



JMS: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies

Vol. 1, No. 2 April 2026, Page 29-37

P-ISSN: XX-XX

E-ISSN: XX-XX

Available Online at <https://pusatpublikasi.com/index.php/jms/index>



The Role of Literature in Building Nationalism: A Study of Chairil Anwar's Poems

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Abstract: This study examines the role of literature in fostering nationalism through an analysis of Chairil Anwar's poems, a poet of the 1945 Generation known for his works filled with the spirit of struggle and freedom. Employing a qualitative approach with content analysis methods, this research explores themes, symbols, and values of nationalism in poems such as *Aku*, *Karawang-Bekasi*, *Diponegoro*, and *Derai-Derai Cemara*. The findings reveal that Chairil Anwar employs symbolic and expressive language to represent the spirit of resistance, courage, and sacrifice for Indonesia's independence. The poem *Aku* highlights rebellion and individualism as expressions of the spirit of struggle, while *Karawang-Bekasi* portrays the sacrifices of fallen heroes for the nation. *Diponegoro* presents heroism as an inspiration for nationalism, whereas *Derai-Derai Cemara* reflects resilience in facing change. These findings affirm that literature plays a strategic role in building national awareness and instilling patriotic values in future generations.

Keywords: Literature, nationalism, Chairil Anwar, poetry, struggle.

INTRODUCTION

Nationalism is one of the essential elements in building the identity and unity of a nation. Amid various social, political, and cultural dynamics, nationalism serves as a cohesive force that unites people from diverse backgrounds. In the context of Indonesia, the spirit of nationalism has been the foundation of the struggle for independence and the formation of the nation's character. Nationalism is intertwined with national identity, reflecting the characteristics that define a nation, such as language, culture, and history (Fadhel et al., 2024). However, nationalism can also generate internal divisions and foster suspicion toward outsiders, potentially threatening national unity. Conversely, patriotism promotes national solidarity and trust among fellow citizens, enhancing civic engagement and contributing positively to the identity and unity of a nation (Huddy, 2023).

One medium that plays a strategic role in instilling and strengthening the spirit of nationalism is literature. Literature, as the visible manifestation of language, functions as a unifying element of nationhood, linking language and literature to nationalism, particularly in the context of nation-building in Europe (D'haen, 2023). As a cultural expression, literature has a unique ability to evoke emotions, convey messages, and build collective awareness. It serves as a means for writers to express their ideas and experiences, reflecting human life—including thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behavior. Literature thus bridges the writer's personal experiences with broader human conditions, showcasing imagination and emotional depth (Lestari et al., 2024). Poetry, as one of the literary genres, often becomes an effective medium for articulating aspirations and national values. During Indonesia's struggle for independence, many poets used their works

to ignite the spirit of resistance and love for the homeland. One of the most significant figures in this context was Chairil Anwar.

Chairil Anwar, a poet of the “1945 Generation,” is renowned for his works that embody the spirit of courage, resistance, and freedom. His poems, such as *Aku* and *Karawang-Bekasi*, are not merely literary works but also manifestations of the struggle against colonialism and the drive to build a free national identity. Anwar’s poetry embodies diverse aspects of nationalism, reflecting historical roots and sociocultural implications that continue to resonate with contemporary Indonesian literature (Andi & Jupri, 2024). Through straightforward, symbolic, and energetic language, Chairil Anwar successfully conveyed messages of nationalism that remain relevant to this day.

This study aims to explore the role of literature, particularly Chairil Anwar’s poetry, in building and strengthening the spirit of nationalism in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach, this research will analyze the themes, symbols, and national values embedded in Anwar’s poems. The study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of how literature, as a part of culture, plays a vital role in shaping national consciousness and inspiring younger generations to love and contribute to their country.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with content analysis as its method. Qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena within their specific contexts, allowing for richer interpretations of social interactions and cultural dynamics (Hammoumi et al., 2024). The qualitative approach emphasizes descriptive analysis, focusing on the perspectives and experiences of subjects, and often utilizes narratives and in-depth interviews for data collection and inductive analysis (Sa’adah, 2023).

Content analysis is a systematic research method used to interpret and measure communication content across various media. It serves as a valuable tool in the social sciences, enabling researchers to uncover underlying themes, assumptions, and trends within qualitative data. Researchers may employ manual coding as well as qualitative data analysis software to enhance the accuracy and depth of their findings (Rucks-Ahidiana, 2024). This method also allows for the identification of significant trends and gaps within the existing literature, guiding the direction of future research (Ghapar & Luqman, 2024).

Content analysis also referred to as textual analysis is a research method used to reveal underlying assumptions and stereotypes within language through the analysis of qualitative sources (Rucks, 2024). This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is on the meanings and messages of nationalism embedded in Chairil Anwar’s poems. The data sources used in this study are Anwar’s poems relevant to the theme of nationalism, such as *Aku*, *Karawang-Bekasi*, and *Diponegoro*. Data collection was carried out through document study, by gathering and analyzing Anwar’s poems from published literary works. The data analysis technique involved identifying themes of nationalism found in Anwar’s poetry, examining his use of language style, symbolism, and the political and cultural context of his time to better understand their influence on the formation of nationalism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the researcher uses Teeuw (1980). According to Teeuw, literary works can serve as a medium to understand social dynamics as well as to shape national consciousness. In this case, Chairil Anwar's poetry can be analyzed as a form of nationalist expression that represents the spirit of struggle and the identity of the Indonesian nation.

4.1 Analysis of the Role of Literature in Building Nationalism: A Study of Chairil Anwar's Poems

4.1.1 Analysis of the Poem "Aku" by Chairil Anwar in the Context of Nationalism

The following data are analyzed based on Teeuw's theory (1980).

Data 1: Poem

Aku

Kalau sampai waktuku
 'Ku mau tak seorang kan merayu
 Tidak juga kau
 Tak perlu sedu sedan itu
 Aku ini binatang jalang
 Dari kumpulannya terbang
 Biar peluru menembus kulitku
 Aku tetap meradang menerjang
 Luka dan bisa kubawa berlari
 Berlari
 Hingga hilang pedih peri
 Dan aku akan lebih tidak peduli
 Aku mau hidup seribu tahun lagi

From Data 1 in the poem "Aku", Chairil Anwar's poem is not only a literary work that stirs emotion, but also reflects a profound spirit of nationalism, particularly in the context of the Indonesian nation's struggle against colonialism. Through themes of rebellion, freedom, and resilience, this poem portrays the struggle of the individual, which simultaneously represents the collective resistance of the nation. In this analysis, we will reveal how the structure, style, and contextual meaning of this poem not only contain the poet's personal expression but also serve as a symbol of nationalist strength that inspires courage in facing the challenges of the era.

a. Theme and Nationalism

In Chairil Anwar's poem "Aku", it represents one of the literary works that reflects the spirit of resistance and courage, which is closely related to nationalism. The main themes in this poem are rebellion, freedom, and perseverance in facing obstacles. The spirit of nationalism is reflected in the resistance against oppression and the determination to endure, as seen in the lines:

*"Aku ini binatang jalang
 Dari kumpulannya terbang"*

This expression illustrates a strong sense of individualism but can also be interpreted as a metaphor for the Indonesian nation's struggle, which at that time was still under colonial rule. The identity

of being a “*binatang jalang*” (wild beast) signifies detachment from colonial rules and the desire for freedom. Thus, this poem does not only contain the personal expression of the poet but also reflects the collective spirit of resistance against injustice and colonialism.

b. Structure and Language Style

The structure of the poem “*Aku*” is free, without a fixed rhyme scheme, reflecting freedom of expression and the spirit of struggle. Chairil Anwar employs various stylistic devices to reinforce the meaning of his poem. One prominent literary device is metaphor, as seen in the line “*Aku ini binatang jalang*”, which depicts a rebellious figure who does not submit to rules. Additionally, hyperbole is used to emphasize an unlimited spirit of struggle, as in the line “*Aku mau hidup seribu tahun lagi*”, which reflects a strong desire to keep fighting endlessly. The use of repetition, such as the repeated word “*berlari*”, stresses perseverance in facing suffering and challenges. This expressive language style aligns with A. Teeuw’s (1980) theory, which highlights the power of poetry in evoking emotion and shaping national consciousness.

c. Contextual Meaning and Nationalism

In its historical context, the poem “*Aku*” was written during Indonesia’s independence struggle, so its meaning is closely tied to the spirit of fighting against colonialism. The lines:

*"Biar peluru menembus kulitku
Aku tetap meradang menerjang"*

Depict an unyielding attitude highly relevant to nationalist values. This stance reflects the bravery of fighters who were unafraid of death for the sake of the nation’s independence. Through words filled with the spirit of struggle, Chairil Anwar instilled awareness that the fight against colonialism required courage and determination. This poem became a form of social and historical reflection that inspired many people to remain steadfast in facing challenges

4.1.2 Analysis of the Poem “Karawang-Bekasi” by Chairil Anwar

The following data are analyzed based on Teeuw’s theory (1980).

Data 2: Poem

Karawang-Bekasi

Kami yang kini terbaring antara Karawang-Bekasi
Tidak bisa teriak “Merdeka” dan angkat senjata lagi
Tapi siapakah yang tidak lagi mendengar deru kami
Terbayang kami maju dan mendegap hati?
Kami bicara
Kami masih bicara
Terbakar perasaan
Menyusup sepi
Harap kami jangan kalian lupakan
Kami sudah coba apa yang kami bisa
Tapi kerja belum selesai, belum apa-apa
Kami sudah beri kami punya jiwa
Kerja belum selesai, belum bisa memperhitungkan arti 4-5 ribu nyawa
Kami cuma tulang-tulang berserakan
Tapi adalah kepunyaanmu
Kaulah lagi yang tentukan nilai tulang-tulang berserakan

Ataukah jiwa kami melayang untuk kemerdekaan, kemenangan dan harapan
 Ataukah cuma untuk satu kerak nasi
 Kami tidak tahu, kami tidak lagi bisa berkata
 Kaulah sekarang yang berkata
 Kami bicara padamu dalam hening di malam sepi
 Jika dada rasa hampa dan jam dinding yang berdetak
 Kami mati muda. Yang tinggal tulang diliputi debu
 Kenang, kenanglah kami
 Kami sudah coba apa yang kami bisa
 Tapi kerja belum selesai, belum apa-apa
 Kami memberi jiwa,
 Kau mesti menjaga jiwa

From Data 2 above, Teeuw (1980) explains that in analyzing literary works, it is important to look at structure (how the elements of the poem are interrelated) and meaning (the message the author wishes to convey to the reader). This analysis will focus on the themes, symbols, and nationalist values contained in the poem.

a. The Theme of Nationalism in Chairil Anwar's Poem

This poem portrays the condition of fighters who lie between Karawang and Bekasi, a location that may refer to an area of historical significance in Indonesia's struggle for independence. The theme of nationalism is reflected in the statement that they had fought with their souls and bodies, even though they could no longer physically fight or raise their weapons.

The phrase "*Kami sudah coba apa yang kami bisa, tapi kerja belum selesai, belum apa-apa*" shows the spirit of continuing the struggle even though their bodies had perished. This poem reflects the spirit of sacrifice for independence, where "*kerja belum selesai*" means that the struggle for freedom continued, even after many had fallen.

b. Symbolism and Representation of Nationalism

The symbol "*tulang-tulang berserakan*" conveys the sacrifices made by the fighters, who, even though they had perished, still held meaning and value in the struggle for independence. In Teeuw's theory, this symbol can be analyzed as a representation of nationalism the soul and spirit of the heroes that live on in the memory and history of the nation.

Furthermore, the symbol "*jiwa melayang untuk kemerdekaan, kemenangan dan harapan*" expresses the great sacrifice of the fighters, not only for themselves but also for the future of the nation. This poem reminds the reader of the important meaning of independence fought for by many, symbolizing freedom as something far greater than mere material needs or personal interests.

c. Nationalist Values in the Poem

This poem also contains nationalist values related to social and collective awareness. The phrase "*Kami bicara padamu dalam hening di malam sepi*" expresses a call to be remembered, containing values of loyalty to the homeland and the spirit of preserving the legacy of independence. The poem calls on later generations not to forget their sacrifices and to continue the struggle for independence and the welfare of the nation.

Furthermore, the statement “*Kami memberi jiwa, Kau mesti menjaga jiwa*” conveys the value of responsibility passed to future generations to preserve and safeguard what had been fought for with blood and soul.

d. Historical Context in Strengthening Nationalism

It is important to note that this poem emerged in the post-independence context, where the freedom fighters still felt that their goals had not yet been fully achieved. “*Kerja belum selesai*” emphasizes that the spirit of struggle must be continued by the next generation. This shows how literature, in this case, Chairil Anwar’s poetry, plays a role in maintaining the spirit of nationalism and reminding the nation of the unfinished task.

4.1.3 Analysis of Chairil Anwar’s Poem “*Derai-Derai Cemara*”

Data 3:

Derai-Derai Cemara

Cemara menderai sampai jauh
 Terasa hari akan jadi malam
 Ada beberapa dahan di tingkap merapuh
 Dipukul angin yang terpendam
 Aku sekarang orangnya bisa tahan
 Sudah berapa waktu bukan kanak lagi
 Tapi dulu memang ada suatu bahan
 Yang bukan dasar perhitungan kini
 Hidup hanya menunda kekalahan
 Tambah terasing dari cinta sekolah rendah
 Dan tahu, ada yang tetap tidak diucapkan
 Sebelum pada akhirnya kita menyerah

Analysis based on the research objective “The Role of Literature in Building Nationalism: A Study of Chairil Anwar’s Poems”:

a. Theme and Context of the Poem

This poem reflects the feelings and contemplations of an individual regarding the changes within themselves as time goes by. The emerging theme is related to the understanding of struggle, the sense of alienation, and the postponement of defeat. In the context of nationalism, this can be interpreted as a representation of the spirit of struggle that continues to persist despite feelings of alienation and hardship. This theme underlines the difficulties in building identity and a strong sense of togetherness, which are essential elements in fostering nationalism.

b. Values of Nationalism

This poem portrays an individual’s feeling of alienation, yet it still shows the spirit of resilience and acceptance of reality. The value of nationalism reflected in this poem lies in the sense of endurance against obstacles and changes. When the poet says, “*Hidup hanya menunda kekalahan*” (“Life is only delaying defeat”), it can be interpreted as a symbol of the unyielding spirit that must

be upheld in the struggle of nation-building. Although there is a sense of alienation, the poet implies that the struggle for the nation must go on.

c. Alienation and Struggle in the Context of Nationalism

This poem conveys the theme of alienation, which becomes a symbol of the feeling of being separated from collective goals. However, despite this alienation, the spirit to continue the struggle still exists. In the context of nationalism, this can be understood as the nation's struggle that continues to endure despite numerous obstacles. This feeling of alienation may also represent what individuals within a nation experience during their fight for independence and unity.

4.1.4 Analysis of Chairil Anwar's Poem "Diponegoro"

Data 4:

Diponegoro

Di masa pembangunan ini
 Tuan hidup kembali
 Dan bara kagum menjadi api
 Di depan sekali Tuan menanti
 Tak gentar. Lawan banyaknya seratus kali
 Pedang di kanan, keris di kiri
 Berselempang semangat yang tak bisa mati
 MAJU
 Ini barisan tak bergenderang-berpalu
 Kepercayaan tanda menyerbu
 Sekali berarti
 Sudah itu mati
 MAJU
 Bagimu Negeri
 Menyediakan api
 Punah di atas menghamba
 Binasa di atas ditindas
 Sesungguhnya jalan ajal baru tercapai
 Jika hidup harus merasai

Based on the above data and Teeuw's (1980) theory, the focus of analysis is on several key aspects: theme, symbolism, and values related to nationalism, as follows:

a. Theme of Nationalism

The poem clearly reflects the theme of struggle and national spirit. "*Tuan hidup kembali*" ("You live again") illustrates the revival of spirit after a time of great suffering. This can be interpreted as a national awakening, where the Indonesian people began to rise after colonial oppression. Furthermore, the line "*Bara kagum menjadi api*" ("The embers of admiration become fire") represents the burning passion to achieve independence and unite the nation. This poem depicts sacrifice and determination in facing challenges, which are the essence of the nationalist spirit that Chairil Anwar aimed to ignite.

b. Symbolism

Several symbols in the poem reinforce the values of nationalism. The symbol "*pedang di kanan, keris di kiri*" ("sword on the right, dagger on the left") represents weaponry and bravery, often

associated with the struggle to defend the homeland. These weapons illustrate readiness for battle, an integral part of nationalism in the Indonesian independence struggle.

The recurring symbol of “*api*” (“fire”) also refers to the burning spirit, resistance against oppression, and the drive to advance fearlessly. Fire in this context symbolizes the never-ending struggle, reminding us of the nationalist spirit that continues to ignite patriotism.

c. Values of Nationalism

This poem emphasizes the values of courage, sacrifice, and the fighting spirit to achieve independence and defend the nation. The line “*Maju / Ini barisan tak bergenderang-berpalu*” (“Forward / This line without drums or gongs”) expresses determination to continue the struggle without expecting praise or recognition. This reflects a nationalist spirit focused on collective action for the nation’s future, even without luxury or attention.

The concept of “*api*” (“fire”) prepared for the country also implies the sacrifices required for national progress, reflected in the ultimate offering of life and body for independence.

CONCLUSION

This study has successfully explored the role of literature, particularly the poems of Chairil Anwar, in building and strengthening the spirit of nationalism in Indonesia. Through the analysis of the poems “*Aku*” and “*Karawang-Bekasi*,” it was found that Chairil Anwar employed powerful and symbolic language to reflect the struggle and resistance against colonialism, which aligns with profound values of nationalism. The poem “*Aku*” emphasizes themes of rebellion and freedom, serving as a symbol of the Indonesian people’s fighting spirit, while “*Karawang-Bekasi*” portrays the sacrifice of heroes who were willing to give their lives and bodies for independence, even though they could no longer continue their struggle directly.

Through the use of expressive language styles, such as metaphor and hyperbole, Chairil Anwar successfully conveyed messages that were not only relevant to the historical context of Indonesia’s struggle but also resonate in modern times. The meaning of nationalism in these two poems instills an awareness of the importance of freedom, courage, and determination in defending independence.

Overall, Chairil Anwar’s poems function as a highly effective medium for awakening the spirit of nationalism, inspiring younger generations to continue fighting for and preserving national values. This study also reveals that literature, as part of culture, plays a strategic role in shaping national identity and maintaining solidarity among citizens in facing social, political, and cultural challenges.

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