



## "Dadi Lemek Dadi Gandhek" in Javanese Cultural Perspective

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### **Abstract**

This article examines the patriarchal system of Javanese society and its effect on the status of Javanese women. Certain expressions that are still commonly used in Javanese language today can be seen to imply the inferiority of women. This article argues for a re-evaluation of these expressions in the light of gender equality and social justice. The potency of this concept within Javanese culture has led to restrictions perceived as curtailing women's mobility; an example being the practice of segregation, which curbs women's freedom. Hence, this research aims to scrutinise the social significance of "Dadi Lemek Dadi Gandhek" and its relevance to contemporary times. Qualitative and interpretive methods inform this study, with Foucault's discourse theory being the theoretical framework. Qualitative and interpretive methods inform this study, with Foucault's discourse theory being the theoretical framework. The literature review is the primary data collection method. The research findings indicate that Javanese gender roles have transformed with the progression of education and technology. Present-day women possess greater autonomy and freedom to voice their desires, unhindered by conventional boundaries restricting their involvement and advancement in numerous spheres.

**Keywords:** *Dadi Lêmèk Dadi Gandhèk; Discourse; Javanese Culture; Sandi Wanita*

### **Introduction**

Gender refers to the differences between males and females based on societal values and behavior. These differences also reflect in the roles that each gender plays in society. The present division of gender roles, referred to as the sexual division of labour, is deemed appropriate for both males and females (Wardani, 2019). In this gender-based division of labor, women typically assume household roles and positions in the workforce, while men tend to work in the public or community sectors. The domestic sector serves as a static consumer sector, whereas the public sector provides a dynamic force with sources of power in politics, economics, socio-culture and defense, capable of creating and controlling social change.

It is widely acknowledged that there are differences between men and women. When examining physical characteristics, differentiation between individuals is easily observable. Sex differences, which are natural biological distinctions between men and women present at birth, can be identified. In concerning decision-making and controlling power, women's subordination to men materialises as an

aspect of the gender divide (Fakih in Sugihastuti and Itsna, 2010: 279). This behaviour of men towards women contributes to a system of control that emphasises the unequal status between genders. The legitimisation and permission of male views and mistreatment of females by patriarchal institutions actively promote the adoption of gender inequality ideology amongst women (Sugihastuti and Itsna, 2010: 122).

The patriarchal system in Javanese society has given rise to expressions, still prevalent today, which are deemed to imply the inferiority of Javanese women (Fananie, 2000). Phrases such as "*kanca wingking*", "*swarga nunut neraka katut*", women only cook, and women only depend on their husbands highlight the perception that Javanese women occupy a lower social status.

The potency of this concept within Javanese society has led to practices that curtail women's movement, including the policy of segregation that restricts women's freedom. The patriarchal culture prevalent in Javanese society has given rise to several terms that subordinate women in the public and domestic domains. These terms include "*kanca wingking*", "*macak, masak, manak*", "*suwargo nunut neraka katut*" and "*dapur, pupur, kasur, sumur*". Some of these terms suggest that women's role is confined to household work and serving men in the family.

The aforementioned concepts emerged in the midst of Javanese society, which was subsequently reformed by the King through the composition of a literary work known as Javanese *sêrat*. This work incorporated *piwulang*, which was intended for Javanese society and specifically included *sêrat* designed for Javanese women. Examples of such works can be found in the Pura Pakualaman Library, including *Piwulang Estri*, which addresses teachings for women. *Sêrat Nitisastra*, *Sêrat Piwulang Warna-warni*, *Kempalan Sêrat Piwulang*, *Piwulang Putra Putri*, *Sêrat Wirasat*, *Wirid Ngelmi Asmara*, *Wulang Putri*, and *Sêrat Piwulang Raden Tumenggung Jayeng Irawan* can be found in the Surakarta Palace library. Additionally, the library holds *Sêrat Suluk Pawestri Samariyah*, *Sêrat Kautamaning Kenya*, *Layang Panuntun Kamulyaning Bocah Wadon*, *Sêrat Candrarini*, and *Wulang Putri in Sêrat Wira Iswara*. The Redyapustaka library also has *Sêrat Candrarini* and *Wulang Putri in Sêrat Wira Iswara*. At Sanabudaya library, there is an extensive collection of manuscripts that includes *Sêrat Wasitadarma*, *Wulang Estri in Sêrat Kramaleya*, *Sêrat Murtasiyah*, *Suluk Jaka Rasul*, *Suluk Luwang in Nitistruti*, and *Wirasat Wanodya in Sêrat Kempalan Suluk Dewaruci lan Sanesipun*. Furthermore, there are various other manuscripts related to women, albeit lacking complete self-sufficiency.

Of the numerous Javanese texts with teachings about gender and women, this study focuses on *Sêrat Sandi Wanita* as it contains several captivating teachings on gender issues. Society's acceptance of *Sêrat Sandi Wanita* is linked to the presence of other texts that likewise contain teachings for Javanese women. The presence of *Sêrat Sandi Wanita* is viewed as a refreshing addition for Javanese women. Two texts, *Sêrat Candrarini* and *Sêrat Cethini*, are limited to Javanese women in their teachings, but their ideas have a significant impact, so traditional thinking remains prevalent. The substance of the teachings tends to indulge and gratify men. Nevertheless, society's perception of an ideal woman is almost indistinguishable. This is attributable to the stereotypical view of women held by society. Over time, these perspectives have shaped positive attitudes and behaviours towards women. However, it is important to note that some view these attributes as inherent to female nature, rendering them immutable (A.P Murniati in Budi Susanto, et al., 2000: 25). Furthermore, Nugroho (2001, 6) explains that the male demands pervasive throughout the text also exert control over women. These demands include reproductive ability, possession of good physical and moral character, physical attractiveness and loyalty to their husband. For instance, "*Dadi lemek dadi Gandhek*" is a fascinating term used to describe the lives of Javanese women. It indirectly highlights how their roles are confined to performing household chores and serving their spouse.

As time progresses and women's attitudes become more modern, various assumptions and opinions that women are solely responsible for domestic duties have been shattered. Women's

independence from men means they are no longer considered weak. The mindset of contemporary women reveals their directed attitude, indicating their support, disapproval, neutrality or opposition towards social objects, including men (Sugihastuti, 2000: 133). The research aims to explore the current relevancy of "*Dadi Lemek Dadi Gandhek*" and its societal meaning.

### **Research Methodology**

This study utilises qualitative research and interpretive data analysis techniques. The research method employed is a literature review to explore various theories relevant to the research problem (Fadhilah, 2021). Additionally, the literature review is conducted to draw conclusions on fresh ideas attained from earlier research (Sulung, 2020). This study provides a detailed discussion of the theory regarding women's roles in the domestic and public spheres, using discourse theory as the analytical framework. Discourse is a means of obtaining and conveying truth, and is a vital factor in the creation of discourse power (Lubis, 2014: 84). As Gramsci noted, hegemony is not just a product of dominant force, but is also established through political and ideological collaboration. The process of hegemony revolves around a contest for power regarding the importance of truth and pre-eminent concepts (Simon, 2004: xix). If executed effectively, the impact of hegemony remains concealed within daily political, cultural, and economic existence (Bocock, 2007: 99).

This study examines the teachings of the *Sêrat Sandi Wanita* manuscript, utilising discourse theory to analyse the discourse on the role of men and women presented in the term "*Dadi Lemek Dadi Gandhek*". The research utilises the textual content of *Sandi Wanita* as its primary data source.

### **Discussion**

In the *Sêrat Sandi Wanita* discussion by KGPA Paku Alam II, the presented theme pertains to the characteristics of a virtuous Javanese woman. It is imperative that a Javanese woman masters self-control over her emotions, intellect, and preferences to align with Javanese instructions. All actions are undertaken to achieve life objectives, and irrespective of the position, the wife must submit to the husband's leadership in the household.

Javanese women are expected to do household chores because Javanese society deems such tasks as women's responsibility, unlike in British society where household chores are not strictly labelled as women's duties. Javanese women are expected to do household chores because Javanese society deems such tasks as women's responsibility, unlike in British society where household chores are not strictly labelled as women's duties. Nevertheless, with more women in employment, household chores are no longer exclusively women's responsibility. Men are also regarded as capable of doing household chores in the British society. In Javanese society, there is a shift in their traditional beliefs due to evolving times. There are various perspectives concerning the labour of men and women. Additionally, the viewpoints concerning the work of men and women in the same cultural region have been altered over time.

In Javanese society, there are embedded, understood and taken-for-granted cultural norms that position women as inferior to men. The ideal woman is depicted as having a meek, obedient nature and avoiding arguments, while men are portrayed as the family's provider, protector and head (Raharjo, 1995). The distribution of roles between spouses is perceived as unjust at times, as it is shaped by societal norms around gender roles. This configuration frequently places women in domestic roles (Purbasari in Syuhudi, 2022).

Javanese culture holds a distinct viewpoint on the position of women. In Javanese culture, women are often perceived as subordinate to men due to the persistence of the patriarchal system. Men are typically expected to act as the breadwinners and heads of the family, while women manage domestic

work or work within the household. Various Javanese terms highlight the inferior status of women in comparison to men, for instance, *kanca wingking*, which refers to wives as 'friends behind' or 'friends who take care of household affairs' (Hermawati, 2007). Another term are *dapur, pupur, kasur, sumur* that describes the domestic role a wife must fulfil is that of homemaker, including responsibilities such as cooking, laundry, dishwashing, housecleaning and childcare. Another term, *suwarga nunut neraka katut*, suggests that a husband holds the power to determine whether his wife will go to heaven or hell. If the husband goes to heaven, the wife also receives the same fate. If the husband goes to hell, the wife is not permitted to enter Heaven simply by virtue of her own good deeds. Rather, she must follow her husband into hell. This is due to the concept of *nek awan dadi teklek and nek bengi dadi lemek*.

<p><i>dadi gandhek dadi lemek/ dadi lemek yen dalu/</i>  <i>ing lakine kèlamun enjing/</i>  <i>dadi gandhek upama/</i>  <i>adang nutu nyapu/</i>  <i>asesaji olah-olah/</i>  <i>kuwajibane ndhuk dhenok beng wong alaki//</i></p>	<p><b>be a helper and be a support/  if the night becomes a bed/  if it's morning for husband/  if it's morning for husband/  be a helper/  cook rice and sweep/  arrange offerings/  it is the wife's responsibility to her husband//</b>  (Page 40 <i>Sandi Wanita</i> Volume1)</p>
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In the above text, it is evident that according to Paku Alam II, Javanese women hold a lower position than men only within the household, being expected to fulfil domestic duties with proficiency. Furthermore, women are advised to continuously be prepared if their husbands desire intimacy. In the context of domestic life, the husband is traditionally seen as the head of the household due to his masculine nature, while the wife is considered his companion. This is exemplified in the Javanese cultural saying *suwarga nunut, neraka katut*, which depicts the wife as the sufferer's object, *nek awan dadi teklek, nek bengi dadi lemek*, meaning that the husband uses the day and night as his shoe and bed. The expressions indicate the husband's dominant role in the household and the wife's subservient position. In Javanese culture, some terms such as *kanca wingking* refer to wives as a friend behind or a friend who manages household tasks, emphasising women's inferiority to men (Hermawati, 2007). Another word for it is "*dapur, pupur, kasur*", which means that women are expected to take care of household duties like cooking, cleaning, laundry, and child-rearing. This expectation leaves women feeling restricted and unable to pursue their own interests or obtain a higher education. (Nursaptini et al, 2019).

In fact, a woman is the best friend of her husband, she gives him inner peace and tranquillity. Being with his wife makes the husband feel at ease and content, free from loneliness, boredom and laziness. Women can make their husbands very happy and joyful. They are willing to forego sleep for the sake of their husband's and children's happiness, sacrificing their energy for the sake of the family's well-being and to ensure that their lives continue happily. She shapes society and works towards its improvement and success. Women are also their children's first school, where they learn basic morals and knowledge that will leave a lasting impression on their hearts, impossible to erase with time or the passing of years. This demonstrates that relationships exist because individuals need each other, creating a horizontal relationship in which both parties respect each other's rights and dignity. A primary woman should always accept trials with patience and sincerity to faithfully support her husband.

Gender differences lead to injustices for both men and women, with women bearing a heavier burden. As a result of these injustices, various forms of gender injustice arise, including marginalisation, subordination, stereotypes, violence, and a double burden. These injustices are particularly evident in the experiences of Javanese women within their families. Women are often under the control of men, and their position is subordinated by the patriarchal cultural structure, restricting their freedom to develop their potential. As a result, they are forced to obey their husbands instead of reaching their maximum potential. Women are often under the control of men, and their position is subordinated by the patriarchal

cultural structure, restricting their freedom to develop their potential. However, women may not experience this feeling due to the patriarchal cultural structure still present in society. They are often perceived as unproductive and are given fewer opportunities, as exemplified in the following quote:

<i>Ning kramamu tan wênang ngungkuli/ Yen wong lanang na paribasannya/ Têkan sajêbug êndhase/ <b>Tan kêna dyah angungkul/ Aja dumeh kowe priyayi/ Naking wong mahabala/ Dalil khadisipun/ Têtela soring wanodya/ Mung ing yudanêgara nggoning mrayogi/ Pindhah-pindhah den-gênah//</b></i>	But you must not surpass/ if men can be said/ even to old age <b>women may not surpass/ not because you are priyayi/ children of people in high positions/ the argument of the hadith/ truly the lowest Woman/ only on good politeness/ everywhere it should be clear// (Page 39 <i>Sandi Wanita</i> Volume 1)</b>
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Despite their high status, women are required to obey the king who serves as both husband and father. As the most powerful figure in the kingdom, the king has significant authority over his family and subjects, particularly his daughters and wives. Women's positions are heavily affected by the patriarchal system ingrained in Javanese society. According to Nurhayati (2012), women are controlled by their fathers, older brothers, and uncles from a young age. Women in the royal family are bound to follow all the rules and regulations. Consequently, they lack autonomy over their lives, despite their elevated position in society. The numerous prerequisites that Javanese women had to satisfy to become leaders highlight their lack of ability to attain leadership positions.

At that time, women had a weak position and were considered only one-eighth as intellectually capable as men. Nurhayati (2012) states that both women and men are intelligent. However, due to masculinist dominance, this potential is often ignored. Patriarchal ideology views women as second-class and frail and as mere objects that can be exploited. In *Sêrat Sandi Wanita*, women are in a lower and unequal position compared to men. It is God's will and only women can accept this situation.

During the time this text was written, Javanese women, especially those in the palace area, were restricted to the keputren and had no authority over men. As women are not as physically strong as men, they must accept all of God's provisions. During that era, men held a higher status than women. Kings, who were typically men, occupied a superior position compared to females, including their spouses (empresses and concubines) and daughters. It was customary for a king to have multiple wives.

### ***Dadi Lemek Dadi Gandhek in the Current Era***

The role of wives when viewed from a patriarchal culture is indeed an interesting issue to discuss because there are various groups of people who begin to have their own views. Some people still hold patriarchal culture by seeing women as people who work in the domestic part only. They still see that a woman must be able to do *dadi lemek dadi gandhek* to be an ideal woman. This demand makes women often feel that they do not have the freedom to do what they like and even obtain a higher education (Nursaptini et al, 2019).

However, some believe that women should have equal rights to men and should be free to pursue their dreams without restrictions on their freedom. According to research by Atta (in Nursaptini et al, 2019), girls' education can undergo a revolution if society alters its negative perception towards it. This entails no longer evaluating education on the basis of gender.

As times changed, numerous women left home duties to pursue careers. The pejorative term *dadi lemek dadi gandhek* gained notoriety with a shift in people's attitudes towards gender roles, particularly

within Javanese culture. *Dadi lemek dadi gandhek* means that a wife is not just a companion for sleeping at night but also a friend, and is considered an equal. She can listen to stories and complaints and can be someone with whom the husband can discuss his problems. This way, if the husband is facing a particularly heavy problem, the wife's input in solving it can ease his burden. Additionally, friendship involves active listening, which can bring a sense of tranquillity to the spouse.

Over time, women have stood up and shown that their existence matters. Indonesian women, in particular, have proven that their intelligence and expertise are invaluable to the country's development. Women are now involved in various fields, including politics and government. Women's work in the productive sphere is also becoming more visible. We can observe that women actively participate in all lines of work. From economic, social, political to religious fields, women have been reliable and productive resources.

### **Conclusion**

Javanese cultural beliefs about women spread to impact social, economic, and ideological situations. Although originally only applied to royal women, eventually these values affected all women. The term "*Dadi Lemek Dadi Gandhek*" places Javanese women in a submissive position to men. This reflects the enduring strength of patriarchal culture within Javanese society during that period.

With the progress of society and increased intellect, new attitudes have emerged regarding the phrase "*Dadi Lemek Dadi Gandhek*". Nowadays, women must be clever and perceptive to fulfil their potential while balancing their role as a spouse. Javanese women nowadays can still carry out tasks in their homes but with the independence to enhance their own value, hence they won't always be seen as secondary or *kanca wingking*. It should be acknowledged that women's tenderness and stamina enable them to fulfil various roles. Under current circumstances, due to either personal preference or other factors, there is a change in women's economic role. Specifically, women are shifting from being seen as supporting players to becoming the primary provider for their families.

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