

# Patriarchal Discourse in Nusantara Classic Children Literature

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# Patriarchal Discourse in Nusantara Classic Children Literature

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28

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14

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**Abstract:** Children's literature works were not ideology-free; which means it had become an agenda to provoke children. Ideologies in children's literature are not simple to found because they have been put in more complex ways in the works. Ideology, such as li<sup>30</sup> gender, has been examined in numerous studies. However, the studies on gender role in children's literature in Indonesia have only been done in small number. This study is aimed to examine patriarchal discourse in some works of Nusantara classic children's literature. They are folklore and fairy tales in Indonesia. The significances of the study are (1) to become a guideline for parents, teachers, and education practitioners, and (2) to contribute for the enrichment of theories on gender and literature. The data were collected from the stories taken from<sup>27</sup> ury tale and folklore in Indonesia children's literature. The purpose of the study were (1) to describe how the relationship between man and women in the Nusantara classic children's literature, and (2) to analyze patriarchal discourse constructed in the children's literature works. The data were analyzed by using critical discourse analysis (CDA). The study found that patriarchal discourse appeared in the form gender stereotype of physical representation, physical abilities, attitudes, pleasures, and the occupations of each character. All patriarchal discourse were represented in children's literature in two ways, euphemization, and sensation.

**Keywords:** Indonesia children's literature, gender stereotype, patriarchal discourse

## 1. Introduction

Children's literature is part of all mainstream literature; it develops, explores, reflects, and explains about the human experiences. Like an adult brain, a child's brain is a narrative tool that is proceed in the world of stories. Hence, children can be hungry for the story. All the knowledge in the form of story, stored in the brain, will be easy to remember. In the other words, the true knowledge, meanings, and the way know and remember the world, will be easily stored in the brain in the form of stories. Simplified in story-formed, information will be more meaningful. Therefore, Children's literature is considered a very important and influential medium on shaping of children's mindset. It is possible because

children's literature has become the instrument that can build children's reading habits. It shows that the story has its own "great magic". There is research that proves that the story plays a very significant role in child language development, emotional development, and psychological developments.

Unfortunately, the children's literary work is not a neutral story which has no specific purpose or agenda for the readers. Citraningtyas (2004) in *Breaking a Curse Silence: Malin Kundang and Transactional Approach to Reading in English Classrooms - an empirical study*, explains that a text of the story of a nation can be a mirror for the nation. This can be, even more clearly, seen in the children's story text. Although children's literature has been deliberately turned into an edutainment tool for the child, various research results show that the story of a child is not an ordinary neutral story, it is usually represented cultural values which later can affect their view about themselves (Heintz 1987).

The stories usually depict about women into several things such as traditional role, normative gender role, inequality between woman and man, feminine beauty standard (Gooden and Gooden 2001; Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003; McCabe et.al 2011; Earles 2017). In such context, the intention of educating in child literature is often more vicious than entertaining. Children's literatures, such as fairy tale, bring intention to propose the beauty standard and the passivity of a woman (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz 2003). In addition, the illustration in books usually portrayed male and woman into traditional gender role; for example, a man is portrayed as a leader, while the female character is controlled by the male characters (Heintz, 1987).

The intention to educate is most commonly found in folklore. Folklore is believed to be a story that is able to provide education for the noble culture of a nation, as well as able to build and nurture cultural values and national identity. Folklore is recognized as an important text in the development of a nation. Therefore, it is not surprising that in many countries, including Indonesia, folklore gets the blessing of the state to be incorporated into the school curriculum.

Children's perspective can be influenced by what they have read, heard and seen. Thus, comprehending various children's literary works critically has become an important thing to do. Issues concerning human life and experience can also be found in stories in the children's literature. Such issues include the ethnic/racial issues, gender issues stereotype and any other issues. On the issue of gender stereotype, many children's literature books describe women in traditional roles, such as the role of women as housewives.

Traditional literature often describes women as helpless or vulnerable female character waiting for a strong, male character who can save them. The male character is described as powerful, competent, as in *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. It is important to look at the story critically since it is possible that there is bias against gender in the content of the story, plot, and characters of the literary work. Patriarchal perspective will limit children's freedom to express and maximize their potential, especially for the girls. The perspective which has positioned women in subordinate positions would construct the children reading children's literature. Women presence has been determined in their relation to men, but not because they have their own identity. It means that men have become values and standards to define and determine the nature of women; Women have not been determined for their own quality. In this study, the children's literature refers to the notion of traditional literary works derived from fairy tales or folklore that are originally from Indonesia.

## 2. Literature Review

Children's literary works have characteristics including having simple and straightforward language styles and having less complex stories. Folklore or fairy tales can be classified into children's literary works because they have those characteristics. Children's literary work was not separable from teaching about the gender stereotype. Often, these stereotypes are exposed to children through the children literacy media. According to Gooden and Gooden (2001), gender stereotypes are assumptions about the characteristics of each gender, which includes physical appearance, physical ability, attitude, interest or occupation. The discourse of patriarchy is related to the gender stereotype. However, the discourse has been then transformed into a symbolic discourse. According to Rusdiarti (2003), symbolic discourse transforms in two ways namely 'euphemization' and 'sensorization'. Euphemization is an invisible symbolic discourse that appears subtly and unconsciously. Sensorization is a symbolic discourse that appears in the form of good-bad moral values. Through these two ways, patriarchal discourse in literary works shades

### *Genre and Children's Literature*

The children's story is a genre in the children's literature. Burhan (2002) follows Lukens (1995: 11-32) states that the genre of children's literature is divided into six categories, such as realism, fiction formulas, fantasy, traditional literature, poetry, and nonfiction, while the other children's literature expert, Mitchell (2002) suggests that there are seven genres in children's literature that include: 1. Picture book 2. Poetry book 3. Traditional literature, includes folklore, fairy tales, myths, and fables 4. Fiction, consists of realistic fiction and historical fiction 5. The fantasy story, which is divided into modern fantasy and science fiction; 6. Non-fiction books and information books and, 7. Biography

Children's literature is also mentioned to have various forms such as comics, graphic novels, illustrated storybooks, picture books, fairy tales, fables, fiction stories, fantasy stories, and others. This study will analyze traditional literature, such as fairy tale and folklore. It studies the traditional literature retold in different stories but at the same value, such as like 'Cinderella'. Citraningtyas (2012) in "Cintarella, Reconstructing Cinderella" paper explains that one of the children's literary products in the form of Cinderella Stories has been widely distributed from generation to generation, and has invested many values for its readers. With so many versions of the Cinderella story that contain less constructive and inappropriate values of the times, it is necessary to have parallel stories that give a more positive value. It needs to present the reconstruction of questionable value in Cinderella, and a more positive value for future generations. With this more positive value assignment, it is hoped that a more positive future community could be built.

### *Patriarchal Discourse*

The word patriarchy refers to a cultural system in which the living system is governed by a "paternal" system. Patriarchy or "Patriarchate" refers to the order of society according to the line of the father. This is a term that denotes certain features of the family or family gathering governed, led, and controlled by the oldest fathers or men. It is a descent law in patriarchy to have family built according to the father line. The name, possessions, and power of the head of the family (father) are then authorized to the boys (Walby, 1990). In another definition, it is explained that:

12

*Patriarchy (from Greek: Patria meaning father and archer meaning rule) is the anthropological term used to define the sociological condition where the male*



*members of society dominate, oppress, and exploit female in each level of social structures and practices.*

Patriarchy has been causing women oppression and people who adopted the patriarchal system of putting men <sup>29</sup> positions and dominant powers over women. Clough (1994) explains that the biological differences between men and women were considered as the beginning of the patriarchal culture formation. The society viewed the biological differences between the two, man and woman, as unequal states. That women have no physical power (muscles) is believed to be the reason why society puts women in a weak position (inferior). Clough (1994) states that muscular weakness cannot be used as a reason for putting women in an inferior position. Men are considered to have a strong physical power. However, physical strength is not an important factor in the relationship between men and women. Modern civilization is capable of replacing physical forces such as weapons, techniques, and knowledge. The excessive differences between men and women are visible because society treats them differently.

The ideology of patriarchy is too resilient to remove from society because society keeps it. The stereotype attached to a woman as a domestic worker makes her position weak because she does not earn money from her work on housekeeping. Domestic work is underestimated. In other side, it is considered as an obligation to a woman. Women are believed do not need to work and earn money. As a result, in they are always dependent on her husband. Millet in Wardani (2009) states that the ideology of patriarchy is difficult to weaken because women are economically dependent on men. That dependence happens throughout their life. Conventionalist believe that men are the main source of income in the family while women are housekeepers. It is believed that men work *outside* the house to earn for the family living, while women work *inside* the house to do all the homework. Women are not allowed to earn their own money because men take the responsibility when they get married.

In the context of this research, the researchers study the patriarchal discourse existing in the children's literature texts of that spread widely in society and in are delivered to children.

2

### ***Patriarchal Discourse in Children's Literature***

Children's literature cannot be examined by alone. Many litera<sup>25</sup> experts define it with different perspective. However, if the definitions are summarized, it can generally be said that children's literature is 'literature that is written and created specifically for the reading of the child (Oittinen 2002). One of the children's literature experts from Finland, Oittinen (2002) to question whether it is necessary to define children's literature because he thinks children's literature should be redefined. In England, children's literature did not first appear in children's literature, but in the form of adult literature. English literary books such as Gulliver's Travel, David Copperfield, Great Expectation, Around the World in 80 Days, and American literary books such as The Adventure of Huckleberry Film, Uncle Tom's Cabin and Winet are examples of adult literature that have been adapted and translated into various languages (German, French, Italian, Russian). The aim is to be read by the children as readers. In other words, children's literature was not specifically written to be read by a child reader, but a form of adaptation and simplification of the form of adult literature.

Oittinen (2002) argues that defining 'children's literature' is a separate issue because 'it might .... well be that today's adult literature is tomorrow's children literature. One example

of the problematic definition of children's literature can be seen from the case of the first Harry Potter series published in 1997 in the UK that sparked a debate over the issue of literary definitions. When the series' first came out, many readers suspect this book was shown for adult readers because of the thickness of each book (approximately 200 pages) as well as the complexity of the stories on offer. However, because the main characters are children, the issues raised are children's issues, the themes and messages conveyed are for children, i.e. friendship, determination, perseverance, and respect to share the story for the children, Harry Potter is then categorized as children's literature. In further developments, when the book series were launched children were scrambling to read with their parents or their older siblings. When this series of books was first offered by JK Rowling to publishers, the question appeared: "Is Harry Potter involved as storybook for children or for adult readers?" The author states that Harry Potter is dedicated to children's readers. This confirms that Harry Potter, although composed of over 200 pages, can be included in the category of children's literature.

### 3 Methodology

This study used a qualitative descriptive method. The data were collected from documentation of Nusantara classic children's literature, i.e. folklore and fairy tales in Indonesia. This study used field notes taking, coding to collect the data and then analyzed them by using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of existing texts.

The data analysis were gathered by the groups' field, for example, data on the role of leaders in the religious, economic, political, socio-cultural and so on. As for some of the stories of literary texts which will be the subject of analysis are *Sangkuriang*, *Timun Emas*, *Bawang Putih Bawang Merah*, and *Cinderelas*.

### 4. Discussion

Children run into how the identity of women and men can be legislated by their surrounding environment and dictate their roles and position in life. Literary works are included in the external elements portraying children's views towards themselves, that is how a "good" daughter and a son is supposed to be. 'How supposed to...' question is the value of "true/not true, good/bad, even pretty/not pretty, manly/not manly in one's mind. These might be shaped by the stories they had heard or read.

There are many found the idea of what an ideal woman supposed to be in Nusantara classic children's literature in folklore and fairy tales genre. Primarily women depicted in children's literature have become minor character as in *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih Sangkuriang*, *Timun Emas*, and *Cinderelas*. A minor character is the main character, but treated as the second sex, passive, sacrificed for, and weaknesses in this case women. In these literary works the woman main characters is portrayed as beautiful figures, kind-hearted, does the house domestics, and weak. Meanwhile, the man is depicted as a manly figure, a female's savior, and a hard worker. This description in line with what Sunarto (2007) describes that children's literature contributed to traditional male or female stereotypes. If children's literature works are used as edutainment to children, they are enabled to perpetuate traditional stereotypes. Folklore and fairy tales were heritage products and it was possible that there is a traditional gender role in them. However, gender stereotype is too complex to reveal. Thus, it needs a deep analysis to see it.

#### *Gender Role in Nusantara Classic Children's Literature*

There are many story illustrated in which women are constructed in genre of folklore in children's literature. Women depicted in children's literature are primarily the center of the

story or main character as in *Sangkuriang*, *Timun Emas*, *Bawang Merah Bawang Putih*, and *Cindelaras*. Those literary works portrayed women as a beautiful figure and kind-hearted. The character of *Bawang Putih*, for example, is depicted as a beautiful woman and has a good manner like *Cinderella*. This also applies in the character of *Dayang Sumbi* in *Sangkuriang*. The story encapsulates all the women in the definition of beauty.

There are found similarities between all the main character in the stories. *Dayang Sumbi*, *Timun Emas*, *Cindelaras*, and *Bawang Putih* besides described as having a beautiful face and kind-hearted, they were also not far from the depiction of domestication. However, domestication described certainly are at different levels depending on how the context of the story was taken. Empress and *Dayang Sumbi* for example, a woman character who came from the royal blood and the royal family, they undergone domestication and tend to be portrayed as a figure who diligently do their housework and do not have a role or occupancy outside their house works. Working outside the home in the context of the story *Sangkuriang* and *Cindelaras* were hunting, cockfighting, and affairs set up by the kingdom. In the other stories, *Timun Emas* and *Cindelaras* were from the common people in which context doing domestic work believed as the women's work.

The characterization of those women figure in folklore is most likely categorized as static characters in which the characteristics of the beautiful and kind-hearted and that the character never changes essentially in the whole story. As the story presents the black and white side, the protagonist and antagonist; every character in the children's literary work presents an overview of a fixed figure. The truth that in the real life one can possibly change from protagonist could be antagonistic and vice versa, of course, is hardly found in children's stories. *Dayang Sumbi*, *Timun Emas*, *Bawang Putih*, and *Cindelaras* constantly have a good character throughout the story. Moreover, despite they suffer pain repeatedly, *Bawang Putih* figures still depicted as a kind and loving to their sisters and stepmother who had tortured them.

On the other hand, *Timun Mas*, who is depicted as having the status of women from among the common people just like *Cinderella*, is portrayed as a heroic woman seen from defeating the giants who want to eat it. But, is *Timun Mas* really a symbol of heroic women? Again, it is digested that *Timun Mas* figure can be as a symbol of a weakness of a woman who depends on the survival pack of the hermits who help her. *Timun Mas* life could be saved because of four miraculous packs given by hermit. Both *Timun Mas* and *Cinderella* story shows magic and describes the story of common people's live. *Timun Mas* depends on the strength of hermit and *Cinderella* relies on the fairy powers to make her dream present in the royal ball came true. Both of the stories seemed like describing that women who are as common people portrayed as a kind of human who needs assistance of other elements outside of themselves.

There are two female characters who come from a higher social status *Dayang Sumbi* and *Empress*. They are not suffered significantly even though the two characters were narrated living in the jungle. *Dayang Sumbi* is exiled in the forest and is maintained and protected by the dog, *Tumang*, who was an incarnation of the god who later became her husband. Likewise, *Empress* was still alive because the duke did not kill her kingdom as the king commanded him.

Stories about *Bawang Merah dan Bawang Putih* presents a storyline that has similarities with the story of *Cinderella*. Similar to the story of *Cinderella*, in that story, *Bawang Putih* has a stepmother and a stepsister who tortured her. The difference is in the story ending. It is told that *Cinderella* has a happy ending because she finally marries a



prince. On the contrary, *Bawang Merah* and *Bawang Putih* does not narrate a romantic love. *Bawang Putih* gets her happiness when her stepmother and stepsister are finally died, bitten by venomous insects contained in a magical pumpkin from an old woman. *Bawang Putih* gets a magic gourd contained gold diamonds and gems. Otherwise, both of the villain character, the stepsister(s) and the stepmother get magical flask contained venomous insects. In the other words, the figure of the fairy godmother and the prince in the Cinderella fairytale have been replaced by a figure of a lonely old lady who has a magical pumpkin in the *Bawang Putih* story.

*Malin Kundang* story is not coming from the myth of beauty, as what is existed in fairy tales and other folklore. It is narrated that *Malin Kundang* has success in the foreign country, and has married to a beautiful woman come from respectable family. However, it is then ended up unhappily because *Malin* is cursed into stone, as the result of his disobedience to his mother. However, this story is still not possibly to be separated from the stereotype of women domestication. *Malin's* mother is told as a poor widow who has to give up her only child to wander and remains to wait for her son at home. *Malin's* mother always waited for his son, who promises to gain success in the distant country and to free their family from the poverty. The distant country, in this story, is a symbol of the world outside the home. Place where it is not allowed for women to enter. Meanwhile, *Malin* mothers who were constantly waiting for her son and still living in her hometown was a symbol of woman domestication.

#### ***Symbolic Power of Patriarchal Discourse in Children's Literature***

Patriarchal relationship built over the story occurs in and pass through cultural aspects. Folklore, in this case, becomes a cultural aspect that preserves the patriarchal relations. *Malin Kundang* story and *Sangkuriang* are depicting the origins of Indonesian society. Children read the story as an ordinary issue, because reading folklores have become a compulsory for Indonesian students. Folklore has been included in the curriculum in Indonesia. Meanwhile, other stories than Folklore have been often exposure to the public through the shows that circulated on television and the story written in the virtual world sites. Thus, the patriarchal discourse in the stories has directly become the legitimate consumed as reading or spectacle. This is certainly in line with the opinion of Bourdieu (1991) that the people of this era do not realize that there is a power that shackles them; the power is clearly visible in the front of the eye. However, unfortunately, the patriarchal discourse that was built in the stories it is not the power that is clearly visible on the front of the eye.

The patriarchal discourse structured in such a way into the stories is 'comfortable' to be enjoyed. In fact, the stories are a part of perpetuating the patriarchal discourse. How men have the power to define others with the authority has been seen in various stories in children's literature analyzed above. Prominent king in every story is envisaged to have power; an illustration in the story that was not much different from the story in the real world. The kings have the power to categorize reality according to their importance. The figure of the king in the story *Cindelas* has the power to determine the queen. He acted abominably in poison concubine and then have the power to throw even to kill anyway. Similarly, the figure of King Aaron told in the story of Abu Nawas. He had the power to determine the rights to judge a mother and to give punishment of her guilty.

The story of the king figure above had shown that the symbolic power of patriarchal discourse run through *sensorization* mechanism. *Sensorization* symbolic power preserves the value regarded as the moral dignity and removes the moral values that are considered low. Moral conserved is fairness, honesty, and loyalty. Meanwhile, low morale to be removed are lying and betrayal. The king in this figure is to preserve the moral justice. To be considered



fair, it is justified to punish the king who has done nothing wrong. Therefore, the story indirectly narrates that king figures conducting practice with the symbolic power of *sensorization* for the perpetuation of moral justice in every boy's identity. That would be a kindness if a boy has a morality like a king.

Meanwhile, the figure of queen Dayang Sumbi who was convicted for allegedly poisoning his concubine and still run her sentence as a form of obedience to the king. The mechanism of symbolic violence against women *euphemization* figures is practiced in the discourse of this story. Euphemization was a mechanism of symbolic violence that is not normally visible, works reasonably, and is unrecognized and selected by "unconscious", for example, can be trust, obligation, loyalty, courtesy, administration, loan, reward, or pity. The queen as the wife of the king is already obligated to be obedient and faithful. In the form of symbolic violence in euphemization the queen might unconsciously be a determinant of character as a good daughter, and is obedient to the king, in this case, the father or husband someday. Women do not have any other choice but to adhere to the king ruling over her despite the fact that she is not guilty. Obedient was the only way that made women rated as good. This is what narrated of the empress characterizations in this story.

In addition, the consort euphemization in Cindelaras story depicted on the mercy of the duke that still allows him to live and even build the house for her in the woods. Furthermore, that through her son's help, again, Cindelaras finally opens truth that he did not poison the empress consort instead concubine slanders. Indirectly, it also gives an overview to the girls that future life depended on men. Just as life of the empress who rely on help the Duke and the son.

In the story, "*Bawang Merah and Bawang Putih*" and "*Cinderella*" which had similarities, both the hero figure Bawang Putih and Cinderella has the kindness to brothers and stepmother who had tortured him. They have the belief and hope that one day the stepsister and stepmother love them. This is a form of symbolic violence shaped *euphemization*. It unconsciously constructs the character of the girls, that they would continue to believe in the power element outside them; although actually they are even living tortured. They have to keep silent even in a marginalized position in conditions of torture as Cinderella and Bawang Putih so that they will continue referring to as a good woman, even they could be a predicate as a hero.

Description of beauty that was in the genre of romance stories that tell the prince or royal princess is always presenting the beautiful female figure as in the story of Sangkuriang, Cindelaras, Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast. The cultural beliefs of society figure princess, queen, or a descendant of King as a beautiful figure. Thus, the description of this beauty can be said to be a form of symbolic violence of euphemism. The stories that build the subconscious mind of children that beautiful women are women who are able to be controlled as well and have a high value because in the future they will eventually be coupled with a king or prince. In fact, it can be possible that they will form the perspective of a beautiful woman as the perfect human figure and will get the life that ultimately happy ending. As the implications of this, formed the myth of beauty in their minds, it is not surprising their dreams will be beautiful.

## **5. Conclusion**

Children's literary works in the folklore and fairy tales genre have contributed to perpetuate patriarchal discourse. The female and male figures in the literature are portrayed through the traditional gender roles associated with the stereotype. This gender stereotype appears in the form of physical representation, physical abilities, attitudes, pleasures, and the

occupation of each character. Through such a way of depiction, the man in the children's literature is figured strong, having the pleasure of hunting. In the same time, the woman is always portrayed as being beautiful, having the task of cleaning up the house, waiting for their father or son to work abroad, needing help from a man or a miracle help to get out of trouble. All patriarchal discourse were represented in children's literature in two ways, *euphemization*, and *sensorization*.

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