

Conference Paper

Reflection of Javanese Characters in Afifah Afra's Novel *Nun Pada Sebuah Cermin*

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Abstract

This paper is the result of a library research which aims at revealing the Javanese characters reflected in the novel *Nun Pada Sebuah Cermin* written by Afifah Afrah. The analysis is conducted by using qualitative descriptive method. The main sources of data were derived from the novel and supported by some related books and other sources such as journals, articles, and essays from some websites. The data were analyzed by applying the theory of Javanese characters proposed by Achmad (2017) who notes that there are nine Javanese characters adopted in their life namely compliant, easy to mingle, working cooperatively, polite, friendly, alert and cautious, timid and shy, not self-forcing, and patient. The Javanese are generally considered as people who have soft and wise characters, particularly in their behaviour, and they always maintain to avoid dispute. The term *Unggah-Ungguh* 'to behave in good manners' is a prior tenet of Javanese people, especially in order to get comfort, serenity, tranquillity, peace, and blessing in life. The findings show that there are five Javanese characters which are vividly reflected in the novel namely easy to mingle, polite, patient, not self-forcing and timid and shy. Those characters are quite significant to put into practice in real life as they constitute dignified moral values to maintain peace and harmony among the members of a family, among the citizens of a nation, and among nations across the globe.

Keywords: Javanese characters, polite, patient, not self-forcing, shy

1. Introduction

Javanese belong to an Austronesian ethnic group native to the island of Java in Indonesia. This tribe constitutes the largest single ethnic group in the country. They are identified as being highly ethical, both in attitude and speech. In conversation, younger persons should use subtle Javanese language that sounds more polite. It is unlike the language used for people of equal age or younger than the speaker. In their personality, younger people should really be able to maintain a good ethical attitude toward people older than themselves. Besides, they do not like to speak directly, and

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tend to keep the ethics of speaking in the contents, the type of language used, and the subject matter. They tend to be shy, and generally prefer to hide their feelings. They generally deny the offer subtly for the sake of an ethic and manners of guarded attitude. For example, when they give a visit to their neighbours or friends, and are served a dish, they tend to refuse the offer. A typical character of a Javanese is waiting to be welcomed to taste food served for him, and sometimes even hesitant to resist the will or desire of the heart. However, such dignified attitude has partially changed in accordance with the impact of globalization era and some Javanese gradually ignore to practice the glorious culture.

A young keen writer, Afifah Afra through her novel entitled *Nun Pada Sebuah Cermin* has depicted the nuance of Javanese culture. Even though the novel focuses on the personal life journey of a poor orphaned Javanese girl named Nun Walqomah, who lives on the river bank near Tirtanadi station in Solo, Central Java, at the same time it also reveals the culture and characters of Japanese people. *Nun Pada Sebuah Cermin* is full of the elements of local wisdom of Javanese culture and philosophy. It tells about the life of the first character of the novel, a girl named Nun Walqomah who is depicted as a young girl who does not want to surrender to her destiny. Nun must work as an actress of *ketoprak* (Javanese theatrical genre). Through her journey of life in the *ketoprak* group and the stories enacted on the stage, the Javanese culture and characters are reflected. This novel is interesting because it tells not only about Javanese culture and characters, but also Javanese art.

The objectives of this study are to reveal the types of Javanese characters reflected in the novel, and to analyze how the Javanese characters are depicted through the protagonist of the novel. Therefore, the scope of this paper focuses on the analysis of the Javanese characters reflected in the novel i.e. easy to mingle, polite, patient, not self-forcing, and timid and shy. The result of this study is significant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it is useful to enrich the literature of literary research related to Javanese culture, personalities and characters. Practically, it can be used as good moral lessons to be practiced in real life to maintain peace and harmony among members of a family, among citizens of a nation and among nations across the globe. Besides, it can also be used for developing local wisdom of the Javanese culture and preserving it from its banishment as in this modern era such Javanese legacy tends to fade away. The young Javanese generations who migrate and settle outside Java island almost completely leave the tradition. So, it is also useful as an attempt to preserve the Javanese culture and tradition as the national asset.

2. Literature Review

Character is defined as the particular combination of qualities in a person that makes him different from others (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary). Achmad (2017: 40) defines that character is interpreted as the whole attitude, expression, temperament, and behaviour of a society. Javanese characters refer to moral values of behavior, attitude, and ethics which are represented by the Javanese community including such behaviour as to behave politely, tend to hide feelings, and keep the ethics in speaking in terms of either the content and utterance or the subject matter to talk about. In the daily life, the politeness in speaking is upheld, and becomes more in priority.

Javanese language is stratified into three classes. The three levels of language are used differently according to the person whom to talk to. The Javanese upholds ethical consideration highly both in attitude and speech. In speaking, a younger person uses subtle Javanese language that seems more polite. Oktafia (2015: 141) says that the culture of *unggah-ungguh* 'to behave in good manners' is more in priority. Soedarmanta (2014: 36) states that etiquette of *unggah ungguh* includes some good deeds in speech and action, such as verbal language, body language or self-presentation. Prabowo (2003: 31) states that ethic is seen as wisdom of life so that it is necessary to be understood by individuals who state herself or himself to have good behaviour.

Achmad (2017: 41) classifies Javanese characters into nine types, i.e. (1) compliant, (2) easy to mingle, (3) working cooperatively, (4) polite, (5) friendly, (6) alert and cautious, (7) timid and shy, (8) not self-forcing, and (9) patient.

2.1. Compliant

Being compliant is one of the important personalities of the Javanese. This character has become the philosophical principle of their life. This is stated in a Javanese proverb "Wani *ngalah dhuwur wekasane*"; meaning that those who are ready to be the loser will become the winner at the end. Prabowo (2003: 61) states that the concept of this Javanese philosophy means that if one has bravery to give way to others, he will get nobility at the end.

The attitude of being compliant *Wani ngalah* indicates that Javanese people do not want to have a conflict which may lead to bloodshed. Besides, the attitude of being compliant means that when someone is ready to be the loser he will confidentially become the winner. It is in accordance with a Javanese proverb saying "*Sing becik ketitik*

sing olo ketoro” which means that someone who is good will be visible and that who is evil will be revealed.

2.2. Easy to mingle

Based on the history of the Javanese, this ethnic group consists of the mixture of several generations such as from China, India, Thailand, Turkey and Arab, consequently they can mingle with one another in the island of Java easily without paying attention to the origin of their tribe, religion, and race. The evidence of this fact can be seen in Yogyakarta in which the Javanese can mingle with people from various other regions or other nations so that this town is known as Indonesian miniature. In this town, the indigenous people mingle and make a relationship with people from East Java, West Java, Jakarta, Sumatra, Sulawesi, Kalimantan and other regions of Indonesia. Even indigenous people can easily mingle with foreigners who visit this artistic town.

Another example which shows that Javanese can mingle with people from the other areas without considering those factors is through their daily interaction. Javanese choose their friends not only from a certain ethnic group but also from other nations, tribes, religions, or races. Anyone may become their friends and soul mates. The most important thing for them is that they should not do evil deeds.

2.3. Working cooperatively

The Javanese communities generally do not like to live individually. They have deep understanding with their colleagues; they like to help one another and to work together to achieve a certain goal. Suwardi (2016: 5) notes that a good individual needs to do useful things not only for himself but also for the others as a moral responsibility in social life.

This thing can be seen when one member of the Javanese community is celebrating a party. All the members of the community around the area will be ready to help and give contribution according to what they have such as power, mind, goods or money. In the event of condolence when one member of the Javanese community passes away, all the members of the community will come to show their sympathy and to help what they can do to relieve the burden of the family who suffer the loss of one member of the family. The next three evenings they will come again to support the sufferer and to help pray to the Almighty so that the deceased may be forgiven for all his sins and may be placed in the best possible place in the heaven.

2.4. Polite

In the range of the Javanese life, being polite is very much respected as high esteem. Therefore, parents always teach their children, grand sons and grand daughters to behave politely in their daily behaviour, including in the way they speak and dress. This is meant that they expect that their children and grandchildren are respected by other people. In Javanese proverb it is said that *ajining dhiri soko lathi, ajining sariro soko busono*, which means that one's self-esteem is determined from the way he speaks, and the way he dresses or behaves. Anshoriy (2008: 136) states that courtesy in speaking takes effect toward someone's life.

Being polite in behaviour must be realized in daily life such as knocking at the door when coming to someone's house by saying *Kula nuwun* 'Excuse me, may I come in'; when passing by through some older people by bowing down while saying *Ndherek langkung* 'Excuse me, let me pass'. It is considered impolite to pass in front of parents or older people, to take food first before the elderly, to stand in front of people who sit on the ground or on the chair, to run in the house, to yawn without closing the mouth and so on.

Being polite in speaking is not only in terms of the way one speaks but also in the type of language one uses. In Javanese there are three types of language according to the level to whom one speaks. They are *ngoko* (the lowest level), *Kromo* (the medium level), and *kromo inggil* (the highest level). In Javanese culture there are three levels of social segregation but it is limited to only in terms of being polite to behave and to speak. The young should speak to the elderly by using the higher level of language. It is considered not polite when someone speaks to the older person by using *ngoko* language, an old man to the Village Chief by using *kromo* language.

2.5. Friendly

The Javanese are well-known for their being friendly not only to people whom they have known for long but also to a new person whom they just know. This reality can be seen when a Javanese gets on the bus or train where he always greets and speaks to the passengers beside him whom he has not known before. Because of their friendliness, they have many friends and like to build friendships with people of various ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the Javanese are always alert to people whom they have just known as in Javanese there is a teaching of the philosophy of life manifested in a proverb saying *Wong urep kui kudu eling lan waspodo* 'In life one should be alert and cautious'.

2.6. Alert and cautious

Being alert and cautious *Eling lan waspodo* in Javanese, is the philosophy to warn people to always remember God the Almighty and to be alert and cautious to face life. The warning which is delivered by a Javanese philosopher Raden Ngabehi Ronggowarsito III in Achmad (2017: 40) who taught human beings to remember God frequently and to be alert toward situation and condition.

By being alert and cautious, the Javanese have confidence that they will get life peace which is not always from one's position or material but from the clean soul. Through awareness to be always alert and cautious, the Javanese give more priority to spiritual need than material need. They believe that happiness comes from God and those worldly things such as position and wealth are only mortal and illusory.

2.7. Timid and shy

Being timid and shy constitute one of the characters of the Javanese. For instance, when a Javanese guest is offered some food, he will keep on saying "No, thank you, I am full" although he is actually very hungry. But, when the host urges him, then he is ready to accept it but usually by taking a little amount of the food although he likes the food very much. When the host tries to simply serve some drink, he usually says "*Mboten usah repot-repot*" 'Don't be so busy', to indicate his feeling of being timid and shy; a dignified character not to make the host busy to serve him. Being timid and shy is one of the Javanese characters which must be practiced in the Javanese life as to behave in good manners *unggah-ungguh* constitutes the ways of life of the Javanese. Idrus (2012: 124) says that *sungkan* 'shy' carries a more positive meaning. This attitude is generally practiced by any individual in any position, social status and authority of the Javanese community.

2.8. Not self-forcing

Another type of the Javanese characters is termed as *ora ngoyo* 'not self-forcing'. This character has been taught to the Javanese community in their deepest soul. Prabowo (2003: 29) states that Javanese is a figure who can accept the condition and the fate bestowed upon him by the Almighty so that everything is accepted sincerely which is termed as *nerimo ing pandum* 'accepting sincerely anything bestowed by God'. In relation to this, Handayani (2004: 74) states "the best human being is feeling sufficient

for what he has got. Self-forcing will only make someone greedier and even expect more and more without limit”.

2.9. Patient

Being patient is another Javanese character which carries philosophy to be adopted by the Javanese as a guideline in their life. In the philosophy ingrained in the Javanese community, patience is the key to a success to reach a goal or ambition. Fadhillah (2010; 41) says that a Javanese who is morally mature will always have such dignified attitude and virtue. The first character of the Javanese is being patient. Adopting the philosophy of Ronggowarsito III, Achmad (2016: 163) says if someone adopts the character of being patient in any condition he will be successful to face any trial of life. It means he will not find difficulty when he faces any life problems and will be safe from distress and suffering and even he will get the sweetest fruit of the grace of God.

3. Research Method

This paper was based on qualitative research. Sujarweni (2014: 19) notes that qualitative research is a procedural research which results in descriptive data in the form of utterance or writing and behaviour. Qualitative research generally can be used for research related to social life, history, behaviour, functional organization, social activities and so on. This research is the study of writing documents such as text books, newspapers, magazines, letters, films, journals, scripts, articles and the like. The main source of data in this study was the text of the novel *Nun Pada Sebuah Cermin* written by Afifah Afra, which consists of 28 chapters, and 370 pages. Other sources which are related to the subject matter of this paper are also used. The data were obtained by noting the explicit as well as implicit information related to the subject matter. Secondary sources of data were taken from written sources. Guiding principles of research and of planning research have been used to isolate causes and effects, to properly apply theoretical relations, to measure and to quantify phenomena, to create research designs allowing the generalization of findings, and to formulate general laws.

Then, the data were analyzed from various angles to explore or reinterpret and find out some supporting arguments that Javanese characters are reflected as the main theme of the novel *Nun Pada Sebuah Cermin*.

4. Discussion

Out of nine types of Javanese personality proposed by Ahmad (2017), five of them were found in Afifah Afra's novel *Nun Pada sebuah Cermin*: (1) easy to mingle, (2) polite, (3) patient, (4) not self-forcing and (5) timid and shy, as discussed below.

4.1. Easy to mingle

Nun is a sociable girl who is easy to make friends with anyone. She lives in the wild crowded area where her neighbours have hard professions which either lawful or unlawful but Nun does not want to interfere other people's business. One of her neighbours named Petty is a prostitute but Nun never feels uncomfortable to have a neighbour like her. She thinks that it is Petty's life, and she should not interfere or go into her business.

Wiratno who lives at the same river bank also likes to mingle with his neighbours.

When Nun and her twin brothers were still small kids, Wiratno ever helped them save them from starving. Wiratno gave them food to relieve hunger. He is a humble man so that he likes helping many people although they are from different nationality and belief. He also firmly helps everyone who needs his help. Furthermore, Wiratno knows so much about Javanese culture so that he can explain about it to Mrs. Anke who comes from Netherland to Indonesia only to know about Javanese culture.

4.2. Polite

The character of being polite is depicted by Naya who interviews Nun one of the *keto-prak* players with soft greeting based on the politeness standard of Javanese culture. In every activity, Javanese people put forward more ethic of being polite. The politeness is a hereditary teaching taught by the ancestors to the next generation. Javanese people will be called unethical if they break the politeness in their behaviour. Naya as a young Javanese generation still firmly holds the principle of Javanese character. Nun, who is actually only an ordinary girl, is addressed by Naya with the word *Panjenengan*, which is the most polite word to say "you" in Javanese culture. Being addressed *Panjenengan* by Naya, Nun feels that Naya respects her so much although Nun is only an ordinary girl. On the other hand, Nun is also the mirror of Javanese girl who has a polite character both in speech and behaviour. When she is interviewed by Naya, a journalist, she answers her questions as polite as Naya does.

Polite character is also reflected by Wiratno who actually gets angry with his boss, Denmas Daruno. Wiratno, who is a wise man, does not evoke his emotion to hear Denmas Daruno's anger. Instead, Wiratno comes near him and greets him politely. It aims at alleviating discomfort of someone's heart and preventing a conflict. His boss, Denmas Daruno is easy to get angry if there is a problem. Greeting him politely is the best solution to cool his heart.

Polite character is not only presented with common people but also with members of a family. Citra, Naya's mother, is a noble Javanese woman who educates her son in a gentle way. She calls her son Naya in a gentle voice with the phrase *Cah bagus* 'Good boy.' Teaching politeness in speaking will make her son obey and respect his parents and he will have soft character. In the long run, he is expected to teach the values of politeness to his children.

4.3. Patient

Being patient is a noble attitude and this character is reflected by the protagonist of the novel Nun Walqolami. In her young age she has undergone many kinds of heavy problems and she is a figure of Javanese young girl who is patient to face various heavy life problems.

Nun feels so happy when the school states Nun as a student with good achievement. She expects her mother to attend the ceremony of graduation. But, her mother prefers working to attending such an event and Nun is so patient to face the bitter reality. It is impossible for her to argue her mother because she realizes the fact of her mother's condition. Nun must be patient to control the flame of her sadness wisely.

Nun has an ambition to become a smart girl and to have a bright future. She thinks that she can get rid of her poverty by pursuing higher study to the Senior High School but her mother cannot support her. She feels disappointed but she can manage her feeling to be patient by keeping her disappointment in her heart.

Nun again has to bear her patience when she is threatened by her boss who is in charge of *Ketoprak* Theatre named Denmas Daruno who is used to speaking rudely so that Nun has to learn how she has to control her emotion well. Her mother teaches her not to oppose parents and older people. Opposing Denmas Daruno means creating dispute which will lead to bad effects and she thinks that harmony of her family is above all. It is impossible for her to get a job with high wage. For her, the most important thing is that she can help her mother's burden.

When Nun receives discrimination from her boss Denmas Daruno who gives more wage to the other players whereas she plays a role as the main artist, again she can

bear to be patient. Denmas Daruno expresses his anger and says sharp words to her, she is consistent to be patient. Crying is the best solution for Nun because she cannot stand looking at his rude face but she needs a job to help her poor mother.

Nun's patience is also reflected when she faces the cruelty of her step father, Jiwo who treats her mother rudely. Not only is her mother hurt by Jiwo but also Nun and her twin brothers are always tortured by him.

Nun can hardly bear the heaviest trial when a policeman gives a bad news that her mother has died because of being killed cruelly by Jiwo, her step father. Nun falls fainted because of the shocking news. After being aware, she directly embraces her mother's corpse. Nun is so sad and beaten toward her mother's death. Nun must continue her duty to grow up her twin brothers lonely. Nun has to accept God's destiny to be responsible for her family. Nun still has another responsibility for her brothers. Her sadness has slowly disappeared from her heart. Nun becomes more patient to face what has happened. Various trials have been undergone by Nun patiently and the hard life has changed her to become a strong girl. Nun is not only strong to face various kinds of temptation but also strong in her faith to believe in God.

4.4. Not self-forcing

After the death of her husband, Kustanti, Nun's mother becomes a street singer and scavenger in the metropolis of Solo exactly around in the hurly-burly of Tirtonadi bus station to support the three children Nun, Bagas and Bagus. As the oldest child Nun gives advice to her brothers not to complain about the condition of their apprehensive family life in the wild small house. Nun and her families are types of people who have self-awareness. They do not have a great dream with the condition of their poor economy. Nun and her mother realize their ability. They run their life sincerely while trying hard to get a better life based on their ability.

Nun wants to study to the Senior High School but it is impossible for her to realize her dream. In spite of the fact that she is successful to reach the best achievement, her mother does not give any reaction toward Nun's success. Nun does not want to force her mother to come to her school. Nun realizes that her mother has worked hard to support their life as a scavenger. Nun and her mother are people who know themselves. Her mother has thought the effect if she must attend the ceremony to receive a trophy and a plaque of Nun's achievement, her children will starve.

Working as an artist in the *ketoprak* group makes Nun acquainted with a young talent journalist, the son of a rich businessman in solo. Coincidentally, Naya is looking for information about the *ketoprak* group which becomes cultural heritage especially

of Javanese culture. The first meeting with him makes a shiny feeling for Nun but she realizes that to build a new life with him is impossible because they have different social status. She does not want to force herself to follow her feeling to love Naya.

Nun works hard daily and she enjoys her job. Living in the crowded area gives her special impression. Everyday she watches people busy with their own business. People compete to chase their ambition until justifying various ways to achieve the ambition. However, Nun is not easy to be influenced to face various temptations by doing something beyond her capabilities.

4.5. Timid and shy

Denmas Daruno, the man in charge of *ketoprak* group Chandra Poernama introduces Nun to Miss Anke Van Schendel. Nun is an elegant girl. She keeps her attitude in front of the foreign guest. She shows her shy attitude to her. Moreover, Anke is an honourable lady, a Ph.D. of Javanesenology. As a Javanese girl, Nun knows how to behave herself in front of a person who has high rank and position. Nun applies the Javanese characters, timid and shy in the intercommunication. Nun keeps her attitude as a Javanese girl who must know manners especially to Anke whom she just gets acquainted. Nun respects Anke's good manner. Nun will answer Anke's question only if Anke asks her a question.

In the mean time, Denmas Daruno plans to invite Miss Anke for a dinner. He will also take her around the city of Solo at night. Nun as one of the *ketoprak* players is also invited by Denmas Daruno for the programs. The dinner will be held in *Warung Gudek Ceker Banjarsari*. Anke asks Wiratno and Naya too to join the dinner. When Nun is offered to choose the list of food menu, Nun only stuns and feels shy to choose it. Nun looks timid and shy in such a situation, in front of honourable persons like Anke, Denmas Daruno, Naya and Wiratno.

5. Findings

There are five Javanese characters which are reflected in the novel *Nun Pada Sebuah Cermin* written by Fifah Afra. Those characters are *easy to mingle*, *polite*, *patient*, *not self-forcing*, and *timid and shy* which are depicted through the main characters. The teaching of ancient Javanese ancestors from generation to generation to uphold ethics and manners in the daily life is still going on firmly in the implementation of the Javanese social life. The difference in social status still becomes priority in the Javanese social life to build eternal housewifery and choosing commensurate pair is the best way for the two sides who will get married to avoid a wide gap in the family life some days.

Lastly, although one should mingle with people from various backgrounds, Javanese people consistently glorify ethics in behaviour.

6. Conclusion

Character is the picture of someone's behaviour in the ways of acting, speaking, and thinking. Javanese character is a set of glorious behaviour which is emphasized on priority of ethics and manners in acting and behaving as cultural heritage from the ancestors for the present and the future generations. The manifestation of Javanese character is mainly reflected by the protagonist of the novel named Nun Walqomah such as easy to mingle, polite, patient, not self-forcing, and timid and shy. The Javanese are generally considered as people who have soft and wise characters, particularly in speaking and behaving and they always maintain to avoid dispute. *Unggah-Ungguh* 'to behave in good manners is a prior tenet for Javanese people, especially in order to get comfort, serenity, tranquillity, peace, and blessing in life. The Javanese teachings give many good values to human beings as taught by earlier Islamic propagators (*Wali*) in disseminating religion teachings of Islam in this Indonesia. For Javanese people, managing good characters can avoid losses of precious things.

Finally, it is recommended that the readers should learn and practice Javanese characters as the heritage of the Javanese culture and also as the asset of Indonesian culture. Further, It is also recommended that parents should teach them to their children so that they will become generations who have good characters.

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