

The Role of Women in Wayang Drupadi and Arimbi and Its Implementation as Teaching Material in High Schools: A Feminist Literary Criticism Study

*¹Veronika Unun Pratiwi, ²Farida Nugrahani, ³Mukti Widayati, ⁴Nurnaningsih, ⁵Benedictus Sudiyan, ⁶Nunun Tri Widarwati, ⁷Suhailee Sulee

Universitas Veteran Bangun Nusantara, Sukoharjo, Indonesia

*Corresponding email: veronikaup@gmail.com



Abstract – Wayang is an Indonesian cultural heritage that has many meanings including the role of women. Women are often portrayed as weak and dependent on men. This study aims to examine a Javanese puppet work that is depicted as a feminine female character but has power over a man, namely Drupadi and Arimbi characters. In addition, this study also explores the potential application of Drupadi and Arimbi puppet stories as teaching materials in high schools, which can provide a deeper understanding of gender equality and appreciate the role of women in society. This research method uses structural-feminist analysis revealed from observations of literature review of several articles related to the story of female puppet characters and feminism articles. The results of this study show that the narrative of male power in Drupadi and Arimbi characters in Javanese puppet performances finally reproduces the identities of women and men in patriarchal societies. The practice is seen through the phenomenon of commodification and objectification in traditional Javanese society. Women become entities marked or known as marked societies in a heteronormative world. In addition, this research can contribute to the development of curricula in high schools that are more inclusive and support gender equality.

Keywords – Javanese puppet, feminist studies, Drupadi and Arimbi.

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern and traditional cultures have different viewpoints on men's and women's roles, depending on which version they choose. Traditional societies believe that the most expansive place for women is their own home. It would be unusual for women to actively participate, let alone dominate, in roles traditionally occupied by men living outside the family home. The ideal woman in traditional society is one who is good at performing housework. Traditional communities continue to employ ancient literary works as a guide for social creation. One of them is a puppet story. What is depicted in puppet stories is typically recognized as a representation of the positive and bad sides of something. Traditional communities, particularly the Javanese, use puppets to accurately represent their surroundings. Thus, what is taught in puppet stories is imitated in their social life, including the division of roles between men and women (Goodlander, 2016). The images of ideal women in Javanese society embrace Dewi Sembadra, Dewi Kunti, Dewi Drupadi, Dewi Setyawati, and others. According to traditional society, there are wayang personalities that embody the attributes of whole women, and as such, the next generations should strive to emulate them. Women's attitudes in *wayang* stories that uphold men's responsibilities as the center of everything serve as the basis for the ideal standards.

The presence of female characters in Javanese literature is typically rarely discussed in special plays, especially in works that incorporate *wayang* themes. Popular plays that tell the stories of men are usually those that are produced frequently and

attract large audiences. Plays that, nevertheless, deal with the lives or occurrences of female characters are seldom seen on stage. This indirectly offers the audience with a strong idea regarding the true picture of how the inequalities in position between male and female characters are reflected in the puppet show. In the process, it will further distance society's strong impression of female puppet figures, diminishing their enthusiasm for them (Walujo, 2000). The strong impact that literature and culture have on shaping the opinions of individuals who value them, especially in the lives of Javanese people, is the reason behind this. Javanese and Wayang civilizations are comparable. Wayang describes the various theories and frameworks that Javanese people apply to their understanding of reality. This means that when building social systems in society, the wayang performance's representations will be directly referred to.

A feminine figure known as Dewi Drupadi was believed to have arisen from her father Drupada's anger against Durna. The ruler of Panchala was Drupada. Legend has it that Panchala held an archery competition with Drupadi as the prize. Dristadyumna, Drupadi's elder brother, initiated the competition. That is not where the fascinating tale of Drupadi as a female character ends. There is also a story about Yudhistira and the Kurawas wagering on Drupadi in a dice game. In the myth, Yudhistira lost the dice game and lost a lot of money; he was even willing to make his brother and wife, Drupadi, the subject of the bet. Dursasana, who was proud of the Kurawa's triumph in the dice game, is described in the narrative as harassing Drupadi in public. Dursasana tugged, dragged, and ridiculed Drupadi. Drupadi, who had the treatment, struggled to stay strong. She wiped her tears and said loudly in front of the audience that witnessed the incident, "If you love and respect the mother who gave birth to you and breastfed you, if you respect the honor of your wife, sister, or daughter, and if you truly believe in God and Dharma, do not insult me like this. "This insult is far crueller than death." (Sharma, 2023).

Geertz (1976) noted that, in addition to being entertaining, wayang had moral and artistic components known as *ethos*. Other studies discovered that wayang is a manifestation of a philosophically rich culture (Guritno, 1988; Hidayat, 2015; Mulyana, 2018; Pandin, 2020; Sunardi, 2013; Susantina et al., 2009; Wardhani & Suprihandari, 2020). Wayang, once used for religious ceremonies and teachings, has evolved into a means for describing modern human behavior and social dynamics. All of this is expressed in the wayang component of the myth, which is defined as a tale that provides precise directions and regulations to a group of people (Peursen, 1992, p. 37). The development of wayang is a reflection or criticism of societal progress, particularly in the cultural dimension, where humans can learn about the nature, form, and evolution of something, as well as how to make it. Immanuel Kant defined culture as people's ability to teach themselves. Beginning with that premise, the development of culture must always be assessed in order to be aware that something is frequently incorrect and, as a result, can change through falling and rising (Peursen, 1992, p. 14). In addition, wayang reveals a knowledge system, as the legendary element in wayang serves as an intermediary of knowledge about the world (Peursen, 1992, p. 41). It is also identical to the things Kuntowijoyo (2016, p. 24) suggested before concerning humanities education. In Wayang, we can observe the fundamental principles of community life, which are shaped not just by economic factors but also by cultural and social relationships.

Wayang performances serves as a medium for early childhood development, ensuring that them to grasp the story in a puppet show form. A puppeteer is responsible for delivering philosophical messages, often known as a *piwulang* teachings 'virtue and truth in human existence' (Wardhani & Suprihandari, 2020). The puppeteer plays a crucial part in developing a story screenplay that is unique based on the story's conditions and needs, but also includes education and cultural introduction without ignoring societal desires for amusement. According to Ismiulya (2019, p. 17), learning media is a tool or intermediary that enables teachers to transfer information to students. Furthermore, Muthohharoh et al., (2021) believe that learning media might encourage and interest students in learning. Wayang media is an option for making it easier for students to learn telling stories and promoting the fulfillment of learning objectives, while also making learning more enjoyable and encouraging students to participate in it.

The primary objective of this study is to determine the role of women in the wayang figures Drupadi and Arimbi as a study of literary criticism and its implementation in the field of education. The wayang media helps scholars in conveying local wisdom of the Indonesian nation, particularly Javanese, where wayang characters are currently not generally known by many young people, especially among the high school students. This study focuses on two key female characters in the Mahabharata puppet show: Drupadi and Arimbi. Furthermore, the complicated identities associated with Drupadi and Arimbi were used to pick

these two characters. Arimbi is seen as a courageous and loyal wife, but she is also a symbol of female objectification, as previous studies has revealed. Meanwhile, Arimbi is a formidable woman who adores her husband but frequently transforms from a giant to a person in front of him. This study includes qualitative research, literature review, data taken from several literature studies related to *wayang* characters, especially female puppet characters Drupadi and Arimbi. The results of this study are applied as one of the implementations in Indonesian language subjects in high schools.

Review of Related Literature

Wayang

Along the process, wayang evolved into one of the media outlets that used moral principles and religious teachings to depict a society (Cohen, 2017). Geertz (1976) classified the way a culture conceptualizes the cosmos as a world view or attitude on life. This perspective is grounded in existential and cognitive aspects of culture. Geertz also discovered that wayang is full with ethos—a term used to describe moral and aesthetic qualities—in addition to world view. Additional research backs up this claim that wayang serves as a vehicle for character education and is an example of how local values are changing (Hidayat, 2015), as an expression of the unique human journey toward meeting the God (Padnobo, 2023), traditional *ruwatan* (spiritual purification) ceremony (Wicaksana & Wicaksandita, 2023), hegemony and power relations in *wayang* performances (Efendi et al., 2016; Riyanto & Mataram, 2018).

Wayang uses language-based media that is skillfully presented to captivate the audience, who unknowingly absorb the moral lessons portrayed in the performances. Moral lessons are frequently expressed orally, either through wayang character dialogues. The ideal identity that each play portrays in a society makes gender representation in the wayang plays a fascinating subject to research. This is because each play depicts an identity that is accepted by society. This ideal identity combines the religious teachings that are to be spread with moral principles. The discussion around the wayang play's portrayal of women in one of the most well-known wayang tales, the Mahabharata, makes the study even more fascinating. Dewi Kunti is represented by Zulaikha, & Purwaningsih (2021) as a representation of purity and the capacity to restrain passion. in order for Dewi Kunti to reach the perfect standard for a woman. In the wayang narrative, Dewi Kunti, Srikandi, is exalted as a courageous lady, leading to the belief that she is a female character who also battles for women's independence. According to Osnes (2014), wayang teaches women how to be tough as well as courteous and well-behaved. This is demonstrated in the Srikandi play. It is said that Srikandi is a trustworthy woman.

Drupadi and Arimbi

Women have succeeded in creating their own space, rendering men impotent and subject to their wishes (Sharma, 2023). Important figures in wayang include Dewi Kunti, Srikandi, Drupadi, and Arimbi. Dewi Kunti is regarded as a symbol of a knowledgeable and smart woman who understands national and state problems, making her function in wayang equal to that of men (Widiastuti & Aziz, 2024). Drupadi is shown as a courageous, intellectual woman who is adored by her husband. However, looking back, that is not what happened. Romanticization was intended to sweeten power dynamics. Drupadi is typically seen as her husband's property. This is shown by a scene in which Drupadi's eldest spouse loses capital gambling. Drupadi is given as a present to the Kurawa who won the game. This scenario makes the depiction of male authority over women's bodies an intriguing subject for further investigation. This is what sparked researchers' interest in analyzing the significance of wayang as a literary work in society. Drupadi and Arimbi are two major female characters in Wayang Mahabharata. Furthermore, the choosing of these two characters is predicated on the complex identities of Drupadi and Arimbi. Arimbi is admired as a brave and devoted wife, but she is also a symbol of female objectification, according to past research. Arimbi, a powerful woman who adores her husband, frequently transforms from a giant to a human figure in front of him.

II. METHODS

This study was designed using a qualitative descriptive method. The descriptive method is a method to evaluate data based on actual reality. The author's data collection methods include content analysis and literature review. Several stories of female wayang characters were chosen as primary data to be searched for, including all information and meaningful lingual units of

women's roles, such as the role of religious women (religion), the role as a person/individual, and the role of women as social beings in Sundari Mardjuki's Genduk novel, first published by Gramedia Pustaka in 2016 with a total of 232 pages. Secondary data is a data source that is used to convey information regarding the type of data being sought, namely the role of women. The data source is discussed in the context of data source triangulation to ensure that the data is valid. Data collecting is related to data sources, specifically observation and interviews. This study's observations were non-participatory, meaning that researchers observed and recorded all data relating to the role of women in wayang characters in field notes.

III. DISCUSSION

Women's Emancipation in Javanese Literature

Plays featuring life stories or events related to female characters tend to be rarely staged. This implicitly conveys a powerful teaching to the audience about the true picture of how the distinctions in position between male and female characters are represented through puppet performance. This will further separate society's strong impression of female puppet characters, potentially reducing their appreciation for these puppet figures. This is due to the powerful influence of literature and culture, particularly in the lives of Javanese people, on the perceptions of those who enjoy it. Similarly, in wayang Javanese people use a variety of concepts and models to analyze their surroundings. Consequently, what is depicted in the wayang performance will be used directly as a reference when constructing social structures in society.

The emancipatory attitude is not only expressed overtly in modern literary works, but it is also represented in Javanese culture through the puppet story. Given the position of female puppet characters, who tend to bow to the rules and dominance of male characters while offering service and protection inside, this cannot be construed as a type of surrender of the female character's body and soul to the male character. This can be seen as an emancipation value because it leads to female figures' strong loyalty to the interests of men as well as the larger community. Because emancipation does not always manifest itself in the shape of women daring to appear in public while ignoring their domestic responsibilities.

The fundamental principle of emancipation, which attempts to equalize women's and men's rights by equalizing obligations in all areas from a modern cultural perspective, will differ from the portrayal of liberation created by female puppet characters. This emancipation mindset is mirrored in the roles of female characters as wives and mothers to kings who rule a kingdom, as well as knights who are trusted to command a body of troops in warfare. In this case, it is apparent that female characters' roles become equal when they are positioned as a necessary party. The presence of efforts and struggles by male wayang characters to marry female characters in various plays implicitly demonstrates male characters' appreciation for women's high status. However, the majority of female characters' responsibilities and contributions are often overshadowed by the powerful impact of male characters, who hold enormous power. This slightly broadens the concept that female characters in wayang stories can be employed not only as supporting characters with no discernible impression, but also as figures that express an attitude of emancipation via women's attitudes and traits. The female characters in this work are chosen to represent people from diverse social classes and positions in the Mahabharata epic.

Women Emancipation in Wayang Kulit Characters

Traditional societies frequently employ historical myths as a guide in constructing their social structures, including deciding the distribution of labor between men and women. Wayang is a story that is well-known in traditional societies, particularly among Javanese. Several wayang characters, notably the female characters in the novel, have served as representations of good and negative characteristics. Traditional society creates an idea of women's roles that is inextricably linked to the female characters in the puppet story. Characters who provide a comprehensive portrayal of Javanese women are often employed as role models for the younger generation, particularly girls, so that they can one day emulate all of the excellent traits shown by the puppet characters.

Puppet stories, particularly the Ramayana and Mahabharata, maintain to depict a feudal social structure and governance environment (Bandyopadhyay, 2017). The numerous plays presented frequently depict the state of society with a kingdom structure, with a king (typically played by a male figure) who becomes the country's leader. This also affects the place of female

characters in the same puppet story. The Mahabharata puppet story contains numerous female characters. Each symbolizes women from a different social class. Because of male characters' strong predominance, these characters are typically seen as second-class citizens.

Departing from Indonesian society's tradition, particularly the Javanese ethnic group as the holders of the wayang performing arts, which believes that the nature of women is to be subservient to men from generation to generation. The wayang narrative reinforces the propagation of beliefs and conventions in Javanese culture. It depicts men's dominance and influence over women's lives.

This is evidenced by the fact that wayang stories continue to employ the feudal system as their primary backdrop. The king plays a more powerful role than the queen. Although they have the same capacity to manage a kingdom, a king's legality is more widely accepted, both in actual life and in the framework of the wayang story. The difference in position resulted in a clear division of tasks between male and female wayang characters in wayang plays. A man character typically has the freedom to decide what will be done, whereas a female character must follow the unwritten norm of providing entire devotion to the male character through her domestic realm.

The rule is acknowledged and recognized even by women. What is incorrect is when women's commitment, both in real life and in puppet stories, is interpreted as a sign of women's unwillingness to express their emancipatory side. On the other side, without recognizing it, the presence of female characters with the stigma of being "behind" male characters might psychologically become more significant characters, even receiving recognition from male characters themselves. Female characters in wayang serve as ideal symbols of women's freedom. Women can still play a part in the public arena, help many people, and gain support and praise from male characters while also fulfilling their domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers.

Drupadi and Arimbi as Wayang Figures Representing Women's Emancipation

The Mahabharata is one of the most famous epic stories in Javanese puppetry. The Mahabharata tells a story full of intellectual and spiritual lessons. This story also presents an ideal concept in society, which includes the development of gender identity. The Mahabharata follows the story of its major protagonists, the Pandavas, and their connection with the Kurawas. The Mahabharata story revolves around the fight for dominance in the kingdom of Hastinapura. Pandawa and Kurawa, relatives of Pandu and Destarata, are essential to the fight. Duryudana refused to give Yudistira the throne, which sparked the power struggle. To prevent civil strife, the five Pandawa eventually fled to the forest. From here, the five Pandawa embark on their quest until they encounter lovely and obedient wives as Drupadi and Arimbi.

These two female characters are described as cruel and strong. Drupadi, the Pandavas' wife, is intelligent, gorgeous, and strong. Arimbi is Bhima's wife, who is a powerful nation. According to Ajidarma (2017), these two plays represent feminist ideas and offer a different perspective on women beyond the stereotype of kindness. However, upon closer examination, Drupadi and Arimbi's plays are riddled with gender repression. The depiction of Arimbi and Drupadi's plays as intellectual, attractive, and tough romanticizes the gender disparity that happens in them. Behind all of this, male dominance continues to play a role in the development of both characters. The main topic of this study is the story of power from Wayang and how it is created in society. Observations of traditional societies in Java provide insight into the creation of values in society.

Drupadi, who was created out of fire and her father's rage, is supposed to have a lovely face. Drupadi's beauty is thought to be a weapon against her opponent. This is one another example of male dominance over women, in which women are treated as commodities. Commodification is a phenomenon in which persons are treated as commodities, progressing from worthless to valuable. In this puppet story, Drupadi's father is the one who carries out this sort of commercialization of women who are tied to economic worth. Kings eventually noticed Drupadi's beauty and desired to take her as a bride. King Drupada offered Drupadi as the prize in a contest. Drupadi was awarded as a gift to the Pandavas who had won the contest; she did not select her spouse during the contest. She turned into a reward for anyone who could successfully fulfill every task set forth by her father. The story shows that Drupadi does not have the freedom to choose the man she like. Drupadi's submission as a gift to the Pandavas

reinforces the monetization of women in the Mahabharata puppet story. This contradicts the belief that Drupadi is considered an example for women to be able to choose a male worthy of marriage (Dhruv, 2012).

Arimbi is presented as a giant princess who falls in love with Bhima. Arimbi encounters Bima as the Pandawa family prepares to settle in the forest. Apparently, the woodland is home to a man-eating behemoth who is waiting for humans to arrive. Arimbi's older brother, the enormous monarch, wishes to feast on the Pandawa. Arimbi falls in love with Bhima's prowess. Arimbi seduces Bhima in every way possible, but to no avail. Bhima rejects her because she has a giant-sized unattractive face. It is apparent that males view women as objects of gratification if they meet specific characteristics, such as being beautiful, white, and smooth. Vandermassen (2010) refers to these phenomena as the male gaze. The male gaze is a concept in which a heterosexual guy perceives women as objects and judges them only on their physical appearance. Women become a marginalized group who are continually subjected by the ruling class, which is predominantly composed of men. This objectification persists throughout the story, and Bhima eventually accepts Arimbi because she has matured into a beautiful woman.

Arimbi's confession of love to Bhima, which ended in rejection, demonstrates another point: women do not choose men, but vice versa. This indicates the prevalence of a power relationship between men and women in which men play a significant influence in decision making. This power dynamic may be seen in everyday situations where males say "marry a woman" and women say "marry". Language reflects society's values. Arimbi's story also demonstrates how a woman's kindness ranks second only to her beauty. Women are commonly connected with attractiveness, and beauty. Meanwhile, men are often blamed for violent behavior (Buss, 2021).

Female beauty and femininity are inextricably linked to patriarchal culture. Because of this desire, women seek male appreciation for their attractiveness and femininity (Iida, 2005). This is shown in the scene in which Arimbi changes into a beautiful woman in order to get Bhima's acceptance. The ideal concept of a beautiful Javanese woman exemplifies how society constructs women's bodies. Beauty represents a woman's body, which began as a natural body and evolved into a social body (Gede Yoga Kharisma Pradana & Ni Made Ruastiti, 2022). The social body is a concept that associates a person's physique with social construction in society. As a result, it is no longer an individual's personal property, but rather associated with shared values.

IV. CONCLUSION

Women cannot define themselves as different entities. The representation of female characters, specifically Drupadi and Arimbi, reveals the power dynamics in the Mahabharata plot. Both characters can be characterized as victims of male authority over women. This is demonstrated by the characters' experiences of commodification and objectification. Drupadi becomes a commodity with a high selling or trading value from her father due to her beauty and intelligence in the Mahabharata epic. Arimbi's circumstance is not that much different. Arimbi must transform herself into a lovely woman in order to marry Bhima. This incident demonstrates Arimbi's lack of control over her own body. This body identity evolves into a social identity that is decided by the ruling party. This demonstrates how the story of male authority in the characters Drupadi and Arimbi in Javanese wayang performances ultimately reproduces the identities of women and men in a patriarchal society. This practice is evident in the phenomena of commercialization and objectification in traditional Javanese culture. In the heteronormative environment, women become marked or known as members of marked society. Furthermore, this research can help to shape a higher school curriculum that promotes gender equality. Other cultural items, like as proverbs, represent the patriarchal mindset that underpins society's social systems. This continuously maintained value then deconstructs the culture such that it continues to create the same product. If this value is maintained, gender imbalance in society will spread even further.

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