



Representation of Femininity in Indonesian Folklore

(Representasi Feminitas dalam Cerita Rakyat Nusantara)

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Abstract: At the level of social life, the issue of femininity and masculinity is still a serious topic of discussion because in the construction of patriarchal culture, there is still a clear dichotomy. Femininity in Indonesian folklore is interesting to study because it presents a female figure who is different from the reality of society and who is able to deconstruct herself. The research objectives are to reveal (1) the role of femininity in female characters in building of themselves and the environment and (2) the strength of female characters' femininity in building their self-image as dignified beings. The method used in this research is a descriptive method, namely describing the issue of femininity in folklore. The approach used in this research is feminist, an approach that emphasizes the image of women and stereotypes of women in literary works. The research data are story sequences in the form of sentences and paragraphs that describe the values of femininity in Indonesian folklore. Data collection techniques were conducted through documentation studies include classifying and categorizing data, as well as critical and creative reading and finding the power of feminism in stories. Research data analysis techniques are carried out by understanding the meaning of the text in depth, observing and exploring the message, and analyzing it interactively and dialectically for the accuracy of the findings. The results show that (1) the role of femininity of female characters in Indonesian folklore is seen in how women develop themselves and the environment, which is marked by the appearance of empowered characters; and (2) the strength of femininity possessed by female characters in building their self-image as dignified beings is shown in their ability to carry out their duties in the domestic and public spheres in a balanced manner. Women's intelligence and ingenuity are demonstrated in developing strategies for dealing with problems. Moreover, women have strong authority and independence. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the representation of femininity in Indonesian folklore is that female characters are able to position themselves with the strength built by themselves and their environment.

Keywords folklore, femininity, empowered women

Abstrak: Pada tataran kehidupan sosial persoalan feminitas dan maskulinitas masih menjadi perbincangan serius karena konstruksi budaya patriarkhi masih terdapat dikotomi yang jelas. Feminitas dalam cerita rakyat nusantara menarik untuk dikaji karena menghadirkan sosok perempuan berbeda dengan realitas masyarakat yang mampu melakukan dekonstruksi terhadap dirinya. Tujuan penelitian adalah mengungkapkan (1) peran feminitas tokoh perempuan membangun diri dan lingkungan; (2) kekuatan feminitas tokoh perempuan dalam membangun citra diri sebagai makhluk yang bermartabat. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini metode deskriptif yakni mendeskripsikan persoalan feminitas dalam cerita rakyat. Pendekatan yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan feminis yang merupakan pendekatan yang menekankan pada citra perempuan serta stereotipe perempuan dalam karya sastra. Data penelitian berupa berupa sekuen cerita dalam bentuk kalimat, paragraf yang menggambarkan tentang nilai-nilai feminitas dalam cerita rakyat Nusantara. Teknik pengumpulan data melalui studi dokumentasi dengan mengklasifikasikan data, mengkategorikan data serta pembacaan kritis dan kreatif serta menemukan kekuatan feministas dalam cerita. Teknik analisis data penelitian dilakukan dengan memahami makna yang teks secara mendalam, mencermati dan mengeksplorasi pesan serta menganalisis secara interaktif-dialektis untuk keakuratan temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa (1) peran feminitas tokoh perempuan dalam cerita rakyat nusantara tampak pada bagaimana perempuan dalam membangun diri dan lingkungan yang ditandai dengan tampilnya tokoh berdaya; (2) kekuatan feminitas yang dimiliki tokoh perempuan dalam membangun citra diri sebagai makhluk yang bermartabat ditunjukkan pada kemampuan untuk menjalankan tugas di ranah domestik dan publik secara seimbang. Kecerdasan dan kecerdikan perempuan dalam menyusun strategi dalam menghadapi persoalan. Di samping itu, perempuan memiliki kewibawaan serta kemandirian yang kuat. Kesimpulan yang dapat dikemukakan bahwa representasi feminitas dalam cerita rakyat nusantara bahwa tokoh perempuan mampu menempatkan dirinya dengan kekuatan yang dibangun oleh diri dan lingkungannya.

Kata Kunci cerita rakyat, feminitas, perempuan berdaya

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INTRODUCTION

Women presented in literary works (stories) are an important part of discussions related to issues of femininity. This is related to the socio-cultural construction of society, which places women in a marginal position. As a result, women are living in conditions that are less taken into account. In the context of relationships between men and women, men are always seen as controlling public roles, and women are seen as dominators and determiners of domestic roles (Akmaliah et al., (2023); Ginting et al., (2023); Tarigan & Hayati, (2023) stated that the existence of feminism is still being fought for up until this modern era. Women are always relegated as secondary figures, insignificant, and their position is not important compared to men. Feminist existentialism is actually about a woman who does not always depend on her opposite gender. However, if we look at it from the perspective of the existence of feminism, women also have the freedom to act against the level of normative values and constructions in society that they think are inappropriate.

Therefore, this study will explore in depth the operation of feminine values constructed through stories. In reality, these values are embedded directly culturally and socially, so they have an adverse impact on women. Indonesian folklore involves women as story characters. The figure of the story character shown will influence him. The question arises about how female characters are presented in the story in relation to being feminine. Therefore, it is necessary to explain the feminine values contained in Indonesian folklore. On the other hand, women have hidden strengths that are rarely taken into account as objects of study. Meanwhile, the concept of "motherhood" in the description of womanhood has a hidden meaning that influences the dignity of women.

Women are educated in values such as patience, obedience, a good temperament, and flexibility. As feminists reviewed the experiences they had as women and found striking similarities in these experiences, the idea of "sisterhood between women" became increasingly important. Although women previously viewed themselves as isolated from other women and, at the same time, as competing with them, they began to show their identities to each other (Hollows, 2000). Femininity is seen as the basis for understanding the oppression experienced by women. It is often stated that adolescent girls are socialized into feminine values and behaviors that are associated with passivity, submissiveness, and dependency. For feminists, to be feminine, women are "colonized" by patriarchy and are implicated in the oppression they experience (Millet, 1977).

The issue of femininity cannot be separated from feminist thinking. Feminism talks about equality between men and women in the political, economic, and social fields. Apart from that, feminism is an organized activity or movement that fights for the rights and interests of women (Sulianti, 2021). The resistance or struggle carried out by writers to oppose and break down the discrimination experienced by women is part of the feminist movement (Muyassaroh, 2021). Feminist thinking emerged as a result of gender prejudice, which tended to prioritize women (Uli, 2020). This is in line with Ismail (2019), who refers to gender for the purpose of gender balance and interrelation. This is because there is a stigma that women do not have more strength than men, both physically and psychologically. Feminism itself forms an awareness built on women's unique experiences of truth, knowledge, and power (Aslamiyah et al., 2020). Basically, women are able to have the same role and power as men.

The idea of feminism demands that women be women of power. Empowered women are women who have the ability and courage to assert their rights (Again, 2020). In real life, most women only play roles and duties as mothers and wives (Danu & Samiatri, 2021). In fact, women are able to have the same roles as men. Apart from that, the real life of feminism is also presented in literary

works. Literary criticism emerged as a bridge connecting feminism and literary works (Anggarawati et al., 2020). This feminist literary criticism is not intended to be negative. Wiyatmi in Islahuddin et al. (2021) explains that feminist literary criticism is literary criticism based on feminist views or ideas that wish to view fairly the existence of women as writers or as female characters in literary works.

In Indonesian folklore, we explore the potential of local culture that lives and develops in society. Indonesian folklore contains various kinds of uniqueness and educational value. In line with the view of Sujiono (2020), the educational value contained in folklore is related to four things: moral values, cultural or traditional values, historical values, and social values. According to Levi Strauss, folklore has its own logic, which also reflects the logic of collectivity. Understanding this logic will make us aware that, at first glance, folklore sounds strange and unreasonable, but in fact it is not strange and makes perfect sense. This awareness will generate appreciation for other cultures, including the culture of the owner of the folklore, which is called multicultural awareness. Folklore also reflects cultural values that are masculine and feminine.

This issue needs to be criticized because, so far, women are still considered weak creatures and at a second-class level. This thought continues to be a question that needs to be answered. Is it true that folklore emphasizes the forgotten femininity of female characters, or vice versa? This issue needs to be explored in depth so that a clear picture of femininity in Indonesian folklore is obtained. Femininity is the nature of every woman. They can find and feel this on different occasions." As long as women continue to return to their nature and role, femininity is women's weapon and strength to remain strong and exist (Levine, 2015). The author's thoughts regarding the reality of life are thoughts that are the result of construction, but the social construction that has been formed so far is still being questioned again, especially related to the existence of the characters in the literary work.

Through the representational system built in Indonesian folklore, the identity of being a woman or a man is built. Identity, in feminist studies, is not understood as a single thing. Identity is the result of individual or group construction in the process of self-labeling. Therefore, gender identity, which is attached to the roles that men and women must carry out in human life, is the result of human construction and is not something that is innate. Thus, gender identity is a political matter. The identity construction process does not occur in a single or causal process based on the subject's own wishes but is a temporal process that operates through the repetition of norms (Butler, 1993). Norms that are imagined as truths are passed down through folklore. Understanding this is very important because the existence of folklore in Indonesian society occupies an important position. Folklore is used as a medium for entertainment and teaching children (Noorvitasari, 2021). This shows the importance of the position of folklore in Indonesian society. However, in reality, various folk tales that are always reproduced and consumed in the form of reading books or learning materials in schools are gender biased (Eliyanah & Zahro, 2021). The findings regarding gender relations in Indonesian folklore are in line with research findings, which state that there is an imbalance in the proportion of characters and a special stigma attached to male or female gender in Indonesian folklore.

Folklore is a story from the past that originates and develops in society as a distinction between every nation that has various cultures, including the rich culture and history of each nation and its gods (Islahuddin et al., 2021). Folklore is a story or literary creation that lives or has lived in a society. Folklore is part of regional literature, namely literature expressed through regional languages (Qur'ani, 2021). Folklore often reflects the perceptions and culture of the region where the story originates. Without many realizing it, many folk tales contain quite strong cultural constructions of patriarchy and feminism. One of the folk tales that is closely related to the image of feminism and is interesting to study is the Indonesian folk tale. This is because Indonesian folklore, which often tells stories about a goddess and queen, contains historical values and beliefs from each region in Indonesia (Pamungkas, 2020). Folklore can be used as a means to build collective awareness about understanding men and women in their functions both biologically and socially.

Similar research was carried out by Islahuddin et al. (2021) under the title *The Image of Women in the Folklore of Putri Kemang: A Study of Feminist Literary Criticism*. The results show that the image of women contained in these folk tales is equal education, women's independence, the ability to make

decisions, the freedom to choose partners, and women's leadership. Apart from that, the research results show that the image of women in folklore is in line with feminist literary criticism. There is also research from [Shofiani et al., \(2022\)](#) on the title *Self-Strength in Female Characters in the Novel Amba by Laksmi Pamuntjak*. The results of his research explain that the female figure is not an “other” figure. Women can also have a dynamic balance with men. Such characteristics can occur due to the processes of socialization and culturization. Furthermore, research from [Holipa et al. \(2020\)](#) titled *Representation of Feminism in the Film Mulan* shows that the film *Mulan* shows feminist values at the reality level through appearance codes, costumes, make-up, environment, behavior, dialogue, movement, and expression. At the level of representation, feminism is shown through camera codes, characters, action, and dialogue. At the ideological level, feminist values are represented through liberal feminism, radical feminism, psychoanalysis, and gender ideology.

The difference between this research and the three studies above is the research object. The first research object is both folk tales but only focuses on one type of story; the second research object is novels; and the third is films. The research focus both focuses on feminism, but there are different points of view and theories so that the research results vary. This research uses feminist theory, namely revealing the important values that exist within women along with the experiences and struggles carried out by women ([Susanto & Shofiani, 2022](#)). The advantage of this research compared to previous research is that it chose a wider research object, so there was a lot of diversity in the data obtained. Apart from that, this research highlights the strengths of women in disposing of themselves and their environment. Ben Agger suggests that feminist theory develops differences, which they see not as a bad thing but as a form of appreciation of the heterogeneity of the world and a reflection of the different subject positions held by feminists, giving rise to different ways of theorizing their conditions ([Agger, 2017](#)). The feminist theory put forward by Agger opens a way of analyzing from a neutral position in positioning gender, not in the position of men and women, but by looking at the analysis of literary texts and understanding what the relationship between texts and texts in the narrative is presented and represented. [Firwan, \(2017\)](#); [Ruthven, \(1984\)](#); [Islahuddin et al., \(2021\)](#) stated that feminist theory is expected to be able to open up new understandings or views by revealing gender components, especially in relation to female characters in literary works.

The femininity of female characters is sometimes underestimated, meaning that women are considered figures who are not yet independent in carrying out their roles both domestically and in public. Meanwhile, if there are women who are successful in the public sector, they still do not receive good appreciation. This happens because society's culture still views women as gender-biased.

Femininity can also be an explanation for the oppression experienced by women. Femininity often discusses stereotypes of women who are in binary opposition to men. This is in line with perspective of [Rowbotham \(1996\)](#) that little attention has been paid to the various models of feminine identity that differ not only in historical and geographical contexts but also in their own contexts. The idea that femininity is a cultural product was central to many second-wave critics. Femininity is seen as the basis for understanding the oppression experienced by women. It is often stated that adolescent girls are socialized into feminine values and behaviors that are associated with passivity, submissiveness, and dependency. However, the construct of thought will always change according to changing times. In reality, many women are empowered in their capacity as members of society.

For feminists, to be feminine, women are "colonized" by patriarchy and are implicated in the oppression they experience ([Millet, 1977](#); [Rowbotham, 1996](#)). Furthermore, the distinction between sex and gender is very important to understand this process. It is the 'maternal' instinct that makes women more supportive, nurturing, and loving than men. The idea that femininity is a monolithic entity ignores the fact that femininity is influenced by class and race ([Hollows, 2000](#)). However, femininity is a strength that women have that arises from women's awareness of being involved in the social life of society.

Based on the explanation above, this research aims to examine (1) the role of female characters' femininity in building themselves and the environment and (2) the strength of femininity that female characters have in building their self-image as dignified beings. The benefit of this research is to

strengthen the field of interdisciplinary literary science to form a body of literary science at a macro level. In addition, this research provides input for the development of further research that focuses on building the dignity of women in literary discourse and social life. In many cases, researchers can develop similar research on the ideology of femininity in folklore in a wider area.

METHOD

This research is a textual study using qualitative research with descriptive methods. Qualitative research aims to describe the lives of existing communities descriptively using words (Andalas, 2017). The descriptive method is carried out through analysis of the data that has been collected, which can be in the form of words or images. The research approach is feminism, namely, an approach that focuses on the image of women and stereotypes of women in literary works. It discusses gender issues regarding the role and position of women as well as gender inequality and the distribution of men's power over women. The data source for this research is 13 folk tales selected purposefully on the website www.ceritakyatnusantara.com. The selection was based on provincial clusters with multicultural considerations, the highest number of female figures, and the mindset of people in different environments. The research data are in the form of story units in the form of sentence quotes and paragraphs related to femininity in female characters. Data collection techniques was conducted through documentation studies include classifying data, categorizing critical and creative reading data, and finding the power of feminism in stories. Research data analysis techniques are carried out by understanding the meaning of the text in depth, observing and exploring the message, and analyzing it interactively and dialectically for the accuracy of the findings. Applicably, data analysis techniques start with data reduction, presenting data, and drawing conclusions. The overall analysis can reveal femininity in Indonesian folklore as a whole.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role of female characters in Indonesian folklore in developing themselves and the environment can be seen in the behaviors and actions they take when faced with problems. The consequences of actions taken by women are more likely to reflect the concept of femininity inherent in them. The self-concept of women as protectors is clear. This can be seen through the femininity of female characters as well as the power of femininity in building their self-image as dignified beings.

The Role of Femininity in Female Characters in Indonesian Folklore

Women have basic maternal instincts, both towards their biological children and non-biological children. A mother's instinct cannot be denied in fulfilling basic needs, namely food. In society, women usually take care of family consumption. The female giant figure in Acehese folklore exemplifies this by graciously accepting human visitors who serve as her delectable food. A woman's feelings as a mother have quite high sensitivity to fulfilling the desire to share with others.

Mendengar keterangan itu, **tiba-tiba si raksasa betina merasa iba kepada mereka. Ia pun segera mengajak mereka masuk ke dalam rumahnya**, lalu menghidangkan makanan dan minuman kepada mereka. Oleh karena sudah kelaparan, ketujuh anak itu menyantap makanan tersebut dengan lahapnya. **“Habiskan cepat makanan itu, lalu naik ke atas loteng! Kalau tidak, kalian akan dimakan oleh suamiku.** Tidak lama lagi ia datang dari berburu” Ujar raksasa betina. (Kisah Tujuh Anak Lelaki).

Hearing that statement, **suddenly the female monster felt pity for them. He immediately invited them into his house**, then served food and drinks to them. Since they were already hungry, the seven children ate the food greedily. **“Finish the food quickly, then go up to the attic! Otherwise, you guys will be eaten by my husband.** Soon he came from hunting," said the female monster. (Story of the Seven Sons)

The female giant character is the one who usually faces humans as her prey. She has social sensitivity and is sensitive to seeing humans who are hungry. A motherly attitude helps children. This

information demonstrates the maternal attitude that the female giant displayed by wanting to assist lost human children and provide them with food and drink. The female giant also hid them from her giant husband, who considered humans to be very delicious food. The female giant clearly showed an attitude of motherly love. Maternal love is unconditional reinforcement of the child's life and needs. This maternal love is manifested in the attention and sense of responsibility given to a child (Khairi & Harun, 2016). Apart from maternal love, women also have a strong sensitivity or feeling for their children. This is shown in folklore about the role of femininity on the island of Lombok, namely the underground *palace*. In this story, the **empress character has a hunch and is sensitive to the situations and conditions that will befall her children.**

Anak yang lahir pertama disembunyikan permaisuri di suatu sudut istana di bawah tanah itu. **Ia sudah menduga, Danawa Sari akan membunuh anak-anaknya** (Istana di Bawah Tanah)
The firstborn child was hidden by the queen in a corner of the underground palace. **He already suspected that Danawa Sari would kill his children** (Underground Palace).

The second piece of information demonstrates the empress's skill in preventing the concubine Danawa Sari from killing her twin sons, who were crown princes. This shows the empress playing a dual and important role in building herself and protecting the palace environment by saving the potential successor to the kingdom. In domestic life, women will have a dual role, namely as mother and wife for their husbands and children (Susanti, 2021).

Women have strategies in their lives to negotiate with men. This can be seen in Rara Jonggrang's cleverness and ingenuity in rejecting the wishes of Bandung Bondowoso, who has supernatural powers. This ingenuity was visible when Bandung Bondowoso almost completed the thousand temples and two wells he requested. So Rara Jonggrang asked the ladies-in-waiting.

“The nymphs wake up the girls around the palace. Tell them to burn straw and pound rice in a mortar. Also sprinkle flowers that smell good.” (Rara Jonggrang)

With the ingenuity of the character Rara Jonggrang in thwarting Bandung Bondowoso, who almost completed the temple he requested, Rara Jonggrang succeeded in thwarting Bandung Bondowoso's desire to marry her, even though he was cursed into a statue. On the other hand, the intelligence of the female character shown by the Youngest from Lampung was seen when she overcame the cunning of the parents who threw their child into the forest. He did this by marking his way home with candlenuts. The youngest's intelligence and ingenuity can also be seen in the following quote.

“Sampailah mereka di sebuah ladang yang dihuni kedua raksasa suami istri. Ketujuh bersaudara itu berencana menaklukan raksasa itu. Si Bungsu kemudian mengambil kolang-kaling dan digosok-gosokkan ke sungai. Akibatnya tubuh dua raksasa itu gatal dan segera menuju gubuk...raksasa jatuh ke dalam api unggun hingga tewas” (Si Bungsu Tujuh Bersaudara, 2015: 29)

“They arrived at a field inhabited by two giants, husband and wife. The seven brothers planned to conquer the giant. The youngest then took the palm fruit and rubbed it in the river. As a result, the bodies of the two giants itched and immediately headed for the hut. The giants fell into the bonfire and died” (The Youngest Seven Brothers, 2015: 29).

The youngest character represents an intelligent woman. He can devise a plan to trap and kill the evil giant. Another role is in Princess *Kencana's Dream from Bali*. It is the princess's choice that will determine the future of the prince cursed by the frog. With the help of her father's advisor, the princess finally decided to help people who were being persecuted.

“Aku harus menolong orang benar yang teraniaya”, “Dengarlah suara hatiku! Dengarlah, hai katak, orang benar yang teraniaya. Aku bersedia menjadi istrimu, pendampingmu seumur hidup!” (Mimpi Putri Kencana, 2015: 22)

“I must help the righteous who are persecuted”, “Hear the voice of my heart! Hear, O frog, the righteous who are persecuted. I am willing to be your wife and your companion for life.” (Princess Kencana's Dream, 2015: 22)

The figure of Princess Kencana is a picture of a character who is kind and full of sincerity. Princess Kencana ultimately made the right decision by saving people in the kingdom and the life of Prince Frog. Women's ability to make decisions indicates that women, as creatures, can be equal to men (Islahuddin et al., 2021). Helping is an attitude that shows a social role. Helping the community is very important. A person living in a society is obliged to help each other when a person has a human relationship (Maikomah et al., 2018).

Another role in building the environment is shown in folklore. *The story of Doyan Nada* from West Nusa Tenggara. The goddess, as a female character, has a responsible attitude and keeps her promises. This can be noted in the following quote:

“Begini, Tuan Putri. Hamba baru saja selesai mengelilingi pulau ini. Hamba melihat pulau ini semakin penuh dengan pepohonan. Maka itu, Hamba menyarankan agar Tuan Putri segera memenuhi pesan kakek Tuan Putri untuk mengisi pulau ini dengan manusia,” ungkap Patih Sangon. “Oh, iya, terima kasih Patih telah mengingatkanku mengenai amanat itu,” ucap Dewi Anjani, “Baiklah kalau begitu, besok temani aku untuk mencari tempat yang cocok dijadikan lahan pertanian oleh manusia yang akan menghuni pulau ini!” (Kisah Doyan Nada: 10).

“It's like this, princess. I have just finished circling this island. I see that this island is increasingly full of trees.” Therefore, Servant suggests that the Princess immediately fulfill the message of the Princess's grandfather to fill this island with humans,” said Patih Sangon. “Oh, yes, thank you, Patih, for reminding me about that mandate,” said Dewi Anjani. “Okay, then, tomorrow, accompany me to look for a place suitable for agricultural land for humans who will inhabit this island!” (Story of Doyan Nada: 10).

A conversation took place between the Princess and Patih Sangon as a form of appreciation for women for being involved in making important decisions. Even though Dewi Anjani is the queen of the genies, she remains humble. He tries to carry out the mandate ordered by his grandfather to make the Lombok people have a civilization. One of the ideas of civilization was for humans to have activities in managing agricultural land on the island. Overall, the role of female characters' femininity in developing themselves and the environment can be examined in the following Table 1:

Table 1
The Role of Femininity in Indonesian Folktale Female Characters

No	Story	The Role of Femininity	
		Figure	Adherent properties
1	The Story of Seven Sons	Female giant	helper, motherly love
2	Underground Palace	Queen	Agility, taking care of the environment, protector, friend
3	Rara Jonggrang	Rara Jonggrang	overcome cunning,
4	The youngest of seven siblings	The youngest	intelligent, helpful
5	Princess Kencana's Dream	Princess Kencono	helpfulness, sincerity, and kindness
6	The story of Doyan Nada	The Goddess	humbly hold the mandate
7	Codet Legend	Maemunah	Kind, fair, and wise
8	Mr. Cucumber	Maybe Srini	Loving, never giving up, and breaking promises
9	Magic Porridge	Grandmother and grandchild	Work hard and never give up.
10	The origin of Mount Mangkon	Granted	Hard worker

Source: Results of the research 2022 (processed)

Table 1 above illustrates that the female characters, in carrying out their roles, experienced quite significant changes. Women are often depicted as side characters who do not have an important role in the family or society and as characters who accept life as it is (Anggraini, 2016). Female characters in Indonesian folklore are able to deconstruct themselves, so they have an important role. This can be seen in the representation of characters and their inherent traits. In reality, the character is described as someone who is sensitive to the environment, helpful, kind, and trustworthy. This is also confirmed by the femininity inherent in women who are agile, intelligent, able to overcome cunning, humble, and hold a mandate.

The power of femininity in building female characters with self-image as dignified creatures

Women, as dignified creatures, certainly have the power to build their image well. In folklore, there are many characters who show this power. One of them is Codet *Legend Folklore*, which brings characters with female roles who like to provide challenges. Maemunah is a reflection of a woman who is clever and brave.

“Sudah beberapa kali Jan Ament meminta tanah Maemunah. Namun Maemunah selalu menolak permintaan itu. Memunah juga berkali-kali diancam akan dibunuh oleh Jan Ament...” (Legenda Codet, 2015:33)

"Jan Ament has asked for Maemunah land several times. However, Maemunah always refused this request. Memunah was also repeatedly threatened with death by Jan Ament. (Legenda Codet, 2015:33)

Quote 6 explains that Maemunah's courage was shown when someone who wanted to propose to her was rejected. Likewise, when dealing with the Dutch, who colonized Indonesia and killed many people for the sake of wealth, Memunah's character still dared to fight him. Apart from that, the courage of the character Timun Mas when facing a giant.

“Anakku, jika suatu hari Si Raksasa datang dan hendak menangkapmu, larilah engkau sekecang mungkin. Jangan lupa kau taburkan isi dari empat kantong ini satu per satu untuk melindungimu dari kejaran raksasa,” nasihat Mbok Sirni dan suaminya (Timun Mas:2).

“My son, if one day the giant comes and wants to catch you, run as fast as you can.” Don't forget to sprinkle the contents of these four bags one by one to protect you from being chased by giants,” advised Mbok Sirni and her husband (Timun Mas:2).

The incident in quote 7 illustrates the advice Mbok Sirni and her husband gave Timun Emas in facing the enemy who was going to kill her. In his escape, Timun Mas showed courage, fought against an arbitrary giant, and succeeded in defeating him. Courage is included in the moral values between humans and themselves (Firwan, 2017). Courage is, of course, also accompanied by independence and toughness. The grandmother character in the folklore of magic porridge demonstrates this.

“..dari hasil sayuran itulah nenek dan cucunya hidup. Karena hasil kebunnya kadang tak mencukupi, si Nenek sering pergi ke pantai mencari ikan” (Bubur Ajaib, 2015:138)

“It is from these vegetables that the grandmother and her grandchildren live. Because her garden produce was sometimes insufficient, Grandma often went to the beach to look for fish.” (Bubur Ajaib, 2015:138)

The figure of the grandmother as a female character represents a woman who is independent and able to survive by working alone. The grandmother character struggles hard to be able to meet the needs of living with her grandchildren, even though she is old. In line with folklore *The origin of Mount Mangkon* tells the story of a widow who is strong **and independent. Mangkon supports his two children**, Taru Otai (first son) and Salikong (second son).

“...Mangkon adalah seorang pekerja keras. Setiap hari ia bekerja untuk memenuhi kebutuhan hidupnya bersama anaknya. Ia mengerjakan huma dengan rajin hingga hasilnya melimpah...” (Asal Mula Gunung Mangkon, 2015:128)

Mangkon is a hard worker. Every day, he works to meet his living needs with his children. He worked diligently until the results were abundant. (Origin of Mount Mangkon, 2015:128)

The character Mangkon is a strong and hardworking mother. The story excerpt contains a picture of an independent woman without a man. The descriptions of the grandmother and Mangkon show that women are as strong as men. This is actually a form of deconstruction of women, who have long been considered weak creatures. This is in line with Millet's thinking [Tong \(2010\)](#), patriarchal ideology exaggerates the biological differences between men and women and ensures that men always have a masculine and dominant role, while women always have a subordinate, or feminine, role. This ideology is so strong that men are usually able to gain the approval of the women they oppress’.

Indonesian folklore shows that women can occupy men's positions and have the same fighting power as men. Forms of gender construction in Indonesian folklore feature female characters who are depicted as acting like men and even being very strong in fighting. The depiction of strong women in folklore is found in the title of the story, *Calon Arang*. This can be seen in the following quote.

Calon Arang tak mau ketinggalan, Dia pun menyerang Narothonama”) Calon Arang (2015: 42)

Calon Arang did not want to be left behind; he attacked Narothonama” (Calon Arang, 2015: 42)

Calon Arang is a magical woman who has power and causes the people of the Kahuripan Kingdom to experience strange illnesses. Calon Arang also has magic knowledge that spreads skin diseases every night. The presence of this disease made the people anxious and made Majesty Erlangga give orders to Path Narothonama, who was accompanied by Pungga Mukti and Pungga Sasra, to arrest Calon Arang in Girah village. However, with his powerful strength, Calon Arang was able to defeat the entire royal army. This shows that women can also be skilled at doing the same things as men. In terms of education or school, it is men who get the opportunity to go to school, while women are only given skills limited to what they need to prepare them for marriage ([Kurnia & Hidayat, 2020](#)). However, Calon Arang was able to show that his skills in using magic were above average.

“Calon Arang yang tinggal di Desa Girah itu menyebarkan penyakit dengan ilmu sihirnya. Rakyatpun resah” Calon Arang, 2015: 41)

“Calon Arang who lives in Girah Village is spreading disease with his witchcraft. The people are restless.” (Calon Arang, 2015: 41)

The depiction of strong and great women is found in the story. Calon Arang is one of three great female characters in stories in East Java Province, which shows that women have the same degree of strength as men. This is illustrated in the story entitled *Damar Wulan and Menak Jingga*, which has a great female character named Ratu.

“Pada masa Majapahit diperintah oleh Ratu Ayu Kencana Wungu” Damar Wulan dan Menak Jingga (2015: 704)

Ratu Ayu Kencana Wungu was in charge during the Majapahit era, according to Damar Wulan and Menak Jingga (2015: 704).

The Queen's character has great greatness and high power in the kingdom, namely as the leader of the kingdom. The power of women reflected in the Queen's character is strong, tough, and wise in leading the kingdom. There are three main factors that determine the success of women's leadership, namely: having a far-sighted way of thinking; having conceptual creativity and thinking that is different from most people; and having the strength of heart to be firm towards relatives and society

(Irwansyah, 2020). Apart from having power, the depiction of female characters also has the ability to think cleverly; this is depicted in the story entitled *The Origin of Tengger and Mount Batok*.

“Waktu masih tengah malam Rara Anteng membanguungkan ibunya serta beberapa perempuan tetangganya. Ia memiinta mereka membakar jerami. Dari arah timur tampak cahaya merah. Bukan hanya itu saja. Mereka diajaknya menumbuk padi hingga sura lesung tak..tak..tak” Asal Mula Tengger dan Gunung Batok (2015: 291)

“While it was still midnight, Rara Anteng woke up her mother and several female neighbors. He asked them to burn the straw. From the east, a red light appeared. Not only that, he invited them to pound the rice until the mortar was tak..tak..tak.” *The Origin of Tengger and Mount Batok* (2015: 291)

In the quote above, the ingenuity of the female character can be seen in *Ra Anteng* when thinking about the right way to thwart a wedding with a giant. *Rara Anteng* asked the giant to make an ocean in the middle of the mountain in one night. The giant agreed. *Rara Anteng's* ingenuity made the giant fail to make the ocean by waking the women in the village to burn straw, wake the chickens, and ring the mortar as a sign that it was morning.

Overall, the strength of women in Indonesian folklore used as research samples represents women who are physically strong. In addition, women have intelligence or ingenuity in thinking when facing problems, which were initially considered to be emotional creatures. The image of women being able to break common stereotypes is one form of struggle to equalize equal rights between women and men (Santoso, 2022). A woman's strength is shown by her ability to respond to problems that befall her so that she can behave as described in the following Table 2.

Table 2
The Power of Femininity in Female Characters in Indonesian Folklore

No	Story	The Role of Femininity	
		Empowered	Self-strength
1	Codet Legend	√	Smart and brave
2	Golden cucumber	√	Able to face challenges
3	Magic Porridge	√	Strong and independent
4	The origin of Mount Mangkon	√	Be tough and work hard.
5	Calon Arang	√	Tough and awesome
6	Damar Wulan and Minak Jinggo	√	Tough, smart, and strong
7	The Origin of Tengger and Mount Batok	√	ingenuity

Source: Results Research 2022 (processed)

Based on the review above, this research has advantages when compared with other research that has been carried out, such as in the folklore entitled *Ande-Ande Lumut and Ken Dedes*, where it can be concluded that women's position is under the power of men. Treatment between women and men in social class This difference includes a woman's voice and desire for a husband; when a man and woman are in the same social class or a woman's social class is higher than a man, the man will take the woman's voice and desire into account. However, if a man in a high position wants a woman to be his wife, the woman's voice and wishes are not taken into account (Rahmawati, 2020). In this research, we pay more attention to the gender equality experienced by women because of the power they have. The femininity depicted in the thoughts of female characters focuses more on the context of women's empowerment in responding to the problems they face.

Based on the review above, this research has advantages when compared with the research that has been conducted Mali (2022) titled *Representation of Feminism in the Novel Dilan Dia is Dilanku 1990 by Pidi Baiq* because it has a more complex discussion of women's images. Then there is research from Putra & Alias (2018) entitled *The Image of Wemen in Waindho-Indhodhiyu Folklore in Wakatobi Society*, which focuses on physical image, family, and others, while this research describes the image of women as creatures with dignity and also the strength that women possess. Lastly, similar research was

conducted by Windiyarti et al. (2022), entitled The Image of Women in Three Folktales of the North Coast of East Java.

In this research, the advantage that can be stated is that the femininity shown is a female character who has an identity and is able to deconstruct herself well so that it can be seen from behavior and thought patterns that are intelligent, independent, and empowered in life. Thus, this research has a different focus from previous research, which focused more on physical image and domestic roles, so that women have less access outside (to the public) with their attached identity.

CONCLUSION

The role of femininity depicted in Indonesian folklore is shown by women's participation in their existence as social creatures in interacting with the environment. In carrying out her feminine role, women are shown as empowered characters, so they have an important role in the story. A strategic role appears when women make decisions for the benefit of themselves and their environment.

The power of women's femininity in building their self-image as dignified creatures is represented through their identity, which is able to divide domestic and public roles. The domestic role can be demonstrated by paying attention to the family with refinement of character. On the one hand, women have intelligence and ingenuity in formulating strategies when faced with problems. Apart from that, women have independence and authority when faced with the opposite sex, so the women in the story are more respected because of the advantages they have.

The implication of this research is that although socio-cultural construction places women as weak creatures, this does not mean that they cannot do anything. However, women actually have extraordinary power within themselves because of the identity that is attached to them by nature. Women can reconstruct themselves well if they always optimize themselves in all aspects of life. In essence, women and men have differences but should not differentiate between them. This issue of femininity will raise men's awareness to respect women, who are actually both equal partners who have the opportunity to build harmonious social construction. In relation to the reader, this research is a new offer to see clearly the existence of women who have so far been sidelined in many ways. However, Indonesian folklore offers another perspective that can be used as a correction for women in identifying themselves.

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