

Outcaste by Choice: Traditional Legends and Gendered Power in a Short Story by Oka Rusmini

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Ida Ayu Oka Rusmini is a major contemporary Indonesian author. She has published two novels, *Tarian Bumi* (The Dance of the Earth, 2000) and *Kenanga* (2003a); a collection of short stories, *Sagra* (2001); and a volume of poetry, *Patiwangi* (2003b, republished in 2007 as *Warna Kita*, Our Colours, 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,¹ but renounced this status, including her title, after her marriage to the East Javanese essayist and poet Arif B. Prasetyo, a Muslim. 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 that the socio-religious practices of caste place on all members of society, but most especially on women, who are expected to marry respectfully within the existing caste structure and bear children who will continue to perform appropriately contextualised roles of domination and subordination. Both of Oka Rusmini's novels tell of a woman's abandonment of her

¹ 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; the *satria*, warrior, noble caste; the merchant caste, *wesya*; and the *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' (1989: 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); this seems debatable. 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 without severely being punished.

brahmin caste status as the result of her marriage to a low-caste *sudra*. Further, the title of the poetry book, *Patiwangi*, refers to the ritual practice by which this degradation is confirmed; the poem that gives the book its title bears the footnote: ‘*Patiwangi*: pati = death; wangi = fragrant. *Patiwangi* is a ritual that 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.’ Significantly it adds: ‘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 economic hardship to the major woman characters. This article analyses one short story, ‘Cenana’ (from *Sagra*, 169–200). As we shall see, the story suggests that living within the caste structure causes women terrible suffering and provides only a minimal personal security. Being placed outside patriarchally-dominated caste ties, by choice or by compulsion, may lead to even greater suffering, although it may also, conversely, provide a degree of freedom for the woman who is determined enough to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that this position offers her.

In this paper, I am particularly interested in the way in which ‘Cenana’ uses traditional legends to frame these various narratives of cross-caste transgression in contemporary Balinese society. The short story’s central references derive from one of the basic legends of medieval Javanese history, the story of Ken Angrok,² 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 legend has been the subject of a number of modern Indonesian literary works, including Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s *Arok of Java* (2007), Oka Rusmini’s is the only account written by a Balinese woman. The references to Ken Angrok and Ken Dedes reinforce concepts of social power, both masculine and feminine. There are also counter references to a number of Hindu epics, notably the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The strong willed characters in these epics, Sita, the wife of Rama, and Gandari, the mother of the rebellious Kurawa, are models for the justification of female resistance to masculine power.

Ken Angrok and Ken Dedes

Let us first describe in some detail the major legend that forms the overarching

² The name is found in various spellings: Ken Arok, Ken Anrok, and Ken Angrok. For convenience I will use this last spelling consistently, even in quotations from other sources.

background to ‘Cenana’ for Indonesian readers. Javanese literature begins in the late tenth century with various re-workings of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The story of Ken Angrok is a much later and completely indigenous tale; according to Theodore Pigeaud, it appears to have many parallels with ‘the historical romances and ballads, kidungs and pamancangahs, which occupy an important part in Javanese-Balinese literature’ (cited in Slametmuljana 1976: 3) In a fourteenth century account of a royal journey throughout East Java, the *Nagarakrtagama*,³ Ken Angrok is simply honoured as the founder of the dynasty of Singosari. The complicated, and highly 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 1996: 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.

As 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.’ The different interpretations of his life are significant for both the original text and Oka Rusmini’s retelling of it. On the one hand, he is a low caste thief—*Angrok*, in fact, probably means ‘a criminal’ (Slametmuljana 1976: 4)—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 episode does not seem to deal with Ken Angrok at all. ‘There was the daughter of a widow from Jiput,’ it begins, ‘who became immoral coming under the spell of Hyang Suksma (that is, 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). The woman’s immorality was presumably the result of her sin with the God him/itself. Did she become pregnant as a consequence of her actions? We are not sure. At any rate, her

³ See Robson’s translation of the *Desawarnana (Nagarakrtagama)* (1995). 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).

sense of guilt led her to the hermitage of the sage Mpu Tapa-wanken, who was looking for a human victim to consecrate the new gateway to his monastery, and she offered herself for this purpose. Her prayer was that she be rewarded with a place in Vishnu's heaven and in her next rebirth be blessed with wealth and power.

If there is to be a connection with the following episode, 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, however, 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 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 have already 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 has been 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 passing gentleman thief, 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 perhaps, he gambles away the properties of Ki Lembon and his wife, of Ken

Endok, and that of the Tantric religious head (*mandala*) of the village of Lebak, whose valuable buffaloes he also loses.

The young 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 disciplines, which might elsewhere be considered the exclusive prerogative of the *brahmin* caste, are so readily available to a wandering thief and his friend, a cowherd. Perhaps it helps that the boy is of divine ancestry. 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.

As he moves into adolescence, Angrok continues to pursue his life of banditry and gambling, now adding 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 (*yogya*) to become king (*prabhu*) in the island of Java?’ (75)

Lord Guru—‘ie God Siva,’ as Phalgunadi glosses (75)—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 reveals himself from 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 implicitly confirms an absence of caste (or at least of 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).⁴

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 each incident is of equal importance), Angrok enters into the service of Tungul-ametun, the governor of Tumapel, whom he is destined to replace. As Phalgunadi explains when Tungul-ametun first appears in the story, ‘Tumapel was a feudatory of [or?] vassal state of the Kadiri 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).⁵

It is at this point that Ken Dedes is first introduced into the narrative. 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’s 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.’

Abduction is a recognised marriage strategy in Javanese-Balinese literature (Creese 1998: 30-31). We are told nothing of Dedes’s response to the abduction, positive or negative, but the couple are apparently happy enough together. One day, when Ken

⁴ 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 destiny is to rule the world.

⁵ 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 2001: 264–65).

Dedes is already three month's 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 fathers. Dang Hyang Loh-gawe explains that a lady like that is an *ardhanareswari*—'the goddess who is half male in her body—the hermaphrodite form of the God Siva,' (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 own *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 that she can inevitably bestow. Angrok therefore goes to Bemo-Samparan the gambler, who not only confirms the sage's interpretation but also 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.⁶ Before he dies, the sword-maker curses Angrok that he and seven further kings will be stabbed with the same sword, extending Mpu Kanwa's curse. 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 about 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 (originally founded in 1122 AD), having been consecrated by both the Sivaite priests and the Buddhist monks with the title of 'Bhatara Guru,' as the gods had promised. He

⁶ 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 1942: 53).

established the new kingdom of Singhasari, and ruled from 1222 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 curses have now been set in relentless motion and the *Pararaton* tersely traces the further history of the dynasty and its successor, the great 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 on various social levels, which possibly represent at best a rather attenuated form of the caste system. At the center of the story is the man Ken Angrok himself, a strange mixture of illegitimate child, offspring of the gods, social bandit and divinely appointed future ruler of a great but murderous dynasty. In modern retellings of the legend, Ken Dedes is often criticised for her deliberate manipulation of both her husbands as a way of gaining her own political power. The *Pararaton*, however, is silent about most of her motives, other than her pleasure at being in the company of the men who love her and her guilt at having told the truth. The power of men is persistently mediated through the fathering of sons by women—the daughter of the widow of Jiput, Ken Endok, and Ken Dedes herself—and the narrative perspective taken is firmly masculine.

Oka Rusmini’s ‘Cenana’ sets uses the legend as a backdrop to a modern short story, set in a contemporary Bali that is devoid of state politics but shaped by a newly emerging national and international economy. She possibly draws on the story of Ken Angrok and Ken Dedes 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 the story with the psychological and spiritual perspectives of the many strong women towards the events in which they are sometimes willing, and more often unwilling, participants.

‘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' (171). 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, another 'cinebron' motivated by their interest in watching endless soap operas on television together. It will also, of course, inevitably also be Cenana's own story as well, particularly that of her pregnancy with the child that has been imposed upon her and whom she thoroughly detests. And it will be the story of women from not only the highest caste but also the lowest, *sudra* caste, herself, her mother, Luh Sapti, and Luh Sarki, the mother of Ida Bagus Oka Puja, Cenana's husband.

Cenana introduces Siwi in a paragraph of just three sentences (171). There is, in the first sentence, a physical description, which locates the woman (the term 'woman' is the first word in the story and is used constantly throughout it) 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 many things here: the woman's relationship to the narrator; the mother-in-law's name, which bears the highest caste marker *Ida Ayu*, and is the female form of the name of the god Siwa; her classic beauty; and her prominent position in the business world society of modern Bali.

The next two sentences describe the mother-in-law's own married status: 'Her father found a man for his child, Ida Bagus Pugu Tugul. The poor (*miskin* = lacking funds, impoverished) man had only one task, to impregnate the child, Siwi was never pregnant to the day he died.' (171). This further description includes the caste status of her husband, also a *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 as we later learn.

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 the widow Siwi to bear, or adopt, a child, who can inherit her wealth. Siwi accepts none of these requests. Unexpectedly, someone comes with whom she does indeed fall in love. It is 'a small dirty black-skinned boy ... with wild, defiant eyes.' (173). The boy, no more than six or seven years old, has come to steal Siwi's mangos, just as the child Ken Angrok stole his teacher's *jambu* fruit. That this is 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' (174). He is the Ken Angrok whom her mother has told her about and the one for whom she has waited since earliest childhood, defiantly rejecting her husband during his life and all the other men after her husband's death.

The third section of the story describes Siwi's visit to the boy's mother, Luh Sarki, who is some twenty years younger than Siwi. The story is again 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 such situations. But to patriarchal caste is added the contradictory dimension of erotic desire: the 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 believed in love,' Siwi admiringly tells the woman (176).

True love, in Oka Rusmini's stories, always carries an enormous cost. The woman 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, and has stubbornly endured her subsequent miserable existence, thanks to the strength generated by that self-sacrifice which has consumed her very body (177). The two women agree to the transfer of the boy to Siwi's protection. A week later, the *sudra* woman, prematurely aged and severely ill, is burned in a conflagration that consumes her hut. Horrifyingly, Siwi has deliberately and knowingly killed the *sudra* woman (this is explicitly admitted on page 180). When she takes the child, her identification with the story of Ken Angrok is again 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' (180). Siwi uses the legend to justify her own wicked power and desire. In the *Paraton*, Dedes may passively acquiesce to the death of her first husband, even though she is pregnant with his child, but she does not actually engage in the murder as Siwi does.

Cremation is, of course, a common Balinese funeral practice for the upper castes. But there are two, more traditional, Indic dimensions to Luh Sarki's life and death. The strong mythological female figure with whom she identifies is not Ken Dedes but Sita (175) of the Indian *Ramayana*. Sita, wife of Prince Rama, was kidnapped by the demon king, Rahwana, and stayed in his palace for many years, maintaining her chastity. On

her recovery, she was forced by her husband to prove her faithfulness by undergoing the ordeal of fire. Such was Sita's purity that she passed the test without any hesitation. Luh Sarki's identification with Sita presents her as a strong woman, faithful to her man even in exile. In this, she is indeed like Sita. There is, however, also a difference. Luh Sarki is a sinful woman and her loyalty is to her love for the man whose child she has borne but to whom she was never married. In this part of the story, the identity of the man is unmentioned, though Sarki does wonder if Siwi the *brahmin* woman knows. She finally dies believing that Siwi does not know; later we are told that she does, in fact, know—ironically, the man was Siwi's own husband (184).

The taking of the *sudra* child is a violation of caste relations. Yet, in a sense, it is also an affirmation of the boy's hidden identity, for if the child is the child of a *brahmin*, Siwi's own husband, he is a *brahmin* as well and a true stepchild—the child she might have borne, in fact. Unaware of this connection, Siwi's extended kin network, the residential unit of the *griya*, do not accept him; they are afraid of possible *sudra* pollution. Siwi, like Luh Sarki, is expelled from her community. Like Sarki, too, she has become an outcast because of her love—her love for this boy, who is her Ken Angrok. Unlike Sarki, however, Siwi is not crushed by her exile. Siwi defiantly takes the boy and leaves for the capital. Using the myth to again justify her actions, she declares: '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' (184). 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' (181). Banishment to outside her immediate caste group is intended to disempower Siwi; because of her own inner resolution and choice, it makes her stronger and provides her with the space to become even more economically powerful.

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 (182, 183–84). She has redefined 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 reclaims her own superior status by building herself a new house and a new temple (184) and adopting the humble demeanour that adorns the true *brahmin* woman (185). The suffering of exile creates a spiritual power that may be turned inwards, as in Sarki's case, or productively turned outward to strengthen the now free woman. Siwi's is a power more of wilful self-assertion than of ascetic self-discipline. She has also shown that wealth may also confer or confirm brahminhood and that a child whose origins are profoundly uncertain may become a *brahmin* too if society can be convinced to accept him as such.

The story then 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 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' (186). Puja, of course, immediately remembers Angrok and the many stories Siwi has told him about this figure. How did she know such things? 'Was [Siwi] one of [Angrok's] concubines?' he pointedly wonders at this stage (187)—clearly he too does not believe that Siwi was Dedes, although this village woman obviously may be. He is, on the other hand, more than convinced that he might be related to Angrok and that his own violent actions can be justified through this identification.

The village woman's name is Cenana, a reference to the fragrant and mysterious *cendana* tree, the sandal-wood used for incense. Puja quickly ingratiates himself with the girl's father, Dawer (later also defined as a *brahmin*, Ida Bagus Dawer, a gambler and polygamist), and soon rapes the girl, like his imaginary forebear, wondering yet again whether she is indeed his Dedes (188).

Unlike Ken Dedes, although we cannot really be certain, the twenty-year old Cenana's response to Puja's rape of her 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 (189). The brutal fact already is that she has very little standing anyway. Because she was conceived before the marriage of her *brahmin* father and

sudra mother, Cenana 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 (191). Here we are taken into the mother's story and it is tragically 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 despidal, mixed with inescapable and agonising love. Her mother, Luh Sapti, now known as Jero Sandat, frankly admits: 'I fell in love with the wrong man, a man whom I let steal my body, suck up my beauty.' And she advises her daughter: 'Never believe in love, Cenana. For people like us, love does not exist' (193). Like Luh Sarki, Luh Sapti's suffering has been intensified by her love and her pain has been hidden and endured in silence. However, while Luh Sarki's separation from her man has led her to an outer exile, Luh Sapti and Cenana experience that same bitter loneliness while remaining trapped within their households.

The last part of the story returns to Cenana and her mother-in-law in front of the television. Ultimately, it is not Cenana's wish to be Ken Dedes at all. To be Ken Dedes is to be a passive object of egotistical male desire. Rather, like Luh Sarki, Cenana identifies with yet another counter-figure from Hindu mythology, this time the more blatantly defiant and even more powerful Queen Gandari. In the *Mahabharata*, there are two factions of a family, cousins, who will eventually wage an enormous war against each other. 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 faction consists of the descendants of Kuru, the one hundred sons of Gandari, who mercilessly provoke the war by cheating the Pandawa, and arrogantly refuse to right the wrongs they have committed. Like Siwi, Cenana's heart is profoundly evil. 'My name is Cenana,' she insists, '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 disgusting. 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!' (195). The woman who bears her suffering resolutely, in whatever

situation, has the ascetic potential to reek her revenge through the enormous explosion of her own psychic power and hatred, not by herself but through her men.

The story is almost done. In an affirmation that is parallel to Cenana's secret blasphemy but opposite to it, 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' (195). To him, 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, above]. The children to whom you give birth will inherit everything I own,' (195–96). As Oka Rusmini writes the story, Cenana and Puja are fighting in parallel but separate worlds, with contrary myths as their psychic weapons. Puja is also aware that Cenana rejects him on his own terms as she swears: 'I will give birth to a child who can kill his Father!' (197). The curse of the sage and the *keris*-maker is repeated, here consciously and deliberately, without shame or regret.

Cenana gives birth to twins, a son (to kill the father) and a daughter (to continue the mother's suffering). Puja remains unmoved. The woman's angry self-protective rejection of her man drives him to seek solace in other women, yet even as he does, she can only desperately pray: 'God of all the World, don't let me fall in love with that demonic man! Don't!' (200—the last paragraph of the story). For a woman, to fall in love is to lose her own power; yet it is also, paradoxically, to become more female—more female and, therefore more suffering.

Conclusion

In his book *Wanita Bali Tempo Doeloe, Perspective Masa Kini* (Balinese Women in Times Past, A Contemporary Perspective), 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' (2007: 3) Clearly Oka Rusmini belongs to this group of women. Her women characters redefine the complexity of female identity in Bali, challenging religion, caste, and custom.

The patterns of characterisation in ‘Cenana,’ as well as in her other works, are consistent. ‘Cenana’ is particularly concerned with *sudra* women who marry men of the *brahmin* caste. Their husbands invariably lead extravagant lives of debauchery and waste. Paradoxically, while Oka Rusmini argues in ‘Cenana’ (and her other works), for a female status that is ideally beyond caste, beyond *brahmin*, her perspective remains completely *brahmin*. Her view of the *sudra* caste is profoundly contemptuous: in her books they are commonly dirty, deformed, barely human creatures.

The women in ‘Cenana’ are defined in caste terms, and redefined by their relationship with the fathers of their children. Luh Sapti attempts to identify completely with her new caste status, even though she also experiences her new status as deforming. Sapti and Cenana are isolated within their marriages; others are outcast from any community. This exile may be imposed, as in Luh Sarki’s case, or it may be willingly accepted, as Siwi does after her adoption of Puja. The story describes female fullness not in terms of a woman’s circumstances but in terms of a love freely chosen. Each woman accepts the sacrifice that love involves, but also realises that this sacrifice means that she must continually negotiate her creative and procreative energy in her relationships the world around her, either within or, if necessary, beyond the bounds of caste and family. All of the women are prepared to gamble everything on love while simultaneously being afraid of that love, knowing, in fact, that they will lose, displaying this knowledge in a hard cold indifference, yet inwardly still in love with the same men who have betrayed them and feeling that this love is their greatest glory. That love makes them women; but the very fact of being women betrays them in Balinese society.

In ‘Cenana,’ Oka Rusmini uses three classical legends to pinpoint the pressures placed upon women and their various psychological responses to these pressures. The major myth is indigenous Javanese-Balinese, that of Ken Angrok and Ken Dedes. Puja, the young *sudra* become *brahmin* (as he in fact is), identifies with Angrok and, in particular, uses the myth to justify his violent attempts to physically and psychologically subjugate Cenana. His adoptive mother, Siwi, strongly identifies him with Angrok and this relationship with an idealised violent male provides her with the strength to live her own life beyond her initial village caste context. Her potential association with the figure of Ken Dedes is, however, denied her by Puja, who instead imposes the archetype on his wife, Cenana, whom he possesses through an act of violence. In her turn, Cenana almost

completely rejects the identification with Ken Dedes and instead turns to one of the major figures of Hindu mythology, Gandari, the mother of the evil thousand Kurawa brothers. Her desire to murder the father of her child is her one acknowledged link with Dedes. (In Dedes's case, her contribution to the father's murder was accidental; in Cenana's case, the desire is chillingly deliberate.) Finally Luh Sarki, Puja's birth mother, also identifies with another, conventionally powerful figure from Indian mythology, Sita. Like Sita, Sarki lives her life in exile, devoted to the man who is, however, the father of her illegitimate child. This myth provides her, too, with the strength to endure her own suffering. Unlike Sita, she perishes in the purifying ordeal of fire.

Through these three legends, Oka Rusmini ultimately argues for a new view of womanhood that is beyond conventional 'respectable' and patriarchal Balinese ideas of womanhood, providing a woman's perspective 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, sometimes willingly, sometimes unwillingly. Their power, and their weakness, comes from their womanhood, defined and redefined by caste, and their ultimate destinies are determined through the affirmation of this embodied, asocial yet deeply social, love.

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