



Javanese Women in Postcolonial Prose: Women's Spirit and Education

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Abstract Women in Eastern culture are often thought of as “the other”. Similarly, feminism in Indonesian literature is also considered a contemporary literary phenomenon in the 21st century. However, according to our research findings, feminism in Indonesian literature has been present since 1901, during Dutch colonialism. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate how feminism is represented in Indonesian literature. The source of this research data is Four Novels by Ki Padmasusastra (FNKP), published between 1901 and 1924. We used qualitative methods to analyze the data. The results showed that FNKP is a postcolonial novel that represents feminism and educational values. Feminism in FNKP was influenced by the Dutch during the colonial period in Indonesia. The authors seek to show that feminism is not at odds with Eastern culture but rather reflects its diversity and complexity. Through literature, the authors seek to educate readers about the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western cultures and how they can coexist in modern society.

Keywords: *Feminism, Novel, Ki Padmasusastra, Educational value, Eastern culture*

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Received: August 2023

Revised: October 2023

Accepted: October 2023

Published: November 2023

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1. Introduction

Women have long been regarded as “the other”. Women are often presented as inferior (Astagini, 2021; Kristeva, 1980). Hence the complexity of women's experiences, the formation of their identities, and how they fit into the feminist movement. In literature, the exploration of feminist lenses often includes a critical examination of gender roles and stereotypes (Irshad & Yasmin, 2022; Panggabean et al., 2022). Through the cultural dimension, women's experiences in literature have contributed significantly to our understanding of how literature reflects and shapes social norms and expectations (Asteria et al., 2016). Feminism, as a social and political movement that fights for gender equality, has given birth to many literary works that explore women's experiences, both in social and personal contexts (Alkali & Talif, 2016; Ogunyemi, 2022). Therefore, the

<https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscsl.2023.2012462.3186>

interdisciplinary study of this perspective provides a broader understanding of women's experiences in sociocultural contexts. By understanding the complexity of women's experiences, we can broaden our horizons on women's experiences and fight for gender equality in a literary context.

Currently, feminist literature is undergoing a period of transformation. Emphasis is growing on intersectionality and the need to address the experiences of marginalized groups, including women of color, queer and trans women, and women with disabilities (Alkali & Talif, 2016; Lloro-Bidart, 2018). However, despite these developments, feminist literature still faces some significant challenges. One of the main challenges facing feminist literature is the continued dominance of Western perspectives and theories. While feminist literature has made significant strides in addressing women's experiences in the West, there are still significant gaps in understanding women's experiences from non-Western cultures (Felski, 2020; Irshad & Yasmin, 2022). This is particularly relevant to the case of Javanese women, who are often excluded from feminist discourse due to their location outside Western feminist movements. Another challenge facing feminist literature is the need to engage with the complexity of cultural norms and expectations. In addition, there is a need for feminist literature to engage more critically with educational theory. Feminist literature has explored the dimensions of education to see their potential in explaining the complexity of women's experiences. For this reason, there is a need to investigate the experiences of Javanese women and their involvement with the feminist movement. The need to address the limitations of feminist discourse today offers an alternative perspective that takes into account the unique experiences of Javanese women in educational contexts.

This study aims to investigate Javanese feminism discourse in four novels by Ki Padmasusastra (FNKP) from an educational perspective. FNKP is a threaded novel, as Java's first prose. It is called the first prose because previously, the literary tradition in Java was only in the form of poetry (Pamungkas, 2021). FNKP was created during Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. Therefore, it is possible that feminist discourse in literature has relevance to the Western culture brought by the Dutch to Indonesia. In addition, given the claim by some scholars that literary creation always has an implied educational message, this study also aims to investigate this aspect. Because, after all, literature is an important educational discourse because literary education is very covert, not in a patronizing way (Pamungkas et al., 2019; Pattaro, 2016). For this reason, this study focuses on FNKP from two different perspectives: 1) feminism in Javanese literature and 2) educational values in feminist literature. In addition, taking into account the chronology of the creation of FNKP during Dutch colonialism, this feminist spirit will also be discussed in the context of postcolonialism.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Feminism in Literature

Feminism is a broad movement and ideology that does not only focus on one issue or group but covers various aspects related to gender equality. The ultimate goal is to create a world where women and men have equal access to social, political, and economic rights (Alkali & Talif, 2016; Ogunyemi, 2022; Situmeang, 2018). In this framework, feminism explores and challenges the patriarchal system that has long privileged men in many aspects of life. Feminism seeks to give women the tools and resources they need to fight this violence and discrimination. Gender-based discrimination often does not stand alone; it often overlaps with other forms of discrimination (Alkali & Talif, 2016; Felski, 2020; Lloro-Bidart, 2018). Therefore, there is a more inclusive school of feminism, known as intersectional feminism, which takes into account how different types of discrimination—such as race, class, and sexual orientation—can interact and reinforce each other.

Meanwhile, Eastern feminism, which developed in Asia and the Middle East, represented a unique approach to the struggle for women's rights. Different from Western feminism, which often focuses on individualism, feminism in this region emphasizes aspects of collectivity and social solidarity (Abu-Lughod, 2020; Lazreg, 2001). A long history involving colonialism, political conflict, and socio-economic change provides a complicated backdrop for the movement. Eastern feminism is rooted in complex local realities, where gender issues are often closely linked to class, ethnicity, and religious factors. Struggles span a wide range of aspects, from combating discrimination in education and employment to tackling gender-based violence to challenging harmful cultural practices such as child

marriage and female genital mutilation. In the face of these challenges, feminists in Asia and the Middle East often offer critiques of Western feminism, which are not always relevant or sensitive to their social and cultural contexts. They demand an approach that is more inclusive and that recognizes the uniqueness of local situations. Despite facing various obstacles, feminist movements in the region have managed to achieve significant progress, including legislative changes and increased public awareness of important issues (Abu-Lughod, 2020; Lazreg, 2001). Through its more integrated and multi-dimensional approach, Eastern feminism not only contributes to local struggles for gender equality but also enriches feminist discourse globally with diverse perspectives and solutions.

Feminism has had an important role in literary works of fiction since decades ago. Literature is a powerful medium for conveying ideologies and social messages, including messages about gender equality (Felski, 2020; Mardani et al., 2018; Masykuroh & Fatimah, 2019). In many ways, literature can be a reflection of society and culture, including in aspects such as power relations between genders, representation of women, and narratives for or against patriarchy. In both classical and modern literature, women are often reduced to stereotypes or one-dimensional characters—such as housewives, objects of desire, or supporting roles for male protagonists. Feminism in literature aims to critique and overhaul this representation. One of the contributions of feminism in literature is the emergence of more complex, powerful, and autonomous female characters. They are not only there to support male characters but have their own motivations, desires, and conflicts. In contemporary literature, there is an attempt to explore feminism from an intersectional point of view, encompassing race, class, and sexual orientation. This helps enrich feminist discourse, which is often perceived as focusing too much on women's struggle from the oppression of many things (Felski, 2020; Lloro-Bidart & Semenko, 2017). Therefore, feminism in literary fiction is not only limited to what is written in the text but also how the text is read, interpreted, and positioned in a broader cultural and social context.

2.2. Education in Literature

The concept of value is derived from the contemplation and recognition of things deemed valuable, significant, virtuous, commendable, and desirable (Gottlober, 2022; Scheler, 1973). Human beings perceive value prior to their sensory encounters, and it is subsequently apprehended on a visceral level (Scheler, 1973). On the other hand, education refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and customs within a community, transmitted from one generation to the next (Aly & Thoyibi, 2020; Cronin & MacLaren, 2018; Harper, 2018; Suprpto et al., 2023). Consequently, the value of education in literature encompasses the diverse facets deemed valuable, crucial, virtuous, commendable, and desirable concerning the knowledge, skills, and customs passed down through generations. In essence, literature plays a pivotal role in shaping educational values. Through literature, individuals can acquire invaluable life experiences and wisdom not always accessible through alternative educational sources. Literature serves as a medium for conveying values, concepts, and notions through creative and artistic expressions, such as short stories, novels, poems, and plays. The value of education in literature extends beyond merely developing linguistic proficiency and an understanding of literary works; it also encompasses the cultivation of moral, ethical, and societal values (Rhamdon & Yanti, 2021; Santoso & Khisbiyah, 2021; Wahyani et al., 2022). Literature frequently portrays human existence, including explicit and implicit depictions of the values and norms prevailing in society. Consequently, literature holds the potential to serve as an exceptionally effective resource for value-based education.

Literature serves as a catalyst for the promotion of fundamental human values, such as justice, truth, freedom, and love. Numerous literary works delve into the challenges faced by individuals or communities as they strive to attain justice, uncover the truth, and secure their freedom (El-Nashar & Nayef, 2023; Pamungkas et al., 2023; Suyitno, 2017). Furthermore, there exists a plethora of literary creations that explore the theme of love, encompassing both romantic love and the love between individuals. Consequently, the educational value of literature is exceptionally diverse and boundless. Its significance hinges upon the reader's or learner's ability to comprehend, interpret, and implement the values encapsulated within literary works into their daily lives. High-quality education is one that seamlessly incorporates knowledge, skills, and values into its pedagogical processes, with literature serving as an invaluable reservoir in this regard.

Although the study of the value of education in literature has touched on various aspects, including how literature can be a medium for communicating social values and norms and developing linguistic skills and understanding, there are still significant research gaps. Most research tends to focus on analyzing the content and values contained in a particular literary work, but less explores the real influence and practical application of these values in formal and non-formal educational contexts. In addition, few studies have deeply examined how the process of instilling values through literature can influence individual attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making in real life. There are also flaws in research that highlight how teachers and educators can effectively integrate the values of literary education into their curricula and teaching methods. As a result, there is an urgent need for further research that examines not only the value of literary education in theory but also its practice in diverse and dynamic educational environments.

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

This study seeks to investigate and provide critical arguments against FNKP's novels. The focus of the investigation is 1) eroticism in educational and cultural perspectives, 2) feminism in Javanese literature, and 3) educational values in feminist literature. The discussion involved the discourse of postcolonialism. Various text models are considered as strategies for the purpose of the spirit of feminism in Javanese culture. As a result, this research is an interdisciplinary study of literature, gender, culture, and education. Therefore, qualitative methods, which focus on hermeneutics, were chosen as they were considered capable of providing a comprehensive explanation of text interpretation (McCrea, 2005; Porter & Robinson, 2011; Ricoeur, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 2010).

The object of this research is called a cyber novel because the data is taken from novels published online on the <https://www.sastra.org> website, which is managed by Yayasan Sastra Lestari, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. The source of the research data is four novels by Ki Padmasusastra, which are detailed as follows.

Table 1

Data for Four Novels by ki Padmasusastra

No.	Novel Title	Publication Year	Catalog Code
1.	<i>Serat Pethikan Saking Kabar Angin</i> (SPSKA)	1901	1901-315, #39
2.	<i>Serat Rangsang Tuban</i> (SRT)	1912	1912, #516
3.	<i>Serat Prabangkara</i> (SP)	1921	1921, #43
4.	<i>Serat Kandha Bumi</i> (SKB)	1924	1924, #112

This research data is in the form of texts that explicitly or implicitly contain aspects of feminism and educational values in FNKP. Data findings were classified based on feminism categories and educational values (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.2. Procedure

The interpretation of FNKP required high accuracy, especially in capturing the nuances and substance of the text. Following Ricoeur's (2016) approach, the text was interpreted carefully to find both implicit and explicit meanings in it. The cultural symbols contained in the text were the key to understanding deeper meanings. The results of the data analysis were compared and validated with other data sources (Archibald, 2016). The analysis also involved interpreting the mode of cultural symbols contained in the text. In addition, relevant academic literature was used as reference material to support the analysis. The analysis process was carried out systematically with the following steps:

- Data [text] were collected according to the categories of eroticism, feminism, and educational values. Specific criteria were used to distinguish texts relevant to these categories. Literature was searched in various databases, libraries, and other online and offline sources. The texts were classified by theme, year of publication, and source.

- Texts were observed and analyzed in accordance with the research problem. The content of each collected text was read and understood. The main concepts, arguments, and views presented in the text were identified. Then, the text was interpreted with qualitative analysis techniques, such as content analysis or hermeneutic analysis, to understand the context.
- Findings relevant to research objectives were recorded systematically. After interpreting the data, the results were then linked to findings from other texts with an existing theoretical framework or literature. In this case, other data sources that had been found were compared. Then, verification of interpretation was carried out before drawing conclusions.
- Conclusions were drawn based on the analysis and interpretation of data that had been done. Conclusions were made after ensuring that the research findings were in accordance with the objectives and research questions. In this section, the implications, recommendations, and evaluation of research limitations were described at the end.

4. Results

The findings of this study will begin by providing an overview of feminist representation in FNKP. Then, the values of education in the context of feminism are displayed at the end of the discussion. It will examine the ways in which Javanese women's identity is shaped by cultural norms and expectations and how these norms intersect with gender power dynamics in narrative texts. Explorations of the ways Javanese women engage with feminist movements can offer insight into Javanese women's experiences of oppression and resistance. After that, the educational values contained in the narrative text will be displayed to see the role of literature in providing a subtle, non-patronizing education to the reader.

4.1. Feminism in FNKP

FNKP is a novel that represents the spirit of feminism. As a postcolonial novel, feminist narratives seem to be influenced by Western ways of thinking brought about by Dutch colonialism. Therefore, the feminist narrative in this novel is one of the pioneers of feminism in Indonesia, which previously prioritized strong Eastern culture with patriarchal culture. For this, findings on feminist narratives in FNKP are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Forms of Feminism in FNKP

No.	Forms of feminism	Description	Novel Title	Data code
1	Supernatural powers	Javanese women have a spirit of magic like men	SRT	SRT:32
2	Supernatural powers	Javanese women have powers like men	SRT	SRT:42
3	Supernatural powers	Javanese women have war skills like men	SKA	SKA:254-255
4	Supernatural powers	Women have the same fighting ability as men	SKA	SKA:259-260
5	Physical resistance	Women kill men because they are abused	SRT	SRT:19
6	Performance capabilities	The heroine has no worries about crime at night	SRT	SRT 99-100
7	Education acquisition	Women deserve maximum educational opinions like men	SKA	SKA:129
8	Political power	Women have equal rights to lead the country	SKA	SKA:153-54
9	Leadership rights	Women have equal rights to be war leaders	SKA	SKA:273-274

Table 3 represents several forms of feminism contained in FNKP. The research findings describe several themes of feminism in four novel titles. These themes include the magic of Javanese women who are

equal to men, both in terms of spirit and supernatural abilities (as seen in the novel "SRT" with data codes SRT:32 and SRT:42). This is illustrated, for example, in the story when the princess is able to show her powers in various ways, "what is desired will be reality, incarnate male incarnate female, can change form" (Padmasusastra, 1912, p. 32). In addition, there is also a depiction of Javanese women with equal war skills to men, highlighting that women can also play an active role in battle (as seen in the novel "SKA" with SKA data codes: 254-255 and SKA: 259-260). This shows that magic is not the exclusive domain of men, but women also have the same potential and abilities. This theme of women's magic provides a picture of women who are independent, strong, and able to face various challenges with superior abilities. The emphasis on women's power in these novels also indirectly invites readers to see women as more than weak. This is an effort to raise the image of women who are strong, empowered, and able to stand alone. Therefore, the female power in these novels is a representation of the intersectional feminism movement (McCall, 2005) by emphasizing the potential and abilities possessed by each individual, regardless of gender.

On the other hand, Javanese women in FNKP are also represented as people who dare to fight back if their pride is abused. In fact, she is not averse to fighting with men (as in the novel "SRT" with the data code SRT:19). This reflects the emphasis on physical resistance as a form of self-defense against unfair treatment. In addition, although in Java, women are considered unethical to go out at night, women in FNKP novels ignore that. Javanese women in SRT, for example, are portrayed as brave enough to travel at night (as seen in the novel "SRT" with SRT data code 99-100). That's a huge risk to women's safety. In this context, women in FNKN are portrayed as independent, strong, and not dependent on men for security and protection. It illustrates the aspiration to eliminate women's dependence on men and promote women's independence in living their daily lives. For this reason, the narrative of the story in FNKP reflects a strong feminist approach, where women are considered as individuals who have the ability and right to defend themselves, as well as have the strength and independence to live a life without the worries of being oppressed. This shows the novelist's attempt to change society's view of women. She let go of stereotypes and norms that limit women's roles and potential.

In the novel "SKA" with data code SKA:129, the theme of maximum education acquisition for women highlights the importance of gender equality in education. This emphasizes the need to provide equal opportunities for women to get quality education without discrimination (Felski, 2020; Irshad & Yasmin, 2022). Therefore, women can develop their full potential and contribute equally in various fields. In addition, in the novel "SKA" with the data code SKA:153-154, women also have the right to have political power and lead the country. With the representation of women in political leadership, there will be a removal of stereotypes and restrictions that hinder women's full participation in politics. This can help overcome stereotypical views that women are less competent or unfit for political leaders. Women serving in high political positions can be powerful role models for young people, inspiring them to actively participate in politics and encouraging women's leadership development in the future. Women's leadership in politics can also bring different perspectives and more inclusive approaches to social and economic issues, which can result in policies that are more balanced and pro-all members of society. Given the strong representation of women in politics, policies related to women's issues, such as gender equality, reproductive health, and violence against women, tend to get greater attention and support at higher political levels (Britton, 2017; Felski, 2020; McRobbie, 2008). This can help advance women's overall rights and well-being.

The novel "SKA" with data code SKA:273-274 also depicts women's right to be leaders in war. This shows recognition of women's ability in leadership, strength, and strategy. In this context, women are given equal opportunities to contribute to conflict situations and take important roles in leading troops or making strategic decisions. In other words, leadership abilities are not limited by gender. Women have equal potential to reach the highest positions in the military hierarchy. Therefore, the importance of women as leaders in this novel reflects the recognition of the intellectual strength, leadership, and strategic abilities possessed by women. This portrayal also stimulates thinking about the importance of gender inclusion (Fraser, 2018) in military leadership, which can lead to better decisions and more effective strategies. Through the strong female characters in this story, there is an attempt by the author to send a message about the importance of breaking down gender stereotypes and providing equal opportunities for all individuals. Thus, "SKA" can be a narrative that provides a positive example for

society, showing that gender equality in leadership is a step that supports more inclusive social development.

4.2. The Value of Feminism Education in FNKP

The text presented highlights various issues related to the representation of feminism in literature. On the one hand, the text explores how women in literature are viewed through the lens of feminism. This opens up a discussion on how the objectification of women is still the dominant narrative in many aspects of culture (Irshad & Yasmin, 2022; Spencer & Nichols, 2010). In this context, the educational value of feminism plays an important role as a tool to promote critical reflection and holistic understanding of women, not only as objects of desire but also as part of individual identity and agency. To that end, novels like FNKP offer a feminist view that influences perceptions of women's bodies, their strengths, and abilities. The themes of feminism covered include the representation of women as strong, independent, and empowered. The presence of female characters who demonstrate power, warfare, and independence provides an alternative picture of educational values about women that are different from traditional narratives that often objectify or weaken them. This is important because novels like these make a positive contribution to the feminist movement by promoting inclusive representations of women (Karlovic & Patrick, 2003; Spencer & Nichols, 2010).

However, judging from the creation process, FNKP is a novel created during the Dutch government. The ideas about feminism in this text also show how the feminist movement in Indonesia was influenced by Western ideas, represented by the Dutch. However, feminism in FNKP still maintains local cultural and historical nuances. For example, women have traditional powers, as a characteristic of Javanese supernatural culture. This suggests there is a need for a more complex and layered approach to understanding and critiquing the female dimension. Thus, literature not only offers stories or entertainment but also serves as an educational medium to explore and understand social and cultural issues such as feminism (Huggan & Tiffin, 2010; Wibowo & Pamungkas, 2023). In the Indonesian context, this is very relevant because the society prioritizes various traditions, norms, and values, including the conflict between traditional patriarchy and the modern feminist movement. Feminist education can serve as a tool to facilitate a deeper understanding of these complex issues, promote gender equality, and appreciate cultural and historical diversity.

5. Discussion

FNKP is a postcolonial-era novel that represents the image of feminism. The feminist discourse present in the novel seems to be the imagination of the author influenced by Western knowledge. For this, there is no strong data on the motivation of the feminist movement in FNKP. Because, in fact, in the colonial period, there were indeed many literati who experienced bad luck when they did literary writing with nuances of resistance (Kersten, 2015; Suwondo et al., 2015; Wulandari et al., 2022). Moreover, feminism is a movement that is not in accordance with the culture of Indonesia, which is predominantly Muslim. For this reason, feminism in FNKP is just an adaptation of a literary character that is different from traditional Javanese literature that has long developed. In other words, FNKP is not a media that wants to awaken Western feminism in Indonesia, but it is only a narrative story that has feminist values to increase people's knowledge about cultures that develop in a global context.

In the context of educational values, FNKP is a source of knowledge about cultural developments in a global context. The theme of obtaining maximum education for women highlights the importance of providing equal educational opportunities to women without restrictions or discrimination. It aims to eliminate systemic barriers that limit women's access to education equal to men's. By providing equal opportunities, women can develop their knowledge, skills, and potential well and contribute significantly to society. The theme of women's right to political power is a representation of the value of education that emphasizes the importance of supporting women's roles in their contribution to the development of society and the state (Ogunyemi, 2022; Pelluchon & Sinnreich, 2019). For this reason, FNKP illustrates that women's themes in these novels contain educational values and knowledge about women's potential support for men, not solely resistance to men. Women in FNKP illustrate that women have the potential to benefit society if needed.

For this, literature is not merely a work of fantasy, but it is also a good source of education and knowledge for readers (Bishop et al., 2000; Höglund, 2021; Pamungkas et al., 2023b; Prihatiningtyas et al., 2022) Through the narratives and characters in literary works, readers are invited to reflect on the ongoing social reality in society. Through FNKP, it can be seen how women are portrayed as individuals who have potential and capability. This narrative invites the reader to reflect on the importance of providing opportunities for women. In literature, the presence of themes such as feminism is often a tool for writers to critique existing social and cultural structures. However, FNKP points out that such approaches are not always confrontational. Feminism in this work is more focused on empowering women, not as a form of resistance to male domination. It shows how literature can be a medium for driving positive social change without necessarily being antagonistic. For this reason, FNKP actually has an important role in shaping the character and values of the community. Through the stories told, readers are invited to reflect on existing norms. In conclusion, literature not only serves as entertainment but also as an effective educational medium in shaping the character and outlook on life of readers.

In turn, this research is an attempt to interpret FNKP in the context of feminism and education. For that, of course, it has limitations. The limitation of this study is analysis in a limited context. Meanwhile, it is very important to involve the role of literature in a broader context, for example, history, culture, sociology, and anthropology. This will provide a deeper insight into how and why certain themes are presented in the novel. Likewise, when talking about feminism and Western culture, it is important to recognize that feminism is not always provocative. Every country, including Indonesia, has its own tradition of feminism and women's rights struggles. Connecting FNKP with local Indonesian feminism will provide a richer perspective. It will provide a more comprehensive picture of the role of women in literature and society. Given FNKP's importance as an educational resource, it might be worth considering integrating this novel into a school or university curriculum. This will provide an opportunity for the younger generation to learn and reflect on the issues presented in literary works. An important implementation of this research is that literature contributes as a medium of education and a source of knowledge for society.

Disclosure Statement

The authors claim no conflict of interest.

Funding

We would like to thank the Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purworejo, and the National Research and Innovation Agency for supporting this research.

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