

Comparative study of shadow puppets and the characters in the novel

Shadow Princess

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Abstract

This paper brings out the importance of Indonesian wayang kulit and the animal wayang (Shadow Puppet) characters in the life of Indonesian people. Indonesia is very rich in culture and heritage. It is also known for its shadow plays, the shadow plays are still performing in Indonesia that teaches moral values to the people. The characters in shadow puppet plays are resemble human traits. This shadow puppet plays are very prominent in South East Asian Countries like India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and so on. Each country has its own source for performing the plays. In some countries the two epics The Ramayana and The Mahabharata are used as a background source for the play. Same way in Indonesia, the stories are taken from the two epics as well as from Indonesian folk tales. Especially animal folk tales are also played an important role. This has adopted by the authors of the novel *Shadow Princess* which portrays the life of the girl Tumbuh, who compares to the animal wayang character Kancil.

Key words: shadow puppet, Indonesia, kancil, and the epics

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In Indonesia wayang plays an important role in human life. It talks about the struggles and obstacles that faced by the Indonesian people. It also teaches the moral values and teaches to overcome the struggles. Shadow puppetry plays a vital role in South Asian Countries. One of them is Indonesia and the country has very rich in culture and heritage. Shadow puppetry also plays an important role in Indonesian people the play portrays the real life of Indonesians. It has a message that conveys to the people through the plays.

The novel *Shadow Princess* is written by Tamara fielding and Cindy Marvell. It is based on the real life experience of the author Tamara Fielding during her childhood days. She was born in west java and later migrated to United States. She has staged many shadow plays throughout the world. She is a puppet master and learns wayang plays in Java at an early age.

In her novel, she foreshadows her life experience through the characters Tumbuh. The novel revolves around the life of a girl who lost her family during the Tsunami. The girl who loves to watch shadow plays when her brother learns from his master. After the disaster she is left alone in the disaster. Later she accompanies with the puppet master and travels many islands. She has seen many struggles in her life and makes use of the wayang Kancil character to overcome the struggles. The wayang plays are acted as an example in her life.

The book itself shows the background atmosphere of Indonesia and the life of Tumbuh. The Cover page of the novel is unique that with a different monotone colour (marrown) which gives the feeling of Indonesia. Looking at the picture one can relate the

main character Tumbuh with the Ramayan Princess Sinta, sitting on the Shadow puppet of Garuda. Here one can relate the Garuda with the Dalang (puppet master) who is taking her on her adventures one by one.

For instance, the girl Tumbuh accompanies by the puppet master after the Tsunami. She learns wayang plays and the dalang who accompanies her teaches wayang to her. She has already listened many stories from her grandma named Oma. As already she is very well talented in story telling art, she learns the techniques and movements of shadow puppets with the help of the dalang. The puppeteer and Tumbuh travel many islands and perform shadow plays for survival. The plays that she performs brings out the real struggles that faced by the Indonesian people. Through her plays the people in islands takes example and apply in their life.

On the other side, the image of the Tree of Life puppets shows the natural balance of the universe. It is used in shadow plays that indicate beginning and end of the play. in the novel The Tree of Life also resembles the entire story of the novel, just like the branches of the puppet, where there are new ones at each and every stage. Tumbuh's journey also finds many twists and turns and ends up providing her with the knowledge and experience. One can also relate the Tree of Life puppet with the final stage of the story where Tumbuh decides to save up the forest after meeting her brother's monkey.

However her life is also compared to the animal puppet Kancil (the mouse deer) that is present in the picture. It also can be compared with the golden deer that was sent by the evil king Ravan to abduct sinta. On another perspective, kancil can also be related to Tumbuh, just like how kancil finds its way out of all kind of situations, Tumbuh also finds a way out by using her stories that she learnt from her grandma.

Tumbuh's father always said that she reminded him a bit of kancil. I never know exactly what you will do, where you will be hiding, he said. But we always find each other in the end, like kancil and Siput, and as with the mouse deer and the snail, it is not always clear who is the wisest. (*Shadow Princess* 25)

The role of kancil is not a trickster in the story of Rama and Sinta. To rescue sinta he has to disguise a takes the form of a golden deer. Like other characters in wayang he is not possess any magical power to use. He uses his wits to make other fools. He uses his own ingenuity to overcome or win others. For this he only needs to grow become a golden deer o rescue princess sinta. But in the novel the kancil uses its tricks to escape from the struggle. It has the ability to fool other animal cleverly.

Kancil may indeed represent an ideal type for Indonesians as a symbol of cool intelligence to be emulated and appreciated those who would overcome danger difficulty, or impending chaos by the resourceful use of wit. As Kancil takes his place in bearing and shaping culture, he may provide an insight into uncharted aspects of the Indonesian identity, with a vision of what man is, and can or should be (The Mouse deer Kancil in Malay-Indonesian Folklore, 84).

For example, in the story "The Tale of Ma and Pa Tani" the kancil gets caught by the farmer in his field. He clever escapes from the field by using his tricks. Same way Tumbuh when she enters into the Nias island, unfortunately she gets caught by the people of the island. They perform plays in the wedding ceremony of Prince Pasaribu and Loeriani. But the dalang and Tumbuh never have an idea that they both are being caught by them. The princess father plans to sacrifice the dalang for the wedding ceremony of his daughter. The plan is revealed to them by the princess because she doesn't want them to be get in danger. While

performing the wayang plays, Tumbuh and the puppeteer takes the tale of Ma and Pa Tani as a tool to escape from the island.

Tumbuh often takes the role shadow deer. While performing wayang she takes up the role of kancil which is also suitable to her life and character. She immerses herself in playing wayng kulit because it the only thing that brings happiness to her. The author of the novel proves the novel is a kind of a performance one could relate with the play and characters. She plays her life journey with the puppet master. As the music built, they start perform the story. She hears the words “Shadow Princess and sea journey” (153).

Finally she comes to know that retelling the tales of wayang is the only way to free from her loneliness and brings her family back. The Dalang, who accompanies her and taught her Indian version of wayang kulit,. Throughout the novel she learns and performs wayang to save her island. At the end she also tells the story of her adventures. She realises all the struggles and obstacles she faces in her life are interconnected.

The wayang kancil stories are not only for the children but it is also for the people of all ages. It entertains and also teaches ethical values to them. Kancil through his clever ideas, brings hope to people those who are in struggle. This unique form of wayang kulit plays are acted as a medicine during their difficult situations. The stories are purposefully portrayed in the novel by adopting the stories from Indonesian traditional stories. The novel shadow princess focuses on the story of the animal Kancil who is good at fooling other animals and also tool to communicate to the audience. The performance of kancil stories leads to the higher level to come out from the struggle and also considered as the best entertainment of the audience. To quote

When the dalang (puppeteer) starts telling stories or performing plays,
reciprocity occurs between the dalang and the community, as the community

also learns from the dalang in addition to being entertained. In wayang performance, where wisdom messages are conveyed symbolically (“The New Order Play: Wayang as a Medium for Development Messages” 208).

One can agree with the quote “History was written by Victors” (Winston Churchill), the Picture of the Tree of Life Puppet is not entirely shown in the cover page, like the controversy between good and evil, like one doesn’t know the entire things happen while sita is abducted. Still there are places to be explored and stories to be revealed. This content can be compared with the cover page which didn’t show the entire picture of Tree of Life puppet. The branches could even lead to many new adventure stories of Tumbuh and Elsie too.

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