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Women's Exploitation under Capitalism: A Marxist-Feminist Analysis of Rena Asyari's *Perempuan dan Mentalitas*

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ABSTRACT ENGLISH:

This research analyzes the exploitation of women in the short story *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* by Rena Asyari using a Marxist-Feminist approach. The background of this research departs from the phenomenon of exploitation of women in rural Indonesia who are trapped in the structure of capitalism and patriarchal culture, where women are used as cheap labour without equal access to education and self-development. This short story displays the reality of how young women are conditioned from the start to accept factory work as their only way of life, which reflects a form of systemic exploitation that is ideological and material in nature. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a close reading technique of literary texts. Marxist-Feminist theory is used to reveal the relationship between economic power, patriarchal culture, and false consciousness formed through consumption and normalization of domestic roles. The analysis shows four main forms of exploitation: the commodification of women's labour, patriarchal ideology and structural submission, consumerism as a distraction of consciousness, and women and the double burden. The short story illustrates how the capitalist system not only drains women physically, but also limits their consciousness and freedom through the internalization of social norms. The conclusion of this study confirms that literature can be an effective medium of social criticism to expose the structured exploitation of women. This study also emphasizes the importance of critical consciousness, access to education, and systemic change as absolute conditions towards women's liberation in a capitalist-patriarchal society.

Keywords: Capitalist, Exploitation, Feminist, Marxist.

ABSTRACT INDONESIAN:

Penelitian ini menganalisis eksploitasi perempuan dalam cerpen *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* karya Rena Asyari menggunakan pendekatan Marxis-Feminis. Latar belakang penelitian ini berangkat dari fenomena eksploitasi perempuan di pedesaan Indonesia yang terjebak dalam struktur kapitalisme dan budaya patriarki, di mana perempuan digunakan sebagai tenaga kerja murah tanpa akses yang setara terhadap pendidikan dan pengembangan diri. Cerpen ini menggambarkan realitas bagaimana perempuan muda sejak awal dikondisikan untuk menerima pekerjaan pabrik sebagai satu-satunya cara hidup mereka, yang mencerminkan bentuk eksploitasi sistemik yang bersifat ideologis dan material. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pembacaan mendalam teks sastra. Teori Marxist-Feminist digunakan untuk mengungkap hubungan antara kekuasaan ekonomi, budaya patriarki, dan kesadaran palsu yang terbentuk melalui konsumsi dan normalisasi peran domestik. Analisis menunjukkan empat bentuk eksploitasi utama: komodifikasi tenaga kerja perempuan, ideologi patriarki dan penyerahan struktural, konsumerisme sebagai pengalihan kesadaran, dan beban ganda perempuan. Cerpen ini menggambarkan bagaimana sistem kapitalis tidak hanya menguras tenaga perempuan secara fisik, tetapi juga membatasi kesadaran dan kebebasan mereka melalui internalisasi norma-norma sosial. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa sastra dapat menjadi medium kritik sosial yang efektif untuk mengungkap eksploitasi terstruktur terhadap perempuan. Penelitian ini juga menekankan pentingnya kesadaran kritis, akses terhadap pendidikan, dan perubahan sistemik sebagai syarat mutlak menuju pembebasan perempuan dalam masyarakat kapitalis-patriarkal.

Kata Kunci: Kapitalis, Eksploitasi, Feminis, Marxist.

Introduction

In the context of modern society that continues to be driven by industrialization and capitalism, the position of women in the work sector, especially in rural areas, is still a complex and relevant issue to be studied. Rena Asyari's short story *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* presents an autobiographical narrative that reflects how the capitalist system affects the mindset and life choices of working-class women in the Majalengka area. This short story not only voices the problem of gender inequality, but also illustrates how young women are encouraged to become part of the capitalist wheel of production, often at the expense of their rights to education, personal aspirations, and freedom of thought. This phenomenon is important to study because it reflects how capitalism not only exploits women's bodies as cheap labor, but also forms a collective mentality that forces women to submit and accept inequality as normal. Understanding this issue can make a critical contribution to gender studies and strengthen awareness of the importance of education and equality in building a more just society.

The exploitation of women in the capitalist system has long been a subject of discussion in feminist studies, especially in the perspective of Marxist feminism. Marxist feminism is a subset of feminist theory and politics that draws its theoretical inspiration from Marxism. It is characterized by its critique of capitalism as a system of institutions, practices, structures, incentives, and sensibilities that promote the exploitation of labor, human alienation, and diminished freedom (Dawn, 2023). According to Guy-Evans (2023), Marxist feminists believe that gender inequality is rooted in the capitalist system and advocate for a classless society to achieve true gender equality. Marxist feminism is concerned with the problems of women in a capitalist environment. In a capital patriarchal society, this ideology assumes that the oppression of women stems from class exploitation (Mardiyani & Tawami, 2022).

According to marxism, capitalism is a socio-economic system based on privatized production and the exploitation of the labor force. And another opinion according to Federici (2021), capitalism not only exploits women's labor but also shapes their identity and expectations through rigid social norms. Capitalism has never had anything liberating, neither its industrial expansion and productivity, its technology, nor its capacity for authority and organization (Dean, 2020). Rena Asyari's short story *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* describes how the presence of factories in rural areas affects the role and mentality of women. The presence of factories is often seen as an economic opportunity, but on the other hand, it can also reinforce gender stereotypes and the double burden for women, where they are expected to be able to work and take care of the household.

Majalengka as a setting in this short story illustrates how industrialization affects the mindset and role of women in society. In the hierarchy of power generated by the distinction between productive and reproductive labor, the latter in which women are overrepresented is placed at the bottom of the social ladder. This not only provides an ideological justification for exploitation, but also results in a kind of "normalization" of the heavy exploitation of women (Giammarinaro, 2022). In the context of the manufacturing industry in Indonesia,

women are often the main labor force with low wages and less favorable working conditions. Data shows that in 2023, 65.35% of women worked in the informal sector, while only 34.65% worked in the formal sector, contributing to the wage gap between men and women (Beln & Mahatmanti, 2024).

The strong patriarchal culture in many societies exacerbates the exploitation of women. According to (Ortner, 2022), patriarchy is a male dominated social system with structured patterns of power, which appear consistently at various levels of community life, ranging from small scopes such as families, kin groups, to communities such as gangs, to large institutions such as the military, police, religion, sports, to state government. Patriarchal culture is highly inclined to place male dominance in various aspects (Hajir & Marsih, 2023). In addition, social and cultural pressures reinforce the exploitation of women by making factory work the only way out of poverty, while education is neglected. This reality is clearly reflected in the narrative of Rena Asyari's short story *Perempuan dan Mentalitas*.

Iqbal et al. (2023), in their study Exploring Intersectionality of Power Dynamics and Capitalistic Dismantling of Female, employed a feminist-Marxist lens to critique capitalist oppression of women in literature. Their analysis contributes important insights into how structural forces shape gendered subjugation, yet it emphasizes macro themes of power and domination, while offering little in the way of close literary reading of specific narratives. This limitation reflects what Federici (2021) terms the “hidden abodes” of capitalism, where women’s reproductive labor and everyday realities are often obscured by abstract structural analysis. Similarly, Khader (2021) argues that feminist literary criticism must remain attentive to the localized and situated experiences of women, particularly in postcolonial and Global South contexts, to avoid imposing universalized frameworks of oppression.

In contrast, Rena Asyari’s short stories capture these micro realities with striking narrative depth. Her depictions of women balancing the pressures of factory labor with household responsibilities demonstrate how ideology seeps into daily practices and shapes subjectivity at the most intimate level. This narrative approach aligns with Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser’s (2019) call for a “feminism for the 99%,” which insists on connecting macro-structural critique with women’s lived material conditions under capitalism. Thus, Asyari’s work fills an important gap by showing how literary fiction can illuminate the ideological control and subtle forms of mental oppression embedded within capitalist systems.

The objective of this research is to analyze the representation of women's exploitation in the short story *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* by Rena Asyari using the Marxist feminism approach. The focus of this research is to understand how women in this short story are conditioned to accept exploitation as something natural, as well as how their life choices are shaped by economic and social pressures rooted in society. This research has significance in expanding the understanding of how capitalism and patriarchy play a role in the exploitation of women in the industrial sector. By applying Marxist feminist theory, this study reveals how women are constructed as exploitable labor and how social and economic pressures shape their mentality. In addition, this study also contributes to feminist literary studies by showing how literary works can be a tool of criticism against systems that oppress women.

Literature Review

The interplay between capitalism and patriarchy has long been recognized as central to the structural exploitation of women (Rahman et al., 2025). Marxist feminism, in particular, offers a critical framework that reveals how women's oppression is deeply embedded in economic systems, rather than being solely a cultural or ideological phenomenon. Federici (2021) argues that capitalist development historically depended on the control of women's labor and bodies. In her work *Caliban and the Witch*, she illustrates how women's unpaid domestic and reproductive labor was made foundational to capitalist productivity—effectively creating a gendered division of labor that persists today.

Eisenstein (1979) further builds on this idea, explaining that capitalist patriarchy constructs gender roles that make women's unpaid labor appear “natural,” thus sustaining a labor force that is both cheap and compliant. Complementing this view, Hartmann (1981) introduces the notion of “the unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism,” underlining how patriarchy and capitalism operate symbiotically—each reinforcing the other to sustain gendered hierarchies. Nancy Fraser (2013) expands on this interdependence in a contemporary context, emphasizing how economic extraction and gendered care work together to reproduce inequality in neoliberal capitalist societies.

In feminist literary studies, scholars have shown how fiction can serve as a mirror and a critique of these power structures. Moi (1985) contends that feminist literary criticism should not only interrogate how women are represented in literature, but also consider the socio-economic conditions that shape those representations. This dual focus highlights literature as a site where ideology and lived realities intersect. Eagleton (2014) similarly emphasizes that feminist literary criticism must examine “the social and material production of meaning,” arguing that literature is not a neutral artistic field but a terrain where patriarchal and capitalist ideologies are reproduced and contested. Yet, much of the literary criticism in the Indonesian context has tended to focus primarily on symbolic or thematic interpretations, often at the expense of structural critique. For instance, Curnow's (2007) study of gender in Indonesian literature centers on the concept of “female nature” and cultural restraints but stops short of examining the economic roots of such oppression—particularly in rural and working-class contexts. This limitation reflects what Donovan (2014) describes as the tension within feminist criticism between cultural analysis and materialist critique, a tension that remains unresolved in many postcolonial literary traditions. Barry (2020) underscores this issue by noting that feminist criticism must continually balance attention to language, representation, and form with the imperative to uncover how literature is entangled with broader systems of exploitation and inequality. Such reminders are crucial in contexts like Indonesia, where literature can both obscure and illuminate the overlapping dynamics of gender, class, and economy.

Recent contributions have sought to bridge the gap between symbolic readings and materialist critique. Purwarno et al. (2025) demonstrate how “various societal constraints limit women's freedoms, placing them in restrictive social roles and causing internal conflicts between pursuing personal desires and adhering to societal expectations” (p. 646). Their

analysis underscores the persistence of cultural stereotypes that shape women's lives, but it stops short of interrogating the deeper economic structures that sustain such constraints. Building on this, Iqbal et al. (2023) investigate the intersection of capitalist systems and gendered power in South Asian literature through a Marxist-feminist framework. While their study contributes valuable macro-level insights into the structural mechanisms of oppression, it does not extend to close readings of specific texts that reveal the lived experiences of marginalized women. By privileging broad systemic critique, their work overlooks the micro-level subjectivities and the subtle ideological conditioning that literary narratives can uniquely expose.

Scholars such as Crenshaw (1991) remind us that intersectionality—where class, gender, and locality intersect—is crucial when analyzing women's oppression. This is particularly true in postcolonial societies, where structural exploitation often hides behind narratives of development and modernity. Maria Mies (1998) adds that the supposed empowerment offered by capitalist employment is often an illusion that reinforces women's subordination through both productive and reproductive labor.

This illusion is further reinforced through consumerism. As Banerjee (2023) points out, the capitalist marketplace redefines female empowerment in terms of purchasing power rather than genuine social or political agency. The act of consumption, especially for working-class women, is frequently framed as a personal success story—masking the continued structural constraints that limit real autonomy and upward mobility.

Empirical evidence from the Indonesian labor context further reinforces these theoretical claims. Beln and Mahatmanti (2024) highlight that a majority of women in Indonesia's labor force are employed in informal sectors with poor working conditions and low wages. These economic vulnerabilities are compounded by limited access to education and a deeply ingrained patriarchal culture that frames survival, not self-development, as women's primary goal. This reinforces a systemic cycle of undervaluation and overwork, where women are expected to contribute both economically and domestically without adequate recognition or support.

Collectively, these studies highlight that women's exploitation cannot be reduced to isolated factors. Rather, it emerges from a complex web of economic, ideological, and cultural structures that literature is uniquely positioned to illuminate. However, while much of the existing research provides critical insights into capitalism's gendered dynamics, relatively few studies explore how these structures are articulated through narrative fiction—particularly from a localized, rural Indonesian perspective.

This study addresses that gap by analyzing Rena Asyari's *Perempuan dan Mentalitas*, a short story that captures the nuanced realities of rural women navigating industrial labor, patriarchal expectations, and ideological conditioning. Through a Marxist-feminist lens, this research contributes not only to literary criticism but also to the broader discourse on gender, labor, and systemic inequality in contemporary postcolonial societies.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with text analysis of the short story *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* by Rena Asyari. The research focuses on exploring women's experiences, particularly feminism, from an insider's perspective. Using an interpretative framework, this study examines how the narrative structure, character development, and thematic elements of the short story reflect feminist concerns and the broader issue of women's exploitation. As Tracy (2024) states, qualitative research serves as a foundation for a study, outlining its purpose and research questions to guide the systematic analysis of textual elements.

This research applies close textual reading as an analytical method, which involves meticulously examining and interpreting a literary work by closely scrutinizing its language and structure to uncover underlying themes and meanings (Smith, 2016). This approach aligns with the goals of qualitative description, allowing the researcher to explore and interpret patterns, symbols, and discourses embedded in the story. As Haase et al. (2021) explain, Qualitative Description (QD) offers methodological flexibility, enabling the use of various theoretical frameworks, sampling techniques, and data collection strategies. This flexibility provides a contextualized understanding of how *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* portrays gender struggles, female agency, and the socio-economic structures contributing to gender inequality.

The theoretical foundation of this research is based on Marxist-Feminist theory, which critiques capitalism as a system that perpetuates gender-based oppression. According to Gimenez (2019), "the provisions of capitalists form the foundation for inequalities between men and women," highlighting that the subjugation of women is rooted in material and economic structures, not just cultural norms. This perspective emphasizes that women's labor both domestic and economic is systematically devalued and exploited within capitalist systems. By integrating this theoretical lens, the study seeks to analyze how the female characters in the short story are situated within broader social and economic forces, thus linking personal narratives to political structures. Through a combination of qualitative description, close textual analysis, and Marxist-Feminist interpretation, this research contributes to the academic discourse on feminism in literature. It demonstrates how literary texts can serve as tools to expose and critique systemic gender inequalities, offering critical insight into the intersection of class and gender in contemporary narratives.

Result and Discussion

Rena Asyari's short story *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* transcends personal testimony to offer a searing critique of the socio-economic conditions that shape the lives of women in rural Indonesia, particularly in the Majalengka region. The narrative illuminates how capitalist modes of production and patriarchal social relations converge to delimit women's agency, structuring their aspirations, labour roles, and subjectivities from early childhood. In doing so, Asyari reveals how the capitalist system not only exploits women's labor but also disciplines their consciousness, embedding compliance within the contours of daily life.

Approached through a Marxist feminist framework, the text exposes the structural mechanisms through which women's labour is simultaneously extracted and devalued. Asyari illustrates the dual burden imposed on women: while they are integrated into the productive economy under exploitative conditions, they remain tethered to unpaid domestic responsibilities that sustain the very system that marginalizes them. These intersecting oppressions are not portrayed as incidental, but as systemic—enforced through ideological apparatuses including the family, education, and the workplace. In this sense, the story underscores what Silvia Federici and other Marxist feminists have argued: that the domestic sphere is not external to capitalism, but integral to its reproduction.

Crucially, the narrative challenges the liberal feminist assertion that access to employment is inherently emancipatory. For Asyari's female protagonists, work does not signify independence or self-realization, but rather submission to a social order that constrains the possibilities of meaningful self-development. Employment, in this context, becomes an instrument of ideological pacification, redirecting aspirations toward economic participation while deflecting critique of the structural conditions undergirding gendered oppression.

By situating her narrative within a localized, culturally specific milieu, Asyari underscores the situatedness of gendered struggle while simultaneously revealing its structural underpinnings. *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* thus becomes a potent site for Marxist feminist analysis, one that complicates prevailing discourses on women's labour and liberation in postcolonial capitalist societies. It invites a rethinking of what constitutes empowerment and insists on the necessity of structural transformation over individual advancement.

Asyari's work contributes to a broader discourse on gender and labour under capitalism, demonstrating how fiction can serve as both a mirror and a critique of material conditions. Her short story is not merely a literary artefact but a form of praxis—illuminating, contesting, and resisting the ideological naturalization of women's subjugation in contemporary Indonesian society.

The Commodification of Women's Labor

In *Perempuan dan Mentalitas*, Rena Asyari articulates a sharp critique of how capitalist systems exploit rural women's labour by commodifying their bodies and capacities. Set in Majalengka—a region emblematic of Indonesia's rural labour landscape—the story lays bare the mechanisms through which young women are targeted as ideal industrial workers, not on the basis of skill or professional merit, but because of socially constructed notions of femininity. These women are deemed “profitable” due to perceived traits such as docility, patience, and meticulousness—qualities that are culturally gendered and ideologically naturalized to serve capital's need for exploitable labour.

This point is encapsulated in the line:

"Tanpa perempuan pabrik hanya sebuah gedung yang akan dihuni kelelewar. Pekerja pria tidak setelaten dan sesabar perempuan."

"Without women, a factory is just a building that will be inhabited by mice. Male workers are not as painstaking and patient as women."

This statement underscores the instrumental valuation of female labour. Women are not integrated into the workforce out of recognition for their professional contributions but are instead reduced to economic functions within a system that prizes compliance and endurance. Within a Marxist feminist framework, such dynamics exemplify the commodification of women's labour—wherein their corporeality and productivity are appropriated, depersonalized, and reconfigured to suit the demands of capitalist accumulation. Women become what Silvia Federici has termed "living machines"—absorbable and interchangeable components in an industrial apparatus that nullifies individuality in favour of mechanical efficiency.

The story further illustrates how women's subjectivities are subsumed under a collective industrial identity, erasing personal aspirations and reducing them to units of labor. The mass hiring process reflects this dehumanization:

"Wajah-wajah perempuan yang mengantri penuh harapan. Mereka saling berkenalan dan ternyata tujuan semuanya sama, mencari 'Matahari' di Pabrik."

"The faces of women waiting in line full of hope. They got to know each other and it turned out that they all had the same goal, to find 'Sun' at the factory."

Here, the metaphor of the factory as "Matahari" (the sun) reveals the ideological mythologization of work. The factory is presented as a beacon of hope and survival, masking the underlying exploitative reality. The collective desire for employment, born out of structural precarity, becomes a form of ideological capture, whereby the very mechanisms of subjugation are internalized as opportunity. The women's dreams are thus co-opted and re-channelled into the service of capital, resulting in the gradual erosion of their personal identities and self-worth.

Asyari's narrative critiques how the promise of economic empowerment is deployed to mask systemic dispossession. Women in the story are hired not as full subjects with agency, but as faceless labour reserves, valued only for their ability to perform repetitive, gendered tasks like sewing, sorting, and packing. They embody what Marxist feminists have long argued: that under capitalism, especially in postcolonial economies, women's labour is doubly marginalized—essential to production yet consistently undervalued and stripped of recognition.

Patriarchal Ideology and Structural Submission

Capitalist exploitation does not operate in a vacuum; it relies heavily on patriarchal ideology to legitimize and sustain its domination, particularly over the labour and aspirations of women. In *Perempuan dan Mentalitas*, Rena Asyari reveals how cultural norms and social conditioning function as ideological state apparatuses—à la Althusser—that render economic

subjugation not only possible but palatable. The narrative illustrates how women in rural Indonesia are raised within an environment that restricts their vision of the possible: marriage or low-wage factory work becomes the only imagined future, while education and personal ambition are framed as unattainable or even deviant.

This is powerfully encapsulated in the line:

"Tekad saya ingin sekolah tinggi harus kandas karena lingkungan yang memaksa semua perempuan muda menjadi serupa. Menjadi pekerja di pabrik."

"My determination to go to university was dashed by an environment that forced all young women to be the same. To become factory workers."

Here, the narrative exposes a profound tension between individual desire and collective conformity. The protagonist's thwarted educational ambitions underscore how gendered socialization operates as an extension of patriarchal capitalism, curtailing women's intellectual development in favour of moulding them into pliable laborers. From a Marxist feminist standpoint, this represents a dual form of alienation: not only are women's bodies exploited in the productive sphere, but their minds are disciplined to internalize and accept structural limitations as normative.

This ideological conditioning is not enforced solely by abstract institutions, but often by intimate figures such as mothers—those who have themselves been subjected to the same oppressive scripts. The intergenerational transmission of submission is captured in the quote:

"Tinggal di desa dan khususnya bagi yang miskin menyebabkan sekolah bukanlah tujuan. Mencari uanglah tujuan utama."

"Living in a village, especially for the poor, means that school is not the goal. Making money is the main goal."

This statement reveals the normalization of survival-oriented thinking, where the pursuit of education is delegitimized in favor of immediate economic contribution. Such beliefs reflect what Pierre Bourdieu terms "symbolic violence": the internalization of social hierarchies that results in self-regulation and complicity. Women are socialized to perceive structural subordination as a logical outcome of their socio-economic context, effectively foreclosing the possibility of resistance before it begins (Zulia & Rahman, 2024).

Marxist feminism emphasizes that patriarchy, far from being a mere cultural artifact, operates as an essential mechanism in the capitalist mode of production. It helps maintain a stratified labor force, ensures the reproduction of compliant workers, and suppresses potential challenges to hegemonic structures. In Asyari's story, patriarchal ideology is deployed not only to dictate women's roles within the household and workplace but to constrain their very imagination of what a future could look like.

Through this lens, *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* offers a compelling critique of how deeply entrenched belief systems serve to reinforce women's subjugation—both materially and ideologically. Asyari's portrayal is not simply a reflection of rural hardship but a systemic indictment of how capitalism and patriarchy operate in tandem to discipline, contain, and silence feminine autonomy.

Consumerism as a Distraction of Consciousness

Perempuan dan Mentalitas offers a trenchant critique of how consumer capitalism extends its reach into the intimate realms of rural women's lives, not merely through labour exploitation but via the ideological seduction of consumption. Rena Asyari illustrates how, after entering the industrial workforce, women derive a sense of self-worth and accomplishment from their purchasing power—the ability to acquire goods such as clothes, shoes, bags, and perfume. However, this gratification is not liberatory. Rather, it is symptomatic of what Marxist theorists describe as false consciousness: the internalization of capitalist values that obscure the realities of structural oppression.

This dynamic is captured vividly in the line:

"Mereka bergaya, mereka ceria. Konsumerisme telah melanda perempuan-perempuan muda di desa. Konsumerisme datang tanpa tedeng aling-aling memangsa, merobek, mengunyah dan melahirkan budak-budak kapitalisme."

"They are stylish, they are cheerful. Consumerism has hit the young women in the village. Consumerism comes without hesitation to prey, tear, chew and give birth to slaves of capitalism."

This passage demonstrates the violent, invasive nature of consumerism as an ideological force. The metaphor of predation and consumption underscores how capitalism disciplines women not only as laborers, but also as consumers. Their cheerfulness and sense of achievement—rooted in material acquisition—are systematically manufactured by the capitalist apparatus, which reconfigures their subjectivity from oppressed workers to willing participants in cycles of production and consumption.

Within a Marxist feminist framework, this phenomenon must be understood as a deliberate strategy of capital: to commodify not only labour but also desire. The women in Asyari's narrative do not perceive consumption as part of the logic of exploitation, but as evidence of personal progress. This represents a critical shift from alienation to what Angela McRobbie has described as "feminine dis-identification"—a process where the appearance of empowerment through market participation masks continued structural disempowerment.

The illusion of progress is further reinforced by economic milestones that appear significant in context but are ideologically loaded:

"Gajian biasanya diberikan per dua minggu. Ada pula uang tambahan lembur. Hidup di desa, bekerja, mempunyai uang adalah suatu pencapaian."

"Paychecks are usually given every two weeks. There is also additional overtime pay. Living in a village, working, and having money is an achievement."

Here, the protagonist equates monetary gain with achievement—a notion deeply embedded in capitalist ideology. However, this achievement is hollow, as it does not translate into structural mobility, intellectual growth, or political consciousness. Instead, women remain trapped in precarious, routinized labour while measuring their worth through commodities. The consumptive act replaces critical reflection; material acquisition becomes a proxy for freedom, diverting energy away from collective struggle or emancipatory pursuits.

Asyari's critique resonates with Marxist feminist analyses of consumerism as a gendered mechanism of control. Capitalism, sustained by patriarchal structures, crafts a specific narrative of feminine success tied to appearance, possession, and economic participation—while systematically withholding access to education, autonomy, and political agency. In this configuration, consumerism becomes not a reward for labour, but a strategy for pacification: it redirects frustration into shopping carts and equates silence with satisfaction.

Perempuan dan Mentalitas unmask the ideological operations of capitalist consumerism, showing how it exploits the vulnerabilities of marginalized women by substituting liberation with lifestyle. In doing so, the narrative calls into question the very metrics by which empowerment is defined, challenging readers to rethink the relationship between labor, identity, and consciousness in late capitalism.

Women and the Double Burden

In *Perempuan dan Mentalitas*, Rena Asyari offers a poignant depiction of the “double burden” borne by women—an enduring theme in Marxist feminist discourse that captures the dual expectations placed upon women to serve simultaneously as wage laborers and unpaid domestic caregivers. Asyari's narrative foregrounds the exhaustive demands placed on working-class women in rural Indonesia who, despite serving as primary breadwinners, are still expected to fulfill traditional domestic roles without recognition, redistribution, or compensation.

This reality is illustrated in the following line:

"Perempuan tetap melakukan pekerjaan rumah sepenuhnya, meski dia adalah seorang pencari nafkah tunggal sekalipun."

"Women still do all the housework, even if they are the sole breadwinner."

This quote underscores the fundamental contradiction of capitalist patriarchy: even when women transcend the domestic sphere by entering the wage economy, they remain tethered to it through unrelenting expectations of domestic servitude. In Marxist feminist theory, this is not merely a social imbalance—it is a structural condition that serves the capitalist system by extracting surplus value from women in both the productive and reproductive realms. Capital benefits twice: from women's paid labour in the factory and from their unpaid labour at home, which maintains and reproduces the labour force at no cost to capital.

Patriarchal ideology is instrumental in sustaining this arrangement. It naturalizes women's domestic labour by coding it as innate, virtuous, and selfless—thus obscuring its exploitative function. The glorification of women as caregivers and homemakers is, in fact, a discursive strategy that masks the material realities of overwork, fatigue, and stunted personal growth. As Asyari's narrative suggests, women are not only physically drained but also denied emotional and intellectual space, kept perpetually in service of others' needs while their own development is subordinated or dismissed.

The long-term impact of this double burden is not only exhaustion but also ideological containment, as illustrated in the following reflection:

"Saya cukup berbangga ketika banyak perempuan-perempuan muda di daerah saya sudah berpenghasilan yang cukup, tetapi yang membuat saya sedih, anggapan bahwa sekolah tidak bisa membuat perut kenyang masih kencang terdengar."

"I am quite proud that many young women in my area already earn a decent income, but what saddens me is that the notion that school cannot fill your stomach is still widely held."

This observation highlights how capitalist logic continues to devalue intellectual aspiration in favor of economic functionality. Even as women become financial contributors, education and self-actualization remain marginalized, particularly for the working class. From a Marxist feminist perspective, this reflects a structural form of intellectual oppression, wherein women are discouraged from cultivating critical consciousness or seeking empowerment beyond their economic role. This condition ensures the reproduction of a labour force that is not only compliant but unaware of its subjugation.

Asyari's critique resonates with foundational arguments from scholars like Maria Mies and Silvia Federici, who contend that capitalism's survival depends on the unpaid, unrecognized labor of women in both the private and public spheres. The "double day" is not incidental but essential to the economic system, and its perpetuation is made possible through patriarchal cultural narratives that render sacrifice virtuous and ambition suspect.

Perempuan dan Mentalitas lays bare the intimate cost of structural oppression borne by women under capitalist patriarchy. The double burden is not merely a logistical challenge; it is a mechanism of control that suppresses women's intellectual growth, consolidates their subordination, and sustains a social order that profits from their perpetual labour.

Conclusion

Rena Asyari's *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* serves as a powerful literary intervention that foregrounds the multifaceted oppression experienced by rural women under the intersecting forces of capitalism and patriarchy. Far from being a mere depiction of factory life, the narrative excavates the structural and ideological mechanisms that shape women's bodies, minds, and aspirations into instruments of compliance. Through a Marxist feminist lens, Asyari reveals that the exploitation of women is rarely overt; it operates insidiously through cultural norms, familial expectations, and even internalized desires, ensuring the reproduction of a docile labor force. In this story, women are not constructed as agents of their own labour trajectories but as "profitable" workers defined by socially ascribed traits such as patience and manageability. Their identities are absorbed into the rhythm of the factory, where the "Sun" they pursue becomes a symbol not of emancipation but of routinized labor and socio-economic stasis. The narrative critiques how capitalism transforms hope into compliance, offering consumption as a surrogate for liberation, and wages as a smokescreen for structural subordination.

More critically, Asyari interrogates the complicity of familial and communal ideologies in reinforcing patriarchal capitalism. The intergenerational transmission of the belief that education is futile—“school cannot fill your stomach”—functions as a cultural apparatus that forecloses intellectual and political development. Meanwhile, consumerism provides the illusion of achievement, further entrenching women in cycles of labour and spending that preclude critical consciousness. Compounding this is the persistent imposition of the domestic role, even on women who serve as sole breadwinners. The double burden they endure—managing both productive and reproductive labour without recognition or rest—is not only physically taxing but constitutes a profound form of intellectual and emotional erasure. These women are denied the very conditions necessary for reflection, self-actualization, and resistance. Asyari’s narrative ultimately exposes the systemic nature of women’s subjugation, dismantling the myth that oppression is merely personal or circumstantial. It calls for more than economic inclusion—it demands collective awakening, the courage to interrogate normalized structures, and the creation of spaces where women can imagine and enact alternative futures. *Perempuan dan Mentalitas* stands as a sharp mirror, reflecting the ongoing realities of gendered labour exploitation and ideological containment. Until the foundational systems are transformed, the struggle for women’s liberation remains incomplete.

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