

Literature as a Cultural Mirror and Educational Tool: An Analysis of the Representation of Women in *Laut Bercerita*

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords: Culture, Education, Women, Laut Bercerita</p> <p>DOI: http://doi.org/10.33005/jesscom.v2i1.13</p> <p>Submitted: 17 July 2025; Revised: 7 August 2025; Accepted: 23 August 2025, Published: 28 August 2025,</p> <p>How to cite: Aninditya Ardhana Riswari, & Dyta Septiyati. (2025). Literature as a Cultural Mirror and Educational Tool: An Analysis of the Representation of Women in Laut Bercerita. <i>Journal of English Studies and Business Communication</i>, 2(1), 12-18. DOI: http://doi.org/10.33005/jesscom.v2i1.13</p>	<p>Literary works function not only as a medium for aesthetic expression but also as cultural mirrors and educational tools that record the social conditions of society. <i>Laut Bercerita</i> (The Sea Speaks His Name), a novel by Leila S. Chudori, depicts the abduction and enforced disappearance of activists during Indonesia's New Order era while portraying the representation of women within the framework of Indonesian culture. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a content analysis approach to examine the portrayal of women through key characters such as Asmara Jati, Kinan, and Anjani. The data are analyzed using feminist literary theory and cultural studies, with particular attention to their implications for character education and literary literacy. The findings reveal that the novel presents women as independent, intelligent, and courageous individuals who play active roles in social, political, and domestic spheres—challenging traditional stereotypes of passive femininity. The novel also portrays the harsh reality of repression against female activists, highlighting the dual position of women within patriarchal society and an authoritarian regime. Educationally, <i>Laut Bercerita</i> serves as an effective learning medium to enhance students' critical awareness of gender issues, history, and human values, while also enriching their cultural understanding. Thus, the novel functions not only as a cultural mirror but also as an educational tool capable of shaping critical, empathetic, and humanistic character development among students in both secondary and higher education.</p>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Literary works function not only as a medium for aesthetic expression but also as cultural mirrors and educational tools that record and reflect the social conditions of a given era (Salwa et al., 2025). *Laut Bercerita* (The Sea Speaks His Name), a novel by Leila S. Chudori published in late 2017, is one of Indonesia's notable contemporary literary works that portrays a dark chapter in the nation's history—namely, the abduction and enforced disappearance of activists during the final years of the New Order regime. Through the lens of historical fiction, this novel not only narrates a story of struggle, power, and oppression but also explores themes of humanity, family, and gender identity (Andani, Raharjo, & Indati, 2022).

The novel presents two main characters representing distinct perspectives: Laut, a student activist, and his younger sister Asmara Jati, a young medical doctor. Asmara Jati's presence in *Laut Bercerita* is significant and merits analysis, as her character embodies the complex image of women within the context of Indonesian culture. She is portrayed as rational and strong, yet simultaneously plays a domestic role within a grieving family. Her character invites a reexamination of women's roles in patriarchal Indonesian society and illustrates that women, though not always at the forefront, are actively involved in historical processes and resistance movements (Mardiana & Apriyani, 2023).

Culturally, the novel is rich in representations of local values, such as family solidarity, the collective spirit of the student movement, and a uniquely Indonesian sense of humanity. As an author, Leila utilizes literary elements as a platform to voice historical truths while also reviving cultural values that are increasingly forgotten by the younger generation. Moreover, the educational potential of *Laut Bercerita* is substantial. The novel is suitable for use as a learning medium in character education and literary literacy programs at both the school and university levels. The values embedded in the novel—such as resistance against injustice, the importance of family, women's resilience, and historical reflection—can be integrated into the teaching of Indonesian language, Pancasila education, and even history and civics education.

In light of the above, it is essential to analyze the portrayal of women in *Laut Bercerita* not only through the lens of literary criticism but also in relation to the cultural values it represents and the novel's potential as an educational tool in academic settings.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a content analysis approach. This approach is used to examine and describe the portrayal of women in *Laut Bercerita* by Leila S. Chudori through an understanding of both the novel's intrinsic elements and the socio-cultural context surrounding the narrative. The primary data consist of narrative excerpts, dialogues, and character descriptions—particularly those of Asmara Jati—that are relevant to cultural constructs, gender values, and social roles. The analysis integrates feminist literary theory and cultural studies, while also considering the implications for education, especially in the contexts of literary literacy and character education. Secondary data are obtained from journals, scholarly articles, and other supporting documentation that enhance the interpretation and critical reading of the literary text.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Image of Women in *Laut Bercerita*

As a popular literary work, *Laut Bercerita* is not merely intended for entertainment; it also conveys significant messages about humanity—particularly through the presence of female characters who play vital roles in supporting the protagonist, Laut. The inclusion of women such as Asmara Jati, Kinan, and Anjani aims to challenge the negative perception that women are a subordinate group often underestimated and dismissed (Tarigan & Hayati, 2023). These

characters emerge as a “breath of fresh air,” bringing positive energy to the resistance movement and reinforcing the idea that women can be independent and self-reliant.

a. Women and Social Resistance: The Character of Kinan

In *Laut Bercerita*, Kinan, or Kasih Kinanti, is portrayed as a woman who refuses to conform to traditional social constructions that position women as passive or secondary figures (Daud & Bagtayan, 2024). She is depicted as intelligent, courageous, visionary, and deeply committed to social change. Her involvement in student activism demonstrates that women also possess the capacity and bravery to stand at the forefront of sociopolitical struggles:

“Seingatku, Kinan tengah membuat fotokopi buku-buku karya Ernesto Laclau dan Ralph Miliband yang akan menjadi bahan diskusi,” (Chudori, 2017, p. 17).

“As far as I remember, Kinan was photocopying books by Ernesto Laclau and Ralph Miliband, which were to be used for discussion.”
(Chudori, 2017, p. 17)

This action is not merely a typical student activity but also an act of defiance against an authoritarian regime that prohibited access to leftist literature. Kinan deliberately enters a dangerous space in her pursuit of knowledge and ideological enlightenment. Her character represents a woman who dares to think and act critically in a patriarchal and repressive society. Furthermore, her choice to major in political science highlights that her struggle is not driven solely by emotion but by logical and structured analysis of social injustice:

“Kinan menyimpulkan bahwa kematian anak-anak pasti salah satu problem negara berkembang... lalu memutuskan memilih Fakultas Politik.” (Chudori, 2017, p. 19).

“Kinan concluded that child mortality must be one of the problems in developing countries... and decided to enroll in the Faculty of Political Science.”
(Chudori, 2017, p. 19)

This decision illustrates her class consciousness and her desire to improve societal conditions through education and activism. It shows that Kinan is not merely reactive but also proactive in seeking solutions. Beyond her intellectual strength, Kinan also demonstrates strong leadership charisma. Laut himself acknowledges that Kinan is often more convincing and realistic than male figures like Bram:

“Kinan jauh lebih realistik, tapi dia mampu menyusun kata-kata...” (Chudori, 2017, p. 183).

“Kinan was far more realistic, but she had a way with words...”
(Chudori, 2017, p. 183)

Kinan’s ability to be a calming and empowering voice during times of crisis reinforces the idea that women can play strategic roles in social movements. She is not merely a follower, but an emotional and ideological pillar for her peers. She embodies a form of social resistance enacted by women in academic, ideological, and practical domains. This representation is crucial within feminist literary discourse, as it illustrates how women can transcend traditional roles and actively participate in shaping history (Hidayah, 2023).

b. The Image of the Independent and Emotionally Mature Woman: The Character of Anjani

Anjani, as Laut’s romantic partner in *Laut Bercerita*, represents a woman who blends independence with emotional maturity. Contrary to the common stereotype that portrays women as emotionally dependent or as hindrances to their partner’s struggles, Anjani emerges as a strong and graceful supporter.

As a student at Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) Yogyakarta, Anjani is portrayed not only as intellectually and financially independent but also as someone with a vibrant personal world rooted in art and creativity. This characterization underscores that Anjani possesses a complete personal identity that goes beyond romantic involvement. Her role as a source of

encouragement and strength in Laut's journey reflects an active psychological contribution to the social movement. She symbolizes a woman who understands and accepts the risks faced by her partner without compromising her own strength (Ginting & Yuhdi, 2023).

Furthermore, Anjani challenges the traditional dichotomy between "independent woman" and "emotional woman." She demonstrates that these two qualities can coexist harmoniously. Anjani is intellectually and personally self-reliant, yet she is also capable of offering genuine care and affection—becoming a steady pillar for Laut amidst pressure and hardship. Thus, Anjani is not merely a secondary character in the activist narrative, but a representation of the modern woman—one who skillfully integrates personal strength and emotional depth within a complex sociopolitical context (Azida & Fitri, 2021). Her presence enriches the discourse on women's roles in literature as both independent agents and deeply human figures.

c. Women in the Domestic and Professional Spheres: The Character of Asmara Jati

Asmara Jati, the younger sister of Biru Laut, represents a woman capable of balancing roles in both domestic and professional realms. She appears as a strong, resilient, and independent figure who is determined to fulfill her dream of becoming a doctor—a profession that demands high intellectual ability and exceptional dedication to saving lives. Asmara's success in academia and her professional life reflects the image of a modern woman who is not confined to domestic roles but actively contributes to the public sphere with expertise and a sense of responsibility.

Moreover, Asmara is deeply devoted to her family, particularly her brother, Laut. Her concern is not merely emotional; she is also brave enough to confront and even scold him for taking actions that might endanger his safety. This attitude reveals the depth of a woman's role in the domestic sphere—not only as a nurturer but also as a protector who demonstrates courage and firmness in family relationships.

Asmara's diverse activities further highlight her independence and active engagement in daily life, both socially and educationally. As described in the novel:

"Saat aku duduk di bangku SMA dan Asmara di SMP, kami mulai sibuk dengan urusan masing-masing. Asmara dengan berbagai kelompok yang dia ikuti: pramuka, karate, gitar, lab fisika, dan renang." (Chudori, 2017: 66).

"When I was in high school and Asmara was in middle school, we began to be busy with our own affairs. Asmara joined various groups: scouts, karate, guitar, physics lab, and swimming."
(Chudori, 2017, p. 66)

This shows that Asmara is a dynamic individual involved in multiple pursuits, embodying a woman who is not confined to one domain but develops herself holistically. Her extended family also recognizes her personality as composed of both "brains" and "guts," highlighting her intelligence and courage:

"Sementara itu keluarga besar Bapak dan Ibu di Solo sudah bisa melihat bagaimana Asmara terdiri atas 'otak' dan 'nyali' sedangkan abangnya hanya terdiri dari 'otak' dan sebutir keberanian." (Chudori, 2017: 67).

"Meanwhile, our extended family in Solo had already seen that Asmara was made of 'brains' and 'guts,' whereas her older brother only had 'brains' and a speck of bravery."
(Chudori, 2017, p. 67)

Her popularity among peers and ability to socialize are further proof of her adaptability and strong interpersonal skills:

“Asmara adalah murid yang populer di kelasnya dan selalu saja menerima berbagai undangan kegiatan, ulang tahun, berkemah, nonton bersama, dan acara-acara remaja SMP yang menurutku tak jelas tujuannya.” (Chudori, 2017: 67).

“Asmara was a popular student in her class and was constantly invited to various events—birthday parties, camping trips, movie nights, and all sorts of middle school social activities that I couldn’t quite understand.”
(Chudori, 2017, p. 67)

Through this portrayal, Asmara becomes a symbol of the ideal woman—one who fulfills her professional responsibilities while also embracing her domestic role with love and care. This challenges traditional notions that confine women to household duties and instead emphasizes that women can simultaneously serve as the emotional backbone of the family and succeed as accomplished professionals (Jannah, 2020).

3.2 Cultural Constructions of Women’s Roles in *Laut Bercerita*

Through narrative analysis and selected excerpts, *Laut Bercerita* clearly emphasizes cultural constructions that support the position of women as independent and empowered individuals. The novel presents female characters who transcend traditional stereotypes that confine women to the “kitchen, bed, and well.” Leila S. Chudori, through characters such as Kinan, Anjani, and Asmara Jati, portrays women who possess dreams, abilities, and the courage to fight for their rights on equal footing with men—reflecting broader social and cultural shifts in 1990s Indonesia (Rafindo, 2021).

The women in this novel are not merely portrayed as supporters of male characters but as agents of change and drivers of social transformation. Kinan, for example, represents a woman with political awareness and the bravery to engage in organized resistance. Anjani and Asmara Jati embody women who are independent in their educational pursuits, professional roles, and emotionally healthy relationships—reinforcing the image of the modern woman who freely navigates her own life (Fujiati, 2016).

Nonetheless, the novel does not ignore the realities of oppression and discrimination that women continued to face during this period. The depiction of violence against female activists by the Tim Mawar unit, as described in the novel, serves as a powerful social critique of the patriarchal culture and political repression that perpetuated injustice against women (Rahmi, 2021). This indicates that *Laut Bercerita* does not merely idealize women but also records the historical suffering and resistance they endured under an oppressive system.

Thus, the cultural construction of women in *Laut Bercerita* contains a duality: on one hand, it presents women as strong, intelligent, and independent figures; on the other, it reveals the harsh realities they face due to unequal social structures and authoritarian governance. Through this approach, the novel becomes more than a literary narrative of individual journeys—it also serves as a critical reflection on the cultural and social conditions of women in Indonesia during the New Order era.

3.3. Educational Implications in Literary Education

The analysis of the portrayal of women in *Laut Bercerita* serves not only as a literary study but also carries significant implications for educational contexts, particularly in the teaching of literature at both the secondary and tertiary levels. As a literary work rich in cultural and social values, the novel can serve as an effective medium for introducing students to various aspects of life, including the roles of women within Indonesia’s social and political dynamics during the 1990s.

First, *Laut Bercerita* presents images of strong, independent women who are active in both public and domestic spheres (Taufiqi & Astuti, 2021). This opens up opportunities for educators to introduce the concept of gender equality in a contextual and relatable manner through

literature. By exploring the characters of Kinan, Anjani, and Asmara Jati, students can be encouraged to examine how women act as agents of change while simultaneously confronting the challenges posed by patriarchal cultural norms. This process fosters students' critical awareness of persistent gender stereotypes in society.

Second, the novel reflects the complex social and historical realities of Indonesia, including political repression and the persecution of activists, particularly women. Discussing these aspects within literary education enables students to learn not only about literary techniques and aesthetics but also about the broader cultural and historical contexts that shape literary works. This interdisciplinary approach integrates literature education with civic education and human values, transforming literary literacy into a holistic and meaningful educational tool.

Third, using *Laut Bercerita* in the classroom can enhance students' analytical and interpretive skills when engaging with complex literary texts—especially those in which female characters are not merely narrative objects, but empowered subjects with agency and voice. This encourages students to think critically, develop empathy, and become more socially and culturally sensitive through the medium of literature.

Thus, *Laut Bercerita* functions as both a cultural mirror reflecting social change and gender dynamics, and as an educational tool that helps students understand and appreciate cultural diversity, history, and the role of women in society. Incorporating this novel into the literature curriculum can enrich students' cultural insight and support the development of critical, humanistic character traits.

4. CONCLUSION

Leila S. Chudori's novel *Laut Bercerita* portrays strong, independent, and spirited female figures as agents of social change, while simultaneously reflecting the cultural and political realities of Indonesia in the 1990s. Characters such as Kinan, Anjani, and Asmara Jati represent women who challenge traditional cultural constructs that confine women's roles to the domestic sphere. They are not merely portrayed as supporters of male protagonists, but as empowered individuals—knowledgeable, courageous, and active in both public and private spheres. At the same time, the novel realistically depicts the oppression and challenges they face, particularly under an authoritarian regime, thereby presenting a dual image of women's positions in society.

From an educational perspective, *Laut Bercerita* holds strategic value as a literary learning resource. It not only teaches literary aesthetics and techniques but also introduces students to social and cultural realities concerning gender roles and women's struggles. By analyzing the female characters in this novel, students are encouraged to develop critical awareness of gender stereotypes and gain a deeper understanding of the historical and political dynamics that shape women's lives. Thus, this work functions not only as a cultural mirror but also as an educational tool that fosters critical, empathetic, and humanistic character development while broadening students' perspectives on gender equality and social justice.

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