' (idiomatic expression). By reading Sundanese novels, reader can get much lost words that is rare used recently. The exploration of some Sundanese culture also can be learned in those novels.

Escarpit (2005: 136) mentions that there is a relationship between a work and public (reader). From the readers' opinion, comment, and suggestion it can be concluded that relationship between Sundanese reader and Sundanese popular novel was very close. Their happiness with the existence of Koropak indicates that they accepted Sundanese popular novel as something to read. They gave good response by sending letters to the writers. They could tell

everything they want, hope, suggest, comment, criticize related with the content and development of Sundanese popular novels. This fact points that they were categorized as (Hoogstad, Valerie & Saxby, Maurice. 1991) implied readers. Various topics presented in the novels attracted much readers' attention. This shows that writers had succeeded to entertain (Turby, 2008: 52) and present moral implication with its effects. As the result, readers suggest to develop stories both topic and transformation. It means that readers need something new like drama and short stories. "Book Hunger" borrowed from Escarpit and Barker's term (1973) happened here. The existence of novels connected with the role of publisher. Readers hope that writers and publishers can produce more novels every week so that they could not wait too long. This fact signs that they need something to read beside magazines and newspaper. They always wait for new arrival and curious to know the continued story. In addition, this also shows how fond of novel readers at that time.

Novels give special experiences as if they play themselves to be the characters in the story. Ideal life offered by writer in the story bringing them into real life for moment. Imagination leads them to have new hope and desire in life. Even, for certain reader novels inspired them to be someone like in the story. This benefit of story influences much to reader. Moral message presented both implicitly or explicitly is as an additional knowledge of rules and norms of life. Local wisdom of Sundanese culture can be maintained by readers through novels. As Derks & Roymans (2009:1) believes that it is as an exploration source for a form of identity.

However, there are some important matters that show readers' expectation to writer. They are satisfied with the strength of novels written by S. Sukandar and Wahju Adam as mentioned above. The writers had considered the usage of language so that can be accepted by all levels of reader. However, it is better for writer to stop the story because of tired of waiting the new series of novel. Transformation is needed to make story long enjoyed. To make happy ending of story, writer should end story by making the major couple marries. It will satisfy readers. Then the content of story can be developed with other topic like talking about a kingdom and history of society's struggle against cruelty. Finally it can be concluded that those readers' responses are valuable information for both writers and publishers in producing meaningful story.

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