



Reading Nature in *The Raja Indara Pitara* Folktales: A Literary Ecological Study of Human and Environmental Harmony

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the representation of nature and ecological ethics that show the human-environment relationship in the folktale of *Raja Indara Pitara* using the environmental ethics perspective by A. Sonny Keraf to map the ecological imagery, moral practices and value horizons offered in the folktale text. The data contained in this study are in the form of narratives, dialogues, and monologues sourced from the folktale book “Raja Indara Pitara” written by Rahmawati. This study was a literature study using a qualitative descriptive method. With a literary ecology approach (ecocriticism), data analysis was carried out by conducting a close reading of the text. This study used a coding scheme based on nine principles of environmental ethics according to Keraf (2010). The results of this study indicate that the *Raja Indara Pitara* folktale contains 1) ecological harmony, which is seen through the attitude of respect for nature, shown by the characters of King Burinaga and King Indara Pitara, 2) the principle of human responsibility and integrity as guardians of nature, 3) the principle of cosmic solidarity: nature as partner of life in which forests, seas, chickens, birds, snake, shrimps, fireflies, ants, forest, trees, and rain are not just backgrounds, but ethical subjects that guide the actions of the characters and show cosmic solidarity, 4) the principle of compassion and concern for all creatures is seen from *Bhangke-bhangkele*’s caring attitude towards Indara Pitara, mutual help between King Burinaga and the Eagle, Indara Pitara’s caring for La Upa, snakes, and sparrows, 5) the principle of no harm to nature, namely Indara Pitara does not kill but only threatens when protecting a fallen tree from a snake’s attack, 6) the principle of simple living in harmony with nature shown by Indara Pitara in his daily life with grandmother *Bhangke-bhangkele* and her chicken, and 7) the principle of justice and ecological democracy is seen when two sparrows quarrel over a wooden branch inherited from their ancestors, Indara Pitara mediates fairly without taking sides. From this study, it can be concluded that the *Raja Indara Pitara* folktale represents seven ecological harmonies through the principles of Sonny Keraf’s environmental ethics. This story teaches us that the harmony of humans and nature is guided by moral values, solidarity of creatures, and spiritual ecological awareness.

Keywords: Literary Ecology, Keraf Environmental Ethics, Raja Indara Pitara Folktale.

1. Introduction

Environmental crises can pose serious threats to ecosystems, biodiversity, and even human life. The way humans interact with and treat nature can have negative consequences, resulting in environmental crises, or conversely, these interactions can have positive effects, contributing to environmental sustainability. The positive or negative consequences of human actions are influenced by ethics, which also forms how humans treat nature. Ethics, as unwritten rules of society, serve to guide people's behavior, including toward the environment.

Environmental ethics is understood as a scientific discipline that discusses the moral norms and rules that govern human behavior in relation to nature, as well as the moral values and principles that inspire human behavior in relation to nature (Keraf, 2010: 40). Environmental ethics, along with the development of knowledge and research using various approaches, not only discusses human perspectives and behavior towards nature, but also includes all non-human creatures in human moral concerns towards nature. The development of environmental ethics, according to Keraf (2010: 41), also discusses the relationship between all life in the universe, namely between humans and humans who have impact on nature, and between humans and other living creatures or with nature as a whole. This even includes various economic and political policies that have an impact on nature. This understanding provides a description of the reciprocal relationship between all forms of life in the universe and the environment studied in the science of ecology. In the context of literary ecology, this reciprocal relationship between humans and nature and ethics is a complementary relationship. Literary ecology is a science that studies how humans adapt to and maintain the environment well (Endraswara, 2016). This study emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between literature and ecology.

Literary ecology is often referred to as literary ecocriticism. Both have the same meaning, as stated by Glofelty and Fromm (1996) "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". Ecocriticism views literary texts as cultural spaces that store ecological knowledge, ethical values, and local wisdom related to the environment. This is in line with ecocriticism according to Garrard (2023), that Ecocriticism explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production. In this regard, Greg Garrard defines literary ecology as an interdisciplinary study that examines the representation of nature and the environment in literary works, and how literature can shape ecological and ethical awareness towards nature. Keraf (2010) formulated ethics towards nature into nine principles of environmental ethics, namely: 1) respect for nature, 2) moral responsibility for nature, 3) cosmic solidarity, 4) caring for nature, 5) no harm, 6) living simply and in harmony with nature, 7) justice, 8) democracy, 9) moral integrity. This ecological and ethical awareness towards nature can be seen through literary works, one of which is the folktale of Raja Indara Pitara.

Raja Indara Pitara folktale is one of the literary treasures of the Kulisusu people, especially the Kulisusu tribe who inhabit North Buton Regency, Southeast Sulawesi Province. The folktale does not explicitly have an environmental theme, however, the

building blocks in the Raja Indara Pitara folktale, both the setting and the characters in it, involve nature, represent the character's relationship with nature, and contain ecological wisdom which can be a reference in maintaining human-nature harmony so as to prevent environmental crises. Raja Indara Pitara tells the story of a child named Indara Pitara who came from the Burinaga Kingdom. His father was king who ruled responsible and wise, and his mother was an empress who was loved by all the Burinaga people. The Burinaga people are safe, calm and happy, the kingdom is prosperous, but the king's family life feels incomplete because there is no crown prince as the successor to the kingdom. Until one day the king vowed "if the Almighty is willing to give me a child, I will be willing even if I don't see his body". A month later, the queen became pregnant and craved mangoes from Pangka Island, which was guarded by a giant. The mangoes from Pangka Island were obtained thanks to the help of an eagle. Nine months later, a child was born, named Indara Pitara. At the age of one, Indara Pitara was struck down with a very severe case of scabies. A fortune teller from Walangka predicted that Indara Pitara's illness was an unusual itchy disease, and that he should be taken to the middle of the sea for treatment. For the sake of his son's recovery, the king and his entourage took Indara Pitara sailing. After a week of sailing, the weather was unfriendly, with strong winds and high waves. In the middle of the night, without anyone realizing it, Indara Pitara was blown away by lightning. The king was very sad and remembered his vow, so he said, "Turn around, we're going back to Burinaga".

While the group was busy returning to Burinaga, far away, a *Bhangke-bhangkele* (a term for an old woman in Kulisusu) found a baby lying in the yard of her simple hut on the edge of the forest, the baby was none other than Indara Pitara, the Crown Prince of the Burinaga kingdom. *Bhangke-bhangkele* cared for and raised Indara Pitara with great love like his own grandson. Indara Pitara grew into a handsome young man and diligently helped his grandmother with work. One day Indara Pitara said goodbye to go for a walk to the city. On his way, Indara Pitara helped a child named La Upa whose leg was caught in the roots of a large tree that crossed the middle of the forest and took him to his hut located behind the mountain. After dropping off La Upa, Indara Pitara continued his journey to the city, where Indara Pitara heard about a competition that anyone who could kick his body until it entered the window of the king's daughter and could win a cockfight, would be married to the princess. Indara Pitara won seven consecutive cockfights and managed to insert his body into the king's daughter's window right on top of her lap. Some time passed, the king was struck by illness and could be cured with the *Kungkumabulawa* fruit. The *Kungkumbulawa* tree only bears one seed and is located in a very dangerous area because it is closely guarded by wild animals. The king held a competition for whoever could collect the fruit, who would receive a large reward from the king. Indara Pitara participated in the competition to find out *Kungkumbulawa* fruit by including the musk bird that was born at the same time as him. Indara Pitara managed to get the fruit after overcoming several obstacles and magical events. The fruit then healed the king. A month later, Indara Pitara married the king's daughter. After his father-in-law died, Indara Pitara was crowned a king.

From the story above, it is shown that the story of King Indara Pitara implicitly contains an ecological context of local wisdom values related to nature that conveys a message of conservation through the narrative and ecological symbolism contained in

the story, which not only has functions as entertainment or moral education, but also as a mirror of human relations with the ecosystem that supports their lives. By using the theory of literary ecology and environmental ethics of A. Sonny Keraf, this study can provide important conceptual elements are integrated aesthetically and ethically in literary texts so that they can reveal the ecological awareness of readers or even the Kulisusu community as the owners of the folktale. Although the study of literary ecology has been applied to various folktales in Indonesia, such as research conducted by Annisa, et. al. (2022) who analyzed literary ecology in East Javanese folktales with a focus on the interaction of characters in understanding the environment and the character of wise characters in utilizing nature in depth studies on the study of Literary Ecology on Kulisusu folktales are still very limited and have never been studied before in the folktale of Raja Indara Pitara. This research gap shows that is important to explore how the narrative of Raja Indara Pitara is understood through the perspective of literary ecology to enrich the understanding of ecological values in this case ecological ethics and its contribution to environmental conservation. Based on this, the study of literary ecology in folklore in the form of folktale entitled Raja Indara Pitara uses the perspective of environmental ethics of A. Sonny Keraf in this study, raising the issues of how the fairy tale of Raja Indara Pitara represents nature as an ethical subject and builds human harmony with the environmental ethics of A. Sonny Keraf?

2. Method

This research is a literature study using a qualitative descriptive method. The data contained in this study are in the form of narratives, dialogues, monologues obtained from data sources in the form of folklore in the form of folktales with title “Raja Indara Pitara” consisting of 53 pages written by Rahmawati. The data collection techniques were carried out using documentation techniques. According to Arikunto in Sundari (2021) documentation techniques are looking for data regarding things or variables in the form of notes taking, transcripts, books, newspapers, magazines, inscriptions, meeting minutes, agendas, and so on. The data collection techniques used in this study are: 1) collecting printed/written versions of the King Indara Pitara folktale manuscripts, 2) identifying descriptions of nature, humans, animals, plants, and ecological relationships in the folklore, 3) coding the text according to A Sonny Keraf’s nine principles of environmental ethics. This research uses a literary ecology approach where literary works are viewed not only as texts, but also as representations of human relationships with nature. Sonny A. Keraf (2010) emphasizes moral values and human responsibility towards nature, so that literary texts are read as symbolic spaces that contain ethical messages about the sustainability and preservation of nature. After the data is collected, data analysis is then carried out, Sugiyono (2013) stated that data analysis usually contains three main components, namely data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions.

In the context of the Raja Indara Pitara folktale, this study focuses on how the tale of Raja Indara Pitara represents nature as an ethical subject and makes the ethics of human relations with the environment according to the nine principles of environmental

ethics by A. Sonny Keraf, with the following analysis steps: 1) identifying ecological elements in the text by conducting close reading, in this case collecting data in the form of descriptive quotes about forests, water, land, animals, plants, and elements of the cosmos, and marking parts of the story that show the relationship between humans and nature, 2) classifying data by using coding techniques according to A. Sonny Keraf, 3) interpreting the ecological moral message or ecological wisdom from the human nature relationship in the folktale, 4) linking the results of the interpretation with current environmental issues and showing the message of environmental ethics in the *King Indara Pitara* folktale. Through the methods used, this research not only uncovers the structural elements of literary work but also establishes the *Raja Indara Pitara* folktale as a text containing an ethical message regarding human responsibility to maintain a harmonious relationship with nature. This research is also expected to make an academic contribution to enriching literary studies while promoting ecological awareness based on local wisdom through folklore.

3. Result and Discussion

The tale of Raja Indra Pitara originates from the Kulisusu region. This tale has been passed down orally by the Kulisusu ethnic group in North Buton Regency. North Buton Regency was previously part of Muna Regency, which later split in 2007. This Study examines how the tale of Indra Pitara represents nature as an ethical subject and builds harmony between humans and the environment according to the nine principles of environmental ethics by A. Sonny Keraf, as follows.

3.1 The Raja Indara Pitara Folktale Reflects Ecological Harmony Through a Portrayal of Respect for Nature

From a literary ecological perspective, this story not only contains the magic of spiritual figures and myths through the main character, Raja Indara Pitara, or King Burinaga, but also depicts the perspectives of the Kulisusu people, as the story's authors, regarding nature as a living entity to be respected, as follows:

“Indara Pitara walked happily along the edges of the forest. His heart constantly praised the creator of nature. He admired the beauty of the wildflowers, the melodious chirping of birds, and the gurgling water of the river in front of him.” (pages 22-23)

This quote demonstrates a sense of respect, awe, and appreciation for nature, expressed through the raise of the creator for the beauty he witnessed along his forest walk. Furthermore, the cohesiveness and integrity of the ecological community are reflected in the harmony of nature, depicted in the story through the beauty of wildflowers and the melodious chirping of birds.

3.2 The principle of Responsibility and Human Integrity as Guardians of Nature

In the story entitled “The King’s Vow” King Burinaga embodies a sense of responsibility towards his family and the universe. He fulfills his vow with sincerity and does not complain about fate. He faces the challenges of nature (the sea and storms) with a non-grid attitude and integrity as a guardian of natural harmony, as seen in the following quote:

“Perhaps last night during the storms, the crown prince was blown away by the lighting king, sir. “The king said nothing. His heart ached for his son. He remembered his vow he had once made. He stood up and said, “Turn around, let’s return to Burinaga.” (Page 19)

This quote demonstrates that the king in the fairy tale continuously fulfilled his responsibilities as a father, desiring his son’s recovery, even in the face of a storm. The storm also causes the loss of his vow, desiring offspring, even though he has not seen his son’s body, responsibility for his vow consequences of his vow can be described as the king’s integrity in maintaining harmony with nature. He does not force himself to search for his son, recognizing the consequences of every action. The principle of responsibility is also evident when the king decides to sail to Pangka Island for the mangoes his queen desires, illustrating human actions that bear moral consequences and are faithful to promises.

The achievement of ecological integrity is seen in the culmination of *Raja Indara Pitara*’s Journey in Heaven to obtain the *Kungkumbulawa* fruit, as he undergoes the test honestly and respects the laws of the cosmos. The fruit is not just medicine, but a symbol of healing for nature. King Burinaga’s recovery after consuming *Kungkumbulawa* fruit enabled him to resolve family disputes and prevent the kingdom from falling into chaos, as quoted in the quote:

“If I remain here, this fruit will not be able to save the king. Right now, the figure of the king is desperately needed to resolve family disputes. If the king dies at a time like this, the kingdom will be in chaos. “ (page 47).

In Keraf’s view, ecological integrity means maintaining the integrity of the entire system of life, such as the mutually supportive relationship between humans, animals, and plants in this story, which exist in cosmic harmony.

3.3 The principle of cosmic solidarity: Nature as a Partner in life

Cosmic solidarity is an ethical and philosophical concept that reflects the awareness of the interconnectedness and togetherness of all creatures in the universe-humans, animal’s plants, and other natural elements-in a single, interdependent life. In the folktale of *Raja Indara Pitara*, the forest, sea, chickens, bird, snakes, shrimp, fireflies, ants,

woods, trees, and rain are not merely backdrops, but ethical subjects that guide the character's actions and demonstrate cosmic solidarity.

Cosmic solidarity is evident in the story "Searching for *Kungkumbulawa* Fruit." During his journey through the forest, *Indara Pitara* helps a piece of wood that is about to be devoured by a black snake but is prevented by *Indara Pitara*. *Indara Pitara* threatened the black snake not to devour the wood. The snake then gave in and said:

"No, *Indara Pitara*. I apologize. I'll give you one of my scales." (page 33)

After saying this, *Indara Pitara* released the snake and took one of its scales which he used as a canoe to cross the river. In the section of the story, entitled "Meeting the Angels", there are several instances of cosmic solidarity between *Indara Pitara* and animals and plants. This cosmic solidarity is demonstrated more by the network of life between *Indara Pitara* and animals and plants, including the universal brotherhood demonstrated by Rattan when *Raja Indara Pitara* was confused about how to find his way to heaven. Suddenly, *Uwencina* (rattan) offered his help, as seen in the following quote:

"Suddenly, the rattan circle seven hills and seven valleys, 'Climb on, *Indara Pitara*. Step on the ring attached to my body.'" (page 41)

Besides rattan, fireflies also offered their help when *Indara Pitara* began to ponder how to complete the task set by the king of heaven. Their solidarity can be seen in the following quote:

"Calm down, *Indara Pitara*. It's an easy matter. Before you enter the room, I will enter first. Just pay attention to which bed I am in: that is the bed of the youngest angel." (page 43)

In the story of "Nazar sang Raja", the presence of the eagle that helps King Burinaga outwit the giant reflects cosmic solidarity, representing the awareness that humans and other creatures are interconnected. As in the quote when the eagle asks King Burinaga to join him on his journey to find mangoes on Pangka Island:

"My lord, allow me to join you on this journey....I am the eagle you once helped in the Kemayan Forest." (Page 5)

The king who once helped the eagle now receives help from it. This reciprocal pattern confirms Keraf's view that humans do not stand alone above nature but are equal within the cosmic web. The king's salvation comes from harmony between humans and animals, not human domination over them. Thus, the story of *Raja Indara Pitara* emphasizes the mutualistic relationship between humans and nature within an ecological moral system.

3.4 The principle of Compassion and concern for All Creatures

From childhood to adulthood, *Indara Pitara* displays compassion for other creatures. He saves a child named La Upa who is trapped by tree roots and helps animals in distress, such as snakes and sparrows. This emphatic attitude is a form of compassionate ecology, where compassion extends not only to humans but also to all living things. From this perspective, compassion for fellow creatures is the moral foundation for environmental conservation.

3.5 The Principle of No Harm to Nature

When *Indara Pitara* lived with *Bhangke-bhangkele* on the edge of the forest, he learned to live with nature without destroying it. He helped his grandmother's garden, planted cassava, and collected water as needed without excessive exploitation or domination. Another no harm attitude is evident when *Indara Pitara* did not kill but only threatened to protect a fallen tree from a snake. This principle aligns with Keraf's environmental ethics, which emphasizes no harm to nature, which requires that human behavior consider the ecological impact of every action. *Indara Pitara*'s relationship with nature demonstrates a form of ecological caution, such as when *Indara Pitara* did not kill a snake but only threatened to protect a fallen tree from a snake attack.

3.6 The Principle of Living Simply and in Harmony with Nature

The lives of *Indara Pitara* and *Bhangke-bhangkele* reflect the values of ecological asceticism, representing a simple life of moderation, moderation, and harmony with nature. They do not pursue material wealth, but rather moral and spiritual well-being through their respect for nature. This principle of simple living conveys a message that humans should reduce the "greed" that is at the root of ecological crisis. In the context of the Raja *Indara Pitara* folktale, the simplicity of life in the forest is not a compulsion, but an ethical choice to maintain harmony between humans and the environment.

3.7 The Principle of Ecological Justice and Democracy

Ecological justice is evident in *Indara Pitara*'s actions, which do not discriminate between humans, animals, or supernatural beings. When two sparrows quarrel over a wooden branch inherited from their ancestors, *Indara Pitara* acts as a fair and impartial mediator. He respects the right of all creatures to their living space. This action reflects the principle of ecological justice, which states that every creature has the right to enjoy a decent life without being usurped by human greed.

While the value of ecological democracy is evident in the contest and the journey to find out *Kungkumbulawa* fruit, the value of ecological democracy is evident in the open attitude towards cooperation between elements of nature. *Indara Pitara*, assisted by eagles, snakes, ants, and fireflies, demonstrates the participatory principle that

all elements of the ecosystem play a role in maintaining harmony. Sonny Keraf calls this ecological democracy, in which humans must give space to the voices and presence of other creatures within an inclusive system of life.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the Raja Indara Pitara folktale represents ecological harmony through Sonny Keraf's principles of environmental ethics. This story teaches us that the harmony or balance between humans and nature is guided by moral values, the solidarity of creatures, and spiritual ecological awareness. Nature is not an object to be conquered, but rather an equal subject of life within an interdependent cosmic system. This teaches us the importance of wisely coexisting with nature to prevent environmental crises. Thus, this story is not merely a folktale but also contains an ecological metaphor that teaches humanity's ethical responsibility towards its environment.

Disclosure of Interest. The authors declare that the authors have no known competing financial interests or personal relationship that could have appeared to influence work reported in this paper.

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