

Calon Arang: From Oral Tradition to Text in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's Narrative for the Advancement of Literary Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the narrative transformation of Calon Arang, a Balinese folklore rich in mysticism and local ethics, into a modern literary text reinterpreted by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. The research assumes that Pramoedya did not merely adapt a folktale but carried out an ideological reconstruction of the character Calon Arang as a symbol of female resistance against structural injustice, gender stigma, and patriarchal epistemological hegemony. In Pramoedya's version, the elderly woman, long portrayed as an evil witch, is reimagined as an intelligent, courageous figure who subverts masculine power structures—both royal and religious. The study employs an intertextual approach and critical discourse analysis by comparing the oral narratives of Calon Arang in Balinese tradition—recorded in lontar manuscripts and dramatized in Calonarang performances—with Pramoedya's literary text. Using postcolonial feminist theory and Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, this research explores the potential of Calon Arang as a teaching material that cultivates both local cultural literacy and critical gender awareness in the classroom. Findings show that the transformation of Calon Arang from oral folklore to modern literary text signifies a paradigmatic shift: from a myth of ostracism to a narrative of resistance. Pramoedya's Calon Arang emerges not as an emblem of evil but as a metaphor for the educated woman oppressed for resisting sexist norms and unequal socio-religious power. The work is thus relevant for inclusion in secondary and higher education literary curricula as a progressive model of critical literacy rooted in local culture. The study concludes that integrating local folklore into modern literature not only enriches the Indonesian literary canon but also opens dialogic spaces across generations, between myth and social critique, and between education and emancipation. Within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, this study offers a strategic contribution to the development of contextual, transformative, and gender-sensitive literary education.

KEYWORDS

Calon Arang, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, literary education, gender equality, critical literacy, narrative transformation



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Introduction

Calon Arang is a folktale deeply rooted in the cultural landscapes of Bali and Java. In the Javanese tradition, its earliest recorded form appears in a lontar manuscript dated to 1540 CE (Saka year 1462, LOR 5387/5279), still preserved in the national library. In Bali, the tale is preserved in *geguritan*, oral traditions passed down through generations, now academically classified as folk literature. In contemporary times, *Calon Arang* stands among the most widely retold folktales across various genres—novels, dramas, comics, dance dramas, and even animated films. Pramoedya Ananta Toer [7] adapted *Calon Arang* from a modern perspective in his book *Cerita Calon Arang*. Motivated by the lack of children's literature in the 1950s, Pramoedya wrote the

story in simplified form. However, when evaluated in today's context, the content does not fully align with current standards of age-appropriate language and psychological development. Though a folktale, Pramoedya imbued his version with his characteristic socio-political commentary, including critiques of gender discrimination. His narrative reflects the patriarchal conditions of household and societal life, particularly for women. As an intertextual work, *Cerita Calon Arang* is crucial for literary education, especially at the tertiary level. In both the Javanese and Balinese oral versions, Calon Arang is overtly vilified as a wicked widow and practitioner of black magic. The tale centers on Calon Arang, who lives in the remote village of Girah and has a beautiful daughter, Ratna Manggali. Despite her beauty, Ratna Manggali remains unmarried because men fear her mother's ominous reputation. This social stigma results in Ratna being labeled as "undesirable." Enraged by the slander, Calon Arang curses the entire village. King Airlangga then orders Mpu Baradah to eliminate her. Ultimately, Calon Arang dies at the hands of Mpu Baradah. New interpretations of the Calon Arang story have emerged through various modern genres and performances, reflecting Bali's flexible approach to traditional art. As a result, Calon Arang's image has evolved—from a villainous figure to a symbol of female resistance. According to Abdullah [1], literature cannot be separated from the realities of human life. It mirrors human experiences and serves as a medium for authors to express their aspirations. Beyond recording history, literature functions as a tool of critique against institutions or entities referenced by the writer [3].

Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative descriptive method. As defined by Ratna [4,5], qualitative research prioritizes the contextual meaning of data. The research object is literary education in Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Cerita Calon Arang* [7]. Data were collected non-interactively through intensive reading and content analysis. Analysis involved close reading of the text, focusing on narrative structure, character portrayal, and quotations with educational dimensions. Selected excerpts were examined within the framework of literary education for university students.

Discussion

Cerita Calon Arang (CCA) by Pramoedya Ananta Toer tells the story of a woman possessing dark powers who causes chaos in a village named Daha. The tale is not merely a struggle between good and evil—it delves into the social consequences of greed and power. It highlights mother-daughter dynamics and explores how fear and prejudice obstruct happiness. Calon Arang is depicted as a marginalized widow, perceived as inferior and powerless. Aware of her social stigma, she becomes a witch in Girah. Her daughter Ratna Manggali, over 25 and unmarried, becomes the target of public gossip, branded as a "spinster." Recognizing the injustice inflicted on both herself and her

daughter, Calon Arang fights for rights: employment, marital status, and the right to choose one's life path. Her resistance, symbolized by her curses, leads to many deaths and prompts King Erlangga to send his troops after her. Pramoedya's narrative portrays Calon Arang's actions as a woman's struggle within a patriarchal society.

"She had a daughter. Until now, no one wanted to marry her." [7, p. 57]

This quote reveals the root of Calon Arang's wrath—not pure evil, but maternal pain. Her rage is shaped by a society that marginalizes widows and elder women. In a patriarchal system like Kediri's, a woman's value depends on her father or husband. Ratna is "undesirable" not by her own doing, but by association with her mother. According to literary psychologists such as Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan, maternal protection can manifest as extreme acts in threatening environments. In this text, Calon Arang's revenge reflects collective trauma and societal exclusion. Gilligan (1982) explains that women often express morality through care ethics; Calon Arang's curse is a distorted act of love.

"Let me tell you the truth. But, my lord, this must not be heard by anyone...
'Of course I won't tell anyone... Would I betray my own mother-in-law's secret? I'm her son-in-law.'" [7, pp. 72-73]

This excerpt reveals the manipulative tactics of a man exploiting family trust for political aims. His false loyalty illustrates how women (Calon Arang and her daughter) become tools in male-dominated socio-political games. In literary education, students are encouraged to critically evaluate gendered rhetoric, particularly how women's trust is often betrayed in asymmetrical power relations. Calon Arang represents a trusting mother deceived by patriarchal structures. Her revealed secret leads to her downfall. This betrayal reflects how women—regardless of their perceived power—are manipulated within male-controlled systems.

From a literary ethics perspective, the phrase "*I'm her son-in-law*" pretends to uphold moral duty but conceals betrayal. This prompts crucial discussions on how language can be weaponized, and how moral responsibility is often sacrificed for ideological or political ends. For students—especially in courses on Gender-Based Literary Education or Literature and Identity—this narrative offers opportunities to: 1) Examine emotional and power structures in interpersonal relations; 2) Cultivate critical awareness of promises and betrayals affecting women's lives; 3) Analyze literature not just for aesthetics but for its social and gender implications.

Pramoedya's narrative urges readers to question dominant stories that silence women, aligning with his assertion that literature's duty is not to reflect, but to awaken consciousness.

Conclusion

The narrative transformation of *Calon Arang* from Balinese oral tradition into Pramoedya Ananta Toer's modern literary text is more than a mere adaptation—it is an ideological reconstruction that challenges patriarchal hegemony and gender stereotypes. In Pramoedya's hands, the vilified widow becomes a symbol of female resistance against socio-political oppression and marginalization. Employing intertextuality and critical discourse analysis framed by postcolonial feminism and critical pedagogy, this article affirms *Calon Arang*'s value as a strategic educational resource. The narrative reveals the complexity of power, betrayal, and ethics in patriarchal systems—issues vital for classroom discussions on gender consciousness and social justice. Aligned with the *Merdeka Curriculum*, this work contributes to contextual, transformative, and gender-sensitive literary education. Pramoedya, through *Calon Arang*, not only enriches Indonesian literature but also compels readers to deconstruct dominant narratives that have long silenced women's voices.

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