



# Maryam: A Literary Exploration of Human Rights in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

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Studying literary works, particularly those described as forms of human rights violations, is crucial for fostering empathy, understanding, and driving social change. In this case, literature serves as a powerful tool for advocacy, reflecting and critiquing societal values and injustices. Literature has the power to transform minds and societies by promoting values of human rights and fostering a better understanding of the suffering of others, thereby inspiring action towards a more equitable world. This study aims to analyze the representation of human rights violations depicted in Okki Madasari's novel *Maryam* using a new historicist approach. This research is a type of qualitative descriptive study that uses material objects in the form of the novel titled *Maryam* by Oki Madasari; the history books titled *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2004* (2005); and several news articles in the mass media discussing the Ahmadiyah raid incident. Based on the characteristics of the new historicism approach, data collection is carried out through parallel readings of literary texts and non-literary texts, followed by note-taking, and complementing the analysis with literature studies. Meanwhile, the data analysis technique is conducted using Foucault's (2004) archaeological method and the thick description method advocated by Geertz (2017). The research results prove that *Maryam* novels depict the struggle of Maryam and the Ahmadiyah community in defending human rights amidst systemic oppression. Furthermore, *Maryam* emphasizes the interaction between personal and collective identities in the face of adversity. The characters' responses to discrimination reveal a deep-seated desire for autonomy and recognition as legitimate citizens. Through Maryam's journey, the author explores themes of resistance and survival, portraying her protagonists as active agents rather than passive victims. Their struggle against societal norms and state indifference not only critiques the political landscape but also calls for a broader understanding of citizenship that encompasses respect for diversity and human rights. Ultimately, *Maryam* stands as a powerful testament to the resilience of marginalized communities and a compelling indictment of the socio-political structures that perpetuate injustice.

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## 1. Introduction

Studying literary works that depict human rights abuses is essential to increasing empathy, understanding, and promoting social change. Through moving narratives, readers can feel the experiences and suffering of individuals or groups who are victims of human rights violations. These literary works serve not only as a reflection of existing social realities, but also as a tool for expressing injustice and fighting for violated rights. By understanding the various forms of human rights violations in literary works, it is hoped that society can become more sensitive to social issues and contribute to efforts to improve these conditions, thereby creating a more just and humane



environment is an opportunity for the author to convince the reader (including editors and reviewers) that the author mastering the research carried out has significance or contributes to the field of study.

In this context, literature serves as a powerful advocacy tool, reflecting and criticizing the values and social injustices that exist in society. Through literary works, writers can explore important issues related to social problems such as discrimination, poverty, and inequality. Literature not only depicts the realities of everyday life, but also encourages readers to think critically about existing social conditions. By using deep narratives and complex characters, literature is able to create empathy and awareness and promote change by inviting readers to question prevailing norms. In this case, literature becomes a bridge between individual experience and collective consciousness, encouraging society to act for justice and social change.

Okky Madasari is a leading Indonesian writer and literary figure with an unparalleled ability to depict the reality of social injustice and human rights violations (HAM) in his work. In his novels, Okky unflinchingly presents characters who are trapped in situations that reflect social injustice, such as poverty, discrimination, and abuse of power. His deep and sensitive narrative style allows him to bring readers into the lives of his characters, making the struggles and suffering he depicts feel real and relevant. Through powerful and moving portrayals, Okky challenges readers to consider the consequences of injustice and the importance of social awareness.

In her novel, *Maryam* (Madasari, 2012), Okki Madasari explores the life of a young woman who navigates a series of challenges and conflicts. Maryam, the novel's protagonist, is a young woman who was raised in a socially conservative and religious environment. In the course of her life journey, Maryam grapples with the challenge of defining her identity and the purpose of her existence, particularly in the wake of a pivotal experience that compels her to navigate a complex moral landscape. The novel portrays the tension between the adherence to beliefs and traditions and the aspiration for autonomy and well-being.

In addition to portraying the personal experiences of the protagonist, Maryam, Okki Madasari employs the character to illustrate the social realities faced by numerous women in Indonesia. Madasari's writing style is fluid and profound, enabling her to craft intricate and compelling characters. The novel provokes introspection on pivotal issues such as patriarchy, freedom of expression, and human rights. Maryam serves as a reflection for numerous women who navigate the challenges of defying stigma and societal expectations, while striving to establish their identity within a world shaped by social norms and pressures.

The diverse manifestations of human rights violations depicted in the novel *Maryam* provide an intriguing subject for analysis through the lens of New Historicism, a literary approach championed by Stephen Greenblatt. New Historicism places emphasis on the interconnection between literary texts and the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which they were produced (Greenblatt, 1980). By analyzing *Maryam* through this framework, we can explore how the novel reflects and critiques the specific socio-political conditions that allow for such violations, including marginalization, religious intolerance, and gender-based oppression. This approach facilitates a more profound comprehension of the manner in which these concerns are interwoven into the narrative and how they may reflect actual occurrences and systems of power in the real world.

Furthermore, New Historicism elucidates the manner in which Maryam not only represents historical moments but also plays an active role in the formation of those moments. The portrayal of human rights abuses in the novel, such as the alienation and mistreatment of the protagonist due to her religious identity, can be analyzed as both a reflection of the dominant ideologies of the era and a critique of them. Greenblatt's (Fathoni, 2013; Greenblatt, 1980) approach allows readers to see how the narrative both reflects and resists the socio-political forces at play, offering insights into the cultural and historical forces shaping the characters' experiences.

In the past decade, studies on Okky Madasari's novel *Maryam* have attracted significant attention from Indonesian literary researchers. The novel addresses a number of pertinent themes, including religious intolerance (Bahtiar, 2018; Pratiwi & Dewi, 2022), social discrimination (Harpian & Qadriani, 2019; Sipayung, 2016; Sosrohadi & Wulandari, 2022; Suryaningrum et al., 2019), and women's rights (M. P. N. A. Azizah et al., 2022; Purwaningsih et al., 2023), which remain significant concerns in contemporary Indonesia. These studies frequently employ the lenses of feminism to

examine how *Maryam*, the novel's protagonist, portrays resistance to patriarchal social and religious domination (Sulkhan, 2021; Sutikno & Supena, 2016). Furthermore, several studies highlight how the novel reflects the social reality of the Ahmadiyah group in Indonesia, which is frequently subjected to discrimination and marginalization (Hambali et al., 2023; Suryaningrum et al., 2019). In these studies, *Maryam* is regarded as a seminal literary work in the fight for equality and social justice in Indonesia (Safitri et al., 2024). Similarly, studies that focus on instances of discrimination against specific beliefs in Indonesia are also relevant (Hafsi et al., 2023). These studies typically associate the experiences of *Maryam*, an Ahmadiyah follower, with the broader social context in Indonesia, where minority religious groups frequently encounter persecution, expulsion, and systematic violence (Kumaniren, 2022; Sutikno, 2018). Furthermore, this study examines the role of the state, including the government's failure to safeguard the rights of citizens who are victims of discrimination based on their beliefs. The narrative and structural analysis in this novel is frequently associated with broader human rights phenomena, including violations of women's rights and individual freedom rights.

In this study, however, a new historicism approach will be employed to examine human rights violations. This approach places emphasis on the necessity of understanding the historical and cultural contexts in which the events or violations occurred. By situating the violations within their specific time period, this method seeks to elucidate the broader ideological and political forces at play, thereby offering a more nuanced interpretation of their significance.

## 2. Method

This research is a qualitative descriptive literary research which employing the archaeological method. Its objective is to explore and analyze literary works from the perspective of historical and cultural contexts. The material object in this study is the novel *Maryam* published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama Publisher in 2012 (Madasari, 2012). The data collection techniques employed include text analysis and document studies, which facilitate a more profound understanding of the portrayal of human rights violations in literary works. The data collection techniques employed include text analysis and document studies, which facilitate a more profound understanding of the portrayal of human rights violations in literary works. These methods allow researchers to undertake a critical examination of the narratives, themes, and character developments that reflect societal issues, thereby facilitating the uncovering of the underlying socio-political contexts. By analyzing a variety of texts, researchers can discern patterns and trends in the depiction of human rights, thereby contributing to a more expansive discourse on justice and ethical considerations in literature. Moreover, document studies permit the examination of historical and contemporary documents that may inform literary works, thereby enriching the analysis with empirical evidence and enhancing the overall validity of the findings. The analysis technique is conducted through a close reading of literary texts to identify representations of human rights violations, symbols, and discourses of power that appear in the narrative. This is done to reveal the ways in which power, ideology, and history shape the depiction of human rights violations, while also providing space for voices that are often marginalized in the official historical narrative.

## 3. Result and Discussion

The analysis revealed a multitude of instances of human rights violations (HAM) in the novel *Maryam*, particularly those pertaining to religious discrimination and the infringement of individual rights to practise one's beliefs. These violations are illustrated through the experiences of the protagonist, *Maryam*, and her Ahmadiyah community, who are subjected to persecution, forced displacement, and social ostracism as a result of their religious beliefs. The novel illuminates the ways in which the rights to freedom of religion, security, and equal protection under the law are systematically denied by both local authorities and society at large. This discrimination reflects broader issues in Indonesian society, where religious minorities often experience marginalisation and violence without adequate state protection. Through these narratives, *Maryam* exposes the deep-rooted power dynamics that sustain religious intolerance and the failure of the state to safeguard human rights. discussion can be made as a whole that contains research findings and explanations.

### 3.1. Representation On Human Rights Violations And Religious Discrimination

The main character, Maryam, who is an Ahmadiyah, experiences discrimination because of her beliefs. The people in her hometown, Lombok, consider the Ahmadiyah community as heretical, resulting in evictions, burning of houses, and threats of physical violence against Maryam and her family. This constitutes a violation of human rights, particularly the right to freedom of religion and to practise one's beliefs. This is exemplified by the following quotation:

“Tanpa ada yang bisa menjelaskan asal mulanya, tiba-tiba semua orang di desa itu menjadi beringas. Mengangkat cangkul dan parang, membawa batu-batu besar, menuju rumah orang-orang yang mereka anggap berbeda dari yang kebanyakan. (Madasari, 2012, p. 51)”.

The quote above describes the situation of mass violence that occurred in 2001 in Lombok and occurred suddenly and could not be explained rationally. The incident occurred spontaneously, without a clear reason or direct trigger that could be understood logically. This highlights how fragile social harmony is in a society based on prejudice and discrimination. When collective prejudice against a particular group becomes stronger, acts of violence can emerge for no apparent reason, as if they just happened because of the psychological influence of the masses (Azizah, 2021). The phrase "menjadi beringas" indicates that the people in the village experienced an intense emotional transformation. Those who previously might have lived side by side in peace suddenly turned aggressive and dangerous. The use of the word "beringas" suggests that humans can quickly lose their humanity when in a situation of social or ideological tension, and become trapped in a destructive collective spirit. The tools mentioned in this quote "cangkul, parang, batu-batu besar" are symbols of violence that is local and traditional in nature, as if to illustrate that this violence was carried out by ordinary people, with the tools around them. This also shows that the violence is not something that is carried out by the authorities, but by the villagers themselves, showing how deep their hatred or fear of those who are considered "berbeda" is.

There appears to be a social mechanism in which differences, especially differences in beliefs or identities, are seen as threats. People who are different from the majority are seen as enemies who must be eliminated. This reflects the phenomenon of dehumanization, where certain individuals or groups are treated as unworthy of basic rights because of their differences (Mardimin, 2018). The quote highlights how social pressure and fear of difference can create uncontrollable situations, where violence becomes a spontaneous response to something that is not understood or desired by the majority group.

Prior to the incident in 2021, a murder of Ahmadiyah followers occurred in 1999. This murder served to illustrate the profound religious intolerance that pervades the region, a phenomenon that was further exacerbated by the absence of state intervention and the proliferation of anti-Ahmadiyah sentiment among certain factions.

“Pasti saat itu karena negara kita sedang kacau. Ribut di mana mana.” Zulkhair menyebut peristiwa itu terjadi pada tahun 1999. Tak lama setelah televisi menayangkan peristiwa kerusuhan di Jakarta dan di banyak kota. Seorang Ahmadi dibunuh di daerah utara. Seorang lagi luka parah. (Madasari, 2012, p. 69)”.

This dialogue excerpt reflects the chaotic and unstable situation that hit Indonesia in 1999, when socio-political unrest was taking place in several big cities, including Jakarta. The political, economic, and social chaos during the reform era gave way to violence and intolerance, including against minority groups such as the Ahmadiyah. The murder of an Ahmadi and the serious injuries suffered by other members of this community show that when the state fails to maintain stability and order, minority groups often become victims of persecution without adequate protection from the government. This dialogue reflects the state's inability to uphold human rights during a turbulent transition period (Nur & Setyabudi, 2021).

The expulsion of the Ahmadiyah congregation in Lombok in 2001 not only had social and religious impacts, but also had economic consequences for the victims (Tohri et al., 2021). The expulsion resulted in the loss of livelihoods, property damage, and the disruption of economic activities of the Ahmadiyah community, which may have played a role in the local economy. Losing their homes and sources of income caused them to suffer financial losses, which overall also affected the economic stability of the surrounding community. This illustrates that religious-based conflicts often have broad impacts, including on the economic aspects of the affected community.

“Pak Khairuddin begitu terpukul karena meninggalkan usahanya. Sesuatu yang dia rintis dari semula sama sekali tidak ada hingga bisa menghasilkan apa-apa. (Madasari, 2012, p. 79)”.

This dialogue quote is illustrative of the profound sense of loss experienced by Mr. Khairuddin as a consequence of being compelled to relinquish the enterprise he had established from its infancy. The business was not merely a reflection of his strenuous endeavours; it also encapsulated his sense of identity, dedication, and aspirations. Mr. Khairuddin experienced a profound sense of loss upon leaving the business, perceiving it as a significant aspect of his identity. The business represented a tangible embodiment of his arduous journey and a crucial aspect of his identity. His anguish demonstrates that material success is not solely determined by quantifiable outcomes, but also by the emotional attachment formed over time.

### 3.2. Power Relations And Human Rights Violations

The power relations between the majority and the minority are clearly illustrated through the experiences of Maryam and her family. As members of the Ahmadiyah community, they were compelled to acquiesce to the prevailing majority opinion, even when it entailed the forfeiture of their fundamental rights. The expulsion from their homes, the destruction of their homes, and their inability to seek protection reflect the manner in which the majority employs social and religious power to oppress the minority. In her work, Okky Madasari elucidates the pervasiveness of majority ideology in justifying the infringement of individual rights based on differing beliefs.

In the novel, Maryam and her family are not only evicted from their home, but also do not receive protection from the state. The government and security forces, who should protect the rights of their citizens, are often silent and do not provide fair solutions.

“Polisi-polisi itu bohong. Kita bukan disuruh pergi sementara agar selamanya. Kita diusir. Rumah itu bukan milik kita lagi,” kata Fatimah (Madasari, 2012, p. 233)”.

This dialogue excerpt illustrates Fatimah's perception of powerlessness and exasperation in the face of the injustices she has endured. Her statement suggests that the eviction she and her community were subjected to was not a provisional measure as initially proposed by the authorities, but rather a form of definitive deprivation of rights. The use of the term "evicted" demonstrates an understanding that this action constitutes a violation of their rights to a secure place of residence. This dialogue illustrates how state officials, who are responsible for protecting the rights of citizens, can in fact play a role in facilitating injustice. This statement also contains a sharp critique of unequal power relations, whereby minorities are compelled to acquiesce to falsehoods and structural violence.

“Bukan soal pengusiran!” bantah Gubernur. Suaranya meninggi. “Ini soal bagaimana agar kita damai. Tak ada kekerasan. Kalian cuma ratusan. Orang-orang itu ribuan. Bisa jadi puluhan ribu kalau datang juga dari mana-mana. Lebih mudah mana, mengungsikan kalian atau mengungsikan mereka?” (Madasari, 2012, p. 249)”.

This excerpt from the Governor's dialogue illustrates the imbalance of power and the state's failure to protect minority groups, in this case the Ahmadiyah community. The Governor, in his capacity as a government representative, explicitly acknowledged that the decision to evacuate the Ahmadiyah community was based solely on pragmatism, rather than on considerations of justice or human rights. His statement indicates that minority groups are perceived as a burden that is more easily relocated than the larger majority. In this case, the majority group exercises power, whereas the minority group is merely a victim of political decisions taken ostensibly for the sake of stability, rather than for the benefit of all citizens.

From the perspective of New Historicism, this dialogue illuminates a recurrent socio-political phenomenon: the tendency for those who are numerically and politically disadvantaged to be sacrificed in the name of maintaining order and averting greater conflict (Azizah, 2021). The Governor opted for the evacuation of the Ahmadiyah community on the grounds that they were deemed more readily manageable than the majority group, which was larger and posed a greater risk of violence. This demonstrates that the state does not adopt a neutral or impartial position, but rather aligns itself with the prevailing majority opinion. This dialogue demonstrates how the power relations and ideology of the majority impact the formulation of political decisions that disregard the rights of minorities.

"Gubernur: Ahmadiyah Silakan Cari Suaka ke Australia", begitu judul yang ada di bawah gambar Gedung Transito. (Madasari, 2012, p. 271)."

The quote illustrates how the state, through its official representatives, such as the governor, not only neglects to safeguard the rights of its minority citizens but also, by implication, encourages them to leave rather than provide solutions or protection. This attitude reflects the absence of the state's responsibility to guarantee the fundamental rights of all citizens, particularly the right to live in safety and to practise their beliefs without fear of persecution. By advising the Ahmadiyah community to seek asylum abroad, the state is effectively denying them a place and sense of security within their own homeland. The quote not only reflects a fictional scenario but also alludes to the tangible social reality in which religious conflicts and discrimination against the Ahmadiyah group do, in fact, occur in Indonesia. The statement contains a bitter irony, in that the governor figure, who should be the protector of the citizens, actually adds to their psychological and social burden by suggesting inhumane solutions. This illustrates how power relations operate in Indonesia during specific periods, whereby government officials and political elites succumb to the influence of the religious majority and are unable to fulfil their role as guardians of human rights.

### 3.3. Minority Resistance

In Okky Madasari's novel *Maryam*, the resistance of minority groups, particularly the Ahmadiyah community, is portrayed through a range of resistance strategies, both overt and covert, in response to the human rights violations they endure. Such violations encompass religious discrimination, physical violence, forced evictions, and the labelling of the group as deviant. By employing the New Historicism approach, it becomes evident that this literary work not only represents social reality but also serves as a critique of the historical context that gives rise to oppression. The resistance depicted in the novel is not solely physical; it also encompasses cultural and mental resistance. This is evidenced by the characters who refuse to submit to the dominant narrative that oppresses them.

Even though Maryam's family experienced discriminatory actions from their environment, they showed their resistance by continuing to survive in the refugee camp.

"Ia gambarkan semuanya. Tentang orang-orang yang tidur berdempetan di dalam masjid, tentang dapur umum, tentang antrean saat mau mandi dan mencuci. (Madasari, 2012, p. 105)".

The above quote exemplifies the manner in which minority groups respond to situations of forced displacement or eviction through forms of resistance. Despite the marginalised status of the community and the severe pressures it endures, the community persists in its efforts to survive and maintain solidarity, despite the limitations it faces. The form of resistance expressed in the quote is not manifested through physical resistance or violence. Instead, it is evident in the perseverance, adaptation, and togetherness demonstrated by the community in the face of conditions characterised by uncertainty. Despite experiencing discrimination and eviction, the marginalised group demonstrates resistance through collective survival. The situation in the refugee camp, which may appear dire, nevertheless demonstrates that the refugees do not abandon hope. The physical conditions of the refugee camp described in the quote are not only a depiction of the reality of everyday life, but also a symbol of resistance to the social and political systems that have placed them in this situation. By surviving, they demonstrate that they retain their existence and are not wholly subject to the oppression they endure (Mardimin, 2018).

The character of Maryam is the most prominent symbol of resistance. Although she does not carry out explicit physical resistance, Maryam's determination to maintain her Ahmadiyah identity shows a form of symbolic resistance. Maryam's decision not to fully assimilate with the demands of the majority and choose to return to her community illustrates a form of resistance to social pressure that seeks to eliminate minority identity. The resistance of the Ahmadiyah community is not only present individually, but also collectively. In this novel, it is described how the Ahmadiyah community maintains their solidarity despite facing pressure and threats from the majority group. For example, when forced evictions occur, this community supports each other and together tries to maintain their beliefs. The collective resistance in this novel reflects the historical reality of minority communities

that often rely on the strength of solidarity to survive in conditions of oppression. This novel highlights how the Ahmadiyah community, despite being expelled from their homes, still finds a way to fight for their rights, both through peaceful actions and the courts, even though the legal system is often not on their side.

The character of Maryam represents the most prominent symbol of resistance. Although she does not engage in overt physical resistance, Maryam's resolve to uphold her Ahmadiyyah identity exemplifies a form of symbolic resistance. Maryam's decision to resist the pressures of social assimilation and to maintain her identity as a member of the Ahmadiyah community represents a form of resistance to the elimination of minority identities (Madasari, 2012, p. 113). The Ahmadiyah community demonstrates resistance not only at the individual level but also at the collective level. The novel portrays the resilience of the Ahmadiyah community in maintaining its solidarity despite facing pressure and threats from the majority group. For instance, in instances of forced eviction, this community demonstrates a capacity for collective resilience, supporting one another in the maintenance of their beliefs.

“Kantor dan masjid kita disegel. Tidak boleh digunakan. Katanya agar tak ada lagi kerusuhan. Agar kejadian Gegerung tak berulang,” kata Pak Zul. (Madasari, 2012, p. 236)”.

The collective resistance depicted in this novel reflects the historical reality of minority communities that often rely on the strength of solidarity to survive in conditions of oppression. The novel illustrates how the Ahmadiyah community, despite being expelled from their homes, continues to advocate for their rights through both peaceful actions and legal recourse, despite the limitations of the legal system.

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings of the study illustrate that the novel *Maryam* portrays the challenges faced by Maryam and the Ahmadiyah community in advocating for human rights in the context of systemic oppression. Furthermore, Maryam underscores the interplay between individual and collective identities in the context of adversity. The characters' responses to discrimination demonstrate a profound aspiration for autonomy and recognition as full and equal citizens. By following the protagonist Maryam's experiences, the author investigates the themes of resistance and survival, portraying the characters as active agents rather than passive victims. The struggle against societal norms and state indifference not only critiques the political landscape but also calls for a broader understanding of citizenship that includes respect for diversity and human rights. Maryam's novel serves as a compelling testament to the resilience of marginalised communities and a forceful indictment of socio-political structures that perpetuate injustice. The novel *Maryam* not only reflects the historical reality of the oppressed Ahmadiyya community but also offers a cultural response to the system of power that suppresses human rights. In the context of New Historicism, this novel can be seen as part of a broader dialogue with the state ideology that rejects recognition of difference. Maryam and the Ahmadiyah community are engaged in a dual struggle: to survive and to be recognised as legitimate citizens. The novel *Maryam* demonstrates how literary texts can serve as a critique of the prevailing political order, while also emphasising the significance of respecting diversity in society.

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