



The Ideology of the Main Female Character in the Novel *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01 Revised: 2026 06-18 Accepted: 2026 06-019 Keywords: Existentialist Feminism, Women's Freedom, Patriarchy Resistance, Female Identity, <i>Amba</i> Novel. DOI: 10.24256/ideasv14i1.10960 Corresponding Author: Erlinda A. Suleman erlindasulemanbahasada nsastrai@gmail.com Jurusan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo	<i>This research examines Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, <i>Amba</i>, which tells the story of the main female character's struggle to find freedom and equality with men. Initially, the main female character views freedom as a means to happiness. However, she experiences destruction and loss that render her unaware of her rights as a woman. This situation drives her to resist patriarchy through a transformation into a woman with freedom of choice, freedom of opinion, responsibility, and independence. This research focuses on two issues: feminine transcendence as viewed from the perspective of women's existence in Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, <i>Amba</i>. This study is analyzed using Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory in her book, <i>The Second Sex</i>, which discusses the transcendence of women's freedom and awareness in determining their identity. The method used is descriptive qualitative, using reading, observing, and note-taking techniques. The research results show that the main female character successfully discovers her identity and truth through her search for a livelihood on Buru Island, leading her to become an independent, critical, and persistent woman. This struggle reflects a woman's efforts to achieve full existence and recognition. The conclusions from the research findings indicate that the main female character successfully fights for women's rights through her efforts to transcend her limitations. The main female character maintains her honor as a mother and the love of a man.</i>

1. Introduction

Various women's issues are a common topic of discussion. On television, newspapers, radio, and other media, many people discuss cases of violence and injustice experienced by women. However, women who choose to live alone and fight for freedom and gender equality still receive less attention.

Women are often perceived as weak and unable to function in society. In patriarchal cultures, women are denied many opportunities for self-actualization. In fact, women are often relegated to the domestic sphere. Therefore, when women do manage to move beyond this domestic sphere, they face social norms that have traditionally positioned them as complementary.

Societal stereotypes dictate that women can only work in areas such as the kitchen, the bedroom, and the well. Kasiyan (2008: 52) reinforces this argument by stating that stereotypes about women depict them as emotional, weak, delicate, dependent, indecisive, and submissive.

Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, *Amba*, is a story not only about love, but also about the wounds of history and memories that never truly fade. The main character, *Amba*, lives intertwined with the turmoil of the times and a destiny she never fully chose. A central character in a novel is one who drives the plot and captures the reader's attention. This is consistent with the female protagonist in Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, *Amba*. She is a strong-willed woman, daring to make her own decisions without consulting anyone else, including her own family.

Through this main character, Laksmi Pamuntjak portrays a complex, independent, educated woman with extraordinary fortitude in the face of love and historical tragedy. Furthermore, the heroine is not a passive victim, but rather a woman who bravely determined her own destiny amidst the political turmoil in Indonesia in 1965.

According to the main female character, freedom to live within ourselves means not always having to listen to and follow the views of others, especially our own family. However, this doesn't mean we should be disobedient and unloving children. Being engaged doesn't mean marriage and family, and love based solely on one's own feelings doesn't guarantee the other party won't cheat and feel guilty.

This novel depicts more than just a love story, but also a rich depiction of Indonesia's dark history, particularly the humanitarian tragedy of 1973-1978 and the exile of political prisoners (Tapol) on Buru Island. The events on Buru Island highlight the impact of the acceptance of the New Order on individual lives and the search for truth about a traumatic past.

Furthermore, freedom is the primary foundation for the development of the main character, *Amba Kinanti*. Freedom is something every individual desires—freedom in any form to respond to the world as they see fit. However, freedom is often abused by many, including women. This triggers gender conflict, which seeks to portray women as weak, thus denying them full freedom. However, this issue has become a matter of debate among feminist scholars. As Simone de Beauvoir explained in her book, *The Second Sex*, women are free and autonomous beings like other human beings.

From an ideological perspective, the struggles of the main female characters reflect the influence of feminist and existentialist thought. Feminism emphasizes the importance of gender equality and the rejection of female subordination, while

existentialism views humans as free beings capable of determining the meaning of their lives. These two perspectives intersect, shaping the character of the main female character, who boldly makes decisions, despite facing social pressure and severe consequences.

Literature, as a cultural product, cannot be separated from ideological content, which shapes the perspectives of characters and the realities presented in the stories. Through literary works, authors often represent individual struggles with the values that develop in society. This is clearly evident in Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, *Amba*, which explores the dynamics of a female character's life within the vortex of history and ideological conflict in Indonesia.

Literary works always reflect the social conditions of the time and place in which they are created. This is because literature originates from authors who are part of society, depicts social issues, and is consumed by society (Didipu, 2021:22). We live in a pluralistic society, with diverse cultural backgrounds, religions, and outlooks on life. Therefore, ideology, according to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI, 2008: 517), means the way of thinking of an individual or group. Furthermore, ideology can be defined as a collection of ideas, values, norms, beliefs, and convictions held by an individual or group that serve as the basis for determining their attitudes and behavior toward the situations and problems they face.

In this case, the main female character has a different view of the ideology of women. Most women want to be enslaved by men, no one can fight, or even make a decision for themselves, they are forced to live under the feet of a man. However, this does not apply to the main female character in the novel *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak, the life path that the main female character chooses has principles that she holds firmly until she finds the grave of her lover who she has always thought deliberately disappeared and ran away with another woman, and does not love her anymore as her last words, they will run away from the city of Jogja and get married in Jakarta to live together.

Laksmi Pamuntjak is a novelist, poet, and journalist who discusses women's, political, and social issues. One of her works is the novel *Amba*, which raises the issue of a woman who chooses to live independently, with mental strength and strong courage. She also discusses women who can find happiness and self-fulfillment outside of family pressure. In addition, Laksmi Pamuntjak highlights various issues and dilemmas faced by women, such as forced marriage, violence, and betrayal, which are depicted in the main female character in the novel. Based on the explanation of the research context above, Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel *Amba* will be analyzed through Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist theory.

2. Method

Literary research methods are the methods researchers use to deeply understand literary works. These methods involve approaches, techniques, and analyzing findings to answer research questions.

According to Febiana et al. (2022), literary research is a comprehensive and multidisciplinary field involving critical examination and literary interpretation. This type of research aims to explore and understand various dimensions of literary texts, including theme, structure, historical context, and cultural significance.

Data and data sources

The data in this study consist of quotes, sentences, and dialogues that illustrate the ideology of the main character in Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, *Amba*. A data source is the subject from which data can be obtained. Therefore, the data source in this study is Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, *Amba*, published by Gramedia Pustaka Utama, Jakarta, in 2016. This aligns with Creswell's (2014: 206) opinion that data collection is a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering information to answer emerging research questions. Furthermore, in this study, the researcher employed reading, note-taking, and documentation techniques. The documentation technique involved reviewing literature and journals related to the research.

Data collection techniques

In data collection, this study uses reading techniques and note-taking techniques, namely reading carefully and thoroughly in the Novel *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak. In this reading process, the researcher uses the deconstruction reading technique. Deconstruction is a way of reading text, as a strategy. Deconstruction is not solely aimed at writing, but all cultural statements, because the entire statement is a text that itself contains certain values, ideologies, truths, and goals. Providing records of text quotations that can be used as data, related to the ideology of the main character in the Novel *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak. The researcher's records by copying novel quotations into document form. As well as presenting the results of data findings in document form along with page codes in the novel.

Data analysis techniques

The data analysis techniques used in this study of the main character's ideology in Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, *Amba*, are as follows:

Identifying data related to the ideology of the main female character in Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel, *Amba*. Analyzing data by including text quotations in the form of sentences or paragraphs or dialogues between characters related to the ideology of the main female character in the Novel *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak, based on

Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist theory. The data analysis process carried out by the researcher is to first present the classified data and then discuss the substance of the data, as well as the relationship of the data to Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory.

Interpreting data on the ideology of the main female character in Laksmi Pamuntjak's novel *Amba*, based on Simone de Beauvoir's feminist theory. The data analysis process carried out by the researcher can be seen in the main female character's interaction with the system of freedom that influences her worldview.

Summarizing the research findings is a way to summarize all research findings concisely, clearly, and in accordance with the previously established research objectives. The conclusion is crucial because it explains the core findings based on the data and analysis performed. This conclusion allows readers to understand the general overview of the research results without having to read the entire discussion in depth.

3. Result and Discussion

The results of this study focus on the ideology of the main female character in the novel *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak which is reviewed from the existential analysis of women who are free to choose, have opinions, and take responsibility, thus becoming independent women. The results of the analysis also found a form of women's resistance against patriarchy that is very free in the novel *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak. By understanding women's freedom through the theory of existential feminism that has been formulated, it can be found that there are three aspects reviewed from the existence of women based on the main female character in the novel.

1. The ideology of the main female character is reviewed from the aspect of freedom in the novel *Amba* by Laksmi Pamuntjak

a. Free to choose

Freedom should be an absolute right for all individuals, regardless of gender. However, since its inception in society, women's freedom has been consistently restricted. Men's rights and opportunities remain unequal to those of women. Women have long been fighting for equality, and with the advancement of technology and globalization, their struggle for equality has only grown.

The female protagonist is independent, strong, intelligent, and critical. The female protagonist is central to the story, which focuses on a life experience, from her youth and romantic relationships to her search for Bhisma, who disappeared after the political events of 1965.

Data 1: ASKEN/BM/KB

"But *Amba* is a seagull. A bird that wants to fly with its wide wings. And like a seagull, there are many things she knows" (Pamuntjak, 2016:92).

The data above shows that the main female character, Amba, is a freedom-loving individual who doesn't want her life to be limited by rules or the views of others. Her desire to broaden her experience and knowledge is reflected in her daily life, where she spends most of her time with books and the ancient scriptures she reads. Even in her early teens, the main female character, Amba, isn't particularly interested in boys, unlike her twin sister, who is overly attracted to boys. Her sister, Ambika, is still very young and completely unaware of the meaning of maintaining a healthy distance from men.

The main female character differs from most women, who are obsessed with beauty. She believes that beauty will only lead to loss, ultimately leading to a lifelong curse. She also bristles at women who are too easily seduced or too quickly flattered by men's words.

Even the main female character in the novel inherits her beauty from her mother, who was nicknamed the village flower from a young age. Not only was she beautiful, but her mother was also intelligent, versatile, and humble, always achieving above-average grades. The main character's mother even had a face as radiant as Seroja, a friendly demeanor, and a rich voice. However, Amba didn't want to be like her mother.

Data 2: ASKEN/BM/KB

"On the one hand, beauty is a gift; it gives life, it flatters. On the other hand, it brings misfortune, it curses, it frightens" (Pamuntjak, 2016:86).

The data describes the main female character who does not want her life to be determined only by her beauty like her mother and her two twin sisters, but rather she thinks that someone or anyone sees her as a woman who has intelligence, critical thinking, and a different personality from her two sisters who only want to be visited by a man who looks like a prince.

This illustrates the independence in looking at life that the main female character sees for her own future. Seeing her mother's life, always pretending to be nice to everyone who flatters her and feeling indebted to others, makes her feel sorry for the life path her mother has chosen without daring to express her opinions and her desire to live freely according to her own wishes, just like herself.

b. Free to express opinions

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right. It allows individuals to express their views and opinions without fear of reprisal or punishment from the government or other entities. The female protagonist's freedom of expression is demonstrated not only through her words, but also through her attitude, life choices, and courage in facing social, family, and political pressures.

From a young age, the main female character knew her purpose in life. She

realized that beauty wasn't the most important thing, or even the only thing that could lead to a happy life. Despite being born to a mother who was once the village's beauty, Amba wasn't satisfied with the beauty her mother inherited. Rather than relying solely on her beauty, she chose to forge friendships with books and knowledge.

Data 1: ASKEN/BP/KB

"Beauty is not the path to happiness. It is both a burden and a curse. It upholds and confines. So there is no need to aspire to be beautiful. Amba chooses to build friendships with books." (Pamuntjak, 2016:87).

The data shows that the main female character can prove herself as a woman and has the same opportunities as men to pursue higher education. This illustrates the main female character's freedom of expression regarding what she doesn't want inherited from her family.

When she turned 12, her father installed a mirror in her room. However, she disliked it and asked him to remove it. However, her father refused and continued to install the mirror in her twins' bedrooms.

Data 2: ASKEN/BP/KB

"Pak, katanya, aku ndak mau cermin itu ada di kamar ku" (Pamuntjak, 2016:88).

The quote describes a female character who does not like an object called a mirror in her room, but her father ignores and does not listen to his eldest child's request. From here it is clear how unimportant a woman's response is for a man. However, with the intelligence and courage of the main female character, it does not make her give up just because at the age of twelve, her father does not want to comply or even accept objections that he does not like.

c. Responsible

Being responsible means being ready to accept all the consequences of one's actions, whether good or bad. However, oftentimes a person will take responsibility when it is too late and they only realize that the most precious thing in their life has been lost. In this novel, the meaning of the main female character's regret is not clearly shown, but the form of the mistake she has made has been accepted with so many trials that she continues to search for the whereabouts of her lover which leads her to the tragic danger that takes her life.

Data 1: ASKEN/BT/KB

"Three days ago, two women were rushed to Wacapo Hospital. The first woman came from Jakarta, according to the ID card in her wallet. Her name

is Amba Kinanti Eilers. She is 62 years old. From her surname, it seems she is married to a foreigner. The woman was seriously injured and unconscious because she was attacked by the other woman. The woman who attacked her is Mukaburung. She is the adopted daughter of the Chief of the Kepala Air Tribe in Warapo. Some say Mukaburung was injured when he attacked the foreign woman, but the details are unclear." (Pamuntjak, 2016:17).

The data describes a violent attack that left the female protagonist severely injured and unconscious. Interestingly, the perpetrator (Mukaburung) was also reportedly injured during the attack, suggesting resistance or mysterious/unclear details of the incident. Furthermore, this incident also sparks intense interpersonal conflict amidst the traumatic history of Buru Island, where her lover disappeared and left no trace.

The main female character is a brave person. Although the novel tells of her having to go through difficult times in her life, she always tries not to be afraid to overcome the various problems she faces. One of her greatest conflicts occurs when she learns that she is pregnant with Bhisma's child and at the same time Bhisma disappears. The main female character chooses to keep her pregnancy, chooses to leave her home and raise her child alone. This demonstrates the great responsibility she has for the life inside her womb, and she is willing to take risks for that life.

Data 2: ASKEN/BT/KB

"She knew she shouldn't be afraid, she would still have a place to protect her secret feelings and that would make her strong. Amba remembered her grandmother. She learned so much from this woman she admired, how to behave, starting from seemingly trivial matters, to the big ones. What she said about how to fight fear. Don't be easily afraid." (Pamuntjak, 2016:200).

The data describes the main female character as an intelligent woman. This is explained when she is twelve years old, as she often appears older than her age, which is caused by her critical thinking.

2. The main female character resists patriarchy in the novel Amba by Laksmi Pamuntjak

Patriarchal culture has existed for a long time, and continues to exist today in various forms. Patriarchal culture places women at the lowest social level. During the colonial era, there were regulations prohibiting women from attending school, not working, and only being allowed to take care of the kitchen. This culture must be eradicated by society because it marginalizes women, even though women have the right to choose how they dress, just as

men are free to wear whatever they choose.

Patriarchal culture exists due to societal constructs of gender. Women and men are often differentiated in various aspects of life, such as education, economics, freedom of expression, and even marital duties. These differences arise not because of their gender, but because society expects men to lead women's lives.

The main female character's ideology is tested at the beginning of the novel, which immediately introduces the plot, on Buru Island, where the main female character experiences discriminatory treatment by the local community. The story begins with the story of the main female character, Amba, being attacked and nearly taking her life. The woman who attacked her was the wife of the man she had been searching for forever, Mukaburung.

A dispute and misunderstanding led to the two of them being found on the mound of the sage, Bhisma, the main character's lover and Mukaburung's husband. They were rushed to Waeapo Hospital with minimal treatment. The main character appeared gloomy, making it impossible for the nurses and Samuel to talk to her. Mukaburung received the same treatment, but Samuel remained wary of her.

Accusations began to be leveled, turning into questions about the female protagonist. She was looking for her husband, while they were referring to Zulfikar as her husband. The integrator confirmed the accusation, saying Zulfikar told one of us that he was her husband. However, the female protagonist denied this, saying, "Well, how do you do that, sir? I don't know how to explain it." At the time, my brother, perhaps feeling that was the best answer, clarified the sentence further with the following sentence:

Data 1: ASKEN/P/KB

"I mean, my brother at that time felt that was the most appropriate answer for him to give when he was asked what his relationship was with me." (Pamuntjak, 2016:50).

The quote above explains the main female character's form of resistance against patriarchy, which reflects that women are often under pressure from men. Fighting against others is one form of resistance against patriarchal culture practiced by women. Women will strive to fight for their rights by opposing those who adhere to patriarchal culture. The methods of fighting against others vary, from refusing, challenging, to even harming others. This approach is used because women know there is no other way to secure their rights than to fight for them. Women who engage in this form of resistance possess the courage and strength to directly demonstrate their resistance.

Data 2: ASKEN/P/KB

"But there was something in Amba's eyes that made the integrator seem to

regret his words." (Pamuntjak, 2016:55).

The data is a form of resistance from the main female character against patriarchal culture, namely against the police. The situation is resisting the police through her gaze. Women's resistance is not only through actions and words, but can also be through body language. The main female character gave this stare because the police began to insult her for the assault case against her. She tried to maintain her self-esteem, not wanting to be humiliated. The police eventually stopped making jokes that insulted women because they knew the person they were talking to was not a weak woman. The main female character shows a fearlessness of anyone when it comes to her dignity. She is not only strong in her actions but also in her body language.

a. Free women

An independent woman is a woman who has complete freedom over herself. She is an informed, assertive, self-reliant individual who can make her own decisions, emotionally, socially, and economically, without restrictive dependencies. Freedom for women means having equal rights, freedom from violence and discrimination, and the ability to choose her own path in life, including her career and future.

The novel's main female character reflects the civilized and progressive spirit of her time. She attempts to revitalize society's view of women's freedom, the ability to stand on their own two feet without a man. Despite the genjer civilization, where women change concubines, the main character's efforts to liberate women in society remain unwavering.

Data 1: ASKEN/PM/KB

"Don't let yourself get caught up in what people think. You have to overcome that and give your name its own meaning." (Pamuntjak, 2016:107).

This quote describes the main female character as a woman who is free through her ability to determine her own identity without being subject to social judgment. It's not just the question of her name that drives her to become an independent woman, but also social issues and her family's wishes regarding the future they have arranged. They planned to marry after she graduated from high school. According to local beliefs, if she hadn't married by that age, it would be difficult to find a partner. The main female character isn't bound by such social rules, trying to find a way to avoid marriage at such a young age.

Data 2: ASKEN/PM/KB

"Marriage is not much different from politics" (Pamuntjak, 2016:110).

The data shows that the main female character is not a woman who simply

fulfills a domestic role, but rather she possesses a critical awareness of institutions like marriage. For her, marriage is not simply a romantic relationship between two people built on love, but also a space filled with interests, power, rules, and negotiations, much like the world of politics. This perspective demonstrates that she does not view marriage simply as society generally views it, but rather recognizes the social structures and power relations at work within it. This demonstrates that the main female character is a woman who possesses intellectual awareness and the ability to think critically about norms that have long been considered normal by society.

4. Conclusion

The ideology of the main female character is reviewed from the aspect of freedom in the novel Amba by Laksmi Pamuntjak

The main female character is depicted as self-aware, critical thinking, and courageous in voicing her opinions. This ideology is evident in her rejection of an arranged marriage, her courage to disagree with her family, and her refusal to conform to social norms that limit women's freedom. Her freedom of expression extends beyond her ability to speak; it is also reflected in the independent decisions she makes in life.

Furthermore, in a social and political context, the character demonstrates that her ideology allows her to maintain her own perspective even in stressful situations. This emphasizes that freedom of expression is a key foundation in shaping her identity and direction in life. Furthermore, the main female character's ideology of freedom also reflects feminist values, particularly existentialist feminism, which emphasizes equal rights for men and women, particularly regarding freedom of thought and expression. The main female character represents women who are able to break free from traditional constraints and take control of their own lives. She demonstrates that women do not always have to conform to norms but can be independent individuals who can determine the direction of their lives.

The main female character's resistance to patriarchy in the novel Amba by Laksmi Pamuntjak

The main female character's ideology of resistance reflects her efforts to maintain her autonomy, freedom to choose her own path, and the courage to define her own identity and relationships without completely submitting to social norms that restrict women. This resistance is not always expressed openly or confrontationally, but rather subtly through her way of thinking, critical attitudes, and personal decisions that reject patriarchal domination, leading her to become a free woman.

Implications and Recommendations

In theory, these results highlight the main female character's portrayal as a woman with self-awareness, critical thinking, and the courage to voice her opinions. This ideology is evident in her rejection of an arranged marriage, her courage to disagree with her family, and her refusal to conform to social norms that limit women's freedom. Her freedom of expression extends beyond her ability to speak; it is also reflected in the independent life decisions she makes.

The main female character's ideology of resistance reflects her efforts to maintain her autonomy, freedom to choose her own path, and the courage to define her own identity and relationships without completely submitting to social norms that restrict women. This resistance is not always expressed openly or confrontationally, but rather subtly through her way of thinking, critical attitudes, and personal decisions that reject patriarchal domination, leading her to become a free woman.

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