



**BOOK REVIEW OF *BUMI MANUSIA*  
WRITTEN BY PRAMOEDYA ANANTA TOER**

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**Submitted by:**

**Fany Ayuningtyas**

**A2B007047**

**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
DIPONEGORO UNIVERSITY  
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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer states truthfully that this project is compiled by her own without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, the writer ascertains that she does not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in bibliography.

**Semarang, 3 November 2011**

**Fany Ayuningtyas**

## MOTTO AND DEDICATION

*Seorang terpelajar harus juga berlaku adil. Sudah sejak dalam pikiran apalagi dalam perbuatan.*

(Pramoedya Ananta Toer)

*Give a man fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.*

(Lao Tzu)

*Fortune favors the bold.*

(Virgil to Alexander the Great)

*A high GPA will lead you to a job interview while a leadership will lead you to your future.*

(Anies Baswedan)

*Be the change you want to see in the world.*

(Mahatma Gandhi)

*I don't dream at night. I dream all day. I dream for a living.*

(Stephen Spielberg)

*I refuse to live in a country like this. And I'm not leaving.*

(Michael Moore)

*This thesis is dedicated to the most priceless things I've ever owned, my family and my life.*

**APPROVAL**

**Approved by**  
Advisor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Nurdien H.K.', written in a cursive style.

Prof. Dr. Nurdien H.K, M.A.  
NIP. 19521103 198012 1 001

## VALIDATION


Approved by  
Strata I Final Project Examination Committee  
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University  
On December 2011

Advisor



Prof. Dr. Nurdien H.K., M.A.  
NIP. 19521103 198012 1 001

Reader



Dr. J. Herudjati Purwoko, M.Sc  
NIP. 19530327 198103 1 006

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The writer realizes that this thesis is still far from perfect. She, therefore, will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendation to make betterment for this thesis.

Finally, the writer highly expects that this thesis will be useful to the reader who wishes to know and learn more about the literatures authored by Pramoedya Ananta Toer especially one of his greatest books, *Bumi Manusia* which has brought him gaining many honorable awards.

**Semarang, 3 November 2011**

**Fany Ayuningtyas**

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### 1

## INTRODUCTION

Literature has become a living inspiration and given invaluable contribution for the development of human beings in this world over decades. As a part of this whole dynamic world, Indonesia also plays an important role within the development of worldwide literature. The golden era of Indonesian literature was actually not started by Chairil Anwar. Several times previously, Indonesia has already owned a brilliant yet controversial writer that unfortunately faces hardship in the way he voice up his thoughts through writings. Thus, he is mostly known and well-regarded by foreigners rather than Indonesian. Pramoedya Ananta Toer is known internationally by his controversial, outspoken and unmask novels especially the tetralogy of *Bumi Manusia*. These writings have rewarded him many honorable achievements from outside this country. However, they were severely boycotted and banned in his mother land.

*Bumi Manusia* is a story about an Indonesian who struggles to figure out his self esteem in the middle of clutter happened in his homeland on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century under the Dutch colonialism. The main character, Minke is a Javanese nobleman who has brilliant and well-critical thinking. He is described as a fortunate

boy coming from a wealthy and noble family who is able to enroll as the only Indonesian in the high school for European named H.B.S (Hogere Burger School). Later, the story goes on how Minke grows as an Indonesian youth who experts and is proud of European culture rather than his ancestor's culture. Minke experiences the turbulence in his mind when comparing the European and Indonesian culture especially his native culture, Javanese. In short, his nationalism is challenged by the reality that he finds during his maturation process.

#### **A. The Objective of Study**

The writer's purposes of the writing are:

1. To summarize "*Bumi Manusia*."
2. To review "*Bumi Manusia*" on how Indonesian especially the main character Minke face and struggle from challenge for their nationalism in the middle of Dutch colonialism. The review also includes some moral values and themes that we can grab from the novel.
3. To provide brief and sequence review between "*Bumi Manusia*" and the rest of the tetralogy novels; "*Anak Semua Bangsa*," "*Jejak Langkah*," and "*Rumah Kaca*."

#### **B. Pramoedya Ananta Toer and His Works**

Pramoedya Ananta Toer was born on February the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1925 in Blora, Central Java. He was graduated from a vocational school in Surabaya and started to work as a typist in the Japanese newspaper publishing company in Jakarta afterwards.

According to *Pramodyasites in googlesite.com*, Pramoedya started to actively write in the early of independence era when he joined some military training requirements. He wrote some short stories picturing the condition of his homeland and his life in the military camp. He was once jailed by the Dutch within 1948-1949 in Jakarta because of his suffrage movement. In the middle of 1950, Pram, the way he is called, was sent to the Netherlands as the Indonesian youth representative in the cultural exchange program. Subsequently, he joined a kind of youth movement organization “LEKRA” after coming back to his homeland. Right away after that, the way he writes had extremely changed. He became braver and more outspoken in delivering critics to the Government.

His first fiction entitled “*Korupsi*” revealed some cheating and dirty movements inside the Government administration. He voiced sharp critics and disappointments toward the Government. Thus, his movement indeed worsened his relation with the Government under Soekarno’s hand. Nonetheless, he kept on writing critics that are mostly about political situation in Indonesia at that time.

Next after that, his big curiosity has triggered him to reveal the real condition of *Chinese* ethnic in Indonesia. He figured out some violation and disobedience toward *Chinese* people in Indonesia. Eventually, he published *Hoakiau*, a series of correspondence between he and a *Chinese* writer revealing about the unmask history about *Chinese* people in Indonesia. It later dragged him to his restraint in 1960. Afterwards, he was jailed in three different prisons in almost a half of his life because he was suspected as a pro communist. Pram suffered from imprisonment without any trial and clear evidence. Although he was finally sentenced as a freeman, he had to undergo home arrest punishment and responsible to conduct a continuous report to the police bureau. During his imprisonment, the Government burned out and banned his works to be published publicly. He was also claimed as the obstacles for Soeharto regime in New Order Government.

Nevertheless, his desire to write cannot be stopped by the prison trellis. When he was jailed in the Buru Island (Pulau Buru), he wrote the most prestigious and masterpiece work, tetralogy "*Bumi Manusia*". The tetralogy "*Bumi Manusia*" which is also known as tetralogy "*Pulau Buru*" is one of the greatest contributions for Indonesian literature. From this work, Pram has been known worldwide. The tetralogy "*Pulau Buru*" has been published in more than 30 countries around the globe. It consists of four novel series telling the story of a Javanese nobleman who struggles in figuring out his self

esteem as an Indonesian under the Dutch colonialism and Javanese feudalism. This tetralogy represents the anxiety and turbulence in Pram's mind toward the real situation in his own country. In other hands, it frankly voices the deep concern of Pram for his nation. These novels have rewarded him many honorable awards from outside this countries. However, since it was banned by the Government in the New Order era, it cannot be easily reached by people in his own homeland.

Eventually, Pramoedya Ananta Toer is one of the greatest Indonesian authors who unfortunately was exiled by some Indonesian writers in his era because of his courage in delivering outspoken and frank thoughts in his books. He was once claimed as a disruption for Indonesian literature because of his suppression toward the New Order writers who are not in line with his perspective. Even though it was failed to be proved but Pram was never been free to deliver his opinion since that one-sided accusation.

Nonetheless, this world has reminded Pramoedya Ananta Toer as a brilliant author who eternally lives on. He is the only Indonesian artist who is continuously nominated as the Nobel achiever for Literature. His name is also mentioned as 100 world's most influential authors altogether with John Steinbeck, Graham Greene dan Bertolt Berecht. Moreover, he has written 50 writings which have been translated in more than 42 languages and published

around the globe. Once, he was also rewarded an honorable title *Doctor of Humane Letters* from University of Michigan in the USA.

## 2

### SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

“*Bumi Manusia*” is a story about Javanese nobleman who faces life turmoil in the way of his maturation process during the Dutch colonialism period. It mostly takes place in Wonokromo, one of small villages in Surabaya, East Java. The main character, Minke is a fortunate Javanese who can enroll in H.B.S, a high school for European students in Surabaya. As a son of noble family in the city B, Minke grows up as a well-raised boy with a proper education since he was kid. This situation is severely different with most of Indonesian children who cannot enroll to school and finally turn as uneducated natives. As the only Indonesian in H.B.S, Minke, who lives separately from his parents, shows an outstanding performance during his study. Since he meets and mingles with diverse people around the globe, Minke is able to absorb various cultures especially from west. He idolizes his teacher from Netherlands named Juffrow Magda Peters as a person who always encourages him to share his thoughts through writing because it will trace eternally and never be vanished by time.

As time goes by, Minke gradually experts on the European culture and unconsciously abandons his ancestor's culture. He really adores western civilization as it is reflected on the way he is able to speak in Dutch fluently rather Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese. Later on, because of his splendid ability in speaking and writing in Dutch, Minke is offered to regularly write articles in one of Dutch newspapers. Under the fame name Max Tollenar, Minke starts to write articles in the Dutch language. He disguises as a Dutch to hidden his real identity as a Javanese nobleman. Surprisingly, the name Max Tollenar and his writings are getting popular in Surabaya. His sharp and critical opinion in commenting and reviewing the publicly spoken issues is well-regarded by the society. Some parties claim that Max Tollenar has unmasked some sensitive and controversial public cases with an objective point of view. In other hands, some of his articles raise inhospitable reaction from some people who dislike his existence.

As an outstanding student who is always be in the spotlight, Minke grabs some jealousy from his mates. Robert Suurhof is one of his classmates who had been jealous on Minke because of his fame and great performance at school. He always thinks that Minke does not deserve to sit together with white people in the same school. He is just like most of the Europeans who assume that Asian people will never be equal with them. One day, he took along Minke to his friend's house in Wonokromo. The house which is commonly known as *Boerderij Buitenzorg* is the house of Herman Mellema's family that is well-known as a dangerous place to go.

The Mellema is popular with their wealthy and pride. They are untouchable and anti-social family who lives in a big house. Robert Suurhof is a friend of Robert Mellema who is the son of Herman Mellema. Afterward, he firstly meets Annelis in that house. Annelis is a daughter of Mr. Mellema who is famous with her flawless beauty. Frankly, Robert Suurhof has an untold interest by taking Minke to that house. He attempts to show Minke on how white people can easily get Annelis. Unfortunately, he is failed to get Annelis' attention. In the other hands, Annelis welcomed Minke thoughtfully. The first meeting has changed both of their life after all. Both Annelis and Minke fall for each other and promise to meet more often afterwards.

Later on, Minke starts to know the Mellema's family deeper. Annelis' mother, Nyai Ontosoroh is a pure Javanese who had been forcedly married to Herman Mellema by her own parents. In other words, Nyai Ontosoroh was being sold to the Dutch for several amount of money. Life was never easy for her since that moment. She had to serve Herman Mellema as a compulsion. Several years later, Herman Mellema kindly married her illegally. Their relationship was getting better and they were having two children from that marriage. They run a family company together with patient and affection until the company was becoming greater. Nyai is a fast learner and smart native woman. From his husband, she learns about European civilization and modernity. It makes her able to speak in Dutch and knowing well about how to manage the company professionally. She learns west culture outstandingly but still be proud of his ancestor's culture. It makes her becoming an



educated and honorable Javanese woman even her statues is not a legal wife of Herman Mellema.

However, an unfinished case with his real family in Netherlands has made Herman Mellema losing his judicious as a family man. When his son from Netherlands came to Wonokromo and sued him because of his irresponsibility in deserting his family in Netherlands, Mellema turned as a whole different man then. Right away after that, he irresponsibly left the house, his wife and his children, Annelis and Robert Mellema. He was later trapped in the brothels house near Wonokromo. After he left, Nyai Ontosoroh took over the family business and developed it bigger than ever. Annelis was being raised well by Nyai until she grown up as a smart girl who helps her mother running the family business. Because of the great cooperation between Ann and her mother, the *Boerderij Buitenzorg* Company is leading in producing qualified livestock goods in Surabaya.

Nyai is a tough, smart and open minded woman who struggles to live her family independently after deserted by Herman Mellema previous years before Minke stepped in that house. However, she still kept a deep revenge on some people in her past life including both of her parents. She really loves Minke and permits him to have a relationship with Annelis. She even asks Minke to stay in the *Boerderij Buitenzorg* whenever he wants to. She also the one who reminds Minke to always be proud of ancestor's culture and never take for granted European's culture. Different with his mother and his sister who accept Minke hospitably, Robert Mellema, who

never regards Nyai Ontosoroh as his mother because she is a native, reacts inconveniently with the existence of Minke in his house. He never accepts Minke as the Mellema's guest because he thinks that native people will never deserve the equal position with the European.

As time flies, Minke spends more time in *Boerderij Buitenzorg* and rarely back to his boarding house. As a consequence, people around start in gossiping Minke who lives in the *Boerderij Buitenzorg* without any bond with Mellema's family. Later on, Minke is accused as Nyai Ontosoroh's new man. The rumor spreads out quite fast in Wonokromo and finally arrives in Minke's home. His father, a major in the city B is terribly mad when he heard something shameful about his son. After that, Minke is forced to come back home and is judged by his own father with a string of unproved accusations. His father claims that Minke has tarnished the family name and pride. However, it does not make Minke say apologize to his father. Meanwhile, he is angry back to his father and finally decides to never come back home. Minke is disappointed with his father who only considers about his self pride-importance and prefers to disbelieve his own son. Start over that, his disappointment toward Javanese culture is getting bigger. He strongly opposes the feudalism that still exists among Javanese people where everyone is crazy about position and self-pride.

Minke still runs his life well after having quarrel with his father. He starts to stay more often in the *Boerderij Buitenzorg*. Therefore, it makes his relationship and Annelis is becoming closer day by day. Hence, Nyai Ontosoroh encourages them to

bond in a legal marriage in order to keep the negative rumor away of them. Subsequently, the marriage is conducted with the consent from both of the family.

Minke's mother comes to the marriage for supporting his son while his father keeps on staying away. Life is so lovely for Minke and Annelis until a letter come one day. It is a letter from Mellema's son in Netherlands that suing Nyai Ontosoroh in the Dutch court. Ir. Maurits Mellema sues Nyai Ontosoroh for the right of his wealth from the *Boerderij Buitenzorg* Company. Maurits claims that Nyai Ontosoroh and the whole family do not deserve to acknowledge and own the *Boerderij Buitenzorg* property because she is not the legal wife of Herman Mellema. Not to mention, he also proposes to take Annelis under his guidance by bringing Annelis to Netherlands. It is indeed a serious test to Minke's marriage. Later on, a series of court session has passed by Nyai Ontosoroh. Fortunately, she gets a lot of support from the native society during the court sessions. However, it cannot help Nyai Ontosoroh to win the claim. Almost all the *Boerderij Buitenzorg* property is taken. It worsens by the withdrawal of Annelis from her legal spouse. Maurits Mellema and the Dutch court forcedly take Annelis away in the middle of her sickness. Minke cannot accept the Dutch court verdict in taking Annelis away of him. Thus, those sequence sorrows finally wake Minke up that Dutch and many other European has brought misery to his nation and his family in particular. He starts to think over about what he had done previously. Eventually, his suffrage movement is begun right away after that.

## REVIEW OF THE BOOK

### A. Themes

#### 1. Nationalism

From the novel, the writer captures a nationalism values as a big theme delivered by Pram. He implicitly delivers the importance of nationalism to keep the spirit and willing in building the nation. It is indeed true that without nationalism, loyalty and sense of belonging toward their country, people will not be triggered to build their nation. However, it could be so hard to keep the spirit of nationalism in the middle of Dutch invasion when multi cultures entering Indonesia. It is reflected in Minke's life as the main character in this novel. Pramoedya carries out nationalism values through some characters' perspectives. The writer discovers the character Minke, an educated Javanese man who grows up among the European civilization to be the one who has European-minded and really proud of being that. He gradually abandons his own culture and put his nationalism away because he thinks the European culture has upgraded his level as human. Meanwhile, the writer sees the real nationalism through Nyai Ontosoroh, an

open minded Javanese woman who is able to keep her nationalism and ancestor's pride inside her veins as well as her ability in mastering western civilization. Furthermore, the writer also finds the nationalism inside the character of Jean Marais toward Indonesia. Jean is a French friend of Minke. He strongly opposes most of Europeans who have ripped away the joy of countless innocent people in Indonesia and snobbishly place themselves as superior race that is allowed to do anything they want. He later encourages Minke to build and educate his fellow nationals with the knowledge and ability that he has. Through Jean Marais, we can see the nationalism of foreigner toward Indonesia. He expresses a sincere loyalty and dedication to a nation that is actually not the one he comes from.

Pram also tries to deliver critics about Javanese feudalism that still exist until nowadays. The main character Minke is the one who mostly struggles with the turbulence in his mind when comparing the western especially European culture with his ancestor's culture especially when it deals with feudalism and unwritten caste system among Javanese. The Javanese feudalism teaches people to bend down on the caste system in the society. People who have more power and belong to the noble family will be honored by their surroundings. Therefore, it makes they feel like a dictatorial king who deserve on taking any actions they want and ignoring else's interest. This conventional system has been handed over from generation to generation

among Javanese neighborhood. Pram voices a sharp critic toward this condition through Minke character. From Minke's perspective, the writer sees that Javanese feudalism will only drag our nation into deterioration and another form of slavery.

## **2. Multiculturalism and Pluralism**

Another theme captured from this novel is pluralism and multiculturalism. As we live in the earth of mankind and become a part of world's society, we see the fact that we run a diverse and complex life. We live in this world altogether with various people in different races around the globe. The world indeed consists of multi-fragmented society that place human in different layer of classes. In this novel, Pram tries to state that we cannot avoid the differentiation existed in this world. Thus, he does not deny the categorization of superior and subordinate community. However, it is not supposed to be a reason for some parties to underestimate and humiliate others because everyone has the same right to live in this earth of mankind. This novel reflects the anxiety, protest and critics from Pram toward the unfairness and the humiliation to his nation during the colonialism era.

Furthermore, the writer sees that pluralism and multiculturalism could be a real challenge to keep the spirit of nationalism inside our veins as it is reflected in Minke's character. Minke unconsciously puts his nationalism

away because he more accustoms with European culture rather than Indonesian. It is because he has trapped in plural society where many foreign cultures involved in. He feels ashamed and disappointed toward his own culture that cannot upgrade his level as human. However, he thinks that European culture is able to upgrade his capacity as an intellect and sophisticated individual. From this phenomenon, we can see that pluralism could be such a dangerous challenge for the loyalty to our nation if there is no self-consciousness and self-coverage from ourselves. Pram tries to say that people should digest and absorb the foreign cultures wisely. The writer sees that living in the diversity and complexity is not as easy as it looks. We need to cover ourselves from the lunge of foreign culture in order to keep the identity and nationalism toward our own nation, Indonesia. Pram is successfully delivers those values through Minke character. He explicitly criticizes most of educated and intellectual people in Indonesia who mostly abandon and forget to build their nation after feeling comfort and proud of foreign culture.

In conclusion, "*Bumi Manusia*" delivers some important values of life. The most important thing underlined by Pram is the nationalism and equal position of all races in this earth of mankind. Therefore, Pram explicitly conveys that we have to fight for our nation pride and never surrender on the other's nation feet.

## **B. Review: Bumi Manusia and the tetralogy**

*"Bumi Manusia"* is not a single novel. It is a part of the tetralogy *"Pulau Buru"* which has three more series. The second book is *"Anak Semua Bangsa"*. In this part, Minke has to accept reality that Annelis is already dead in Netherland. Minke cannot accept it easily at the earliest. He tries so hard to continue his life afterwards. In other hands, people around Minke especially Jean Marais start to force him in writing articles in Bahasa Indonesia in order to help his fellow nationals to read it. Minke strongly refuses at the beginning, but some severe facts that he finds in the real life has changed him. He sees his fellow nationals were suffering under the Dutch colonialism. He finally figures out that he should help his nation to fight the Dutch. Therefore, his sense of nationalism soars up and triggers him to write in Bahasa Indonesia. Minke chooses to fight the Dutch with no gun but writings. Through his writings, Minke soars up Indonesians spirit and courage to fight for their rights in their own homeland. His writings inspire the other Indonesians to vigorously fight for the Dutch and take the pride back. In the third book *"Jejak Langkah,"* Minke starts to publish a local newspaper in Bahasa Indonesia named *Medan Prijaji*. Through this, he is more active in delivering protest to the Dutch. He is also married for the second time to a *Chinese* girl.



Unfortunately, his extreme movement has dragged him to the prison. He is continuously on and off the jail because of his resistance. The last book, *“Rumah Kaca”* tells Minke’s life through Pangemanan’s perspective, a native police who guides Minke in the internment camp. It tells about the life of Minke after imprisoned until he is finally dead.

Eventually, the whole series delivers a story of Minke’s movement to fight for his nation’s pride. It captures Minke’s life from a stubborn teenage boy that arrogantly abandons his own culture until the one who finally finds his own way to fights for his nation’s pride. Minke feels comfort with journalistic to voice up his resistance toward the Dutch.

### **C. Personal Comment**

Pramoedya Ananta Toer outspokenly delivers the values of nationalism in a very different way of writing. He comes up with no heroic story as usual nationalism stories might be. He delivers nationalism value through some characters especially Minke who grows along with European civilization. This novel brings us the reality that we will always find unfairness and disappointment in the land of human. However, it should not make us surrender on that condition. We should fight for our right to live equally in this world. In *“Bumi Manusia”*, Nyai Ontosoroh encourages Minke to fight for his nation’s pride and never surrender to the Dutch. From Nyai,

Pram tries to deliver the real fact that Indonesian people can be equal with white people.

In the last line of this Novel, Nyai said “*Kita telah melawan, Nak Nyo, sebaik-baiknya, sehormat-hormatnya*”. It represents that surrender is not the best way to end the problem. As equal human that have the same right to live in the earth of mankind, we should fight for something that we deserve for. This novel also comes up with a natural and real story on how nationalism can be hard to be kept in the middle of foreign culture invasion. The writer thinks that this novel can be such a mirror for our today society. The nationalism among Indonesian people has been seemingly decreasing from decades to decades because of various reasons. Thus, this novel can be a valuable reading for Indonesian readers to eventually become more sensitive toward what happened in their surroundings. Pramoedya Ananta Toer has brilliantly written this masterpiece to unmask and criticizes many absurdities and strangeness that he found in his around. He tries to awake our society from a long hibernation period of skeptical and superficial perspective about the conception of nationalism. In other words, he tries to encourage the society to take the most suitable way for them in building this nation and show up their nationalism because showing nationalism is not only about fighting in war.

## CONCLUSION

*“Bumi Manusia”* is a novel that tells how a native Javanese struggles to find his self esteem as an Indonesian in the middle of Dutch colonialism. Minke as the main character is describe as a fortunate boy who grows up along with European civilization. He refuses to acknowledge his ancestor’s culture because he comforts with European culture which has upgraded his level as a human. However, a severe tragedy finally rises up his sense of nationalism to fight the Dutch colonialism through his own way. This novel delivers a deep moral value under the big theme of nationalism. Pramoedya Ananta Toer successfully criticizes the Dutch colonialism and Javanese feudalism at the same time.

However in the whole *“Pulau Buru”* series, Minke finds so many heartbreaking and unfair treatments toward his fellow nationals in the reality. Therefore, he finally realizes that the Dutch colonialism and most of white people has seized his nation happiness, so he needs to do something in order to fight it. Minke eventually finds that journalistic is the best way for him to deliver thoughts and

protests to the Dutch administration. Through Minke, Pramoedya builds up a strong headed and stubborn character that actually represents himself in reality.

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