

OUTCASTE BY CHOICE: RE-GENDERINGS IN A SHORT STORY BY OKA RUSMINI

HARRY AVELING

Ida Ayu Oka Rusmini is a major contemporary Indonesian author. She has published two novels—*Tarian Bumi* (2000)¹ and *Kenanga* (2003); a collection of short stories, *Sagra* (2001)²; and a volume of poetry, *Patiwangi* (2003, republished in 2007 as *Warna Kita* with the omission of some 12 poems). Born in Jakarta in 1967 of Balinese parents, she was a member of the highest Balinese caste, the *brahmana* caste,³ but renounced this status, including her title, after her marriage to the East Javanese essayist and poet Arif B. Prasetyo. Oka Rusmini is a graduate of the Indonesian Studies Department, Udayana University, and lives in Den Pasar where she works as a journalist for the *Bali Post*.

Most of Oka Rusmini's prose works explore the constraints which the socio-religious practices of caste place on all members of society, but most especially on women. Both of her novels tell of a woman's abandonment of her brahmin caste status as the result of her marriage to a sudra. The title of the poetry book, *Patiwangi*, refers to the ritual practice by which this degradation is confirmed, and the poem which gives the book its title bears the footnote: "*Patiwangi*: pati = death; wangi = fragrant. *Patiwangi* is a ritual which is performed on a noble woman in her Village Temple to remove her noble status as a consequence of having married a man of a lower caste. The ritual often has a serious psychological impact on noble women" (107). In both novels, and many short stories and poems, their loss of status brings enormous scorn and hardship to the major women characters. Nevertheless, as we shall see, stepping outside patriarchally dominated caste ties may also provide an ambiguous freedom for any woman who is positioned to take advantage of the opportunities which the modern, potentially secular nation-state of Indonesia offers her.

In this paper, I am interested in the way in which the short story, “Cenana” (*Sagra* 270-318), uses a traditional myth to deal various cross-caste transgressions in contemporary Balinese society. The story draws on one of the foundation myths of medieval Javanese history, the story of Ken Angrok,⁴ founder of the dynasty of Singhasari, East Java, in 1222 AD, and his consort, Ken Dedes, the wife of Ken Angrok’s predecessor. To my knowledge, although the myth has been the subject of a number of modern literary works,⁵ Oka Rusmini’s is the only account by a Balinese woman. Through its focus on the transgressions committed by strong female characters of all caste backgrounds, and dissolute male characters, Oka Rusmini’s narrative in “Cenana” allows for the revision of conceptions of feminine agency in a society based on respect for high caste men and marriage to them.

Ken Angrok and Ken Dedes

Let us first describe the legend which is the background to “Cenana.”

Javanese literature begins in the late tenth century with various reworkings of the major Hindu epic, The *Mahabharata*. The story of Ken Angrok is a much later, and completely indigenous, tale, and appears to have many parallels with “the historical romances and ballads, kidungs and pamancangahs, which occupy an important part in Javanese-Balinese literature” (Th. Pigeaud qtd. in Slametmuljana 3). In the fourteenth century account of a royal journey throughout East Java, the *Nagarakrtagama*,⁶ Ken Angrok is highly honoured as the founder of the dynasty of Singosari. The complicated and ambiguous details of his life are presented in the much later work entitled *Pararaton*, the Story of the Kings, and subtitled *Katuturanira Ken Arok*, the Story of Ken Angrok. The *Pararaton* was composed in medieval poetic Javanese, probably “at the beginning of the sixteenth century AD” (Phalgunadi 2) and now exists in a manuscript bearing the date 1613. The story of Ken Angrok’s relationship with Ken Dedes is reserved for this latter book. Here we will follow the text of the *Pararaton* as translated into English by Dr I Gusti Putu Phalgunadi, a Balinese scholar.

The first sentence of Phalgunadi’s translation rather flatly states: “The story of Ken Angrok begins with his birth.” The Javanese text states: “when he became human.” There is a difference, for as the text develops, there are clearly two very different possible ways of understanding him. On the one hand, he is a low-caste thief (“Angrok,” in fact, probably means “a criminal”⁷)

and, ultimately, the usurper of the throne of East Java. On the other hand, he is also an incarnation of the highest Hindu gods and rules with their blessing.

The first pericope does not seem to deal with him at all. “There was the daughter of a widow from Jiput,” it begins, “who became immoral coming under the spell of Hyang Suksma [i.e. God] and then out of repentance wanted to commit suicide.” As Phalgunadi’s footnote explains: “The literal meaning of ‘Hyang Suksma’ is ‘the holy void’. It is used to signify a particular state of God in which He is invisible to the layman and is only seen by those with some supernatural power” (57, n. 2). Was she merely immoral or did she sin with the God him/itself? Was she pregnant? We are not sure. At any rate, she went to the hermitage of the sage Mpu Tapa-wanken, who was looking for a human victim with which to consecrate the new gateway to his monastery, and offered herself for this purpose. Her prayer was that she be rewarded with a place in Vishnu’s heaven and that, in her next rebirth, she be blessed with wealth and power.

If there is a connection with the following story, we may accept that the unfortunate woman was reborn as Ken Endok, later to become the mother of Ken Angrok. Phalgunadi explains that “‘Ken’ is an honorific prefix. It was put before the name of a person of a particular rank. The literal meaning of ‘Ken’ is nobility” (57, n. 1). Although a noble, Ken Endok is married to Gajah Para, a peasant who appears to have no title.

Repeating the story of the daughter of the widow, Ken Endok has sexual intercourse with the God Brahma while on her way to bring her husband his lunch in the fields. As the translation explains, “Lord Brahma was on the lookout for a mate for begetting a human child.” After their intercourse is complete, “she had the impression of God Brahma telling her: ‘Do not have sexual relations with your husband any more. If you do, your husband will die. Also the foetus will be defiled. After it is born, call my child Ken Angrok. In [the] future the land of Java will be ruled by him’” (59).

The husband does insist on intercourse and, five days later, he dies. Fortunately they agreed beforehand to divide their properties and Ken Endok is able to return to her home in Pankur.

The death of the peasant is blamed on the foetus in the woman’s womb. After the child is born, Ken Endok throws it away “near the children’s graveyard.” Defiled the child almost certainly is, for it emits a radiance that

attracts a glow which attracts a passing gentleman thief, named Ki Lembon (“The literal meaning of ‘Ki’ is gentleman” 61, n. 2). Lembon takes the baby home and raises him as his own son, bringing him along whenever he sets out to steal. In time, Ken Endok hears of the child and goes to the robber to tell him of Ken Angrok’s divine origin. She does not take the child back, however, but rather leaves Lembon and his wife to lavish their “care and love” on him.

Ken Angrok does not repay his adopted parents’ kindness. Despite his tender years, less than ten years old perhaps, he gambles away the properties of Ki Lembon and his wife, of Ken Endok, and of the Tantric religious head (*mandala*) of the village of Lebak, whose valuable buffaloes he also loses.

Ken Angrok keeps moving on in his life of crime. He is next adopted by a gambler called Bano-Samparan, and then more specifically by Bano-Samparan’s first wife, Genuk-buntu. Eventually he becomes friends with a cowherd named Tuwan Tita (“‘Tuwan’ means: Lord or Master. The title was given to the person-in charge of palace affairs”, 63, n. 2). Together they approach the village teacher, Jangan (“a village doctor, scholar, astrologer or diviner, who otherwise earn their livelihood by cultivating lands”, 63, n. 3). The wise man teaches them reading and writing, grammar, and the practical aspects of astronomy as they relate to everyday life. It is interesting that these skills, which might otherwise be considered the prerogative of the Brahmin caste, are so readily available to a wandering thief and his friend, a cowherd. Angrok repays the teacher’s kindness by stealing the fruits from his precious *jambu* (rose apple) tree. His method of stealing relies on a physical power normally associated with spiritual strength, if not honesty: he emits bats from the top of his head, and these bats eat the fruits until dawn.

The young Angrok continues to pursue his life of banditry and gambling, adding now an occasional rape as well. All the time his actions are under the divine protection of Lord Brahma, who miraculously saves him on a number of occasions. As he flees yet again, an old woman hides him at the Mount Lajar sanctuary, just at the time when all the gods are preparing to hold a meeting there. The meeting is extremely noisy, as the gods shout out questions to each other: “Who will strengthen the island of Java and precisely from where?” and “Which one is fit (*yogyā*) to become king (*prabhu*) in the island of Java?” (75)

Lord Guru (“ie God Siva,” as Phalgunadi glosses) steps forward and announces: “May you know all the gods (*devata*), that there is a child of mine, a human being (*manusa*) born among the people of Pankur. He will strengthen

the land (*bhumi*) of Java.” Angrok steps out of his hiding place among the rubbish in the sanctuary and all the gods immediately bless him, promising that he will be “coronated” (*abhiseka* = anointed) with the title Bhatara Guru, the name of Siva.

The gods also commit Ken Angrok to the company of yet another father, Dang Hyang (Sage) Loh-gawe, “who was to be the origin of the all Brahmana race in the Eastern Kawi region (East Java)” (75). This genealogical claim significantly suggests an absence of caste (or at least the Brahmin caste) in the region to this time. When the sage finds Angrok, he recognises him by his physical features, which are those of a Buddhist *cakravartin*, or “world ruler”: “an (abnormally) long hand reaching below his knees. In his right hand is the symbol drawn of a wheel (*cakra*) while in the left one there is the mark of a conch-shell (*sankha*)” (75, 77).⁸

Together, and this is where the story starts to build to the first of a number of more important climaxes (being episodic, we may also suggest that it has one high point after another, all of equal importance), they enter into the service of the governor of Tumapel, Tungul-ametun, whom Angrok is destined to replace. As Phalgunadi explains earlier, when Tungul-ametun previously enters the story, “Tumapel was a feudatory of [or?] vassal state of the Kadirī kingdom of this period” in East Java during the thirteenth century (67, n. 5). Tungul-ametun’s position was that of “the Akuwa of the territory of Tumapel,” “a petty king or chieftain. Here probably it has been used as a synonym of ‘Governor’” (67, n. 4).⁹

It is now that Ken Dedes at last enters the story. She is the daughter of “a religious official (*bhujanga*) a Buddhist priest (*bodhasthapaka*) named Mpu Purva.” Like a number of other religious figures in the *Pararaton*, Mpu Purva is also a devotee of the “left-handed” form of Tantra, given to anti-social and forbidden practices, and spends much time meditating in cemeteries. The fame of Dedes’ beauty, however, has spread far and wide and while Kanwa is away, Tungul-ametun abducts her to be his wife. When the sage returns he curses the abductor, whoever he may be, to die from being stabbed by a dagger (*keris*), although he wishes his daughter “who is bright and of good behaviour to be blessed with happiness and good fortune”.

We are told nothing of Dedes’ response to this situation but the couple are apparently happy enough together. One day, when Ken Dedes is already three months pregnant, they take “a merry and pleasant trip” to Bonoji-park.

As she is getting down from the cart at the park, “it so happened and surely it was God’s wishes, that her thighs got bared so much that her private parts (*rahasya*) too were exposed. Ken Angrok happening to be there at the time ...”—coincidence but also divine destiny—“was amazed to see that the private parts of the lady were glowing. Moreover her beauty cast such a spell over him that immediately he fell in love with her, although at this time he did not realise” (79).

Angrok seeks an explanation to this bewitching glow from his various father figures. Dang Hyang Loh-gawe explains that a lady like that is an *ardhanarieswari* (“the goddess who is half male in her body—the hermaphrodite form of the God Siva,” Phalgunadi, 81, n. 1), that she is “a most prominent lady” (*adhimukhya*), and that “even if a sinful (*papa*) person acquires her, he will become the sovereign of the world (*chakravarti*).” Because of his Brahmin status, however, the sage does not feel that he is in a position to allow Angrok to kill Tungul-ametun in order to have access to this powerful woman and the kingly benefits which she can bestow.

Angrok therefore goes to another, former, father-figure, Bano-Samparan the gambler, who not only confirms the sage’s interpretation but directs Angrok to a master sword-maker, who can make him a keris with which he can stab the Governor, take his wife, and eventually become king of the world.

The rest of the story follows relentlessly from this point. The sword is made and Ken Angrok impetuously kills the craftsman with it.¹⁰ Before he dies, the sword-maker curses Angrok that he and seven further kings will be stabbed with the same sword. Angrok stabs Tungul-ametun, and is able to lay the blame for the murder on a close friend who is subsequently executed for the crime. Ken Angrok and Ken Dedes become intimate companions, contemptuous of the gossip around them and her pregnancy; she eventually bears him three sons. (His second wife also bears him three sons and a daughter.)

In time, Ken Angrok led an attack on Daha, the capital of the kingdom of Kadiri (founded 1122 AD), having been consecrated by both the Sivaite priests and the Buddhist monks with the title of Bhatara Guru, as the gods promised. He established the new kingdom of Singhasari in the Saka year 1144 (1222 AD) and ruled until 1247, when he was killed with his own keris by Anusa-pati, the son of Tungul-ametun, to whom his mother had inadvertently revealed his origins. (After doing so, she “kept silent, apparently she

felt guilty for having told the truth to her son," 89). Anusa-pati was himself killed with the same sword by Panji Toh-jaya ("a person of ecclesiastical status ... a scholar and lawyer," 91, n. 1), the son of Ken Angrok, in Saka year 1171 (1249 AD). The keris-maker's curse had been set in relentless motion and the *Pararaton* tersely traces the further history of the dynasty and its successor, the Kingdom of Majapahit (1293-1478), in a series of brief notes on the kings, their families, and their misfortunes.

"Cenana"

The *Paraton* presents a linear tale, told in episodic form. The story of Ken Angrok and Ken Dedes moves between heaven and earth, the countryside and the capital, and various social levels which possibly represent a rather attenuated form of the caste system. At the center of the story is Ken Angrok himself, a strange mixture of illegitimate child, offspring of the gods, social bandit, and appointed future ruler of a great but murderous dynasty. If we read closely, we can see that the power of men is persistently mediated through women—the daughter of the widow of Jiput, Ken Endok, and Ken Dedes herself; nevertheless, the narrative perspective taken is firmly masculine. Oka Rusmini's "Cenana" sets the frame tale in a contemporary Bali, devoid of state politics. She draws heavily on the traditional story, but, we may guess, does so indirectly, through a remembering of the tale rather than a copying and translation of it. Her major contribution to the re-interpretation of the legend, however, is to re-gender her story by presenting it from the perspective of many strong women on the events in which they are willing, and more often unwilling, participants, struggling to turn these events to their own advantage.

"I will make my own story," says Cenana, the figure after whom the short story is named. It will not be a story about herself but about Ida Ayu Putu Siwi, "a middle aged woman, my mother-in-law. This is her story" (272). The statement does not encourage us to believe that the story will necessarily be true; rather it will be Cenana's imagined account of her mother-in-law, a telling motivated by their interest in watching endless "cinetron" stories on television together. It will also, of course, inevitably be Cenana's own story, particularly that of her pregnancy with the child she thoroughly detests. And it will be the story of women from not only the highest caste but also the lowest, "sudra," caste, to which Cenana herself belongs. Sudra women indeed

feature prominently in the story. Other low-caste women include Cenana's own mother, Luh Sapti, who is also the wife of a Brahmin, Ida Bagus Dawer, and Luh Sarki, the mother of Ida Bagus Oka Puja, Cenana's husband.

Cenana introduces Siwi in two stages. There is, firstly, a physical description, which locates the woman (and "woman," *perempuan*, is a term that appears constantly throughout the story) in a social context: "My mother-in-law is called Ida Ayu Putu Siwi, she has eyes like those of a wayang puppet and comes from a rich family, she owns lots of land, in Kuta, Nusa Dua, Jembaran and Den Pasar ..." We are told of the woman's relationship to the narrator (mother-in-law); and the specific name which includes the caste marker *Ida Ayu* as well as a female gendered form, Siwi, of the name of the god Siwa. Beyond the traditional caste reference is her position in the world of work, the modern capitalist society of commercial Bali.

The second stretch of information relates to her married status: "Her father found a man for his child, Ida Bagus Pugu Tugul. The poor (*miskin* = lacking funds) man had only one task, to impregnate the child. Siwi was never pregnant to the day he died" (273). The further description includes the caste status of her husband, also Brahmin with the high title of *Ida Bagus*, and the subjection of the wife to the family's procreative needs, which she has never fulfilled, through her own deliberate choice.

For convenience, I will follow and connect the various pieces of the story as it unfolds. The next section of the story describes the requests of numerous men, women, and families for Siwi to bear or adopt a child who can inherit her wealth. Siwi accepts none of these requests. Unexpectedly, someone comes, and she falls in love with him, "a small dirty black-skinned boy ... with wild, defiant eyes" (270). The boy, no more than six or seven years old, came to steal Siwi's mangos, just as the child Ken Angrok stole his teacher's jambu fruit. This, the first, intertextual reference to the *Pararaton* story is left in no doubt as Siwi thinks: "I admire Ken Angrok, the wild man who became a king. Later this thief will be a king. Whose child is he? Good God! Don't say that this small child is a sudra. No! Bathe his body. Make him mine, make him a noble" (278-9). He is the Ken Angrok whom her mother told her about and the one for whom she has waited, defiantly rejecting her husband and all other men after her husband's death.

The third section of the story describes Siwi's visit to the boy's mother, Luh Sarki. The story is played out in caste terms, a Brahmin woman incongruously

visiting a sudra woman, with all the added politeness that the Balinese language, represented in this case in Indonesian, encodes into this situation. But to patriarchal caste is added the contradictory dimension of femininity: the sudra woman has known something that Siwi has never known, the love of a man and the birth of a child: "You are a fortunate woman because you have known love," Siwi admiringly tells the woman.

Luh Sarki is an outcast. She was exiled to the middle of the forest for her pregnancy and refusal to acknowledge the name of her illegitimate child's father (286-7). The two women agree to the transfer of the boy to Siwi's protection. A week later, the Luh Sarki, prematurely aged and severely ill, is burned in the conflagration that consumes her hut.

Cremation is, of course, a common Balinese funeral practice. But there is a more traditional, fully Hindu, dimension to her death. The mythological figure with whom Luh Sarki identifies is Sita (280). Sita, wife of Prince Rama, was kidnapped by the demon king, Rahwana, and stayed in his palace for many years. On her recovery, she was forced by her husband to prove her faithfulness to him by undergoing the ordeal of fire. Such is Sita's purity that she passed the test without any hesitation. Luh Sarki, on the other hand, has Sita's loyalty, but she is a sinful woman; her loyalty, finally, is to her own love for the man whose child she has borne. In this part of the story, the identity of the man is unmentioned, though Sarki does wonder if the Brahmin woman knows. She dies believing that Siwi does not know; later we are told that she does know, that the man was, in fact, Siwi's own husband (294). Further, Siwi has deliberately and knowingly killed the sudra woman (this is explicitly admitted on page 288). When she takes the child, the references to the story of Ken Angrok are again plentiful and explicit: "you are my Angrok. The man I love. Later you will grow to be a brave man. I will shed my old body for you." Dedes may passively acquiesce to the death of her first husband, but she does not actually engage in the evil of murder as Siwi does.

The taking of the child is a violation of caste relations. Yet, in a sense, it is also a reaffirmation, for if the child is the child of a Brahmin, Siwi's own husband, he is a Brahmin as well and a true stepchild. Unaware of this connection, Siwi's extended kin network, the residential unit of the *griya*, do not accept the child; they are afraid of possible sudra pollution. Siwi, like Luh Sarki, is expelled from her community. Like Sarki, too, she becomes an outcast

because of her love—her love for this boy, who is her Ken Angrok. Defiantly, Siwi takes the boy and leaves: “I, Siwi, am a woman. I believe in the truth of my choice. I believe in the truth of my Angrok! Full stop. They may curse me until the day I die. Good God, I believe that You can see me more fully” (292-3). The fullness comes from her new status: a woman with a child who symbolically also represents her ideal lover. “My Angrok, you have made me a complete woman!” she insists. “No one will ever hurt me” (288).

Siwi is too rich and too powerful to be subject to the ritual of *patiwangi* and, because she has not married beneath herself, it is not necessary. In leaving the griya, Siwi rejects the patriarchal bias of Balinese religion, for the same reasons as Sarki has also given earlier: the gods and the ancestors have lots of rules and regulations, all of which seem to benefit the nobility, and most especially men, as well as the men’s children, but never women (290, 291-2). She redefines the meaning of family and marriage through her own adoption of the thief child. As a free individual, with (importantly) the wealth to do so, Siwi also redefines her own superior status by building herself a new house and a new temple (293). She shows that wealth may also confer or confirm brahminhood and that a child whose origins are profoundly uncertain may become a brahmin if society can be convinced to accept him as such.

The story now moves to focus more fully on the child become man, with the Brahmin name of Ida Bagus Oka Puja. Like all of the Brahmin men in Oka Rusmini’s stories, his life is one of rich self-indulgence and sexual libertinage. When his friends take him to spy on village women bathing in a river one the late afternoon, he is overwhelmed by the image of one young woman in particular: “Puja gasped,” Rusmini writes, “His wild eyes blinked when he saw a shaft of light embed itself in the body of a young woman. The light entered the young woman’s crotch. When the woman finished bathing, the light vanished” (297). Puja, of course immediately remembers Angrok and the many stories Siwi has told him about this figure. (“Was [Siwi] one of his concubines?” he pointedly wonders at this stage—clearly Siwi is not Dedes, although this village woman may be.)

The village woman’s name is Cenana, a reference to the fragrant and mysterious “cendana” tree, the sandal-wood. Puja quickly ingratiates himself with the girl’s father, Dawer (later defined as a brahmin, Ida Bagus Dawer), and soon rapes the girl, wondering yet again whether she is indeed his Dedes (299).

Unlike Ken Dedes, although we cannot really be certain, Cenana's response to Puja is one of cold contempt and she maintains this response even after it is obvious that she is pregnant and must marry him if she is to have any social standing at all (300). The brutal fact already is that she has very little standing anyway. Although the child of a Brahmin father and sudra mother, she has never received the recognition that her position might, in other circumstances, deserve. She has no caste title, no rights and is completely subservient to the legitimate siblings sired by her father, to whom she must always use the most respectful register of the Balinese language (301, 303). Here we are taken into the mother's story and it is structurally the same as that of most other women in Rusmini's stories: a cross-caste marriage, the wasteful lifestyle of the man, the constant female experience of rejection and despisal, mixed with inescapable and agonising love. Frankly, Luh Sapti admits: "I fell in love with the wrong man, a man who[m] I let steal my body, suck up my beauty." She advises her daughter: "Never believe in love, Cenana. For people like us, love does not exist" (307).

The characterisation of men is clear: they are wicked and wasteful beasts. That of women is more complex: personally outcast from any community and personally outcaste by their relationship with the father of their children, they are nevertheless prepared to gamble everything on love, knowing outwardly that they will lose, displaying this knowledge with a hard, cold indifference, yet inwardly staying in love with the same men who have betrayed them and simultaneously being afraid of that love. It is that love that makes them women; it is the very fact of their being women that betrays them in Balinese society.

The last part of the story returns to Cenana and her mother-in-law in front of the television. It is not Cenana's wish to be Ken Dedes at all. Rather, like Luh Sarki, she identifies with yet another figure from Hindu myth, Gandari. In the *Mahabharata*, there are two factions of a family, cousins, who eventually wage an enormous war. One faction comprises the descendants of Pandu, the five virtuous Pandawa, who are cheated out of their kingdom in a game of dice. The other comprises the descendants of Kuru, the one hundred sons of Queen Gandari, who mercilessly provoke the war by cheating in the game of dice, and arrogantly refuse to right the wrongs they have committed. Like Siwi, Cenana's heart is profoundly evil. She insists: "My name is Cenana. Born as a woman! I won't easily let life play with me. This is my story, you all need

to hear it. There were never any tears, the slightest essence of complaint, that would be revolting. Take my hand, let us enter into the thread of my life. We will journey to a distant land, in accordance with the roles we have chosen. There is one thing you must remember, if you want to follow my journey, I have a secret. I want to be Gandari, the wife of Dastarata”—the blind king of the *Mahabharata*, morally and physically blind—“the mother of those called the Kurawa. This is my book and I open it wide to you all!” (310).

The outcast, suffering woman, betrayed by society, is also the violent woman who seeks her revenge through the enormous explosion of her own power and hatred.

The story is almost done. In an affirmation immediately parallel to Cenana’s secret blasphemy, Puja affirms yet again that he is like Ken Angrok, “the man who can uncover the omens of nature, he can capture the signs of power (*kekuasaan* = force, might) hidden in the body of the woman he chooses” (310). Cenana is “exactly like Ken Dedes, the woman who can bring a man to the success and perfection of his manhood. ... I chose you. No one can take your place as queen (*parameswari* = the woman who rules everything, compare the sage’s description of Dedes, 4 above). The children to whom you give birth will inherit everything I own” (311). As Oka Rusmini writes the story, Cenana and Puja are fighting in parallel but separate worlds; Puja is also aware that Cenana rejects him as she promises, “I will give birth to a child who can kill his Father!” (313). The curse of the keris-maker is again repeated, here consciously and deliberately, without shame or regret.

Cenana gives birth to twins. It is the woman’s angry self-protective rejection of her man that drives him to seek solace in other women, yet even as he does so, she can only desperately pray: “God of all the World, don’t let me fall in love with that devil! Don’t!” (313, 318—the last paragraph of the story). To fall in love is to lose her own power, yet it is also, paradoxically, to become more female—more female because more suffering.

Conclusion

Rusmini’s stories are filled with women who marry out of their caste. Sometimes the women identify completely with their new caste status (as we see, for example, in the case of Luh Sekar in *Tarian Bumi*), even though they

simultaneously experience their new status as harshly deformative. More often, they violently reject the discriminative new identity, as we see repeatedly in “Cenana.” Ida Ayu Putu Siwi, Cenana, Luh Sarki, and Luh Sapti are powerful women who redefine their worlds and themselves through their distancing from society and their affirmation of the importance of love and childbirth as the experience of women.

In his book *Wanita Bali Tempo Doeloe, Perspective Masa Kini (Balinese Women in Times Past, A Contemporary Perspective, 2007)*, the Balinese scholar, I Nyoman Darma Putra, insists that although Balinese women have been severely disadvantaged in the areas of education, work, and politics, they have never been “passive, accepting (*nrimo*) individuals, prepared to put their hands in their laps without any interest in fighting to improve their fate and that of their kind” (3). Clearly Oka Rusmini belongs to this group of women. Her female characters redefine the complexity of female identity in Bali, challenging religion, caste, custom, and love. They describe female fullness in terms of a love freely chosen, accepting the sacrifice that this involves, yet, like the witch Rangda, a major figure in Balinese dance, and the Hindu goddess Kali, they powerfully project their creative, and procreative energy, onto the world around them.

Oka argues for a female status that is beyond caste, beyond Brahmin, but from a perspective that is completely Brahmin. Her view of the sudra caste is profoundly contemptuous: in her books they are dirty, deformed, barely human creatures. Sudras in general, we may expect, do not see themselves in this way at all. As a former student once told me proudly, to be a sudra is “at least to have a caste.” (The student’s father-in-law, also a sudra, was the former head of a state teachers’ college and had successfully raised its status to that of a university.¹¹)

Oka Rusmini also argues for a new view of womanhood that is beyond conventional “respectable” ideas of womanhood, a re-gendering of what it means to be a woman. Ida Ayu Putu Siwi, Cenana, Luh Sarki, and Luh Sapti are all, in different ways, both personal and social outcasts and outcastes, by choice. Their power, and their weakness, comes from their strong womanhood, thoroughly written onto their bodies, and their social status is ultimately defined by a rejection and individual affirmation of this embodied, asocial yet deeply social, love.

Notes

1. This novel was first published in serial form in the newspaper *Republika*, 4 March to 8 April 1997.

2. These short stories were published in various magazines between 1994 and 2000; some were the recipients of major prizes from those magazines.

3. Anthropological commentary on caste in Bali is, at best, confused, because of its domination by idealised Indian models of four castes: the *Brahmin*, priestly caste; *satria*, warrior, noble caste; the merchant caste, *wesya*; and *sudra*, the lowest caste. F. B. Eiseman notes: “This is a great simplification. There are four castes, true, but they are subdivided and fragmented into dozens of status groups. And the clan system, woven within and without caste, offers hundreds more” (32). Eiseman states the common perception that the *sudra* are “basically those who are left, the ‘outsiders’ of the Tri Wangsa” (the three topmost castes) and constitute “some 90 percent of Bali’s population” (34). There is also common agreement on the ease with which men may marry “below themselves,” raising their wives and children to their own level (more or less), but the virtual impossibility of a woman marrying down with any impunity.

4. The name is found in various spellings—Ken Arok, Ken Anrok, and Ken Angrok. For convenience I will use this last spelling consistently throughout my paper, even in quotations from other sources.

5. Including Pramoedya Ananta Toer: *Arok of Java*. Trans. Max Lane. Singapore: Horizon Books, 2007.

6. See *Desawarnana (Nagarakertagama)*. Ken Angrok’s history appears in Canto 40: 1-5 (52-53); a reference to his deification as Shiva and Buddha occurs in 40: 5 (53) and his two funeral temples are mentioned there as well as at 36: 1 (49), 73: 3 (78) and 37: 1-2 (50).

7. Slametmuljana 4.

8. A future Buddha can choose to be reborn either as a *bodhisattva*, whose role is to bring all creation to salvation, or a *cakravartin*, whose role is more political.

9. An Indonesian scholar, Boechari, has argued that Ken Angrok was, in fact, the illegitimate son of Tungul-ametun, and that the story of Ken Endok’s impregnation by the god Brahma is an attempt to cover the story of Tungul-ametun’s rape of Ken Endok. See Soebadio 264-5.

10. It is important to note that blacksmiths, “*pandé*, the ancient firepriests who made the magic krisses” form “a caste in themselves,” and that “Even Brahmanas, highest among all the classes, must use the high language when addressing a *pandé* who has his tools in his hands” (Covarrubias 53).

11. Clearly my student didn't accept that the fourth caste included all Balinese who did not belong to the tri-wangsa.

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