

## Research Article

# Description of Feminism in the Characters 'Ningsih' and 'Aku' in the Short Story 'Istri Prajurit' by Nh. Dini

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## ABSTRACT

The short story 'Istri Prajurit' by Nh. Dini is one of the Indonesian literary works that reflects the values of feminism through the characters Ningsih and Aku. This research aims to analyze three indicators of feminism, namely discrimination, emancipation, and women's power, using a descriptive qualitative approach that integrates literature study and content analysis based on feminist literary criticism. The analysis shows that the discrimination experienced by Ningsih comes from her family, who reject her marriage to Garjo, a non-bangawan man, as depicted in Data 1 and 2, which also affects her daughter, Nani, who does not receive financial support for treatment. Women's emancipation is shown through Ningsih's courage to go against social norms by abandoning her family's traditions to marry Garjo (Data 3) and her decision to migrate to Jakarta in search of a better life (Data 4). The character Aku plays a major role in this emancipation by providing moral encouragement to Ningsih and convincing her of her potential. Women's power is seen in Aku, who realizes her worth as a woman, chooses not to continue her relationship with Narto to maintain her life principles (Data 5), and inspires Ningsih to rise from adversity (Data 6). This research reveals the dynamic relationship between discrimination, emancipation, and women's power, showing the struggle against patriarchy and the achievement of independence, making a significant contribution to the study of feminism in Indonesian literature.

**Keywords:** Feminism; Characters; Short Story 'Istri Prajurit'; Indonesian Literature

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Short stories or short stories are a form of literary work that has unique and specific characteristics. In general, a short story is a work of fiction written in prose, which conveys a particular theme or problem in a short and concise manner. Short stories can usually be read in one sitting, with a reading duration ranging from half to two hours, which is different from novels that take longer to read (Rahardian Putra & Burhannudin, 2022). Short stories also often contain moral values that readers can take away. These values cover various aspects of life, such as social care, tolerance, and honesty, which are conveyed through characters and storylines (Febriyanto & Suryani, 2021).

Short stories are a creative art form that makes humans and their lives the main focus, with language as a means to convey expression. As works of art, short stories are expected to be able to present beauty through the uniqueness of the creations created, while fulfilling the aesthetic needs of its readers. The beauty in short stories arises from the creativity that is the basis of the creation process (Desy, 2020). Overall, the short story is a complex and multifaceted form of literary work, which not only functions as entertainment but also as an educational tool and social reflection. Through a deep understanding of short stories, readers can appreciate the beauty of language and the meaning contained in each story. Short stories as literary works emerge from the author's observations of the reality he sees through his personal perspective. Therefore, short stories reflect a picture of reality as well as the author's vision. That way, short stories function as a reflection of people's lives at a certain time. One of the themes that often appears in short stories is gender representation, especially related to feminism.

Feminism is a movement that focuses on the struggle for women's rights and gender equality, covering various aspects of life, including politics, economics, and social affairs. According to Winarti (2023), feminism is a series of social, political, and ideological movements that aim to achieve gender equality, departing from the understanding that society often prioritizes men's perspectives and ignores women's rights. Feminism not only focuses on women's issues but also seeks to

address broader societal injustices. Feminism also plays an important role in understanding intersectionality, which is how various social identities, such as class, race, and gender, interact and influence individual experiences. Kiranantika (2022) explains that feminism is an important alternative in understanding intersectionality and finding inclusive solutions to discrimination in Indonesia.

In the modern context, feminism also plays a role in addressing issues that arise due to social change, as seen in the discourse of women's empowerment after the COVID-19 pandemic. Hawa and Muhajir pointed out that media, such as Femina magazine, played a role in conveying feminist messages and increasing gender awareness among women (Hawa & Muhajir, 2022). In addition, feminist movements in Indonesia have produced political action and knowledge that contribute to women's emancipation and gender equality (Indiah, 2022). As such, feminism functions as a social movement and a tool to drive broader political and social change. Meanwhile, feminism is a complex and multidimensional movement aiming to achieve gender equality and social justice. Through various approaches and streams, feminism seeks to address the injustices experienced by women and other marginalized groups and promote positive societal change.

Feminism in literature is an approach that focuses on the representation of women, their experiences, and the critique of oppressive social structures. Feminist literary works often feature complex and diverse female characters rather than simply as objects or supplements to the story. Writers try to portray women's life experiences more deeply (Olifia, 2016). Feminism in literature serves as a tool to fight for women's rights, challenge patriarchal norms, and give voice to women's experiences. Through critical analysis and innovative writing, feminist writers contribute to a deeper understanding of gender and identity in social and cultural contexts (Afiah, 2021).

The short story by Nh. Dini's short story 'Istri Prajurit' is one of the many literary works that discuss feminism. It tells the story of an aristocratic woman named Ningsih who marries Gardjo, a soldier from a simple family. Their marriage does not get the blessing of Ningsih's family, so they are removed from the family. Even so, their marriage brings happiness, albeit briefly, as Gardjo dies in battle. Ningsih's sadness deepens when her daughter, Nani, suddenly falls ill, while her family offers no help. Her grief was eased when a friend from the city came to visit. The friend persuaded Ningsih to go to the city to earn a living for herself and her child. At first, Ningsih was reluctant to leave her royal status, but her friend's advice finally touched her heart. With renewed determination, Ningsih comes to Jakarta to seek a better future.

This short story was published in the book 'Dua Dunia'. The book is a collection of short stories by Nh. Dini was published in 1956, and then in 2002, it was republished in its 3rd printing by Grasindo, Jakarta. In the book, there are several short stories, and one of them is the short story 'Istri Prajurit.' This article aims to explore women's discrimination, women's emancipation, and women's power in the characters Ningsih and Aku in the short story Istri Prajurit. Although there have been many studies on feminism in literature, most of them only focus on analyzing female characters in general or are limited to the aspects of discrimination and emancipation. Previous studies rarely explore the relationship between discrimination, emancipation, and women's power in one narrative and how these three elements influence each other in character formation and development. In addition, the study of Nh. Dini's work, especially the short story 'Istri Prajurit', is still relatively minimal compared to feminist research on other literary works. In fact, this short story contains a deep portrait of women's struggle against discrimination, achievement of independence, and strength to survive amid social pressure.

To bridge the gap, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of three main indicators, namely women's discrimination, women's emancipation, and women's power, represented through the characters Ningsih and Aku in the short story 'Istri Prajurit'. This analysis highlights the existence of each indicator and examines the dynamic relationship between indicators in building narratives and characters. Thus, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to understanding the representation of feminism in Indonesian literature, especially in the context of women's struggle against patriarchal culture.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research applies a descriptive qualitative method. This method is an approach that aims to describe and analyze social phenomena in depth without manipulating the data. This approach combines descriptive and qualitative research elements to provide a more thorough understanding of the conditions or situations that are the object of study (Sugiyono, 2016). This type of research is used to describe the criticism contained in the short story Istri Prajurit descriptively. This research uses data collection techniques in the form of literature studies. This method focuses on analyzing various written sources, such as books, articles, and other documents relevant to the research topic (Rusli et al., 2014). The data analysis technique used is the content analysis method with a feminist literary criticism approach. This analysis will focus on examining the content

of information conveyed through written or printed media (Sumarno, 2020). The content used in this research is a short story entitled *Istri Prajurit* by Nh. Dini.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Story Synopsis

This short story was published in the book 'Dua Dunia'. The book is a collection of short stories by Nh. Dini (2014) was published in 1956. This short story tells the story of a woman of noble descent named Ningsih. Ningsih, a woman from a noble family, decides to leave her noble status to marry Garjo, her schoolmate from a commoner. Garjo later became a soldier, and they lived a happy life together and were blessed with a daughter. However, their happiness did not last long. Ningsih's life changed drastically when Garjo died in the war. As the widow of a soldier, Ningsih did not have enough inheritance to raise her child. Her parents, still reluctant to accept her past decisions, refused to help her. Finally, Ningsih decides to migrate to Jakarta with her friend, the character Aku, rather than continue to drown in sadness and adversity. In addition, Aku is a woman who dares to follow her heart. She chose to leave Narto, a noble young man whom she actually liked, to pursue her career. My character prefers to live according to her principles rather than following the tradition that expects women to be the ideal figure in marriage.

#### 3.2 Feminism Findings

This research focuses on three indicators: women's power, women's emancipation, and women's discrimination. The following table shows the results of the analysis of Ningsih's character with indicators of women's power, women's emancipation and women's discrimination.

**Table 1. Results of Ningsih Characters Analysis**

Indicators	Ningsih character	Citation
Discrimination of women	<p>Ningsih suffered from discrimination from her family.</p> <p>Ningsih was not given any assistance by her parents despite being related by blood.</p>	<p>(Data 1) <i>Aku mencoba memecahkan dinding kekakuan saat itu. Kudengar keluhannya perlahan sekali. Dan dia tetap tak memandang kepadaku.</i></p> <p><i>"Aku tak tahu dari mana mesti memulainya."</i></p> <p><i>Aku tertawa sedikit mengejek.</i></p> <p><i>"Seperti juga kau tak tahu bagaimana mesti memulai dan mengakhiri hidup dengan Garjo."</i></p> <p><i>Sekali lagi kudengar keluhnya, kali ini memberat.</i></p> <p><i>"Mereka menyalahkan aku, mereka semua mengutuk aku. Tapi aku tak mengharapkan itu dari kau, Niek," perlahan sekali dia berbicara dengan sebentar-sebentar berhenti.</i></p> <p><i>Digititnya bibirnya, kesedihan yang tak terderita membanyangi seluruh wajahnya. Aku tertegun sejenak.</i></p> <p>(Data 2) <i>Tujuh bulan aku di sini, Nani sakit. Tadinya hanya influenza. Tapi lalu dokter bilang long onsteking. Uang mengalir terus untuk obat dan dokter. Dari Bapak aku tidak menerima apa- apa," dia berhenti seperti mencari tenaga. "Aku terasing di sini seperti orang yang dikebonkan. Dan Nani, ah, anak prajurit katanya. Dan begitu saja," serak dia tertahan-tahan mencoba meneruskan bicaranya.</i></p>
Emancipation of women	<p>Ningsih dared to disassociate herself from her noble family to marry Garjo.</p> <p>Ningsih decided to come to Jakarta to continue her life there.</p>	<p>(Data 3) <i>Tiga setengah tahun yang lalu ia kawin. Ia berani melepaskan diri dari lingkungan keluarganya di balik dinding itu hanya untuk Garjo anak desa Sentul, beberapa kilometer sebelah Selatan Yogyakarta. Kenekatannya itu masih mengejutkan benar, juga bagiku yang tahu benar siapa Ningsih.</i></p> <p>(Data 4) <i>"Tapi kini aku juga tahu kesadaran. Aku bisa seperti kau Niek, aku bisa! Kau mesti percaya ini," tiba-tiba suaranya mengeras, penuh semangat. Aku tetap pada sikapku semula. Mataku menahan air yang makin memanas. "Aku pergi dengan kau kalau kau balik ke Jakarta." Aku dengar suaranya jernih dan tegas.</i></p>

In Ningsih's character, only two of the three indicators studied were found, namely women's discrimination and women's emancipation. In data 1, there was discrimination experienced by Ningsih. The discrimination came from her own family who rejected her return to their home. This rejection was accepted because a few years earlier Ningsih had defied her family by marrying a man who was not from a noble family like hers. The rejection from her family was not only for Ningsih but

also for her daughter, Nani. This is supported by data 2. In data 2, it was found that Ningsih's family was reluctant to help Nani seek medical treatment. It is also known in the data that Nani experienced a misfortune and Ningsih was unable to pay for Nani's treatment. Women's discrimination in the context of feminism refers to the unfair treatment and inequality experienced by women based on their gender. It includes various forms of distinction, exclusion and restrictions that prevent women from enjoying human rights and basic freedoms in areas such as politics, economics and socio-culture. This discrimination is often rooted in a patriarchal culture that considers women as lesser beings than men, so they experience marginalisation in various aspects of life (Apriliandra & Krisnani, 2021).

Data 3 shows Ningsih's resistance to her family. In a noble family like Ningsih's, it is required to marry a fellow noble. But Ningsih went against the customs or traditions that grew up in her noble family. She went against her family by marrying a common man and leaving her home. Ningsih's action is a form of female emancipation. Women's emancipation in the context of feminism refers to the struggle to gain equal rights with men and to free women from various forms of oppression and discrimination. Women's emancipation is the process of liberation from the restraints experienced by women, both legally and socially. This concept stems from the desire to achieve gender equality, where women are expected to develop themselves and participate fully in all aspects of life, whether social, political, or economic (Maghfiroh & -, 2020).

Similar to data 3, data 4 also shows a form of women's emancipation. In data 4, it was found that Ningsih was again brave enough to make her own decision for the sake of her and her child. The decision is that Ningsih wants to go to the city with Aku's character to find a decent job there. This decision was made after persuasion from Ningsih's friend, Aku. Aku convinced Ningsih to work on her own and not depend on her family for Nani's treatment and for herself. The following table shows the results of the analysis of the character I with indicators of women's power, women's safety and women's discrimination.

**Table 2. Results of the Analysis of My Characters**

Indicators	The character 'Aku'	Citation
Women's power	My heroine is aware of her own worth as a woman.	(Data 5) <i>Dalam hati aku merasa malu kepada diriku sendiri. Aku mengingkari cinta karena mengkhawatirkan pandangan orang lain. Tapi apa yang aku khawatirkan adalah satu hal yang wajar yang pasti ada pada pikiran orang-orang lain. Narto saudara sepupu Ningsih mempunyai sebutan gelar yang ada jauh di atas-ku. Aku tak punya sebutan apa-apa. Dan aku merasa tergugah oleh kesombonganku sendiri. Aku harus bisa mempunyai sebutan yang ada di atasnya, sebutan yang bukan sis-sisa kefodalan. Lalu aku lari dengan kesombongan itu. Akhirnya, aku sadar bahwa itu bukanlah kesombongan, melainkan satu kesadaran akan harga diriku sebagai perempuan yang mau mengulurkan tangan dalam kerja bermasyarakat.</i>
Emancipation of women	The character Aku persuaded Ningsih.	(Data 6) <i>Aku mencuri pandang Ningsih. Tapi dia masih tetap menghindarkan paduan matakku dan dia masih tetap diam pula. "Kenapa kau tidak mencoba hidup sendiri dengan tenagamu. Kau punya ijazah untuk kerja di kantor, kawan-kawan Garjo mesti bisa menolongmu mencari pekerjaan. Dengan begitu kau bisa menunjukkan kepada orang-orang bahwa kau bisa hidup tanpa mereka yang ada di sini," pandangku aku edarkan ke seluruh pendara.</i>

In Aku's character, only 2 of the 3 indicators studied were found, namely women's power and women's emancipation. Based on data 5, it illustrates the existence of women's power in Aku's character. The character Aku has an awareness of her dignity as a woman. It is this awareness that makes the character not regret her decision to reject Narto's love, who is a noble family and Ningsih's cousin. In fact, the data mentioned the character also has the same feelings as Narto, but Aku's character is more concerned with her dignity than her love for the man.

Women's power in the context of feminism, especially in Naomi Wolf's feminism of power, refers to women's ability and right to control their own lives and participate fully in various aspects of life without having to ask permission from others. This concept emphasises that women have full power over themselves and have the right to determine their own destiny. Women's power in feminism has several principles, including (1) Women and men have equally important roles in life. No one gender is more valuable than the other. (2) Women have the right to determine their own destiny and path in life. This emphasises the importance of individual freedom without intervention from other parties. (3) Women's experiences have significant meaning and value, not just something to be taken for granted. Each woman's experience is valued and recognised. (4) Women have the right to speak the truth about their life experiences. This includes freedom of speech and

expression without pressure from others. (5) Women deserve respect in all aspects of life, including education, health and safety. This includes recognition of their dignity and rights as individuals (Annatasya & Saksono, 2021). Furthermore, in data 6, I found an effort from Aku's character in persuading Ningsih to work and try to live on her own. She also assured that many of her other friends would be ready to help Ningsih find a job. The data also illustrates my character's efforts to make Ningsih realise her abilities as a woman and to make her realise that being a woman with one child is not a barrier. Data 6 found here is included in the emancipation of women. There is a process of liberation from existing constraints.

### 3.3 Relevance of Feminism Approach to the Short Story 'Istri Prajurit' by Nh Dini

Based on the research results above, several things can be described regarding the relationship between the short story 'Soldier's Wife' by NH Dini and the indicators in feminism, among others:

#### a. Discrimination of Women

Discrimination against Ningsih is evident through the unfair treatment she experiences from her family. Based on Data 1, Ningsih's family blames her and criticises her choice to marry Garjo, a man who does not come from the aristocracy. This family rejection indicates that they are more concerned with gender-biased social norms than Ningsih's happiness as an individual. Furthermore, the discrimination is not only experienced by Ningsih, but also affects her daughter, Nani, as noted in Data 2. When Nani suffers from a serious illness, Ningsih's family is reluctant to provide financial assistance, forcing Ningsih as a mother to bear the entire burden independently. This situation illustrates the marginalisation of women, with Ningsih not receiving proper support from her family. This discrimination is rooted in a patriarchal culture that ignores women's rights, both as individuals and as part of the family.

#### b. Women's Emancipation

Ningsih's actions reflect the courage and spirit of women's emancipation. In Data 3, Ningsih takes a big step by abandoning her family's tradition to marry Garjo, even though she realises that her actions will be heavily criticised. This decision reflects Ningsih's struggle against social norms that limit her freedom in choosing a life partner. Ningsih's emancipation is further seen in Data 4, when she decides to follow Aku to Jakarta to find work. This step shows Ningsih's courage to live independently without relying on her family who have rejected her. This decision reflects Ningsih's belief in her ability as a woman to face challenges for the welfare of herself and her child. In addition, the character Aku also contributed to encouraging Ningsih's emancipation, as illustrated in Data 6. My character persuaded Ningsih to believe in herself and strive to live independently. By providing moral encouragement and motivating Ningsih to utilise her potential, Aku's character shows that emancipation does not only include individual actions but also a process of mutual support between women to achieve independence.

#### c. Women's Power

Awareness of women's power is evident in the character of Aku. In Data 5, Aku acknowledges her feelings of love for Narto, but she chooses not to continue the relationship in order to maintain her dignity as a woman. This decision reflects the feminist principle of power, which emphasises a woman's right to determine her own path in life without being subject to social expectations or pressures. In addition, Aku's power is also seen in her role as a source of inspiration for Ningsih, as illustrated in Data 6. She is not only able to determine the direction of her own life but also helps Ningsih to realise her potential as a woman. With this action, Aku shows herself as an empowered woman, who is not only able to empower herself but also support others to achieve independence. Overall, both Ningsih and Aku reflect various aspects of women's discrimination, emancipation and power. Their experiences illustrate how women can confront injustice, resist restrictive norms, and fight for control over their own lives.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the short story "Istri Prajurit" by Nh. Dini serves as a strong reflection of feminist issues in literature, particularly on the themes of women's discrimination, emancipation, and empowerment. Through the character of Ningsih, readers are presented with a vivid portrayal of the discrimination faced by women as a result of patriarchal culture. This discrimination not only affects Ningsih as an individual but also extends to her child, Nani. The injustice experienced by Ningsih from her family, such as their refusal to provide financial assistance for her child's medical treatment, illustrates the marginalization of women within the family sphere, rooted in gender-biased social norms. This short story successfully depicts how discrimination against women often stems from patriarchal values

that disregard women's fundamental rights. Furthermore, "Istri Prajurit" highlights Ningsih's struggle to achieve emancipation and personal strength. Ningsih demonstrates courage in defying traditional norms by marrying Garjo and later making a significant decision to live independently in Jakarta after losing her husband. This act not only reflects women's emancipation in challenging social constraints but also her confidence in her abilities as an individual. The support from the character "Aku" further strengthens Ningsih's journey of emancipation, emphasizing the importance of solidarity among women. Additionally, the character "Aku" represents women's empowerment, choosing to uphold her principles and dignity rather than succumbing to social pressures. Overall, this short story underscores the importance of the feminist struggle to create gender equality and empower women across various aspects of life.

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