



# Epic of *Mahabharata* in Kuntowijoyo's Novels: Aesthetic Response Analysis

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**Abstract.** This study aims to describe and reveal the meaning of the Epic Mahabharata in Kuntowijoyo's novels in terms of Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetic Response theory. The study of Iser's aesthetic response is basically centered on the process of interpreting the text produced through communication between the text and its reader, concerning (1) the way or act of reading; (2) the interaction between the text and the reader. Readers are directed to react to the text. Called an aesthetic response because it stimulates the imagination of the reader and gives the desired effect. Aesthetic response must be understood in the interaction between the text and reader. The research data source is a novel entitled *Mantra Pejina Ular*, and *Pasar* by Kuntowijoyo. This technique is carried out through 1) identification, 2) classification, 3) interpretation, and 4) inference. The results showed that 1) Kuntowijoyo's novels are inseparable from the epics of Mahabharata, especially in puppet (Javanese version). The Javanese version of wayang is shown by the appearance of the scene of Goro Goro and the Punakawan figures; 2) The epics of Mahabharata are the background for the creation of Kuntowijoyo's novels, including plots, names of characters, names of places and events.

**Keywords:** Epic · Mahabharata · Punakawan · Wolfgang Iser

## 1 Introduction

The stories of Mahabharata have been adapted in various genres of literary works, not only prose (short stories and novels) but also poetry and drama scripts performed on stage. The spread of the Mahabharata epic into literature throughout the archipelago with various adaptations indicates that the Ramayana and Mahabharata stories were once popular and received a positive reception from the community.

Two great epics have been known in ancient Indonesian literature: the Mahabharata. These two epics were initially written in Sanskrit. The epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata contain customs and human culture in the past [1]. The authors use puppet elements in their works to bring back the culture they feel so far. Those who were born and raised in regional culture, after becoming Indonesian people long for the sub-culture that has shaped them. This is an artistic longing that has significantly contributed to the development of Indonesian culture [2]. The epic Mahabharata is the story of the Pandavas when demanding their right to the royal throne, a struggle that must be completed through

Bharatayuda (war between the Bharata clan). During the reign of Darmawangsa, the epic Mahabharata began to be adapted into Javanese [3].

In the form of prose, the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata are presented in short stories and novels. Several modern Indonesian novels that contain Ramayana and Mahabharata's stories in novels by Kuntowijoyo include *Mantra Pejnak Ular*, and *Pasar*. Kuntowijoyo as a writer who is close to Javanese culture, certainly cannot be denied if his works present the world of puppet both in terms of story fragments, the world of puppet, and adaptations of the characters. The problem studied is the repertoire in the Novel *Mantra Pejnak Ular* and *Pasar*. This study discusses the embodiment of repertoire in the novel which is used as the background of creation so that the foreground that Kuntowijoyo aims for through the novel he created can be revealed.

What is realized in the novels, *Mantra Pejnak Ular*, and *Pasar* are related to the stories of Mahabharata as previous references, which are a form of "resources of knowledge" [4] owned by Kuntowijoyo. Resources of knowledge, when equated with Iser's concept, can be called a repertoire. In his book *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1987), Iser reveals aesthetic response and repertoire theory. Repertoire can be identified through references to previous works or to a set of norms that form the basis of creation, namely social, historical, and prevailing cultural norms that appear in the text while the aesthetic response must be understood in terms of the interaction between text and readers [5]. Called aesthetic response because the text is able to stimulate the imagination of the reader and give effect [6].

There are gaps to be negotiated in the act of reading. Thus the reader bridges the gap and communication between the text and the reader can begin [7]. Each interpretation is an act of translation that opens a space between the subject matter to be interpreted [8].

Repertoire cannot be separated from the aesthetic existence of the reception. Repertoire relates to the reader's ability to respond in the form of giving meaning through the acquisition of effects on the literary texts he reads.

This study discusses the story of Mahabharata as the embodiment of repertoire in the novels *Mantra Pejnak Ular*, and *Pasar*, which are used as the background of creation so that the foreground that Kuntowijoyo aims for through the novel he created can be revealed. The novels *Mantra Pejnak Ular*, and *Pasar* written by Kuntowijoyo cannot be separated from his experience relating to the reality of humanity as a reality in the real world. It becomes the background of creation to go to the foreground in his works as fiction in an imaginary world. It also reveals how far Kuntowijoyo has expressed his repertoire or resources of knowledge related to the Mahabharata stories as references that preceded the creation of the novels *Mantra Pejnak Ular*, and *Pasar*.

## 2 Results and Discussion

Previous references contained in Kuntowijoyo's novels (*Mantra Pejnak Ular*, *Pasar*), are the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata that appear in the texts contained in the novel. Previous references in the form of the Mahabharata stories appear in the text as a form of a repertoire of the creation of Kuntowijoyo's works. The emergence of the story of Mahabharata in the novels *Mantra Pejnak Ular*, and *Pasar* is described as follows.

## 2.1 Puppet Story in Mantra Pejina Ular's Novel

Regarding puppet as a previous reference presented in the *Mantra Pejina Ular* novel, it appears in the fragments of the Mahabharata stories. The story of puppet presented in *Mantra Pejina Ular's* novel can be seen in the quote below.

*...andaikan wayang, begitu dia seperti Banowati, istri raja Astina, tapi tergilagila dengan Arjuna. Sebentar Abu berpikir, pilih jadi Suyudana, Raja Astina atau Arjuna [9; p. 29].*

...if a puppet, then she is like Banowati, the wife of the king of Astina, but is infatuated with Arjuna. For a moment Abu thought, choose to be Suyudana, King Astina or Arjuna. [9; p. 29].

In the quote above, it can be seen that puppet is the previous reference used by Kuntowijoyo in the creation of *Mantra Pejina Ular* novel. The puppet reference can be seen from the comparison of the names of the characters in the puppet and the names of the characters in the novel. Kuntowijoyo presents the characters Lastri and Abu Kasan Sapari in the *Mantra Pejina Ular* novel, while in the Mahabharata puppet story, Kuntowijoyo presents the characters Banowati, Suyudana, and Arjuna. Kuntowijoyo likens or compares Lastri's character in *Mantra Pejina Ular* to Banowati in Mahabharata. In addition, the character of Abu Kasan Safari in *Mantra Pejina Ular* is related to the character of Suyudana and Arjuna. This comparison of the two characters, namely the character in the novel and the character in the Mahabharata puppet, cannot be separated from Kuntowijoyo's resources of knowledge as a writer. Kuntowijoyo's resources of knowledge cannot be separated from his knowledge of the world of puppet, both the Mahabharata Ramayana, as well as the storyline, story characters, and characters in puppet. Thus, it is not difficult for Kuntowijoyo to present the story of Banowati as the wife of a king named Suyudana but Banowati loves Arjuna more. Other Mahabharata characters presented by Kuntowijoyo in *Mantra Pejina Ular* novel, can be seen in the quote below.

*Namun manusia yang gentur tapanya bisa lebih sakti dari Dewa. Arjuna alias Ciptoning dapat mengalahkan Newatakawaca dan dihadiahi Dewi paling top Dewi Supraba. Batara Indra turun dari langit bersama para guru dewi yang jumlahnya 9, menjadi prototype tari bedaya. Orang Jawa bilang langit itu kosong alias awang awung ternyata keliru. Langit itu padat penghuni, ada nur Tuhan, ada dewa dewa, ada malaikat, ada roh-roh [9].*

However, humans who are gentle in their asceticism can be more powerful than gods. Arjuna or Ciptoning was able to defeat Newatakawaca and was rewarded with the top Goddess, Dewi Supraba. Batara Indra descended from the sky with 9 teachers of the goddess, becoming the prototype of the *bedaya* dance. The Javanese say that the sky is empty, *awang awung*, which turns out to be wrong. The sky is densely populated, there are divine lights, there are gods, there are angels, and there are spirits [9].

“Darmakusuma: Oke

Kresna: Werkudara, bagaimana keadaan Jodipati?

Werkudara: Wah, kalau bertanya jangan secara umum begitu, tapi lebih terperinci.”

...

[9]

Darmakusuma: okay

Krishna: Werkudara, how is Jodipati?

Werkudara: Well, if you ask questions, don't do that in general, but in more detail.

[9]

Berkali-kali Semar mengingatkan hal itu, namun Raden Arjuna selalu menjawab dengan 'besok'. Tentu hal ini sangat menjengalkan Semar. Suatu hari Semar dan anak-anaknya menghilang. Madukara jadi lemah. Tidak bisa menahan serangan Astina. Tidak bisa menahan serangan dari Kerajaan Raksana Sawuraja. Kadipaten Madukara dikapling-kapling. Raden Arjuna terpaksa lari ke Amarta mengadukan nasibnya dalam "goro-goro". Di akhir cerita, Kresna menganjurkan supaya Arjuna meminta bantuan Raja atas angin yang ternyata Semar dan anak-anaknya.

[9].

Semar repeatedly reminded him of this, but Raden Arjuna always answered with 'tomorrow'. Of course, this is very upsetting Semar. One day Semar and his children disappeared. Madukara becomes weak. Unable to withstand Astina's attack. Unable to withstand attacks from the Kingdom of Raksana Sawuraja. The Duchy of Madukara is divided into lots. Raden Arjuna was forced to run to Amarta to complain about his fate in "goro-goro". At the end of the story, Krishna suggests that Arjuna ask the King for help over the wind, which turns out to be Semar and his children [9].

The two text quotes from *Mantra Pejina Ular*'s novel above reflect Kuntowijoyo's knowledge as a writer. Through the text above, it appears that Kuntowijoyo understands the Mahabharata figures, namely Arjuna, Supraba, Darmakusuma, Kresna, Werkudara, Nawatakawaca, and Bathara Indra. Kuntowijoyo as a Javanese who understands Javanese culture very closely, especially puppet, certainly has no difficulty in adapting the characters in puppet to be presented in his novel entitled *Mantra Pejina Ular*. Not only the characters, but Kuntowijoyo is good at packaging the storyline and the relationships between the characters in the puppet. Kuntowijoyo as a writer and humanist who understands Islam, of course in writing his novels it is not only limited to stringing words but there are intentions that will be conveyed in his work, namely transcendental intentions or human relations with God. This can be seen in the quote "Javanese people say the sky is empty, "*awang awung*", turns out to be wrong. "The sky is densely populated, there are divine lights, there are gods, there are angels, there are spirits." From this quote, it can be understood that most Javanese people think that the sky is only limited to the sky. But for people who believe, the sky is considered a light or a manifestation of God's existence. Thus, for people who believe, he will believe in the existence of God even though God is invisible to the eye.

In the Javanese version of the fragrance story, there are many new characters that are not found in the Indian version of the wayang story. These figures were created and adapted to Javanese culture. An example of a new character in wayang is the Punakawan figures. Punokawan consists of four people, namely Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong.

The Javanese version of the puppet has Punakawan figures (Semar, Petruk, Gareng, and Bagong) who represent the common people. In wayang performances, Punakawan becomes a medium for social criticism and raises the voice of the common people. Punakawan [10] figures convey messages of kindness and local wisdom related to human character, relationships between humans, and human relationships with nature and the environment.

*Mantra Pejina Ular* novel text excerpt, there is the character Semar. Semar is a punokawan with a wise character. Semar is present as a servant who takes care of the knights. In the text excerpt, Kuntowijoyo wrote that Arjuna asked the King of Atas Angin for help, who turned out to be Semar. This text quote is Kuntowijoyo's background knowledge regarding the world of puppet, especially Punokawan Semar. Semar as the King of the Wind has a tendency that Semar describes the leader and the people. There is a social criticism that Kuntowijoyo wants to convey that leaders should have leadership and wisdom. Semar in the wayang story is a symbol of the leader while the knights raised by Semar are symbols of the state. [11] Semar character is in the Javanese version of the Ramayana and Mahabharata stories and is not found in the original book in the Sanskrit Wiracarita.

## 2.2 Mahabharata Story in Pasar Novel

Novel *Pasar* by Kuntowijoyo describes a piece of the story in the Mahabharata story as a previous reference used to create or appear in the novel *Pasar*. The story of the Mahabharata can be seen in the quote below.

*Iniilah yang diperbuat Arjuna ketika menghadapi resi Bima. Tidak salah lagi, pahlawan itu mencintai musuhnya, yang juga moyangnya. Tetapi lenyapkanlah dirimu bersama tujuan yang mulia. Muliakanlah dirimu bersama dengan kepentingan manusia. Mungkin itu menyiksamu. Menyedihkanmu. Menyengsarakanmu. Tetapi apa artinya setitik air dalam samudra yang luas. Dan siapakah sangkamu sang Adipati Karna itu? Ia tahu, pandawa itu saudaranya sendiri tetapi ia memihak Kurawa, padahal sudah jelas bahwa ia akan hancur. Mengapa? Ia seorang pemberani. Satria itu menempatkan dirinya sebagai bagian dari warga yang hidup di Astina. Ia adalah bagian dari Negara itu. Ia hanya satu bagian yang harus ikut dalam arus besar yang disebut perang Baratayuda [12].*

This is what Arjuna did when he faced the sage Bhima. Unmistakably, the hero loved his enemy, who was also his ancestor. But obliterate yourself with a noble cause. Glorify yourselves along with human interests. Maybe it tortures you. Sad for you. It hurts you. But what does a drop of water mean in a vast ocean? And who do you think the Duke of Karna is? He knew that the Pandavas were his own brothers, but he sided with the Kauravas, even though it was clear that he would be destroyed. Why? He is a daredevil. The warrior places himself as part of the citizens who live in Astina. It is part of that State. He is only one part that must participate in the great current called the Baratayuda war [12].

In the excerpt of the Mahabharata story contained in the text of the novel *Pasar* by Kuntowijoyo, it can be seen that there is the use of the names of the characters in the

Mahabharata story, namely Arjuna, Resi Bima, Adipati Karna, and Kurawa. In addition, there is a major event in the Mahabharata story contained in the text of the novel *Pasar*, namely the Baratayuda war.

Kuntowijoyo considers that literary works must provide a balance between social themes and spiritual themes, between personal involvement in humanitarian issues and worship activities, between the worldly and the hereafter, historical activism, and religious experience. Most of Kuntowijoyo's works depict prophetic.

Kunto emphasized his position as the originator of prophetic literature. Prophetic literature is literature that is involved in the history of humanity. Kunto deliberately did not use the term Islamic literature because he thought it was too narrow. His desire with literature is literature as worship and pure literature. Worship literature expresses his appreciation of religious values, and pure literature is an expression of his capture of reality [13].

Through his work, Kuntowijoyo protested how to worship God who does not care about humans or other God's creatures (animals and plants), Kunto seemed to want to emphasize that social worship (humanization) is as crucial as ritual worship to God (transcendence). Kuntowijoyo views literary works as a structuralization of experience, both personal experience, the experience of others, collective experience, and the experience of research results. From these experiences, writers work to write their works. According to him, literary works are also seen as structuring imagination. For him, literary works are also a structuration of values derived from religion, philosophy, science, proverbs, and everyday wisdom. These values are then internalized in the text [14].

### 3 Conclusion

The results showed that Kuntowijoyo's novels are inseparable from the epics of Mahabharata, especially in puppet (Javanese version). The Javanese version of wayang is characterized by the presence of Punakawan figures, namely Semar, Gareng, Petruk, and Bagong. This Punakawan character is not found in the Indian version of the puppet story. The Punakawan character is a new character in the Mahabharata puppet which has been adapted to Javanese culture. Another Javanese version of the puppet marker is the story of goro-goro. Goro-goro is one of the episodes in the wayang kulit (purwa) performance in the Javanese cultural tradition. Goro-goro is a part of a wayang performance which is usually marked by the appearance of clowns. In Goro-goro there is advice interspersed with humorous stories by clowns. Secondly, The epics of Mahabharata are the background for the creation of Kuntowijoyo's novels, including plots, names of characters, names of places and events. This shows Kuntowijoyo's knowledge in the world of puppet as basic knowledge or background in realizing the foreground, namely the creation of the novel *Mantra Pejina Ular* and *Pasar*.

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