



Gender Representation in Madurese Folktales: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study explores gender representation in Madurese folktales using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). By analyzing two selected folktales, *The Origin of the Madurese People* and *Menak Sanaya*, the research examines textual, discursive, and sociocultural dimensions to understand how gender roles are portrayed and their implications on societal perceptions. The findings revealed a recurring pattern of patriarchal ideologies where male characters were depicted as dominant, protective, and decision-makers. In contrast, female characters were relegated to subordinate roles, often portrayed as passive and reliant on male intervention. These representations reflected traditional Madurese societal values and contribute to the reinforcement of gender hierarchies. The study highlighted how narratives serve as tools for intergenerational transmission of cultural norms, shaping collective consciousness and perpetuating gender stereotypes. Insights from this research emphasize the need for critical engagement with cultural narratives to foster discussions on gender equality.

Keywords: CDA, Gender Representation, Madurese Folktales



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

In facing global challenges, preserving cultural heritage is necessary to express love and appreciation for one's culture. Cultural heritage is an asset not only for a culture but also for a nation. As cited in Brata et al. (2022), cultural heritage can be classified into three categories: intangible cultural heritage, such as the value of harmony; tangible cultural heritage, such as the keris (traditional dagger); and intangible heritage, which can be experienced through the senses,

such as folktales. Madura, an island in East Java, is one of the regions that actively preserves its cultural heritage. This is evident through annual traditions and traditional arts that are still practiced, such as folktales.

Madura's folktales are stories passed down orally from generation to generation. These tales usually depict life events, such as origins, births, romantic relationships, conflicts, struggles, and miracles associated with the ancestors of Madura. These folktales serve as a reflection of society, imparting moral lessons to their listeners or readers. In other words, the ancestors of Madura used folktales as an effective medium for transmitting cultural values, norms, and perspectives on gender roles within society. Consequently, these tales provide a discourse to explore how men and women are represented.

Moreover, as traditional narratives, folktales hold significant authority in shaping social roles. This is consistent with Knapp (2005), who argues that narratives serve as a medium capable of transforming perspectives and shaping individual identities. Consequently, folktales are often recounted to introduce cultural identities, encompassing beliefs, social norms, and perceptions of gender roles within society, as illustrated through plotlines and character interactions.

According to Srikandi and Erlangga (2019), the concept of gender is reflected in the separation of the domestic sphere as the feminine sphere for women and the public sphere as the masculine sphere for men. Gender issues in narrative texts have become a focal point of numerous studies, including research on folktales. This is because gender representations in folktales are complex. These stories often implicitly reflect power relations, hegemony, and patriarchy. Additionally, folktales reinforce existing stereotypes and portray non-neutral gender roles, where men are frequently represented as dominant figures responsible for leadership and decision-making. At the same time, women are relegated to subordinate roles, depicted as complementary or supportive characters in society.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach utilized to interpret texts in relation to social phenomena and their broader implications. This aligns with Van Dijk (2001), who asserts that CDA emphasizes power and inequality as manifested in social structures (Rohanna & Syamsuddin, 2022). Accordingly, CDA is applied in this research to investigate how language usage within discourse correlates with power, ideology, and social relations. This approach is instrumental in examining gender representation by exploring how language in Madurese folktales reflects and perpetuates gender ideologies within Madurese society.

CDA has been extensively developed by scholars such as Sara Mills, Teun A. Van Dijk, Michel Foucault, and Norman Fairclough. This study employs Fairclough's model of CDA due to

its relevance to gender issues within critical discourse. Fairclough (2013) states that CDA seeks to establish connections between text structures, discourse practices (text production, distribution, and consumption), and broader sociocultural practices. Fairclough introduced a framework known as the Three-Dimensional Model, which integrates linguistic and sociopolitical concepts. This model analyzes discourse by connecting three aspects: text, discursive practice, and social practice.

The first one is textual analysis, this dimension examines how structured language (macro-linguistics) represents social aspects. This research focuses on analyzing gender roles as depicted in Madurese folktales. The second is Discursive Practice Analysis. This dimension involves examining discourse practices, including processes of text production, distribution, and consumption (Fairclough, 2013). It is essential to understand the context in which these folktales are produced and how the audience receives them. This analysis explores how Madurese society creates and perceives Madurese folktales and their relationship to broader gender discourses within Madurese culture. The last is Social Practice Analysis. This dimension focuses on the social practices within which discourse is constructed and utilized. This dimension implicitly incorporates social power, authority, and ideology within texts. It examines how gender representations in Madurese folktales reflect and influence gender roles in Madurese society. For example, “I work always where there is work to be had, and so in this place, I worked very hard all hours” (*Judgement of esteem*). The excerpt is taken from Katherine Anne Porter, an Indian-American author. It narrates the story of a Black servant willing to do anything to sustain her livelihood, catering to white employers. This quotation highlights social inequality, particularly racial disparity (Sudarna and Yulina, 2021).

Gender remains a compelling topic due to varying interpretations and understandings. Often equated with biological sex, gender is far more complex. Gender refers not only to biological distinctions but also to social constructs encompassing norms and roles. As aligned with Nurhasanah and Zuriatin (2023), gender is defined as characteristics used to differentiate men and women based on societal culture, values, behaviors, mentality, emotions, and other non-biological components. Thus, this research will analyze how Madurese folktales reflect gender representation. This analysis is essential because it offers insights into how these tales influence societal perceptions of gender roles in daily life.

Several scholars have researched gender representations. Putri et al. (2023) analyzed gender representation in the folktale *Joko Kendil* from Indonesian elementary school textbooks. Using Van Dijk’s (1993) discourse theory, they examined linguistic, cultural, and schematic structures, revealing dominant masculine language features, implicit portrayals of male bravery, and recurring

male gender roles in all narrative elements. Similarly, Amri (2021) explored gender relations in two folktales: *Tempiq Empiq* (from West Nusa Tenggara) and *Mencari Ilmu Berumah Tangga* (from South Kalimantan). Employing Roland Barthes' semiotic approach, Amri found that linguistic systems revealed a dichotomy of roles between men and women. Connotative meanings exposed myths of sexuality and masculinity, perpetuating patriarchal ideologies.

Previous studies have shown that many folktales reinforce gender stereotypes. Building on this foundation, this research aims to analyze how language and narrative structures in Madurese folktales shape understandings of gender roles and investigate the impact of gender representations on modern Madurese society. Addressing gender representation in Madurese folktales remains scarce. Also, research using Norman Fairclough's CDA framework to analyze these narratives is limited. Thus, this research aims to analyze how language and narrative structures in Madurese folktales shape understandings of gender roles and investigate the impact of gender representations in Madurese folktales on modern Madurese society.

1.2. Research questions

Based on the aforementioned background, this research is eager to answer these questions: How do language and narrative structures in Madurese folktales shape understanding of gender roles, and how does it impact modern Madura society?

1.3. Significance of the study

This research contributes theoretically and practically to the development of Indonesian folklore studies, especially from the perspective of gender and linguistics. Theoretically, this study provides information to sociolinguistics and narrative studies by highlighting the relationship between language, culture, and social construction of gender in the local context of Madura. Meanwhile, practically, this study provides a deeper understanding to the Madurese community about the influence of folklore on current gender views. Besides, the result of this study might become a reference for policymakers, educators, and gender activists to develop programs that promote gender equality with a local culture-based approach.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research model to provide detailed explanations and in-depth findings through descriptive narratives rather than numerical data. According to Walidin et al. (2015) in Fadli (2021), qualitative descriptive research delivers a complex and comprehensive understanding of phenomena by interpreting detailed perspectives

from data sources in natural settings. Furthermore, Sugiono (2010), as cited in Wakarmamu (2022), emphasizes that qualitative research methods aim to deeply understand social phenomena by collecting data in natural environments, with the researcher as the key instrument.

Following Creswell's six stages of qualitative research, this study began with problem identification, focusing on gender issues found in Madurese folktales. This stage underlined the importance of selecting data that aligns with the research objectives, specifically narratives from the folktales *The Origin of Madurese People* and *Menak Sanaya*, which contain gender-related discourse. Next, theoretical comparisons and gaps were identified during the literature review stage to establish a novel approach to analyzing these folktales.

2.2. Samples/Participants

The study examined *The Origin of the Madurese People* and *Menak Sanaya* from a book collection of Madurese stories titled *Mutiara yang Tersisa*. It was chosen for its gender-focused narratives and under-researched status.

2.3. Instruments

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques, as described by Marshall and Rossman (2014) by reading the texts thoroughly and extracting sentences containing gender-related issues. These sentences are the primary data, supported by secondary data from books, journal articles, and credible online sources.

2.4. Data analysis

The data analysis follows Miles and Huberman's three-step approach: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Fadli, 2021). Reduction involves selecting gender-related data for analysis using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework, which integrates textual analysis, discourse practice, and social practice. Textual analysis examines linguistic elements to explore gender representation in the folktales, while discourse practice focuses on how the texts are produced and consumed by readers. Social practice links these findings to broader societal contexts, particularly the patriarchal norms in Madurese society. Finally, data display and conclusions were presented narratively to ensure clarity and coherence for readers.

3.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

Madurese folktales are part of Indonesia's rich cultural heritage, reflecting the people's values, beliefs, and identity. These tales are typically passed down orally from generation to generation, often

carrying moral messages, religious teachings, and social depictions of Madurese society. Two notable examples of such tales are *The Origin of the Madurese People* and *Menak Sanaya*.

Text Analysis

The book "*Mutiara yang Tersisa*" (2010), an anthology of Madurese folktales compiled by Sutarto et al., is the primary source for this research. This anthology encompasses a diverse range of narratives, from origin stories to accounts of historical events on the island of Madura.

Table 1. The Textual Analysis of "*The Origins of the Madurese People*"

Title	Character	Description	Paraphrase	Reduction	Reflection
The Origin of the Madurese People	King Kamajaya	He loved his daughter and adored the beauty gifted to her by God. Without hesitation the soothsayer was killed by order of the king (Para.1). The king became angrier. He called his prime minister and ordered him to take the princess away and kill her in the jungle (Para.2).	The king's daughter was prophesied to be pregnant. Upon discovering the prophecy was true, the king became furious and ordered both of them to be executed.	Anger Order Murder	Did the King make such a hasty decision? Was he completely ruled by anger?
	Prime Minister	He created a boat to sail the princess out to sea. Besides, he asked the princess to stamp her	After discovering the truth that the Princess was innocent, he continued to support her	Making a boat Asking	Do men always protect women?

foot of the even after
ground three her child was
times; in case, born.
she needed
his help
(Para.4).

The Princess	She said that she had never committed adultery with any man. Her answer was regarded as a lie (Para.2). Suddenly, she got a terrible stomachache. Being in a difficult situation, she immediately called the prime minister (Para.5).	The Princess could only resign herself to her fate, as her claim of innocence—that she had not committed adultery—was not believed by her father, the King. She often sought the prime minister's help throughout her life.	Did not commit adultery Was not believed Difficulty Sought the prime minister	The words of women are not believed?
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The main difference between male and female characters in the story lies in their position of power and how they deal with conflict. Men are portrayed as having control through power (the King) and logical actions (the Prime Minister). Though stoic and innocent, the woman faces injustice and relies on the man to solve her problems. The story reflects traditional gender dynamics, where men hold the power and women are the victims who must fight to prove the truth.

Table 2. The Textual Analysis of "*Menak Sanaya*."

Title	Character	Description	Paraphrase	Reduction	Reflection
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Menak Sanaya	Menak Sanaya	Once there lived a prince named Menak Sanaya. His father was the King of Gresik (Para.1). He peeped at them, and then took one of the angels' cloth they put at the edge of the lake (Para.2). Menak Sanaya approached the mourning angel and said that he would help even to marry her (Para.3. He felt guilty because he did not do as his wife asked him (Para.5). Menak Sanaya definitely felt regret and lamented. (Para.6).	Menak Sanaya was highly manipulative, deliberately taking what belonged to the angel and then pretending to sympathize with her. However, due to his actions, he experienced sorrow in his life when his wife, the angel, left him.	Peeping Taking cloth Helping and marrying Feel guilty Regret and lamented	Peeping on and taking a woman's clothes? Regretful and feeling guilty?
	Angel	Eventually, the other angels had to	The celestial maiden could only resign	Losing Leaving	Women never declined?

leave	her	herself	after	Not declining
alone		losing	her	Reprimanded
(Para.2). The	scarf	and		
angel did not	reluctantly			
decline	accepted			
Menak	Menak			
Sanaya's	Sanaya's			
offer	proposal. She			
(Para.3). She	served her			
reprimanded	husband well.			
her husband	However, at			
angrily	one point, she			
(Para.4).	scolded him			
	for			
	something.			

Menak Senaya is portrayed as an active and dominant figure, peeping, taking the cloth, helping, and marrying the angel, reflecting the male stereotype of the controller. In contrast, the angel is passive and submissive, as seen by losing the cloth, not resisting, and accepting reprimands, reflecting the female stereotype of being submissive and non-confrontational. This trait difference reflects the social construction that prioritizes male dominance and female subordination in folklore narratives.

According to the data collected and the researcher's text analysis, several key themes and discourses are intended to be conveyed in the folktales *"The Origins of the Madurese People"* and *"Menak Sanaya."* First, in *"The Origins of the Madurese People,"* men and women are represented emotionally and in terms of their behavior. In both tales, men are depicted as filled with anger, possessing more power than women, and capable of protecting women. This notion has also been highlighted by Alvarez-Vazquez in his research. He reported that (Alvarez-Vazquez, 2024) traditional narratives frequently associate power and violence with masculinity, while depicting female anger as deviant or monstrous. It challenges these portrayals by framing women's rage as a multifaceted emotion and a form of resistance.

On the other hand, in both stories, women are portrayed as subordinate characters. They are shown as resigned to their fate, their words are considered lies, and they are depicted as needing the role of men in their lives. Traditional narratives, such as folktales, often reinforce the idea that men are naturally suited for power and women require protection (Keefe, 2019). However, there is a slight variation in the conclusion of *"Menak Sanaya."* At the end of this tale, the woman's role

is emphasized as a character with more power, resisting without undermining her husband, who has wronged her.

Discourse Practice Analysis

Every text is inherently connected to the levels of production and consumption. The discourse practice analysis in Madurese folktales, particularly in *"The Origin of the Madurese People"* and *"Menak Sanaya"*, focuses on how the production and consumption of these texts occur. A text is born through a discourse process that determines its construction. The relationship between the author, reader, and publisher is examined in the discursive discourse within this study: how the author attempts to tell the story based on their experiences and knowledge.

The book *"Mutiara yang Tersisa"* was compiled by three editors: Ayu Sutarto, Marwoto, and Heru S.P. Saputra. These editors and faculty members at the University of Jember share a common educational background in literature. They have published numerous books and articles related to literary studies. The book's introduction states that the background of these folktales, including *"The Origin of the Madurese People"* and *"Menak Sanaya"*, is to preserve the folklore through the publishing world.

Furthermore, from the reader's perspective or from the extent to which readers engage with the text, the issue of gender equality addressed in both short stories is quite evident. This is reflective of the royal era, which was still bound by patriarchy and lacked sufficient understanding of gender equality between men and women. During this period, power and authority were predominantly held by men, while women were often confined to domestic roles and expected to remain obedient and submissive (Cudorge, 2022). The concept of gender equality was largely absent, as societal norms dictated strict gender roles that favored male dominance and female subordination. Women's voices, ambitions, and rights were frequently disregarded or suppressed, and any deviation from these expectations was often met with criticism or punishment.

Considering the current situation, which has certainly advanced beyond what is depicted in these folktales, *"The Origin of the Madurese People"* and *"Menak Sanaya"*, the government has enacted laws to protect women. However, some individuals may still apply outdated doctrines, such as women's roles being confined to the home. Yet, many women today can pursue careers or professions.

Social Practice Analysis

One of the bases of sociocultural practice analysis is the belief that social conditions outside the media can influence how discourse is conveyed within the media. Although this sociocultural

practice is not directly related to text production, it can affect the comprehension and production of texts. In discourse studies, relating to social conditions refers to the sociocultural relationship between society's knowledge of folktales and social conditions and how society creates and maintains interaction patterns, values, and norms that reflect certain social and cultural relationships. This practice also aids in understanding how folktales such as *"The Origins of the Madurese People"* and *"Menak Sanaya"* represent social structures, power relations, and gender constructions present in society.

Folktales often serve as a tool for illustrating societal perspectives on gender roles and relationships through the narrative and the characterization of characters. This analysis demonstrates how Madurese folktales portray patriarchal views and social hierarchies within Madurese culture. In *"The Origins of the Madurese People"* and *"Menak Sanaya"*, men are predominantly depicted through their actions and emotions, which reflect bravery, strength, and the ability to lead and protect. In these stories, men, portrayed as those with the authority to make decisions, dominate power relations. This dominance is reinforced by the folktale's backdrop, which involves a kingdom, traditionally placing men as kings or leaders who determine the course of society (Winter, 2018). In contrast, women appear passive and merely play the role of objects of protection, reflecting the representation of a strong patriarchal social structure (Hiwarkhedka, 2024).

3.2. Discussion

This study presents the gender representation in Madurese folktales titled *"The Origin of the Madurese People"* and *"Menak Sanaya"*. Based on the data findings and analysis, the gender reconstruction in these folktales systematically positions women in marginal and subordinate roles. This is in line with Fairclough's (2013) notion that language serves as a specific mediator to enhance power, thus producing a particular ideology within modern society (Tambunan, 2022). The analysis reveals that female characters are often portrayed through limited characterizations, such as being passive and victims of male actions. This is evidenced by the use of narratives that reinforce weakness and dependency. Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis shows how the narrative structure of these folktales can construct power relations or patriarchal ideologies that define women's roles in traditional society.

The research data indicate that gender representation in Madurese folktales follows a pattern of reproducing patriarchal ideology. For example, men are associated with power, and conflicts are resolved through masculine mechanisms, such as shipbuilding and assisting the princess with her troubles, as demonstrated by Kyai Poleng. On the other hand, women are

depicted in psychological terms, portrayed as emotionally weak and in need of protection, as exemplified by the Princess and the Celestial Maiden who loses her scarf.

Moreover, this study on Madurese folktales identifies a systematic gender construction pattern that shapes societal understanding of women's roles and positions. This understanding is formed through the internalization of narratives. The narratives consistently depict women as homemakers, confined to domestic spheres, and these narratives not only function as myths but also limit the freedom and expression of Madurese women. Folktales shape collective consciousness, normalizing inequality through a process of intergenerational socialization. In this process, women are socialized to accept roles as supporters, caregivers, and subjects whose existence is defined by their relationship with men. All of this is symbolically produced and reproduced through folktales, which maintain conventional gender constructions.

The findings of this study show a pattern of gender representation in Madurese folktales that is significantly similar to a previous study by Putri et al. (2023), which examined gender representation in the folktale "*Joko Kendil*" in a primary school textbook. The results of that study found that the linguistic aspects expressed by men were more dominant. The key difference lies in the intensity of character portrayal. In the previous study, male character depictions were fewer but more meaningful (involving conflict). In contrast, in this study, the portrayals are more varied with multiple male characters and two main folktales. Both studies reveal the discursive mechanisms that sustain gender hierarchies. Still, this study offers a deeper ethnographic context related to the specific gender construction in Madurese society, which was not fully explored in previous research. Therefore, these findings contribute to the understanding that language and narrative structure in Madurese folktales not only reflect traditional gender norms but also function as mechanisms that shape and maintain the Madurese community's understanding of gender roles.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1. Conclusion

This study, titled *Gender Representation in Madurese Folktales: A Critical Discourse Analysis*, reveals that gender relations are rooted in patriarchal social structures. Male characters are portrayed as dominant, strong, and active decision-makers, while female characters are often depicted as passive supporters dependent on male protection. These representations align with traditional Madurese cultural values that place men in leadership roles and women as guardians of domestic harmony.

The findings indicate that Madurese folktales preserve cultural values and perpetuate hierarchical gender norms. Through their narratives, these tales reinforce traditional gender roles,

reflecting how local culture shapes perceptions and behaviours regarding gender. In contemporary society, where gender equality is gaining more attention, the traditional gender representations in these folktales are increasingly being scrutinized and questioned.

4.2. Suggestions

The researcher offers some recommendations. Firstly, future studies could expand the scope of analysis to include the production of texts by exploring the authors' perspectives through direct interviews or biographical studies and examining the role of publishers in shaping these narratives. Such approaches would provide additional insights into the contextual formation of the texts. Further research could also delve deeper into related topics or employ different theoretical frameworks, enriching the understanding of gender representations and their implications. Lastly, educators and cultural stakeholders are encouraged to critically examine the traditional gender norms presented in folktales and explore ways to use these stories to foster discussions on gender equality and empowerment in modern contexts.

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