

= Saman (novel) =

Saman is a controversial Indonesian novel by Ayu Utami published in 1998 . It is Utami 's first novel , and depicts the lives of four sexually @-@ liberated female friends , and a former Catholic priest , Saman , for whom the book is named . Written in seven to eight months while Utami was unemployed , Saman sold over 100 @,@ 000 copies and ignited a new literary movement known as sastra wangi (originally used pejoratively) that opened the doors to an influx of sexually @-@ themed literary works by young Indonesian women .

Saman deals explicitly with themes of sexuality , taboo for women writers in Indonesia at that time . She also writes about the supernatural and mysticism . Utami has said the stories reflect some of her personal experiences , such as her loss of religion which mirrors that of the priest , Saman . Utami also includes passages reflecting the destructiveness of Suharto 's political authoritarianism ; in later interviews she said the political realities reflected in Saman are still applicable to post @-@ Suharto Indonesia .

Saman won the 1997 Jakarta Art Institute novel writing contest , which led to its publication . Critical reception was mixed . Some critics praised the richness of its language , while others derided the novel for its sexual explicitness and questioned whether it was Utami 's own work . The novel eventually was hailed for its groundbreaking portrayal of a woman 's views of sexuality . As of 2008 , it has been translated into six languages and won several awards , including the 1998 Jakarta Arts Council Novel Competition and the 2000 Prince Claus Award . A film adaptation is in the making .

= = Plot = =

Saman follows four sexually liberated female friends : Yasmin , a married Catholic lawyer from Medan ; Cok , a Balinese lawyer with a high libido ; Shakuntala , a bisexual Catholic Javanese dancer ; and Laila , a Muslim Minangkabau journalist . The other protagonist is the titular Saman , a former Catholic priest turned human rights activist who becomes the target of sexual advances by Yasmin and Cok .

The first chapter , beginning in Central Park , New York , describes Laila waiting for the married Sihar and planning to lose her virginity to him . Eventually Laila realises that Sihar is still in Jakarta with his wife , and feels depressed .

The second chapter covers Saman 's childhood ? including his relationship with his mother , a woman drawn to the spiritual world ? his entry into priesthood , and his attempt to protect a rubber tapping community from the attempt by a local plantation to acquire their land . After the attempt fails and the plantation 's hired thugs raze the community to the ground and kills those who resist , Saman is captured and tortured . He eventually is broken out of his confinement by the surviving resistance members , becoming a fugitive and relinquishing his duty as a priest . He becomes a human rights advocate , assisted by Yasmin .

The third chapter , written from the point of view of Shakuntala , tells how Yasmin , Cok , Shakuntala , and Laila met at high school and their escapades there , both sexual and academic . Shakuntala recounts a fantasy she had as a teenager about meeting a " foreign demon " , embracing him and then having a debate on the different cultural aspects of sexuality . Towards the end of the chapter , Shakuntala notes that she is attracted to Laila and dislikes Sihar , but supports her friend 's efforts as she cares for her .

During the fourth chapter , Saman is spirited away to New York by Yasmin and Cok . Although both Cok and the married Yasmin make advances toward him , he initially declines . However , during the middle of the night he and Yasmin have sex , but Saman is distressed because he ejaculated quickly . The entirety of the last chapter consists of emails sent between Saman and Yasmin , discussing their insecurities , that become increasingly sexualised .

= = Writer = =

When written , Saman was intended to be included in a work in progress entitled Laila Tak Mampir

Ke New York (Laila Does Not Come to New York) . However , after the character Larung became too developed Utami split the storylines . Saman was published first , with Larung following in 2001 . Saman was written during a period of seven to eight months while Utami was unemployed .

A. Junaidi of The Jakarta Post suggests that the political insights in Saman are partially inspired by Utami 's earlier career as a journalist , both with Forum Keadilan and as a founding member of the Alliance of Independent Journalists .

= = Themes = =

Junaidi notes that although Saman is about a female 's perspective of sexuality , it also deals with the authoritarianism of Suharto 's regime of the New Order , including the repression of human rights activists . In a 2005 interview with The Jakarta Post , Utami said that her critique of the New Order is still relevant ; at the time of the interview , she saw the Suharto government as having left Indonesia with a legacy of what she calls " nuclear waste " , including a loss of Indonesia 's agricultural ability . In the interview , Utami also noted that Indonesians had become corrupt and lazy , increasingly bureaucratic , and without a feeling of sportsmanship .

Utami has also noted that the novel is a reflection of her own restlessness and anxiety . Although little of it directly reflects events in her life , she notes that Saman 's loss of religion reflects her own , and the book reflects her belief that a double standard exists regarding virginity in Indonesian culture . Although the novel touches on racial harmony , Utami said that she considers the theme to be undeveloped .

Barbara Hatley notes that Saman contrasts the perceived differences between Eastern and Western cultures . She cites the scene where Shakuntala fantasizes encountering a " foreign demon " (European explorer) while bathing , later " embracing " him and discussing the " bizarre " requirement that Asian men are required to wear penis decorations and the " crassness " of Europeans who do not care about virginity , wear bikinis in public , and show sex on television . According to Hatley , this is rendered more ironic by both characters being naked during the discussion . She also notes that Saman touches on the traditional archetype of feminine power drawn from nature and the supernatural , and it reinterprets the hero archetype through Saman , who is small , thin , and inexperienced with women but able to withstand torture and defend a community of rubber tappers .

Junaidi writes that Saman also includes bits of the supernatural , including ghosts and mysticism . In her master 's thesis , Micaela Campbell writes that Saman 's mother , known only as " Ibu " (Indonesian for ' Mother ') , was " highly susceptible to supernatural forces that seem to govern over her " . Through Ibu , Javanese mysticism and other supernatural content is introduced that contrasts Saman 's father , a realist ; this leads to Ibu " failing " in her role as a mother , and , according to Campbell , may be a factor driving Saman to priesthood . Campbell notes that Shakuntala also lives in a world of jinns and peri ; however , unlike Ibu , Shakuntala draws further strength from this spiritual world .

= = Release and reception = =

Saman was released in 1998 after winning the 1997 Jakarta Art Institute novel writing contest . In 1998 , Saman won the Jakarta Arts Council Novel Competition . In 2000 , it received the Prince Claus Award . By 2005 , it had been translated into Dutch and English ; the English translation took a long time to write because Utami was concerned that an overexplanation of the novel caused it to lose all of its sensuality . It has also been translated into French , Czech , and Japanese (by two separate translators) . As of 2008 , a translation into Korean is underway . By 2004 , the book had sold 100 @, @ 000 copies , a large figure for an Indonesian novel .

Critical reception was mixed . Some critics praised the " rich language " used in the novel . However , others disapproved of the open sexuality of the novel , and its explicit use of the words " penis " , " vagina " , " orgasm " and " condoms " was considered " too much " ; other controversial terms include " rape me " , " I am still a virgin " , and " masturbation " . Utami 's own mother refused to read

the novel aloud to her nearly blind husband , stating that it is " not meant for those of their generation " . Campbell notes that the use of language in *Saman* reflects the positioning of the female characters as self @-@ empowered and independent , capable of making their own decisions .

In *Saman* Utami became one of the first female Indonesian authors to explicitly discuss sexuality , generally a taboo subject for women , in her work . However , when it was first released Utami faced charges that she was not the actual writer ; among those suggested as the author was poet Goenawan Mohamad , known as Utami 's mentor . Mohamad denied the rumours and said that he wished he " could write the kind of prose which Ayu uses " . Utami suggests that the rumours were based on a belief that only men could write good novels ; the literature scene before *Saman* had indeed been dominated by male writers .

The novel started a new era of literature after the downfall of President Suharto and ignited the *sastra wangi* (literally ' fragrant literature ') literary movement as well as an influx of sexually themed literary works by women . Utami disagrees with the label *sastra wangi* , stating that it reflects the obsession of the press with the women writers and not their work .

A film adaptation is in the works , with Dutch director Orlow Seunke expressing interest to be involved with the project . However , Seunke and Utami have had creative differences regarding which characters should be kept .