

Hydropedagogical Literary Perspective on the Brantas River Myth in Java, Indonesia



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ABSTRACT: This study on the myths of the Brantas River is conducted using a literature hydropedagogy perspective. The research aims to dissect the literary aspects of the myth by applying the concept of water studies. This qualitative research uses data in the form of mythological narratives about the Brantas River that are prevalent in the Kediri community, collected through interviews with local residents. The data is analyzed through various literatures using the hydropedagogy perspective developed based on the concept "Learning from Water" by Prof. Dr. Suwardi Endraswara, M.Hum. The origin of the Brantas River is described by Empu Bharada, who divided the Kediri Kingdom's territory by pouring water from a jug in the middle of the kingdom. The analysis reveals several Javanese philosophies related to water: (1) water always flows from higher to lower places, (2) water always fills empty spaces, and (3) water always flows to the estuary. Additionally, the term "kendhi" is derived from the phrase "kendhalining dhiri". A myth suggests that if a president crosses the Brantas River, they will lose their position or power. This belief is linked to the mystical nature of the Brantas River, often used for rituals and spiritual practices by ancestors. However, the validity of this belief depends on one's logic and religious values. Moreover, the study explores how individuals perceive myths as life guidelines or literary works that enhance cultural awareness and wisdom in facing life.

KEYWORDS: myth, river, hydropedagogy, water

I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is one of the arts of language and expression of thought, encompassing spontaneous expressions of deep feelings (Nasrimi, 2021). These expressions include views, ideas, feelings, thoughts, and all human mental activities. In literature, there is a surge of profound human emotions and moral truths with a touch of sanctity, broad perspectives, and captivating forms with building elements that create aesthetic value. Such literature is often found in the stories circulating within society.

Folk literature is part of the cultural heritage of a community, covering all aspects of life in a given society (Endraswara, 2018). Folk literature arises among people who are unfamiliar with writing, thus referred to as oral literature. Oral literature is based on the literary traditions passed down verbally within a region. It is delivered in the form of mantras, rhymes, proverbs, myths, and bedtime stories.

According to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (KBBI, 2011:749), a myth is a story of a nation's gods and heroes from ancient times, containing profound meanings expressed in a mystical manner. The Popular Scientific Dictionary defines a myth as related to primitive beliefs about the supernatural, arising from unscientific human efforts to explain the world or surrounding nature (Pius, 2001:475). The term "myth" comes from the Greek word "muthos," which means a story or something spoken by someone. Myths are stories about the origins of the world and extraordinary events that are believed to have truly occurred and contain mystical elements.

Myths are essentially religious in nature. The connection between myths and religious values lies in how individuals or specific groups still believe in and apply the principles of these myths in their lives (Endraswara, 2015:13). Myths provide a rationale for religious beliefs and practices. The topics discussed are closely related to human existence itself, addressing fundamental issues about our origins and everything in the world. Myths offer explanations and descriptions of an ordered universe and serve as a backdrop for regulated behavior (William, in Dananjaya, 1991:50).

Peurson (1992:28) describes myths as stories that provide guidelines and direction to a group or society. These stories can be conveyed through oral narration, but also through dances or puppet performances. The essence of these stories includes symbols reflecting primitive human experiences, symbols of good and evil, life and death, sin and purification, marriage and fertility,

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paradise and the afterlife. The content of myths tends to be denser than mere sequences of thrilling or entertaining events. In other words, myths are not just reports of past events or tales of gods and magical worlds but provide guidance for human behavior and serve as a form of wisdom. Through myths, people can engage in surrounding events and respond to natural forces (Pearson, 1993:37).

Some functions of myths include: (a) raising awareness of supernatural forces; myths are not information about these forces but methods for anticipating, studying, and relating to them; (b) providing assurance for the present; myths represent past events and offer advice and anticipation for the present; (c) expanding epistemological and ontological horizons about reality; myths provide an understanding of the world and its origins, but not in the manner of modern historical science. Simon (2006:45) explains that mythological space and time are contexts for discussing origins and purposes rather than factual space and time.

In Kediri District, many myths are prevalent, especially those concerning the Brantas River, which supposedly makes Indonesian presidents afraid to cross it. It is said that if a president enters Kediri District, they will be easily defeated by political opponents and lose their position. So, what is it about the Brantas River?

The Brantas River is a river flowing in East Java Province. It is the second-longest river on Java Island after the Bengawan Solo River. The Brantas River stretches approximately 320 km, flowing around an active volcano, Mount Kelud. Its catchment area is about 12,000 km², or a quarter of East Java Province (Handayani, 2001). The river's source is located at the foot of Mount Arjuno, in Sumber Brantas Village, Bumiaji District, Batu City. The Brantas River flows through nine districts: Malang, Blitar, Tulungagung, Trenggalek, Kediri, Nganjuk, Jombang, Mojokerto, and Surabaya.

Many myths about the Brantas River circulate within the community. Among them is the belief that if a president visits Kediri, they will lose their position, along with myths such as Bedug Seketi the White Crocodile, the Kingdom of the White Crocodile Queen, the river's water turning into blood, or even treasure at the river's bottom. These myths are intriguing to study.

This study of the Brantas River myths is conducted using a literature hydropedagogy perspective. Hydropedagogy is a relatively new concept, and literature specifically addressing water studies in literature is rare. This research aims to explore the literary aspects of the Brantas River myths through the lens of water science. Ontologically, hydropedagogy (hydropedagogy) is derived from the Greek word "hydro" meaning water and "pedagogy," which is the art or science of teaching or learning styles. Hydrology, in general, is a branch of geography studying the movement, distribution, and quality of water on Earth and water resources (Balai PSDA, 2017). The relationship between living beings and water is inseparable; life without water is ultimately unsustainable. Similarly, writers often use water as inspiration. Water in literary texts becomes a central focus for research using a hydropedagogy perspective. From the nature of water, even everything about water can be a lesson. Endraswara (2018:186) states that in Javanese local ethnic life, water contexts have various important properties. Based on the concept of water, myths or other oral literature function like water, serving as a means of generational learning.

Relevant previous research includes a study by Afif Andi Wibowo (2011) titled "Community Perception of the Three-Taste Water Myth in the Sunan Muria Area of Kudus Regency." This study aimed to understand how myths related to the three-taste water myth develop in society. The similarity between Wibowo's (2011) study and this research is the focus on myths. The difference is that while Wibowo (2011) studied the development and community perceptions of the three-taste water myth, this study investigates the myths related to the Brantas River from a literature hydropedagogy perspective.

Therefore, the research problem to be examined in this study is: What is the origin and the myth of the Brantas River from the perspective of literature hydropedagogy? This research is limited to myths surrounding the Brantas River in Kediri District. The expected benefits of this research are to expand knowledge related to multidisciplinary studies of Javanese literature, enrich literary studies related to the perspective of literature hydropedagogy, and enhance understanding of the myths in Kediri District, particularly those concerning the Brantas River. Hence, the title of this research is "Hydropedagogical Literary Perspective on the Brantas River Myth in Java, Indonesia"

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method. According to Moleong (2014:6), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as actions, behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and views, described comprehensively using words and scientific language. The objective of qualitative research is to understand social phenomena. The data for this research consists of mythological stories about the Brantas River circulating in Kediri society, which are collected through interviews with local residents. The data is then analyzed using various literatures with a hydropedagogy perspective developed based on the concept of "Learning from Water," as proposed by Prof. Dr. Suwardi Endraswara, M.Hum (2018:183).

The findings are then interpreted, presented in a narrative form, and concluded. The next step involves validating the findings. The validity of the data in the research is determined using credibility criteria (degree of trustworthiness). This is done to ensure that the findings align with the facts in the field. Data validation is carried out through:

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1. Enhancing Diligence and Precision

Researchers increase diligence and precision by employing various techniques to ensure accurate and precise research results. This involves expanding knowledge on all aspects related to the research topic.

2. Data Triangulation

Data triangulation is conducted to avoid critical errors during data collection. Triangulation can be done through various sources, techniques, and times to ensure the accuracy of the data obtained. In this study, triangulation is performed through source triangulation (validity test by seeking, understanding, and rechecking data sources before drawing conclusions).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Origin of the Brantas River from the Perspective of Literature Hydropedagogy

According to legend, there once was a great kingdom called Kahuripan, ruled by a king named Prabu Airlangga, who hailed from Bali. He was a prince from Bali. As Prabu Airlangga approached old age, he desired to become an ascetic and intended to pass the throne of Kahuripan to his only daughter, Sanggramawijaya. However, Sanggramawijaya refused her father's wishes; she did not want to become a queen and only wished to be an ascetic. She requested her father's permission to become an ascetic in the Selomangleng Cave at the foot of Mount Klotok, Mojoroto District, and changed her name to Dewi Kili Suci.

Prabu Airlangga then decided to pass the throne to his two sons from a concubine, Sri Samarawijaya and Mapanji Garasakan. The king was confused about choosing one of them to inherit the throne of Kahuripan. He sought a fair and best solution and sent Empu Bharada to Bali. Empu Bharada was instructed to request the throne from Prabu Airlangga's father in Bali for one of his sons. It turned out that Prabu Airlangga's father's throne in Bali had already been given to his brother, Anak Wungsu.

Upon returning from Bali, Empu Bharada informed Prabu Airlangga of the situation. Empu Bharada then suggested that Prabu Airlangga trust him to find a way to divide the kingdom into two equal parts. The next day, Empu Bharada flew with a jug of water. While flying over the center of the Kahuripan kingdom, he poured out the water from the jug. Miraculously, the land where the water fell immediately turned into a river. This river became large and its flow was very strong. This river is now known as the Brantas River.

The Kahuripan kingdom was thus divided into two parts, with the boundary being the river created by Empu Bharada. Prabu Airlangga then handed over the two parts of the kingdom to Sri Samarawijaya and Mapanji Garasakan. The eastern part of the kingdom was given to Mapanji Garasakan and named the Jenggala kingdom. The western part of the river was given to Sri Samarawijaya and named the Panjalu or Kediri kingdom, which is now Kediri City. Prabu Airlangga peacefully left Kahuripan to become an ascetic in Pucangan and changed his name to Resi Gentayu (cited from infokediriraya.com).

Based on this story, Empu Bharada poured the water jug while flying over the kingdom. According to Saputro (2011), water and water sources play a crucial role in life. He states that in Javanese cosmology, patirtan or water sources have significant meanings. Patirtan can be a water source, well, river, lake, sea, etc. Water and water sources are sources of life. Besides being used for daily life, water is also used by ancestors for various rituals, such as ritual bathing or tirta perwitasari in sacred relic purification. Given the importance of water sources, ancestors and Javanese society preserve them through rituals such as ruwatan and nyadran.

Saputro (2011) explains that water, as a source of life, has philosophical and local wisdom values that can guide life, including: (1) Water always flows from higher places to lower places, symbolizing that leaders should serve and be a source of welfare for their people; (2) Water always fills empty spaces, meaning that in life we should improve ourselves, fill our hearts and minds with good things like water, and benefit many people; and (3) Water always flows to the estuary, referring to the concept of "sangkan paraning dumadi," which signifies that we will return to our creator.

In Javanese philosophy, there is a saying, "Dadia banyu, aja dadi watu!" (Be like water, not like stone!). While people might think that stone is stronger than water, Javanese believe otherwise. Despite its apparent weakness, water, which adjusts to its surroundings, possesses immense power. Drop by drop, water can wear down stone. This philosophical lesson suggests that we should adopt a gentle attitude like water in life. When facing problems, we should approach them patiently rather than with force. As Empu Bharada did, solving problems with water symbolizes a gentle approach. If Empu Bharada had thrown stones, the Brantas River would not exist.

Additionally, there is a saying "Ora ana banyu mili mandhuwur" (No water flows upward), which describes how Empu Bharada poured water from above. This aligns with the nature of water, always flowing from higher to lower places. Similarly, a leader should serve and be a source of welfare for their people. Another interpretation of the saying is that children generally follow their parents' traits.

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In the story, Empu Bharada carries a jug, which is a container for water. The term "kendi" (jug) is derived from Sanskrit (Hindi), "kundika," meaning 'water container.' Kundika is an attribute of Hindu deities Brahma and Shiva and is also associated with Avalokitesvara in Buddhism. Jugs were traditionally made from clay and fired, serving as containers for drinking water, medicines, or traditional herbal concoctions.

In Javanese philosophy, the jug symbolizes the source of life, with water inside representing the source of life for humans and nature. Jugs are used in Javanese rituals, such as in the ceremonial preparations for marriage, symbolizing hopes and prayers for a harmonious household.

B. The Meaning of 'Kendi' in Javanese Literature

In the development of Javanese literature, the word kendi is not only viewed as a term borrowed from Sanskrit but holds a deeper significance. The Javanese are known for their creativity in language. The practice of othak-athik gathuk - refining a word or phrase until it fits or makes sense - is a common method in Javanese linguistic and literary traditions. This process involves not just combining words but giving them more philosophical meanings. Such meanings attached to "something" are often used as symbolic language by the Javanese in communication, offering pepeling (warnings) or paweling (messages or advice) to others. In Javanese linguistics and literature, this practice is referred to as kerata basa. Kerata basa can be interpreted as an abbreviation of a sentence into a single word, which then conveys the meaning of the entire sentence.

The Javanese word kendi is often interpreted as kendhalining budhi, meaning "control over the heart and mind" (Muryanto, 2020). From the term kendi, the Javanese convey that the water put into the kendi is clean, and its outflow is also clean, pure, and purifying. Philosophically, humans should also be like this. If what they hear and learn is good, then what they speak and do should also be good.

In the past, kendi and lincak (a bamboo seat, similar to a small cot) were always placed in front of houses. Anyone passing by could drink water from the kendi and rest on the lincak. When the water in the kendi was depleted, it would be refilled daily. The purpose was to ease the journey for passersby, even if they were strangers. The kendi and lincak symbolized tolerance and sharing with others. Drs. Raden Mas Panji Srokartono (1877-1952), as cited by Susbandono (2022), described this attitude of providing drinking water in kendi and lincak as "sugih tanpa banda" (rich without wealth). This means that wealth is not solely measured by material possessions. Richness is not just about money, or being a person of high position with many connections, but rather being filled with compassion, sharing one's possessions without expecting anything in return, recognizing that others might be facing greater difficulties than oneself.

C. The Curse of the Brantas River: If the President Crosses It, They Will Be Ousted

In Kediri Regency, East Java, there is a belief that the area should not be visited by Indonesian presidents. According to local myth, if an Indonesian president visits Kediri Regency, they will be ousted or lose their position. The locals also associate this curse with several places, such as Simpang Lima Gumul in Kediri, believed to be the center of the Kediri Kingdom. Another version links the curse to the Brantas River, which marks the boundary of the Kediri Kingdom, suggesting that if a king or currently, a president enters Kediri by crossing the Brantas River, they will be ousted.

It is believed that after visiting Kediri, several presidents were ousted. Presidents Sukarno, B.J. Habibie, and Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) are known to have been ousted after visiting Kediri. Is there a connection between this curse and the Brantas River, which marks the boundary of the Kediri Kingdom?

Tifani (2022) posits that the myth of the president being ousted if they visit Kediri is related to the history of the Kediri Kingdom. According to the Babat Kadhiri chronicles, there was a curse on the Kediri Kingdom during wartime. The curse states:

If Kediri's troops attack the enemy first in their territory, they will always win the battle. However, if the enemy attacks the Kediri Kingdom's center first, they will achieve a resounding victory.

Perhaps due to this curse, presidents have avoided visiting Kediri. Presidents Soeharto, Megawati Soekarnoputri, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and Joko Widodo have never visited Kediri. Some interpret that if a president dares to visit Kediri, their position becomes more vulnerable to political attacks or defeat.

However, few are aware that the Brantas River has historical significance for Majapahit kings. According to Purwadi (2021), Majapahit kings, since the era of Raden Wijaya in 1293, engaged in spiritual practices, including tapa ngeli at the Brantas River. This practice was also undertaken by the rulers of Medang, Kahuripan, Kediri, Jenggala, Daha, Singosari, and Majapahit. Through tapa ngeli, Javanese ancestors obtained supernatural powers.

Tapa ngeli is a form of ascetic practice involving floating or drifting in a river. According to Wirasandjaya (2019), in ancient times, this practice was done by floating on a raft in the river. Today, tapa ngeli is interpreted as surrendering to the will of the Creator. Drifting along the winding river symbolizes a natural wisdom language. In Javanese, there is a saying, "manut ilening banyu" (following the will of the water), reflecting the concept of surrender and acceptance of divine will.

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For those practicing Kejawen (Javanese spirituality), Mount Arjuno and the Brantas River are considered sacred, often used in ancestral rituals. If the Brantas River is considered sacred, does it mean that individuals with bad intentions will face consequences? If so, does the myth that crossing the Brantas River into Kediri leads to being ousted suggest that the president harbors ill intentions? This ultimately relates to the interpretation of myths as part of oral literature. Oral literature can stimulate intelligence as it contains riddles that engage reasoning and logic (Endraswara, 2018:183), leading to greater cultural awareness and wisdom in handling life.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This research on the myth of the Brantas River is conducted using a hydropedagogical literary perspective. The study examines the literature of the myth through the lens of water science. The origin of the Brantas River is depicted by Empu Bharada, who divided the Kediri Kingdom by pouring water from a kendi right in the center of the kingdom. Upon examination, the origin story contains several Javanese expressions or philosophies related to water, namely: (1) water always flows from the source/higher place to a lower place, symbolizing that a leader should serve and be a source of welfare for their followers; (2) water always fills empty spaces, meaning in life we should continually improve ourselves, fill our souls and hearts with goodness, and benefit many people; and (3) water always flows to the estuary, referring to the concept of “sangkan paraning dumadi,” which means that we will return to our Creator. Furthermore, the term kendi (Javanese) is a *kerata basa* of the phrase *kendhalining dhiri*, meaning control over one’s heart and mind.

The myth that Kediri Regency in East Java is a place that Indonesian presidents should avoid is still believed by some people in Indonesia. Allegedly, if an Indonesian president crosses the Brantas River in Kediri Regency, they will be ousted or lose their position. This is linked to the Brantas River’s sacredness, as it has often been used for rituals and *tapa ngeli* by ancestors. However, whether this is true depends on individual logic and religious values. Additionally, it relates to how one views myths as guidelines for life or literary works that increase cultural awareness and wisdom in dealing with life.

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