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Submission date: 30-Jan-2023 09:14AM (UTC+0700)

Submission ID: 2001994758

File name: Publikasi_Jurnal_Internasional.pdf (348.2K)

Word count: 4676

Character count: 23333

The Representation of Women in the Rajagopalachari's Version of "Mahabharata" as the "Garwa" in the Javanese Culture Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: February 11, 2019

Accepted: February 27, 2019

Published: March 31, 2019

Volume: 2

Issue: 2

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.2.21

KEYWORD

Garwa, faithful, worship, devotion

ABSTRACT

Mahabharata was known and enjoyed by Javanese for centuries. It is an epic that was considered to have a big bond and has been affecting human life, the culture, mindset, and even various forms of value, including the value of the marriage system of Javanese. The marriage system from Javanese perspective placed woman as garwa (sigaraning nyawa/ soul mate) which should fulfil three criteria. The first characteristic of Javanese woman is faithful and able to dedicate themselves to serve their husbands. It is termed as "swarga nunut neraka katut". The second criterion of an ideal woman as the garwa is having an accepting/ worship attitude (narima). The ideal Javanese woman has to be able to accompany her husband in all conditions, always grateful, sincere and satisfied even though life that is lived is not easy at all. The third is devoted. The devotion to the husband can be shown through attitude, speech and sincerity in serving the husband. In addition, an ideal woman must be able to maintain the honor of herself and her husband, keep herself away from all forms of infidelity or things that may bring disgrace to the family. These criteria also be found in Mahabharata.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mahabharata is an ancient literary work originated from India. From the historical point of view, the authors of the *Mahabharata* were Begawan Vyasa or Vyasa or Wiyasa who wrote it in about the fourth BCE. That book consisted of eighteen *parvas* (chapters) so that was called *Astadasaparwa* (Purwadi, 2012).

The *Mahabharata* was estimated to come to Indonesia around the fourth century in line with the introduction of Hinduism. This statement was proven by the discovery of Balitung inscriptions which already implicitly discussed the *Mahabharata* puppet shows. While in the writing form, *Mahabharata* story in Indonesia was estimated to be composed in the tenth century (991-1016 M) during the reign of King Darmawangsa Teguh, in East Java. Unfortunately, it was not known who the author was (Sena Wangi Authors Team, 1999).

After that time, the books were spreading into some regions, and in certain circumstances there was cultural assimilation. The cultural assimilation and the process of composing the books that were done by some authors made *Mahabharata* transformed into several versions which were slightly different from the original one. It also engendered and inspired some stories. Some of famous stories inspired by

Mahabharata that were written by Javanese were *Kakawin Arjunawiwaha* composed by Mpu Kanwa, and the *Bharatayuddha* written by Mpu Sedah then finished by Mpu Panuluh as the offer of the Kediri King, Prabu Jayabhaya (1135-1157 M). The composition of these texts was based on the fact that the story of the *Mahabharata* was full of the good values that could be imitated by humans.

The existence of the *Mahabharata* showed no signs of lost by the times. The story line about internal conflict which turned into a big war was considered as a heroic story (*wiracarita*). The story of the *Mahabharata* also contained many values of life (*dharma*), mythology, and also the political elements. In addition, for the Hindus, this story was considered as a sacred story (*adiluhung*) because it told about the process of human life and how the humans did relate to their God. These things made the *Mahabharata* never lost its devotees (Purwadi, 2012, and Suartaya, 2016).

Literature and the society had a strong bond. Sociology of literature is an academic field which can be used to analyze the relation of them. Sociology of literature can be studied by using some approaches. One of them is functionalism approach by Albrecht. Through this approach, Albrecht via Faruk (2013) explained that literature is able to fulfill the primary

and secondary needs of human beings, both of sociologically and psychologically needs. As an institution, the art has a multiplicity of functions in society which not only serves as a framer of the stability of society and enriches the culture, but also represents a secular replacement, develops and spreads the alternative values, and becomes an important value for the social life. Based on this view, the text of the *Mahabharata* which had been known for centuries and enjoyed by the Javanese community, was considered to have a big bond and has been affecting human life, the culture, mindset, and even various forms of value, including the value of the marriage system of Javanese.

In the Javanese concept of marriage, woman was placed as a *garwa* (*sigaraning nyawa*/ soul mates) that should have some criteria include: loyal, *narima* (receiving/ surrendering) and *bekti* (worship). The ideal Javanese woman's personalities are also represented on the figure of women in the Rajagopalachari's version of *Mahabharata*. Both of them would be a major focus of the discussion in this article.

1. METHODOLOGY

In composing this article, it is used descriptive qualitative approach. The object of the research was the representation of *garwa* on *Mahabharata* from the Javanese perspective. The data source in this research was the script of *Mahabharata* that had been rewritten by Rajagopalachari and published by the International Gita Society in 2003. The research data were in the form of words, phrases, sentences, monologue, dialogue, and paragraphs that indicated about the representation of *garwa* which appropriated to the perspective of Javanese culture.

The type of this research was the literary research. In this study, data were collected by using the read and note (*baca-catat*) technique with the researcher as its main instruments. There were six stages used in this study (Krippendorff, 2004), namely: unitizing, sampling, recording/coding, reduction or simplification of data, abductively inferring (retrieval summary), and narrating process.

2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the concept of marriage form of Javanese perspective, woman is termed as a *garwa* (*sigaraning nyawa*/ soul mate) which must have some criteria such as: faithful, *narima* (accepting) and *bekti* (filial/ worship). Javanese ideal personality is also depicted in the figure of women in the *Mahabharata* story. In this article there are four women which will be discussed based on the Javanese criteria of *garwa*, namely: Kunti, Madri, Gandhari, and Draupadi .

a) Faithful

One of main characteristics of Javanese women are faithful and able to dedicate themselves to serve their husbands. In addition, an ideal Javanese woman must be able to maintain her and her husband's honor, both in good and bad time. In other words, the ideal Javanese woman must be able to apply the term "*swarga nunut neraka katut*" which means that a wife will follow her husband either into heaven or to hell (Handayani and Novianto, 2011). The loyalty of a woman is not only tested when the husband is still alive, but also when her husband is gone (death). She has to keep herself to not marrying again until her death. The term of "*swarga nunut neraka katut*" also can be found in the *Mahabharata*. In the *Mahabharata* story, most of the women are wholeheartedly to keep their loyalty to their husband. It can be seen from the determination of their heart to keep accompany their husband through happy and bad time.

The first woman who adheres the belief of "*swarga nunut neraka katut*" was Madri. Madri plunged herself into the fire during the burning of Pandu's corpse procession. Her purpose was so that she could immediately followed Pandu to heaven. Although her sacrifice was also motivated by guilt because she felt that the death of Pandu was due to her mistake, but the sacrifice that she did actually proof her faith to her husband.

As same as Madri, Kunti was also faithful to her husband. Her loyalty to Pandu was shown by her willingness to take care of the Pandavas after Pandu and Madri death. Her loyalty was also shown by her decision in order not to marry until the end of her life.

In addition, Dhritrashtra's wife, Gandhari was also a loyal figure. The faithful of Gandhari be seen when she was sacrificing her pleasures and choosing to share the pain of her husband as her own too. Gandhari's husband, Dhritrashtra was a blind man. To show her loyalty, Gandhari was willing to close her eyes with a cloth to feel what her husband felt (Riantarno, 2016). Throughout her life, she decided to live in darkness. Gandhari closed her eyes to show how loyal she is, in a state of slump, her a hundred sons died in the battlefield then her husband decided to wander in the middle of the forest. Gandhari not once intend to leave Dhritrashtra. She accompanied her husband until the death came. With her loyalty, they were devoured by the fire that burned the forest and their hermitage. The loyalty that showed by Gandhari is in accordance with the criteria of ideal woman as expressed by Djaya and Asmara (2004) that a woman should always accompany her husband under any circumstances, even in the worst condition.

The next woman who had an extraordinary loyalty was Draupadi , daughter of the Pancala's king. Draupadi 's loyalty to her husbands, Pandavas, were tested more than once (Vat and Tantray, 2015). The

first test that Draupadi faced is when Arjuna won the contest in the Panchala kingdom. Draupadi accepted the Pandavas' decision to marry her together. Draupadi might have a chance to refuse that decision, but by her sincerity to Pandavas, she finally agreed to marry them (Sena Wangi Authors Team, 1999).

The second test of Draupadi's loyalty to the Pandavas occurred when Yudhishtira followed a dice game that was held by Kauravas. By the cheating of Sengkuni, Yudhishtira lost that game. Pandavas lost all their wealth and kingdom. Due to the incitement, Yudhishtira pawned Draupadi in his last game, and once again Yudhishtira lost. As a woman Draupadi felt so disappointed and angry when she was made as a bet by her own husband (Riantiarno, 2016). Not only being a bet, the harmest one was when she had five husbands but no one could do a favor to help her from the bad thing happened to her (Vat and Tantray, 2015). All she could do was only to wait for God's help.

Seeing this, Duhsasana went to Draupadi and made ready to seize her clothes by force. All earthly aid had failed, and in the anguish of utter helplessness, she implored divine mercy and succor.

(Rajagopalachari, 2003: 54)

There was nothing more horrible and more miserable than be shamed in front of her five husbands, but none of them prevented this act. Not stopping there, after being humiliated, Draupadi still faithfully accompanied her five husbands. For thirteen years, Draupadi lived miserably in the forest as the consequence and the punishment of Yudhishtira's mistake (Riantiarno, 2016). As a princess who lived her life happily and well since her childhood, it would be hard when she had to live in exile and deprivation (Vat and Tantray, 2015). It never made her gave up. With her loyalty, she undergoes all the joys and sorrows.

The conclusion for the explanation above is that Kunti, Madri, Gandhari and Draupadi are in accordance with the main characteristics of Javanese women as an ideal wife, that is faithful and able to devote their selves completely to their husbands or it is known as "*swarga nunut neraka katut*". They are the representation of the real *garwa*.

b) Narima

The second criterion of an ideal woman as the *garwa* is having an accepting/ worship attitude (*narima*). The term to define this kind of woman is "*urip gelem, mukti uga bisa*" which means that woman should be willing to assist her husband in all

circumstances. In the good condition, the woman should be grateful while in the bad condition she has not to complain much about it. "*Sabaya mukti sabaya pati*" together in the happiness and sorrow in the life time until the dead comes.

As a wife, the ideal woman must be able to carry out domestic duties of kinship with full of acceptance. Without a course, women are required to be able to run her duties and accept all the worst possibility in her life. It must be hard to do because the women have double tasks at a time. Those are to accompany the husband and to care for and educate their children (Silitonga, Puspitawati and Muflikhati, 2017). These multiple responsibilities are not trivial and easily done. Nevertheless, Javanese women are able to manage them and show that although difficult, accepting attitude (*narima*) is not impossible to do.

The attitude of *legowo* (elate) and *tawakal* (resigned to God) is the key to the *narima*. By realizing that every single problem occurs in the life is a destiny of the God; *narima* is easier to apply (Murtisari, 2013). The resignation that is done does not mean that woman just stay in silent and accept the entire situation, but it means that woman have to strive for the happiness of the families. Furthermore, the final result is entirely left to destiny, and let the God take His parts.

The same statement is also stated by Handayani and Novianto (2011) that Javanese women can accept any situation even the bitter ones. They are strong and resilient. As a *garwa* with a *narima* attitude not only showed by the Javanese woman. In the *Mahabharata* story rewritten by Rajagopalachari, it also can be found.

The first woman in the *Mahabharata* story that has *narima* attitude is Kunti. Kunti was woman with the high level of acceptance attitude. The first acceptance was shown by her willingness to undergo destiny as the wife of a cursed king (Sena Wangi Authors Team, 1999). Pandu was condemned to be unable to have sex as the consequence of his mistake but Kunti still took it wholeheartedly. She never regretted about it. Moreover, she was supporting her husband to do *tapa brata* in the forest (Riantiarno, 2016). Kunti never left Pandu despite they are in very bad condition.

As same as Kunti, Madri did the same. Madri loved Pandu so much. Just like the Javanese slogan "*sabaya mukti sabaya pati*" together in happiness and sorrow from the life time until the death comes (Djaya and Asmara, 2004). This slogan is done by Madri. Madri did the *Labuh Geni* ceremony as a final tribute to her husband's corpse. During the ceremonial, she plunged herself into the fire and being burned together with Pandu. That was all she did to show how much she loved Pandu. "*sabaya mukti sabaya pati*" together

in happiness and sorrow from the life time until the death

Besides Kunti and Madri, Gandhari also a woman who has full of acceptance attitude. With full acceptance she lived her life as the wife of a blind king who lost the throne. Gandhari also must be a mother with a hundred of evil children (Dwiyanto, Susantina and Widyawati., 2009). The burden of Gandhari's must be immense both of physically and psychologically but she never complained about that. Another form of acceptance was also shown at the end of her life by wandering in the forest for three years with her husband Destrarata and Kunti. She surrendered and realized that everything that happened to her life and her sons (Kauravas) was the result of their own crimes. She accepted it wholeheartedly.

The next woman in this discussion is Draupadi. Draupadi was a figure of the princess with a beautiful face, having virtue, wise, patient, meticulous, faithful and devoted to her husband (Vat and Tantray, 2015). In performing her role as Pandavas' wife, Draupadi showed the high level of the attitude of *narima*. There are at least three major acceptances showed by Draupadi .

The first of *narima* attitude was showed by her willingness to marry five men at a time. It was done not on the basis of lust (sexuality) but as a form of acceptance of the Pandavas' decision (Sena Wangi Authors Team, 1999). Draupadi willing to leave the kingdom of Panchala and following her husbands wherever they go, no matter what the condition have to be faced. The second, attitude of *narima* was shown by Draupadi in a way that she forgave the Pandavas, especially Yudhishtira, which ever made her as the bet. The third, attitude of *narima* was shown by Draupadi with her willingness to be the maid of the empire in the Matsya kingdom.

The princess Draupadi who, if fate had been less cruel, had herself have been served by many maids, had now to pass her days in serving Sudeshna, Virata's queen. She lived in the inner apartments of the palace as maid and companion, engaging herself in uncongenial tasks.

(Rajagopalachari, 2003: 90)

By being a servant, things that were never expected to happen are appearing. A lot of bad things happened but it did not make her give up and reveal the secrets of who she really was. The ability of keeping secret is one of the criteria of the ideal wife (Handayani and Novianto, 2011) that was shown by Draupadi. She accepted all temptations with resignation and confidence that the dharma will bring her to a happy ending. She was never troublesome her husbands, instead she supported every single thing done by Pandavas.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that all of the women above face different temptations but *narima's* attitude keeps them from despairing and leaving their partner. On the contrary, they become the *garwa* in the life time until the dead, both in joy and sorrow.

c) *Bekti*

Javanese woman should always be "*bekti mring kakung*" which means that she has to devote to her husband (Djaya and Asmara, 2004). Devotion to the husband can be shown through attitude, speech and sincerity in serving the husband (Koentjaraningrat, 1990). In addition, an ideal woman must be able to maintain the honor of herself and her husband, keep herself away from all forms of infidelity or proles that may bring disgrace to the family. Moreover, she also must be able to defend and be by her husband's side no matter what problems that are coming to her (Handayani and Novianto, 2011). In Javanese terms the attitude of devotion is summarized in three terms, namely *momong*, *momor* and *momot*.

Momong means nurturing, caring and keeping things to run as what is expected (Djaya and Asmara, 2004: 11). In this case it is not only able to nurture her children but how to keep the husband and her household from the threats coming so that her family is always in peaceful condition.

The second is *momor* that has the meaning of hanging out. Javanese women who are married are expected to be women who are easygoing and easy to get along with everyone (Djaya and Asmara, 2004: 11). Knowing how to place herself in society and having good threat such as friendly, easy mingling and good self-defense is a mus. Those attitudes are which later can avoid herself and her families from the bad gossip and can help her family when the trouble comes. *Momor's* attitude shown by a Javanese woman is not only a form of *bekti* to the husband but also the devotion to her family and society.

The third is *momot* which means that a woman should understand, able to keep secrets, patient and steadfast (Djaya and Asmara, 2004). *Momot's* attitude makes a wife as a person who can be trusted by everyone and make the husband always feel comfort because someone in his side is a person who is ready to bear the pain together. In *Mahabharata* the expression of *bekti* (*momong*, *momor*, and *momot*) can also be seen.

Kunti had three traits of *momong*, *momor* and *momot* as a form of *bekti* (devotion) which were shown not only to her husband but also to the God, the kingdom, and the society. *Momong* have been shown by her willingness to take care of the Pandavas as a form of responsibility as a mother. No matter in what conditions Kunti never stopped teaching *dharma* to her five children. Even when Pandu and Madri died,

she never gave up nurturing and teaching her children. Unfortunately the *momong* traits must be tarnished with her attitude when she has not met Pandu yet. Kunti had thrown away her own child, Karna with the reason of her and her families' honor (Sena Wangi Authors Team, 1999).

The attitude of *momor* owned by Kunti was shown by her willingness to associate with everyone including Gandhari and Madri and keep her relation with the Gods (Dwiyanto, Susantina and Widyawati, 2009). It made her life always full of help and ease, even in the hardest time. With the help of the God, Kunti was able to give birth her children even when her husband Pandu was cursed for sexual intercourse. Her willingness to have a child even without sexual intercourse was a form of *bekti* to her husband. It also showed that Kunti was a woman with a good *momor* attitude so that the God loved her and fulfilled every desire and what she praised.

The third is Momot. Kunti not only understood the condition of her husband but she also accepted it as a temptation from the God. In addition, Kunti was also woman who was able to keep the secrets. She really knew what should and should not be done and be said to keep her household safe. One of the secrets that Kunti has successfully hidden over the years was the born of Karna. She thought that Pandu did not need to know about her past because it might disrupt the peace of their household.

Slightly different from Kunti, Madri who during her lifetime has the nature of *momong* and high dedication in terms of caring for her twins. She has the nature of *momor* so that she could always get along when living with Kunti. Unfortunately she has less the nature of *momot*. It can be seen when she finally agreed to serve Pandu sexually. As a wife, she should understand about the curse that may happen to her husband if they making love, and she should try to keep her husband away from calamity (Djaya and Asmara, 2004) but Madri failed. She only did devotion without thinking the consequences that may be faced. In addition, Madri's attitude that cannot be *momot* is when she plunged herself into the fire. As a woman, she fails to face the harsh reality and choosing shortcuts by eliminating two other traits (*momong* and *momor*) to cover her guilt and sorrow.

If Madri fails in *momot*, then Gandhari fails in *momor*. Her decision to close her eyes for the rest of her life and to lock herself in the room to shows her loyalty to her husband which was an unjustified problem (Maitra and Saha, 2016). What Gandhari has done showed that she has failed in *momot* because she has closed herself from various forms of association. Although she did not have the character of *momor*, in terms of taking care of children and husbands (*momong*), Gandhari can be classified as a very sincere

woman. During her life, she must be the wife of a blind man with a hundred children but she was never failed to do her duties as a good wife and also good mother (Sena Wangi Authors Team, 1999).

In terms of *momot*, from the four women in this discussion, Gandhari is the best one. She has not only a blind husband but she also has a hundred of evil children. In the *Bharatayudha* war all of her sons died. As the woman who lost a hundred sons at a time, it would be really hard to keep the chin up, but Gandhari realized that everything was design by the God and it was her destiny. It made her stay strong (Riantiaro, 2016).

The last one is Draupadi . Just like her mother-in-law, Kunti, Draupadi also had all three attitudes as the embodiment of *bekti*. The attitude of *momong* when she took care of children was not much discussed in Rajagopachari's version of *Mahabharata*, but by seeing the proximity to her fifth husbands, Abhimanyu and also Gatotkaca, it already implied that Draupadi was a wise woman. From the *momor* point of view, Draupadi was a sociable person so she was loved by many people. While in the *momot*, compliance and loyalty of Draupadi was no need to doubt. She was willing to live hard with the Pandavas. She kept their secrets and identities when they were exiled for thirteen years. Moreover, Draupadi was able and wholehearted to become a royal servant as a form of *bekti* on Pandava.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that the forms of *momong*, *momor* and *momot* were done by Kunti, Madri, Gandhari and Draupadi showed their *bekti* (devotion) attitude in running the household. These traits fit to the criteria of ideal woman in Javanese perspective.

3. CONCLUSION

The marriage system from Javanese perspective placed woman as *garwa* (*sigaraning nyawa*/ soul mate) which should fulfil three criteria. The first characteristic of Javanese woman is faith and being able to dedicate themselves to serve their husbands. It is termed as "*swarga nunut neraka katut*". The second criterion of an ideal woman as the *garwa* is having a worship attitude (*narima*). The devotion to the husband can be shown through attitude, speech and sincerity in serving the husband. In addition, an ideal woman must be able to maintain the honor of herself and her husband, keeps herself away from all forms of infidelity or things that may bring disgrace to the family. These criteria are also represented in *Mahabharata*.

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