

## **The Social Messages in The *Ramayana*: Perspektif on Literary Theory**

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### **Abstract:**

*The story of Ramayana has been deeply rooted in the community and is a material for literary studies that has never completed for discussion. In Java the epic, Ramayana first fully appeared in the form of a relief at the Lara Jonggrang Temple which was built around the year 782 to 872. The other emergence about the Ramayana story was in the composition which was in the form of Ramayana kakawin in Old Javanese. The Ramayana story begins with a blessing and a preface including a summary of the story which then contains verses of poetry. This study aims to convey the social messages contained in the Ramayana story to the public. This study uses qualitative research method based on the study of literature in the book of P. Lal (1981) which has been translated into Indonesian. The results of this study are (1) Explaining the social messages contained in the Ramayana story, (2) Explaining the exemplary wisdom of the character Rama, (3) Explaining the exemplary loyalty of the character Sita, (4) Explaining the example of Rahwana's character in the form of perseverance and sincerity in loving Sit, (5) Explaining ibrah (lessons) from the Ramayana story so that it can be used as the life learning. Overall, it can be understood that in the Ramayana there are many social messages that can be used as the exemplary life.*

### **Keywords:**

*Exemplary, Kakawin Ramayana, Ramayana, Social Message*

### **Abstrak:**

Kisah Ramayana telah mengakar dalam masyarakat dan merupakan kajian studi sastra yang tidak pernah selesai untuk dibahas. Di dalam kisah Jawa, Ramayana pertama kali muncul dalam bentuk sebuah relief di Kuil Lara Jonggrang yang dibangun sekitar tahun 782 hingga 872 Masehi. Kemunculan lain tentang kisah Ramayana adalah dalam *Kakawin Ramayana* berbahasa Jawa Kuno. Kisah Ramayana dimulai dengan doa-doa dan kata pengantar termasuk ringkasan cerita yang kemudian berisi ayat-ayat puisi. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyampaikan pesan sosial yang terkandung dalam kisah Ramayana. Kajian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif berdasarkan studi sastra dalam buku Ramayana karya P. Lal (1981) yang telah diterjemahkan ke dalam bahasa Indonesia. Hasil kajian ini adalah (1) Adanya pesan sosial yang terkandung dalam cerita Ramayana, (2) Adanya kebijaksanaan teladan dari karakter Rama, (3) Adanya kesetiaan teladan dari karakter Sita, (4) Adanya contoh karakter Rahwana dalam bentuk ketekunan dan ketulusan dalam mencintai Sita, dan (5) Adanya pelajaran dari kisah Ramayana sehingga dapat dijadikan pembelajaran hidup.

Secara keseluruhan, dapat dipahami bahwa banyak terdapat pesan sosial dalam cerita *Ramayana* yang dapat digunakan sebagai contoh teladan dalam kehidupan.

**Kata kunci:**

*Kakawin Ramayana*, Pesan Sosial, Ramayana, Teladan

**Introduction**

*Ramayana* is derived from *Sanskrit* namely *Rama* and *Ayana*, which means “Rama’s Journey”. The story of the *Ramayana* is a classic literary work from ancient India that is exalted. The story is so famous that there are some researchers that are interested to analyze it, especially in the field of literature (Purwanto, 2015). There are various forms of literary works. It can be in the form of *sloka* poetry as seen in Valmiki’s *Sanskrit* work entitled *Ramayana*. It can also be in the form of *kakawin* poetry such as *Ramayana* in Old Javanese, and *macapat* poetry in Javanese. Therefore, the *Ramayana* story has become a major theme that is interpreted in the form of literary work (Pratikto, 2011: xi).

The story of *Ramayana* told the story of an epic main character named Rama. Rama is the son of the King of Ayodya named Dasarata. One day, there was the contest held by Prabu Janaka that made Rama married Sita. Sita’s beauty—both physical and personality—made anyone could easily admire her. Rahwana, as the antagonist in the *Ramayana* story, suddenly had an interest in Sita that continued with a thirteen-year abduction story. It is worth to be discussed since most of earlier studies could not convey the message within the story. Therefore, the discussion in this study will present the social messages contained in the *Ramayana* story so that it can be used in real life.

This study aims to (1) describe the exemplary of Rama’s wisdom in the *Ramayana* story, (2) describe the exemplary of Sita’s loyalty in the *Ramayana* story, (3) describe the exemplary of Rahwana’s love sincerity in the *Ramayana* story, (4) describe the lesson in the story.

The method of the study uses qualitative

method based on the data obtained in the book of *Ramayana* written by P. Lal (1981) in Indonesian translation by Djokolelono (1995). It becomes the object of the study. It is supported with the book of *Hamba Sebut Paduka Ramadewa Teladan Cinta dan Kehidupan Rama-Sinta* (2011) written by Pratikto. It is supported with thesis, some scientific articles, and book that also discuss about *Ramayana* story which are thesis entitled *The Ethical Values of Dewi Sinta in Puppets (Review of Sri Mulyono’s books)* (Muad, 2003), some scientific articles entitled “The Symbol of Rama in the *Ramayana* Epic for Javanese Kings and Communities” (Wachid, 2015), “*Ramayana* Walmiki: Holistic Exploration of Management Control Systems” (Bonnie, 2017), “*Ramayana* Local Wisdom in Global Culture: Defamiliarization of the Hegemony of the Character in *Kitab Omong Kosong* Novel” (Prasetyo, 2017). This study uses descriptive analysis in which the data in this study will be presented systematically in order to obtain a clear picture of the focus of the study.

This study uses literary theory by referring to Bachruddin Musthafa’s book entitled *Theory and Practice of Literature in Research and Teaching* (2008). According to him, determining the meaning of a literary work is not easy. The meaning of a literary work does not only come from the words in the text as believed by supporters of the New Criticism. According to O’Brien (2002, in Mustafa 2008), meaning is determined by the perspective used in determining an object. He also added that meaning depends on the context (context-bound). The search for the meaning has long been carried out by people with their respective beliefs which are basically related to many things such as knowledge about the author,

texts or literary works, and context, including the context of reading (Mustafa, 2008).

According to Wahyuddin (2016, in Mustafa 2018) there are two elements in literary theory. First, the intrinsic element is the element that compiles a literary work from within that embodies the structure of a literary work such as themes, characters and characterizations, plot, setting, point of view, message and style of language. Second, the extrinsic element is the element that compiles a literary work from outside concerning the sociological, psychological aspects and others.

### Discussion

The glimpse of *Ramayana* book. The Ramayana story is a literary work from India written by Walmiki. The word Ramayana comes from Sanskrit namely Rama and Ayana which means the story of Rama's odyssey (Purwanto, 2015). Ramayana is the main verse and ideal verse which is also called as *kawi itihasa* or historical poetry (Lal 1981).

According to Sri Mulyono (1982), in Purwanto (2015), the story of Ramayana was first known by the Javanese people in Lara Jonggrang Temple which was built around 782 to 872. It was one of the temples in the Prambanan Temple complex. Another appearance of the Ramayana story was in the literary work of the *Ramayana kakawin* in Old Javanese. The story of the Ramayana began with blessing and preface which include a summary of the story and contain some poetic verses.

The Indonesian Wayang Encyclopaedia (1999), in Purwanto (2015) stated that the original Ramayana kakawin was written in seven volumes (kanda) which entirely consisted of 24,000 sloka. These are the explanation of the content of each sloka:

#### Bala-Kanda

This chapter told the story of the Ayodya which was the capital of the kingdom of Kosala.

The kingdom was led by a king who had a very extensive Vedic wisdom and knowledge—the king of Dasarata. Then, it continued the story of Rama's journey in the forest and his marriage with Sita.

#### Ayodya-Kanda

This chapter told the story of the expulsion of Rama from Ayodya to the forest of Dandaka. This chapter also told a lot about the wisdom of Rama when facing the challenges in his life. In addition, it also told Sita's loyalty as Rama's wife and Laksmana's obedience as Rama's faithful step brother. Furthermore, it also told the story of Dasarata's sadness which was the cause of his death.

#### Aranya-Kanda

This chapter told the abduction of Sita by Rahwana who was brought her to the kingdom of Alengka. Then, it continued with the story of Jatayu who tried to save Sita from Rahwana followed by the story of Sita's death. When Rama heard the news of Sita's disappearance from the care of Laksmana, he became sad and restless. The effort done by Rama and Laksmana to look for Sita made them having a long to the Mount of Risamuka where a tree named Sugriwa belonged to.

#### Kiskenda-Kanda

This chapter told the long journey of Rama and Admiral to Mount of Risamuka and his meeting with Sugriwa and Hanoman. It also discussed the conflict between two brothers'—Sugriwa and Subali—story. It continued with the story of the murder of Subali and the coronation of Sugriwa to become the king. In addition, it also told Sugriwa's strategy to free Sita from the kingdom of Alengka.

#### Sundara-Kanda

This chapter told the story of Hanuman in carrying the plan out to save Sita from the

kingdom of Alengka. It continued with the story of Indrajit who arrested Hanuman and the burning of the kingdom of Alengka.

### **Yuda-Kanda**

This chapter told the war in the Alengka kingdom, the death of Kumbakarna in the battle against Hanuman, the death of Indrajit because of the battle against Laksmana, the battle between Ramayana and Ravana which lasted for seven days and seven nights until the death of Rahwana and the return of Sita to Rama.

### **Uttara-Kanda**

This chapter told about the ritual of Sita's self-immolation as a proof of her sanctity after she was abducted by Rahwana and the earth's acceptance of Sita's body as proof of her sanctity as well.

### **The Synopsis of the *Ramayana* Story**

The country of Ayodya was a capital city with peaceful, prosperous and happy people. The place became the icon of the kingdom called as Kosala. Ayodya became a famous city throughout the world founded by Manu who was one of the main knights of the mankind (Lal, 1981). The kingdom of Ayodya was ruled by a king of Ayodya named Dasarata. He was the wise king. He had deep understanding knowledge of the Vedas. His insight and knowledge was so extensive that he was very loved by his people.

The king of Dasarata had three wives. The first wife was Goddess of Kausalya who gave birth to Rama - the ruler of the universe. The second wife was Sumitra who gave birth to twins named Satrugna and Laksmana. Both of them had expertise in using weapons and bequeathed a quarter of the power of Lord Vishnu. Then, the third wife, Goddess of Keikeyi, who gave birth to the son named Bharata who was bequeathed a quarter of the power of Lord Vishnu and a quarter of his wisdom.

A sage named Wiswamitra came to the

kingdom of Ayodya asking the king of Dasarata to send his son, Rama, to the place where he was imprisoned. Wiswamitra was imprisoned for many years and his solemnity was disturbed by giants during that time. The king of Dasarata reluctantly refused the request by considering Rama was too young to fight against the giants. However, The king allowed Rama and Laksmana to go with Wiswamitra.

The journey of the knights was very far through the Serayu river, the Gangga river and some forests where giant hid. During their journey, Rama and Laksmana were given spiritual knowledge by Wiswamitra. They also incessantly killed the giants who interfered the ritual of the sages. After seeing the power of Rama and Laksmana, Wiswamitra gave them invincible weapons.

The journey continued and Prabu Janaka heard the news about the arrival of Wiswamitra, Rama, and Laksmana. He asked them to come to the palace in order to join the contest. Prabu Janaka showed them a supreme bow that no one could take and bend it. However, Rama—with the blessing of Wiswamitra—managed to pull the bowstring until it curved and broke. Its sound was like the sound of an erupting mountain that everyone could fall because of its vibration. Because of his success, Prabu Janaka introduced him his beautiful daughter named Sita. Then, the wedding took place. The Janaka daughters were married to the king of Dasarata's sons and they were brought to the Kosala kingdom in Ayodya. Their lives were side by side, harmonious and prosperous until one day Goddess of Keikeyi asked the king of Dasarata to exile Rama.

The expulsion led to the abduction of Sita by the king of giant—Rahwana. The warfare between Jatayu and Rahwana was unavoidable while trying to save Sita. As the consequence, the kingdom of Alengka was destructed by Hanuman. All the chaos that ensued finally ended with Sita's return to the kingdom of

Kosala at Ayodya. However, the conflict was still not unstoppable with Rama's suspicion of Sita's holiness. This story ended with Sita's chastity oath.

### **The Exemplary of Ramayana's Wisdom in the *Ramayana* Story**

The story of Ramayana teaches many things to everyone like the lesson of human struggle in achieving love for the Creator. Besides, the *Ramayana* story also teaches that good can fight evil and it also contains the way of life that is built from humanism and spirituality (heteroglosia). Every character, conflict and event in the story talks about philosophy of high wisdom to understand the path of duty for daily life (Soeherman, 2017).

The example of Rama's wisdom in the *Ramayana* story is evidenced from disputes provoked by Goddess of Keikeyi. The envious incitement of Mantara maid for making Barata become the king and exiling Rama into the forest. This is clearly seen in the following quote:

"I honor my father's promise. I will go into exile to the jungle. I will braid my hair thick. I will dress in tree bark. I will do that for my teacher, for my father, for my friend, for the person to whom I owe. One thing that disappointed me — why didn't my father tell me about Barata's coronation? He is my brother. I will voluntarily and gladly give Sita, my kingdom, my life, and whatever I have to my brother, Barata. Why is my dad crying? Try to cheer him up. I have received his orders, and I will carry them out. I will soon go to the forest of Dandaka (Lal, 1981)."

The quote shows darma of Rama to his father and the people around him as the way to obtain the kindness and blessing of the Creator. As the guarantor of the promise given by the king of Dasarata to Goddess of Keikeyi, Rama

did not object to the request. Rama patiently took orders and released the throne that would be given to him.

*Darma* can be interpreted as the path or responsibility ordered by religion and tradition. On the other hand, religion is a form of human interaction with the cosmos and God (Soeherman, 2017). It means that Rama is the figure who lives accordance with his fate. This following quote is the example of his wisdom when he was exiled in the forest:

"Sita, my father has exiled me to the jungle. You are the main aristocratic family, you understand darma, you always follow the path of darma. I have to go. Please stay here, my love, and obey the King, my father. Also obey whatever Barata says, and don't forget religious ceremonies. My love, I have no other choice. I have to go. Listen to my advice and do not let you hurt anyone's heart. (Lal, 1981)."

Based on the quotation above, Rama's wisdom is seen when he decides to leave everything that he has in order to practice darma as the example for the others. He is able to sincerely decide it without any doubt.

According to *KBBI* online, wisdom means the ability using the mind (experience and knowledge), being clever and careful (accurate and thorough) when experiencing difficulties and so on. The story has shown darma and the ability in observing the events that occur. In addition, Rama's wisdom is proven by his cleverness in understanding the books and taking the advantage from the previous events. It also can be seen in the following quotation from the conversation of the *Ramayana* story:

"Mother, I cannot disobey my father's orders. I can only excuse myself from you, Mother, and go to the jungle. Do you remember the story of the hermit's kandu who slaughtered

a cow? He knew that it was against *darma*, but he did it because of his father's orders. Do you remember the story of the Sagara children? Sixty thousand in number, and all died trying to make the tunnel on the earth. They did it based on their father's orders. And now they all attained the status of gods because they obeyed their father's orders without asking! I want to be like that. I am not alone, Mother, I only follow the *darma* that has been set as the example from the past (Lal, 1981)."

### **The Exemplary of Sita's Loyalty in The Ramayana Story**

Sita as the noble woman was a well-loved daughter of Janaka. Sita was the incarnation of Dewi Laksmi as Lord Wisnu's favorite wife. In the *Ramayana* book (Lal, 1981). Prabu Janaka told the story of the birth of Sita that one day when Prabu Janaka hijacked his field, he was very surprised because he saw a tiny baby. He took her and raised her as his child. Prabu Janaka gave her the name Sita which means 'pirated lane'. Prabu Janaka said, "My daughter was not born of human content. I swear only an extraordinary human being who can become her husband. I do not want to give her to any prince (Lal, 1981: 32)." When Sita started to grow up, Prabu Janaka took the initiative to match Sita with a prince who was able to win the contest. Then, Rama came together with Prabu Wiswamitra and Laksmana. Rama managed to win the contest and married Sita and the three sons of Dasarata with the other three daughters of Prabu Janaka.

Dewi Sita has been described as a perfect person who can be exemplary of every woman's life. Dewi Sita has been widely used as a role model (Dailami, 2003: 6). The attitudes of simplicity, patience, loyalty are exemplary role in following the teachings of religion and traditions. Her respect towards her husband is also worthy of being the example.

"The King will convert you.  
May Indra protect you from the east,  
May Yama protect you from the south,  
May Baruna protect you from the west,  
May the Kuwera protect you from the north  
(Lal, 1981)."

The prayer quotation above indicates that Sita's love towards her husband was so deep that she always prays for him. Her prayer was her strength to make her stay faithful and love her husband. Thus, there is no doubt how much loyalty and love Sita has for Rama.

When the incident of the expulsion of Rama into Dandaka forest, Dewi Kausalya, Laksmana and Sita also mourned the decision. Many contradictions occurred, but Rama's wisdom could improve the situation at that time. Sita—as the faithful wife—did not easily let her husband leaving her but she decided to follow every path chosen by her husband.

"I will go with you.  
I'll eat after you finish eating.  
I will live from roots, tubers and fruit.  
I won't upset you.  
I will walk in front of you.  
I will enjoy the hills, lakes and rivers.  
I will be safe in your protection.  
I will enjoy the lake with geese and lotus.  
I will never feel tired  
No, even for a hundred thousand years  
I will not covet heaven  
If you don't exist there  
I love you and only you  
I will die without you "  
(Lal, 1981)."

In the *Ramayana*, there are many events that show Sita's loyalty to Rama. The main event was the abduction of Sita by Rahwana. His love for Sita had blinded her. However, Sita was still steadfast in her love for Rama. This is evidenced by the following conversation quote:

“Rahwana, listen to my words, ”Sita calmly answered. A woman lives to be chosen and choose. When he has made a choice, he is his whole life (Pratikto, 2011).”

“... I was born noble  
I married with all the ceremony  
I cannot do  
What not to do  
By a filial wife ... (Lal, 1981).”

Sita had to live miserably without the figure she loved for years but she still kept her love up. Rama whom she always longed for make her dedicated her life and death to him.

### **The Exemplary of Rahwana’s Love (Sincerity in the *Ramayana* Story)**

As a mighty king, Rahwana lead the invincible kingdom. Until one day, he was predicted that the one who could defeat him was only the powerful human, the ruler of nature. Living as a giant with the magical power of Mandraguna, Ravana could immediately do whatever he wanted and no one could prevent it. Rahwana has a cunning nature. He had big body as a giant nation, creepy face with bright red face, big head, and wide eyes (Amrih, 2016: 64). Not only being a scary and powerful figure, but Rahwana also had a wise characteristic. This is evidenced by the quotation of the following story:

“Fire and weapons and snares  
We don’t really fear it  
But the danger is more severe  
Coming from friends and relatives  
They are enemies in the blanket  
They always make bad tricks  
To trap us all To be caught and imprisoned  
(Lal, 1981).”

In the above quote, Rahwana as king and as an older brother had been influenced by his

thoughts. After kidnapping Sita and bringing her to the kingdom of Alengka, Rahwana lovingly presented a beautiful garden called Asoka.

However, after a dozen years, Sita was detained, not even once Rahwana touched her. Rahwana felt helpless about her great love for Sita until there was an incitement from his sister to rape Sita without deep thinking. The thought was automatically pushed aside by Rahwana.

For about 13 years, Sita lived with the luxury of Asoka Park, a magnificent building and a clean environment during the kidnapping. Rahwana, the very powerful figure, was only able to look at Sita from a distance during that times. When the curiosity met flared up in his heart, he was only able to stand in front of the garden outside the gate and shouted out what he said. Rahwana was keeping his character and chose good words to say in order not to hurt or frighten Sita. (Amrih, 2016: 284).

### **The Lessons in the *Ramayana* Story**

From the brief discussion, the lessons contained in the story of *Ramayana* appeared through the presence of Rama, Sita and Rahwana that provide a role model so that we can take the positive values on. First, the figure of Rama is illustrated as someone who was wise that could be understood from the depiction of his attitudes such as his pertinacity in seizing the throne, his patience in undergoing the exile in the forest, his persistence in trying to save Sita. In addition, he was both accurate and smart in dealing his problems.

Second, the lesson that could be taken from the character of Sita is her noble personality, especially her loyalty. Her loyalty was because she followed the advice of both religion and tradition. Besides, her loyalty was the form of wife’s obedience towards her husband.

Third, the example of Rahwana was his sincerity in loving and treating the woman he loved. Taman Asoka. Furthermore, his sincerity was the proof that love did not blind him

considering he never touched Sita even he gave her a special guard.

### Conclusion

From the study above, there are four conclusions that can be drawn. First, Rama in the *Ramayana* is a very special figure. This is illustrated by various stories in the *Ramayana* story that portray the character of Rama as a wise figure. His wisdom is evident from the various events experienced by Rama in his life such as his attitude when expelled from the kingdom of Ayodya or the incident when Rama was taken down from the throne of the king and chose to accept it gracefully. It can be used as the example in real life in order to be a good and wise person.

Second, there are some examples about Sita's loyalty in the *Ramayana* story. If Rama is the figure who is full of wisdom, then Sita is the character depicted as a very loyal person. Her loyalty is clearly illustrated in the *Ramayana* story that can be seen from the depiction her obedience and faith towards her husband such as when she swore and obeyed the wishes of her husband (Rama) to get into the flames as proof that he was faithful and still in the state of purity.

Next, the Rahwana figure in the *Ramayana* story is the antagonist. Therefore, readers often fail to understand ibrah (lessons) that can be taken from him. In fact, there are some examples that can be taken from Rahwana's character which are his perseverance and sincerity in loving Sita. It was illustrated by his story when he succeeded in kidnapping Sita and locking her up for approximately 13 years but Rahwana never touched him.

Finally, the lesson that can be taken from the *Ramayana* story is how the leaders reflect their attitudes that can be used as the examples e.g. the wisdom of Rama's figure in dealing with a problem, the character of Sita who has loyalty and honor, and the sincerity of love by Rahwana towards Sita in order to dignify her.

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