



# Novel Gadis Kretek By Ratih Kumala and the Social Function of Smoking Kretek Cigarette

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**Abstract.** Gadis Kretek, a novel by Ratih Kumala, has sparked my recollection of the practice of smoking rokok kretek (kretek cigarette). In my childhood up to my early youth (1960-1970), cigarette and smoking had significant meaning in social life. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to describe the social meaning of smoking, that is, how the people in my kampong smoked kretek, how it became an identity of adulthood, and how it became a means of hospitality in social life. This study which was conducted through phenomenological methodology could reveal the phenomenon of the social function of cigarette and smoking.

**Keywords:** cigarette, smoking, social function

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background

Gadis Kretek, a novel by Ratih Kumala, which has been adopted to film with the same title, reveals the history of rokok kretek (simply called kretek). The novel narrates the early development of kretek in Kudus, a town in Central Jawa, where kretek firstly was introduced.

As told by historians, the emergence of kretek was firstly initiated by Haji Djamhari in 1870. When his breast was unwell, he rubbed his breast with clover oil, even eschewed clovers. Feeling well, Haji Djamhari cut clovers into pieces and mixed them with minced

tobacco and covered the mixture with klobot (corn petal) to become a cigarette. It is called kretek because when the clover in the cigarette is burned it sounds kretek, kretek, kretek. He smoked the hand-made cigarettes and when feeling better, he made more kreteks to give to his friends who wanted to taste the kreteks. Then he developed it into business. But it was Nitisemito who succeeded to develop the business to become great industry. He had his kretek product formally registered as kretek “Tjap Bal Tiga”. Hence he has been known as the pioneer in kretek industry and Kudus, the town where kretek was firstly initiated, has been identical with kretek.

Smoking kretek then became daily life, even became equal to having a meal. In Javanese language it is called *udud* (in ngoko variant of Javanese language), *ngeses* (in krama variant). But in Indonesian language it is called *menghisap* (suck), *merokok* (having cigarette), or *minum* (drink). Being called *minum* (drink), smoking is equal to having a meal or drinking; having a meal is not complete without being ended with smoking. Even when an addicted person has to choose between smoking or having a meal, smoking is preferred.

*Udud-ududan*, getting together leisurely just to smoke together (of course accompanied with coffee or snacks) is common to some communities. As such, smoking is social as well as cultural activities; it is social because it is binding the community together and it is cultural because it becomes a habit of the community. That is what made me interested in conducting this study on *Gadis Kretek*, a novel by Ratih Kumala, and kretek and smoking. This study which was conducted through phenomenological methodology is significant because this study revealed the phenomenon of social function of kretek and smoking.

## 1.2. Problems

The problems of this study is to reveal the social function of kretek and smoking kretek. This problem is broken down into three research questions.

- a. how did the people in my kampong smoked *kretek*.
- b. why is smoking became an identity of adulthood,
- c. how is *kretek* became a means of social hospitality.

### 1.3. Objectives

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are:

- a. to describe how the people in my kampung smoked *kretek*,
- b. to explain why smoking became identity of adulthood,
- c. to describe how *kretek* became a means of social hospitality.

### 1.4. Significance

As for the significance of this study is that the result of this study may become an input to understand that smoking kretek is not only a mere enjoyment, but also a social activity with certain function. As such, the result of this study may add references on the study of kretek and cigarette in general.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Previous Researches

Ridhoi and Adlani (2020) [1] found out how in Kediri, a town in East Java, where Bentul, one of giants of kretek industry was established in 1970, kretek was so popular so that smoking kretek was not only a daily activity, but also religious ritual.

Setyawan (2021)[2], a smoker, says that in Greater Solo (Solo Raya), Menara, a brand of kretek produced in Solo City, has become a part of the people's culture. It is identified as collective cigarette because it is always served in many social activities. "*Karena kepopulerannya, rokok Menara bahkan menjadi salah satu elemen budaya masyarakat Solo Raya. Ia sering diidentikkan sebagai rokok kolektif. Pasalnya, ia selalu ada saat gotong royong, sinoman, pembangunan jalan, dan sebagainya.*"

Dinata et al. (2022: 30) [3] in their research “Analysis of Genetic Structuralism in the Novel *Gadis Kretek* by Ratih Kumala” concluded that “the novel *Gadis Kretek* has a strong relationship with its social facts”.

The finding of the researches and the testimony of Setyawan provide important data for my research which enlarges the finding of the researches. The objective of this research which is focused on the social functions of kretek and smoking adds the data on the people’s habit of smoking kretek in Java.

## 2.2. Theory

Smith (2013) [4] explains that, literally, phenomenology is the study of “phenomena”: appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies structures of conscious experience as experienced from the first-person point of view, along with relevant conditions of experience.

The central structure of an experience is its intentionality, the way it is directed through its content or meaning toward a certain object in the world. We all experience various types of experience including perception, imagination, thought, emotion, desire, volition, and action. Thus, the domain of phenomenology is the range of experiences including these types (among others). Experience includes not only relatively passive experience as in vision or hearing, but also active experience as in walking or hammering a nail or kicking a ball.

Smith provides 9 example of the descriptions of the experiences from first person point of view, as follows.

- a. I see that fishing boat off the coast as dusk descends over the Pacific.
- b. I hear that helicopter whirring overhead as it approaches the hospital.
- c. I am thinking that phenomenology differs from psychology.
- d. I wish that warm rain from Mexico were falling like last week.
- e. I imagine a fearsome creature like that in my nightmare.

- f. I intend to finish my writing by noon.
- g. I walk carefully around the broken glass on the sidewalk.
- h. I stroke a backhand cross-court with that certain underspin.
- i. I am searching for the words to make my point in conversation.

Each of the sentences is a form of phenomenological description, expressing the structure of experience. The sentences articulate the basic form of intentionality in the experience: subject-act-content-object. Intentionality is really ideological, it means that intentions have something to do with ideology. The methodology of this research is based on the theory.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Strategy**

To solve the problems, the strategy chosen for this study is qualitative research. The data are in the form sentences and the analysis is qualitative analysis. No statistical analysis is employed.

#### **3.2. Methods**

The location of this research is my kampong Mojosongo. It is a kampong among many kampongs in a village with the same name Mojosongo. Mojosongo Village belongs to Jebres subdistrict, Solo City, central Java, Indonesia. Solo City has 11 districts and Mojosongo is the biggest village in Solo City. Mojosongo is of 541 hectares, while the smallest village, Kepatiham Kulon, is only 17 hectares. In my childhood up to early youth, most of the population in Mojosongo were abangan, Islam nominally only.

The data is my recollection about kretek and smoking undergone by people in Mojosongo when I was still in my childhood up to early youth. It was late 1960s up to early 1970s when social life in Mojosongo was still so traditional. Modernism was still far ahead.

Collectivism was so strong, almost every activity, individual or social, were carried out collectively. Cultivating fields, harvesting rice, building houses, having wedding parties, celebrating new born babies, and so on, let alone social works like making better roads or clearing grave yard from grass, were carried out collectively. No fee was paid to the participants in the works, except for works needing skills like laying brick, which was rare because almost all houses were made of woods and bamboos and no plaster or ceramic for the floor. The obligation of the individual having the work was providing tea and meal for the people, including kretek.

Data collection was conducted through recollection of what I experienced; I recollected the experience and made note of the experiences in sentences from first person point of view, my point of view. The source of data were myself, my friends in my childhood up to early youth, and documents. The instrument for data collection, then, was me.

Data validation was conducted through triangulation of data sources. Firstly I checked what I recollected with my kampong mates. My youth life experiences were really collective experiences. All youngsters in my kampong had the same life experiences. We studied at the same elementary schools, herded cows after school together in the same fields, played games together at the kampong square at night when the moon shone, and when reaching the age of early youth we were assigned to become *sinoman* (youngsters assigned as party's attendance), serving meal and drink for guests in parties like wedding parties and parties celebrating newborn babies. Secondly, I checked the data with documents, comparing my recollections with documents documented the life experiences.

Data analysis was conducted through the following steps. First the data were classified based on the theme of research. The second, the data were analysed qualitatively. The last is drawing conclusion.

#### 4. Result

First, how did the people in my kampong, Mojosongo, Solo City, smoke kretek? As told by Ratih Kumala [5] in her novel *Gadis Kretek* how Jeng Yah, the *Gadis Kretek*, made kretek herself, *kretek tingwe*, so did most people in my kampong, they smoked *kretek tingwe*. *Tingwe* is acronym of *nglinting* and *dhewe*; *nglinting* is a verb meaning “roll up”, while *dhewe* means “oneself”. So, the acronym *tingwe* means “rolling up oneself” and kretek *tingwe* means *kretek* that is rolled up by the smoker himself.

The ingredients of *kretek tingwe*, tobacco and *wur* (clover powder), were available in many shops so that it was easy for the smoker to make a *kretek tingwe*. The cover might be made of *klobot* or ready-made paper, called *sek*; which was also available in shops. The smokers were able to prepare the *klobot* themselves because in my childhood almost every person had their own gardens or fields in which they planted corns so that the material for *klobot* was at hand. The people used to keep the ingredients of *kretek tingwe* in *slepen*, wallet to keep the ingredients of *kretek tingwe*. *Sek*, the paper to cover tobacco and *wur*, and *slepen* are still sold in shops today, even they are available in on-line shops.

*Kretek tingwe* was cheaper than kretek produced by industries and the taste could be made to fit the smokers’ taste. But the social status of *kretek tingwe* was under the status of industry products, young people preferred to have industry product than *kretek tingwe*. In my childhood up to early adult, there was one popular kretek: *Kretek Menara*, simply called *Menara*. To have *Menara* was more prestigious than to have *kretek tingwe* so that by and by *kretek tingwe* was only consumed by old people or people of low income. Besides, *kretek tingwe* was only for individual consumption.

Second, why smoking kretek became an identity of adulthood? In my early youth, children were not allowed to smoke. They were allowed to smoke when they had already reached the age of adulthood. One of the signs of reaching adulthood was circumcision because circumcision used be carried out when a boy had already been the age of 13-15 years old, or had already passed secondary school. The reward given to a boy on circumcision was kretek: he had been circumcised, so he had been an adult now and

allowed to smoke. People would see him hanging around in the kampong awkwardly because he had to dress in sarong in order not hurt his newly circumcised genital until his circumcision was well cured. People also used to see how he had in his mouth kretek to smoke, awkwardly too, because it was the first time he smoked. His pockets on his new clothes was full with branded kretek, Menara Kretek, and his seniors would approach him, teasing him, and, at last, begging his kretek to smoke together with him. It was a common view in my childhood in my kampong in certain months when circumcision (and wedding parties) used to be carried out. When more than one boy was circumcised, the boys used to hang around together to make the view of boys dressing in sarong, walking awkwardly, with kretek on their mouth common view.

Third, how kretek became a means of social hospitality? As told by Setyawan (2021) [2], in Greater Solo, Rokok Menara was always available in social activities like *gotong-royong*, for *sinoman* (in parties), working on roads, and so on. Ridloi and Adlani (2020: 9)[1] explain that in Kediri, kretek was never absent in social activities. “*Ketika warga mengadakan forum atau acara tertentu, rokok keretek yang diletakkan dalam gelas-gelas belimbing merupakan pemandangan yang umum dan tidak asing. Saat ada acara informal, rokok keretek sudah menjadi bagian dari sosialisasi antarwarga, dan sering dihadiahkan untuk menghormati dan menghargai seseorang karena bantuannya dalam hal tertentu.*” So, “the novel *Gadis Kretek* has a strong relationship with its social facts.” (Dinata, at. al., 2022: 30) [3].

In my kampong, one of the rewards given to *sinoman* serving meal and tea to guests in parties was kretek, the same as what explained by Setyawan [2]. Smokers or non-smokers-yet would get one kretek so that, by and by, the non-smokers-yet eventually became smokers too. So did reward for care takers digging grave yard to bury corpse. In parties, the same as in Kediri as explained by Ridloi and Adlani [3] in previous page, several *kreteks* were put in glasses and the glasses were put on tables together with tea and snacks. In many *wayang* and *kethoprak* performances in Solo City, the actors of comic reliefs (comedians), as did in *wayang* performance in Sriwedari, were often given kreteks by the audience; the kreteks were thrown to the comedians playing the comic relief on stage.



In social interaction, an individual having kretek often offered his kretek to others. Or, the individual having no kretek would ask for kretek to the individuals having kreteks. Giving kretek to others to smoke was an indication of generosity. Indeed, in my childhood up to early youth (1960s-1970s) kretek and smoking kretek were served as social hospitality in social activities and social interaction between individuals.

The socio-cultural habits of using kretek as social hospitality is not common now. It may be due to the fatwa of Majelis Ulama Indonesia in 2009 [6] that smoking is haram (forbidden) in public places and recommended that Indonesian Government make regulation to prohibit smoking in public places (Majlis Ulama Indonesia, 2011: 895). And posters of campaign that smoking causes lung cancers are available in all hospitals and Puskesmas. Let alone, many rooms in many offices have been equipped with air-conditions so that smoking in the rooms is prohibited. In many offices no-smoking notices are everywhere and smokers who would like to smoke should go to special rooms/places reserved for smoking. Using kretek as social hospitality is clumsy now.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

The result shows how kretek and smoking kretek revealed in the novel Gadis Kretek by Ratih Kumala functioned significant role in social activities as social hospitality in my kampong in my childhood up to early youth (youngsters). But now the function has been fading away, offering kretek or cigarette to friends in social interaction is not common, except for using it in social activities like gotong royong in villages far from towns. Social changes continually happening changes socio-cultural habits.

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