

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF JAVANESE TRADITION: A LITERARY ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF SERAT PRABANGKARA

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Abstract *The Prabangkara Manuscript or Serat Prabangkara by Ki Padmasusastra is one of the notable Javanese literary works that captures the social and cultural transformations during Indonesia's colonial transition. Serat Prabangkara is one of the Javanese literatures works steeped in local representations of tradition. This paper explores how text portrays royal court life, marriage arrangement, and the use of occult practices, as well as reconstructing traditions of harmony through thematized of love, social hierarchy, gender relations, and nature symbolism. A literary anthropological approach is utilized to examine the text within the Javanese cultural context. Within the framework of literary anthropology, the study of Serat Prabangkara serves as a medium to comprehend how Javanese tradition is reconstructed and preserved through literary narrative. This theory frames literary works as a cultural representation, which enables in-depth analysis of the traditional aspects embodied in it. The study result revealed that Serat Prabangkara serves as a medium for tradition preservation as well as cultural value adaptation in a modern context. The symbolism in text reflects universal values of balance, love, and harmony that remain relevant across different periods.*

Keywords:

Serat Prabangkara, Javanese tradition, harmony, literary anthropology, Nature symbolism

Article Info

Received : 15 May 2025

Accepted : 19 Aug 2025

Published: 20 Nov 2025

1. Introduction

Javanese literature is one of the cultural heritages that capture the richness of values, traditions and indigenous wisdom of the Javanese people. In this body of literature, local traditions and cultures are frequently placed as the center of exploration—historically, philosophically, and symbolically. Literary works do not merely serve as entertainment; in their development, they also serve as a medium for elaborating the memory of a society's philosophical values and behavioral norms, as well as a response to the beauty and majesty of nature (Agustina, 2015). In Javanese literature, one of which is *serat* or manuscript, which contains morals or virtuous teachings, advice, among others (Fahmi, 2020). One notable work in Javanese literature

is *Serat Prabangkara*, a classic manuscript steeped in traditional and artistic values. Through this work, various traditions, social values, and worldviews of Javanese society are clearly portrayed, making it a reflection of cultural identity that remains relevant for scholarly examination.

Serat Prabangkara is a literary work that will be examined in this paper from an anthropological perspective. Anthropology and literature represent a dual relationship, as the creative and imaginative nature of anthropological writing parallels the process of literary creation. Through Nigel Rapport's analysis, which draws on Clifford Geertz's perspective, anthropology produces writings that represent sociocultural realities through personal perspectives reflecting individuality and imagination. Nigel argues that anthropological writers construct new worlds by imagining other realities based on the symbolic realities they inhabit and on scriptural conventions that may serve as a foundation for their application (Rapport, 1994). Field notes or monographs, which are anthropological writings in itself, are not merely a tool for conveying facts, but rather a creative way of comprehending and reconstructing reality. This aligns with literary works that bring experiences to life through individual style.

As Ratna (2011) explains in the context of literary anthropology, literary works are analyzed as forms of cultural activity that embody anthropological elements—particularly the complexity of ideas such as language, religion, and myth—alongside literature as a dominant medium enriched by cultural aspects. According to Potaya (as cited in Ratna, 2011), literary anthropology examines literature from a cultural perspective, emphasizing that literature and anthropology complement each other in portraying and recreating cultural reality through the lens of individual experience and imagination. As illustrated in *Serat Prabangkara*, language, religion, and myth are interrelated and embedded within the literary work.

Serat Prabangkara by Ki Padmasusastra is one of the Javanese literary works that represents the social and cultural transformation during Indonesia's colonial transition, especially Java. According to Robin Williams (Alfan, 2013) Social values shape the common good through effective collective agreements that reflect shared opinions, thus forming norms that are widely accepted and upheld in society. Whereas cultural values according to Koentjaraningrat came from the conception that originated from the community's thoughts based on something that is regarded as honorable (Syarifuddin, 2017). *Serat Prabangkara* was composed in the late 19th century. This text bears witness to how local traditions interacted with the forces of modernity introduced through Dutch colonialism. Within the story of Prabangkara, Padmasusastra brings up themes of individual freedom, criticism of hierarchical social systems, and exploration of the values of love and morality.

The dynamics of changing times often create challenges to the sustainability of traditions reflected in literary works. In the modern context, tradition frequently undergoes transformation—or even a reduction in meaning—necessitating efforts of reconstruction to ensure its preservation. The anthropological study of *Serat Prabangkara* is particularly relevant as it reveals how traditions are constructed, interpreted and inherited through literature. A literary anthropological study *Serat Prabangkara* offers an insightful perspective on how literature acts not only as an aesthetic expression, but also a social document and a tool of cultural critique. Literary anthropology emphasizes the analysis and understanding of literary works and culture, aiming to reveal and comprehend various cultural phenomena represented by literary works (Ratna, 2011). This approach enables a deeper exploration into the ways in which Javanese literary traditions are reconstructed for wider relevance, as exemplified by Helena Wulff's views in *Rhythms of Writing: An Anthropology of Irish Literature*. According to Wulff (2017), literature is a dynamic reflection of the cultural and social context of its surroundings, as

well as a medium for writers to negotiate identity and transformation.

Boon emphasizes that the concern of structuralism is not with what something means, but with how it "means"—through relations, oppositions, and transformations (Boon, 1972). In this regard, Boon offers a perspective that positions culture—including language and literature—as a system of signs that can be analyzed like a text. Boon highlights how structures in myths are understandable through the connections between narrative elements, similarly local languages and traditions such as Javanese can be read as a significant structure that represents the societal worldview. In its discussion, *Serat Prabangkara* can be understood as a cultural text that contains symbolic structures reflecting the cosmological values, spirituality, and ethics of Javanese society—not merely as an aesthetic literary work. This view also aligns with structuralist thought, which assumes that the elements of a culture, like those found in literary texts, derive their meaning from their relationships within a system, rather than from reference to external reality (Culler, 1975).

Also, it is similar to the notion that myths and symbolic systems in culture work through binary oppositions and internal transformations that can be described as the structure of the collective human mind (Lévi-Strauss, 1963). Thus, the multiple layers in *Serat Prabangkara* are revealed as a reflection of the cultural system and a symbolic logic of Javanese society. By integrating local concepts from Javanese tradition with the influence of modernity, this study aims to provide a new understanding of literature's role as a medium for cultural adaptation and renewal. This aligns with Darmono's view that literature represents life, while life itself is a social reality (Wicaksana, 2013). Meanwhile, Javanese culture, according to Endraswara, is an expression or reflection of the Javanese people's intellect (Suprayitno et al., 2018). Furthermore, this study will examine how traditional and modern values are harmonized to create a balance between the past and the future.

According to Geertz (1992), tradition, as a component of anthropology and social sciences, consists of systems of meanings and symbols that must be interpreted, translated, and understood in order to transcend being merely a concrete pattern of behavior or a causal relationship. Javanese tradition is one of the cultural richness that represents the identity of its society through various expressions, such as literary texts. Literary works itself can be regarded as a human life representation and its culture (Endraswara, 2016). *Serat Prabangkara* by Padmasusastra is one of the manuscripts that contains an insightful view of the traditions, social values and cultural relations of Javanese society. The complicated culture of Javanese society, basically has a pattern as a community life regulation (Pramula, 2019). As a text that emerged from a traditional cultural context, *Serat Prabangkara* not only serves as a medium of entertainment, but also as a cultural document that reflects the social dynamics, symbolism, and norms of Javanese life in its period.

Serat Prabangkara as one of the monumental works in Javanese literature, it contains various element of traditions, such as the royal court life, marriage arrangements, and the use of occult practices. It also emphasizes on the love theme as an attempt to reconstruct harmony, both at the individual and social stages. In the context of literary anthropology, the study of *Serat Prabangkara* can be a medium to comprehend how Javanese traditions are reconstructed and preserved through literary narratives. This theory frames literary works as a cultural representation, which enables in-depth analysis of the traditional aspects embodied in it. Koentjaraningrat explains that anthropology is an academic discipline focused on studying the various types of human diversity, including physical characteristics and the cultures produced by societies (Endraswara, 2016). The literary anthropological approach as a tool for observing

cultural realities allows the study of *Serat Prabangkara* to be deepened through an ethnographic perspective.

In this regard, Dell Hymes (1973) states that comprehension of literary works requires consideration of the social function and cultural context in which the text is used, as well as the societal communication that produced it. Hymes also argues from an ethnographic point of view that literary studies should take into account not only textual features but also their function and meaning in a particular cultural context (Hymes, 1973). Within this perspective, *Serat Prabangkara* is not merely considered an aesthetic text, but rather a cultural act that illustrates the use of language and narrative by Javanese society in conveying values, forming identities, and responsively adapting to the era. This approach allows researchers to explore the relevance of traditional values in facing the dynamics of modernity, thereby generating a deeper understanding of how these traditions transform and remain relevant in modern life.

This study is significant, as many Javanese traditions are increasingly marginalized by modernization and globalization. Javanese culture contains a system of rules that supports the continuity and sustainability of these traditions. The reconstruction of tradition in *Serat Prabangkara* provides valuable insights into how Javanese people understand, maintain and adapt their traditions with the passage of times. This study employs a literary anthropology approach to answer the main question: How Javanese tradition is represented, reconstructed, and articulated within a modern context in *Serat Prabangkara* by Padmasusastra?. By utilizing this theory, this study will examine the text holistically, including narrative analysis, symbolism, and the surrounding socio-cultural context. This study is intended to make a significant contribution to the study of classical Javanese literature, especially in understanding the relationship between tradition and literary texts. In addition, this study may serve as a foundation for developing scholarly discourse on the relevance of Javanese traditions within contemporary cultural contexts.

The previous research on *Serat Prabangkara* might have mentioned some of these aspects. Such as the research conducted by Onok Yayang Pamungkas in (2017) entitled "*Serat Prabangkara Karya Ki Padmasusastra Tinjauan Psikologi Sasatra dan Nilai Pendidikan Karakter*". The study states that through character analysis using Sigmund Freud's psychological approach (id, ego and superego), the personality of each character is recognizable and provides a realistic effect in character education. Another research is conducted by Prasetyo Adi Wisnu Wibowo in (2016) entitled "*Pandangan Multikultural Ki Padmasusastra Melalui Empat Karya Sastranya*". In the research, it discusses the multicultural views, thoughts, creativity, and the spirit of Ki Padmasusastra as an author who has succeeded in developing the nation's character through his literary works. It also includes a review of *Serat Prabangkara*.

Furthermore, there is research compiled by Renggo Astuti et al, in (1993) entitled "*Kepengarangan Pujangga Ki Padma Susastra*". In this writing, they examine and comprehend the history of Ki Padmasusastra's authorship, which is expected to achieve a complete and comprehensive understanding of the works that have been produced, one of which is *Serat Prabangkara*. Among the studies mentioned, one of which focuses on character education values and the other two focuses on Ki Padmasusastra. However, this research will provide a more directed and profound focus on Javanese tradition reconstruction through the lens of literary anthropology, with the expectation of providing a meaningful contribution to the development of Javanese literary studies and cultural anthropology. This study is also expected to be a reference for further research related to the study of classical Javanese literature and Javanese cultural traditions.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method to analyze *Serat Prabangkara* from a literary anthropology perspective. A qualitative approach was selected since it allows for a deeper comprehension of the complex social phenomena embedded in literary texts. As stated by Denzin & Lincoln (Ahmadi, 2019), qualitative research emphasizes a process that focuses on a deep comprehension of the studied object. Moleong (Saragih et al., 2021) added that qualitative research aims to completely understand phenomena by exploring the behavior, views, motivations, and actions of research subjects in their natural context. In this case, qualitative approach is utilized to examine how *Serat Prabangkara* represents Javanese cultural values and traditions. Thus, this study not only provides insight into *Serat Prabangkara* as a literary work, but also opens up opportunities to understand how literary text functions as instruments for preserving, transforming, and transmitting cultural values within a society.

Descriptive-analytical method used aims to elaborate and analyze each element in the text to unveil the traditions, worldviews, and social norms that were internalized in Javanese society during that period. Through this approach, a more thorough comprehension of the literary role in representing traditions and how these traditions shape the worldview, morality and social structure of Javanese society is expected. This qualitative study places greater emphasis on the meaning of texts or phenomena rather than on numerical data or coefficients typically used in quantitative research (Aminuddin, 1991), and aligns with the explanation from Endraswara (2008) which states that qualitative research is appropriate for literary research, as it focuses on understanding concepts and interactions, instead of numbers. This study consists of primary data, which is *Serat Prabangkara's* text itself, and secondary data which includes books, articles, scientific journals, and previous studies relevant to Javanese literature, literary anthropology, and Javanese cultural traditions.

This context also refers to *Serat Prabangkara* not merely as a record of tradition, but as a creative reconstruction of cultural realities shaped by the author's imagination. As Roy Wagner (1975) has stated, culture is not simply inherited, but also created through processes of imagination and interpretation. Given this perspective, researchers consider *Serat Prabangkara* more than just a reflection of culture; they also see it as an imaginative construction that actively creates new interpretations of the Javanese traditional values. Through a qualitative approach, the analysis focuses on how the text shapes, reframes, and even reimagines cultural heritage through its narrative power. The data in this study consists of primary data, including the text of *Serat Prabangkara* itself, and secondary data, which includes books, articles, scientific journals, and previous studies relevant to the themes of Javanese literature, literary anthropology, and Javanese cultural traditions.

Data collection procedures refer to the methods employed to obtain the necessary data for this study (Ekawati & Purnomo, 2015). Data collection was conducted through document analysis of *Serat Prabangkara* texts to identify elements of tradition including royal court life, marriage arrangement, the use of occult practices, social hierarchy, love story, and nature symbolism. Additionally, a literature study was conducted to strengthen the comprehension of the Javanese cultural context associated with the text. The literature review involved a comprehensive search for relevant prior studies through extensive reading and reference gathering (Handayani & Darni, 2014). Literature review is an approach that serves to establish concepts or theories that underlie studies in research (Sujarweni & Utami, 2014). Data analysis was completed in stages, starting with data reduction by identifying and selecting parts of the

text that contain Javanese traditional elements. The data was subsequently categorized into themes such as royal court life, marriage arrangements, the use of occult practices, love, social hierarchy, gender relations, and nature symbolism. Thereafter, these elements are analyzed contextually by connecting them to the social, cultural, and spiritual values of Javanese society based on the perspective of literary anthropology. The final stage is meaning reconstruction, which involves reinterpreting the tradition embedded in the text so that it can be applied in a modern context.

This study uses the literary anthropology approach developed by Hellena Wulff (2017), which integrates literary studies with cultural anthropology. This approach aims to comprehend literary texts as a reflection and a form of a society's cultural identity. Djirong (Maulidiah & Saddhono, 2019) states that the theory that examines the relationship between literature and culture is commonly referred to as literary anthropology. Literary anthropology is a study that examines the literary structure and correlates it with the surrounding socio-cultural context (Endraswara dalam Juwati, 2018). In accordance with the statement, Rokhmansyah argues that literary anthropology is an attempt to analyze and understand literary works in terms of culture (Rokhmansyah, 2014). In this study, *Serat Prabangkara* is regarded as a medium that contains Javanese traditions and cultural values, as well as a media to reconstruct the traditions in a modern context. The approach developed by Hellena Wulff provides a theoretical framework that provides an opportunity to view literary texts as social documents that reflect tradition, yet also as culturally transforming agents. Therefore, in this study, *Serat Prabangkara* is analyzed by integrating text analysis and cultural studies to reveal how Javanese traditions are represented, reconstructed, and reinterpreted within the text.

This study was conducted through several interrelated steps to reveal the elements of tradition in *Serat Prabangkara*. The first step is to read and examine the text of *Serat Prabangkara* in depth to identify the various elements of tradition contained in *Serat Prabangkara*. It involves observation of the narrative structure, characters, symbols and cultural values represented by the text. Subsequently, the second step is to examine the socio-cultural context in which the tradition was formed. Understanding this background is essential for constructing a more comprehensive picture of how the tradition functioned within society at that time. Furthermore, in the third step, the traditional elements are analyzed using a literary anthropology approach, which aims to explore how literary texts represent cultural values and social norms in Javanese contexts.

This approach correlates literary elements with existing socio-cultural circumstances, and analyzes how literature contributes in reflecting and forming cultural identity. Lastly, the fourth step is to develop an interpretation to reconstruct the traditions as revealed in *Serat Prabangkara* so as to remain relevant to the contemporary. The interpretations focus on how the traditional values contained in the text can be reinterpreted in the context of contemporary society, thus retaining its significance and role in confronting the current challenges. This study is intended to provide a holistic overview of the traditions in *Serat Prabangkara*, as well as to offer new perspectives on Javanese tradition preservation. Through the medium of literature, it is expected that the tradition can continue to exist and evolve, while also contributing to the formation of a culture that is relevant to the needs of contemporary society.

3. Results and Discussion

Serat Prabangkara by Ki Padmasusastra highlight the themes of true love, loyalty and sacrifice, while also reflecting deep Javanese traditional values, such as the importance of social

hierarchy, manners, and human-nature relationships. The story illustrates the power of love transcending custom and social boundaries, becoming a force greater than just personal feelings. Prince Adipati Prabangkara, son of Prabu Andakara, is known as a wise and brave man, but his destiny changes when he falls in love with Rara Apyu, a girl from a non-aristocratic background. Their story exposes the tension between personal love and the social obligations expected by society and the royal family. Even though Prabu Andakara had selected a prospective wife for Prabangkara based on their tradition and political interests, Prabangkara remained steadfast in loving Rara Apyu. Their journey against royal disapproval and social status differences highlights the importance of commitment to love and loyalty.

Through this story, Ki Padmasusastra not only delivers a narrative of sacrificial love, but also illustrates how powerful Javanese tradition is when it comes to forming an individual's life, both in social and spiritual aspects. In the framework of literary anthropology, as explained by Helena Wulff, "*Serat Prabangkara*" reflects and influences Javanese culture and identity, especially in terms of social regulation and moral values. It also portrays how literary stories serve to reconstruct Javanese traditions, connecting personal loyalties with social obligations, as well as showing the important role of love in society as it evolves over time. In this case, literature not only captures cultural history but also contributes actively to forming and maintaining collective identity of Javanese society.

3.1 Depiction of Javanese Tradition in *Serat Prabangkara*

3.1.1 The Royal Court Life

Serat Prabangkara portrays the royal court life as the center of culture and government. The manners, ethics and interpersonal relationships of the court reflect the hierarchical values and social harmony. The royal life in this text demonstrates how tradition is maintained through rituals and arts.

"Ing nagari Indhu wontên ingkang jumênêng nata ajêjuluk Maha Prabu Āndakara, agêng karatonipun, pintên-pintên nagari ingkang sami suyud nungkul aris botên kalayan kagêbag ing prang, kapraban ing kawibawan dening kontaping asmanipun sang prabu, dhasar ratu agung binathara, nyakrawati ambaudhêndha. Patihipun sang nata taksih kalêbêt santana ajêjuluk Radèn Apatih Giripawaka, bijaksana mêngku bang-bang pangalum-aluming praja, sinuyudan ing wadyabala." (Serat Prabangkara 1)

The story is set in the Kingdom of Indu (Negeri Indhu), ruled by King Prabu Andakara. He is accompanied by his minister, Raden Giripawaka, who is also a member of the royal family. The kingdom is governed in peace and stability. Prabu Andakara has one hundred sons, and the youngest, born to Queen Dewi Geniyara, is the designated successor to the throne, named Adipati Prabangkara. At that time, the Majapahit Kingdom had a rule where the royal succession rights were passed down to the youngest son or daughter born from the empress (Septiyani dkk, 2019). From the literary anthropology perspective, royal life as portrayed in *Serat Prabangkara* reflects the construction of Javanese traditions that focus on harmony, hierarchy, and the sacred power. The royal palace (*keraton*) in Javanese tradition is not only a governmental place, but also an idealized symbol of social and cosmological order, where the king is both a worldly leader and a spiritual intermediary between humans and the universe.

Prabu Andakara as a king portrays a leader who carries peace and balance, in accordance

with Javanese cultural values that place harmony (*rukun*) as the main goal of life. In Javanese tradition, the king is not only a political sovereign, but also a symbol of stability and wisdom, who manages the connection between society, ancestors and cosmic forces. The presence Raden Giripawaka, the *patih* (minister) as the king's main proponent also emphasizes the importance of cooperation and loyalty within the court's hierarchical structure, where each individual has a specific role in maintaining royal harmony. The royal court in *Serat Prabangkara* also represents strong patriarchal values, where power and responsibility are frequently in the men's hands. However, this structure is not merely highlighting gender dominance, but also reflects how Javanese society views hierarchy as part of a larger organized system. Every stratum of society, from the king to the ordinary citizen, has complementary duties and responsibilities to create balance.

In the literary anthropology context, the royal court life such as Negeri Indu also represents the Javanese society's view of human relationships with nature and the spiritual world. The court is regarded as the center of the cosmos, where the effort to preserve harmony between humans, the environment, and the divine powers takes place. Therefore, the narration of Negeri Indu highlights not only political stability, but also conveys a cultural message about the importance of maintaining balance in all aspects of life. Through the depiction of royal court life, *Serat Prabangkara* not only represents Javanese tradition but also offers insight into cultural values that place harmony, hierarchy, and spirituality as the foundation of society. The royal court life being a reflection of the ideal system idealized by Javanese society, as well as a reminder of the importance of each individual's role in maintaining social and cosmological balance.

3.1.2 Marriage Arrangement

Arranged marriage system in *Serat Prabangkara* emphasizes the value of harmony between the family and the broader community. Marriage arrangements are not merely regarded as personal matters, but also as part of social responsibility. This reflects the importance of harmony in interpersonal relationships.

"Awit saking punika gusti, kawula kapêksa anyèlèhakên kawibawan, dening botên kuwawi kataman sêkêling manah ingkang sagêd mugut panjanging nyawa kawula, milalu nandhang papa cintraka, angupadosi pêpacangan kawula sangkaning lare Rara Apyu, anakipun jurutaman ingkang nistha kawijilanipun, awit amung punika ingkang dados witing kabingahan bilih sagêd pinanggih, ananging punapa nama bêgja" (Serat Prabangkara 16)

Prabu Prabangkara and Rara Apyu have spent their childhood together because they were schoolmates. Rara Apyu and her brother, Jaka Geniraga, are the child of Ki and Nyai *juru taman* (the gardener). However, both of them are children out of wedlock from Nyai *juru taman* and Prabu Andakara. Due to the childhood that passed together between Prabu Prabangkara and Rara Apyu, they both eventually had feelings of love. Unfortunately, this was strongly rejected by the royal court because Prabu Prabangkara had already been arranged for a marriage and Rara Apyu was only a gardener's daughter. It reflects the conflict between true love and obligation to tradition. Prabangkara decided to follow his conscience even though it was against the tradition and his parents' will. This is where Padmasusastra's reconstruction of the conflict between rights and obligations as well as Prabu Prabangkara's heart desire.

In the literary anthropology perspective, the arranged marriage in *Serat Prabangkara* is

one of the essential elements that illustrate Javanese tradition, especially in terms of how to choose a life partner, which is frequently determined by the family or social authority. Prabu Andakara, as a king, holds full authority to determine Prabangkara's future wife, framing this decision in terms of family hierarchy and royal interests. Rejection of Prabangkara and Rara Apyu's relationship represents how Javanese arranged marriage traditions are based on social status, family obligations, and political interests, rather than individual love or desire. In Javanese culture, arranged marriage are frequently considered as a way to maintain social harmony and extended family's stability. Partner choice usually considers equality of social status, kinship relations, and the benefits that could be provided to the family and kingdom. In *Serat Prabangkara*, Prabu Andakara's act of selecting prospective wife for Prabangkara reflects a traditional construct in which individual will is subordinate to collective rules and interests. It also emphasizes the dominant authority of the father or head of the family in determining the course of life for other family members.

The conflict that arises from the rejections of Prabangkara and Rara Apyu's love also represents the tension between the tradition and personal feelings. Through this story, *Serat Prabangkara* illustrates the dilemma between carrying out the traditional obligations and pursuing the inner calling. Javanese tradition typically perceive marriage as more than just relationship between two individuals, but rather as a union symbol for the family and the larger social group. Rara Apyu's love rejection reflects the perspective that true love must be in accordance with social norms and never violate established rules. Through this arranged marriage portrayal, *Serat Prabangkara* highlights how Javanese tradition prioritizes social harmony over individual interests. However, literature also creates a possibility to question the boundaries of tradition by presenting a character like Rara Apyu, who strives against the norm for the sake of love. Thus, *Serat Prabangkara* not only represents the construction of Javanese tradition, but also becomes a medium to explore the dynamics between tradition, love, and personal struggle in a complex cultural context.

3.1.3 The Use of Occult Practices

The occult in *Serat Prabangkara* reflects people's belief in supernatural powers as an integral part of life. It not only functions as a narrative element, but also reflects the belief in the connection between the human world and the spiritual realm.

"Dumugi samantên sang pangeran pêtêng paningalipun, wusana kantu ngantos sawatawis dangu, sarêng wungu kêngêtan yèn sariranipun nate anggêguru kalêpasaning ngèlmi panggandan, sarêng dipun watêk lajêng sumêrêp puruging lampahipun Rara Apyu enggal tinututan, mila lampahipun namung untap-untapan kemawon, sarêng dumugi sacêlaking sêndhang: panggandanipun kèndêl mulêk wontên ing ngriku. Sang rara pinanggih tumungkul sarwi mêtêk pada," (Serat Prabangkara 25)

Prabu Prabangkara leave the royal court to look for Rara Apyu. In his quest, after arriving at the forest where Rara Apyu had secluded himself, Prabu Prabangkara used his sense of smell that he had learned and easily found where Rara Apyu was. In literary anthropology perspective, the use of occult in *Serat Prabangkara*, such as the supernatural olfactory ability used by Prabu Prabangkara to find Rara Apyu, reflects the Javanese traditional construct of belief in supernatural powers as an integral part of life. The occult in Javanese culture is not only goal-

oriented method, but also a symbol of human connection to the spiritual dimensions, nature, and the cosmos. Prabu Prabangkara's supernatural olfactory ability reflects a belief that humans can utilize metaphysical powers to overcome obstacles, especially with regard to love and the quest for harmony.

In terms of Javanese tradition, the occult frequently regarded as an ancestral heritage which is honored and cultivated to maintain a balance between the real and unseen worlds. This knowledge is not only an indicator of one's intelligence or personal power, but also of spiritual depth and a harmonious relationship with the universe. In Prabu Prabangkara's case, the usage of supernatural olfactory ability signifies that his quest for Rara Apyu involves more than just physical effort, rather an act of spiritual pursuit that affirms their inner connection. This also indicates that Javanese tradition perceives love as something that is not only a worldly thing, but also has a metaphysical dimension. The use of the occult also reflects the Javanese belief in the unity between humans and nature. The olfactory ability that utilizing the power of the senses shows how Javanese tradition encourages harmony with natural elements as a way to overcome problems or achieve goals.

Within Javanese traditions, the occult or the supernatural powers frequently seen as a way to connect human limitations with natural and divine powers, which ultimately helps restore balance in life. Through this depiction, *Serat Prabangkara* reflects the cosmological view of Javanese society, here the occult not only functions as a medium, but also as a symbol of cultural values such as loyalty, love and harmony. This literature illustrates how Javanese tradition combines logic, spirituality and supernatural beliefs to resolve conflicts and achieve happiness. In the literary anthropology context, it also reveals how the supernatural in Javanese literature reflects and reinforces a cultural tradition that integrates the real world and the spiritual world in everyday life.

"wontên baya mêntas saking kêdhung kados anandhang sakit, mungkak-mungkuk badhe mutah (wusana lajêng mutah pocongan) sasampunipun mutah baya lajêng wangsul ambyur dhatêng kêdhung, Jaka Gêniroga anyêlaki panggenaning pocongan, botên wontên gandanipun mayid, dipun uthik-uthik ing têtên sirahipun, tangsul muka wudhar kêtêngal gumêbyar pindha wulan karainan, wusana botên pandung yèn punika adhinipun Rara Apyu, enggal dipun rungkêbi sarta dipun tangisi, dene pinanggih pêjah kauntal ing baya, lajêng dipun bikak buntêlipun mori, ing nglêbêt taksih mangangge sarwa sae kados mêntas dados pangantèn, kêkêtêgipun dipun tingali taksih ebah, botên dangu nglilir sang paripurna, kados punapa bingahipun Jaka Gêniroga, Rara Apyu enggal dipun rangkul sarta dipun tangisi malih" (Serat Prabangkara 39)

In the other story, Rara Apyu died due to mental distress when she felt unhappy about being married to a failed prince. Afterward, Rara Apyu was thrown into the river and swallowed by a crocodile. Jaka Genira in his quest for Rara Apyu found a crocodile that was spewing out a bundle of corpses which turned out to be Rara Apyu in her bridal clothes. At that moment, Rara Apyu was awakened back to life. In literary anthropology, the use of the occult in *Serat Prabangkara*, such as the story of Rara Apyu coming back to life after being found by Jaka Genira, represents a Javanese tradition that combines spiritual beliefs with the values of cosmic harmony. This story emphasizes the perception that the occult is not just part of a magical story, but also a representation of the deep connection between humans, nature and supernatural

powers at the core of Javanese cultural beliefs.

Rara Apyu who died due to mental distress and was subsequently swallowed by a crocodile symbolizes a life crisis reaching its peak, a metaphor for disharmony in her personal and social world. In Javanese tradition, mental distress frequently associated with a spiritual imbalance, and the incident of Rara Apyu being swallowed by the crocodile can be interpreted as a symbol of sacrifice or unification with the greater powers of nature. In Javanese mythology, the crocodile is often regarded as a guardian of the spirit world, closely associated with the cycles of life and death. This incident indicates that nature is not only setting for an occurrence, but also plays an active role in the spiritual processes of human life. When Jaka Genira discovers Rara Apyu coming back to life, this represents the reconciliation between the real world and the spiritual world through the intervention of the occult. In terms of Javanese tradition, the occult frequently perceived as a way to reestablish the imbalance and overcome the boundaries between life and death. Rara Apyu's return to the world shows the Javanese people's deep belief in the possibility of spiritual awakening as a way to restore harmony, both in individual life and in social relations.

This narration also depicts about how important the role of characters that understand the occult, such as Jaka Genira, who becomes the bridge between the physical and metaphysical worlds. Within this context, the occult serves as a medium to resolve conflicts that cannot be resolved by ordinary methods, reinforcing the belief that human connection to the supernatural world is an essential element in Javanese tradition. The resurrection of Rara Apyu can be interpreted as a symbol of restoration, rebirth, and the resolution of complex problems through spiritual. Thus, *Serat Prabangkara* not only depicts the occult as a narrative element, but also as a representation of the cosmological view of Javanese society that sees the human world as an integral part of the cycle of nature and supernatural powers. This literature reflects the cultural belief that the occult can provide great transformation, solutions, and generate greater harmony in life.

3.2 Love as the Reconstruction of Harmonic Tradition

In *Serat Prabangkara*, love is portrayed as a path to harmony, both individually and collectively. Love relationships between the main characters are frequently described as very challenging, but ultimately lead to harmony in their lives. This illustrates the harmony concept at the core of Javanese tradition, whereby love is not only an emotional affair, but also a symbol of social and spiritual harmony.

" Kowe iku jare pintêr, nyatane bodho, kêthul atimu, apa pawèwèh iku dudu urub-urubing budi kang nuntun marang piala, samāngsa aku wis nampani pawèwèhmu, aku bakal kowisesa pindhha wong tukon, iku dudu karêpku, awit aku ora arêp adol awak, arêp adol trêсна.." (Serat Prabangkara 4)

In literary anthropology perspective, Rara Apyu's love for Prabangkara in *Serat Prabangkara* can be symbolized as a love that transcends materiality and emerges from the deepest of hearts, which reflects the traditional values of Javanese society. The statement that "love does not have to give, but comes from heart" is highly relevant in this relationship, as it portrays love as something pure and sincere, not based on possession or demands. Rara Apyu showed sincere love for Prabangkara, where these feelings were not motivated by personal gain or social interest, but by a deep inner connection. This reflects the Javanese concept of love that

emphasizes harmony (*rukun*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*), which are more important than physical actions or material gifts. Love that comes from the heart, as shown by Rara Apyu, emphasizes the spiritual aspect which is the foundation of their relationship.

In terms of literary anthropology context, love also reflects the Javanese worldview of cosmic harmony. Rara Apyu does not see love as a transactional relationship, but as the embodiment of a higher value-fidelity to the heart and true feelings. This kind of love narration not only represents local traditions and values, but also serves as a critique of social norms that often binds love to status, material, and obligation. Rara Apyu's love for Prabangkara also symbolizes the struggle to maintain pure and authentic love amidst the pressure of social norms and traditions that sometimes limit the expression of feelings. It is also a reflection of how Javanese society, through literature, embraces the true value of love, which comes from a selfless heart, as a form of harmony in life.

"Sang prabu jumênêng saking palênggahan lajêng mlêbêt ing kamar dandos ngagêm cara putri, mêdal anjujug ing ngarsanipun sang pangeran lajêng ngabêkti, sang pangeran sanalika kagèt ngantos kamitênggêngên, sarêng dipun waspaosakên sayêktos yèn Rara Apyu, sang pangeran botên pandung lajêng kinêmpit-kêmpit lungyanipun, ingaras êmbun-êmbunanipun, pangandikanipun, kowe apa dadi garwane sang prabu, têka rupamu padha kaya jambe nom sinigar paro, Rara Apyu matur sarwi gumujêng, sang prabu punika wau inggih kula. Lajêng matur lèlampahanipun, purwa madya wasana titi. Sang pangeran dhêlêg-dhêlêg mirêngakên aturipun ingkang putra. Wusana sang putri matur: rama, kaprabon ing Guwasiluman, kula saosakên ing panjênêngan paduka, kula nyuwun kaêmong wontên ing ngatsa dalêm, sarta narimah wahdat tanpa krama bilih botên sagêd panggih kalihan putra dalêm pangeran kula, namung bok ayu Puyi kula suwun dadosa jatukramanipun kakang Gêniroga, dene pun bok sumangga ing karsa dalêm." (**Serat Prabangkara 64**)

This excerpt depicts how Rara Apyu, disguised as Prabu Bramarkata, successfully proposed marriage to Prabu Andakara through the intermediary of Prince Andapawaka. This decision shows how much Rara Apyu sacrificed and fought for his love for Prabangkara. From the literary anthropology viewpoint, Rara Apyu's love story to Prabangkara in *Serat Prabangkara*, especially through her disguise as Prabu Bramarkata, can be interpreted as an attempt to reconstruct the tradition of harmony that is unique in Javanese culture. Rara Apyu's love is not merely a personal feeling, but instead a form of effort to create the social, spiritual, and cosmological balance which is frequently being the core of Javanese culture. Rara Apyu's disguise shows her bravery and sacrifice to stand up for her love for Prabangkara. By disguising herself, she not only tried to unite herself with Prabangkara, but also to resolve the conflict and harmonize the relationship between both sides. This action represents the value of harmony (*rukun*) in Javanese culture, where true love is not only about personal happiness, but also about creating balance in social relationships.

Rara Apyu's love, manifested through her disguise, affirms her sincerity and loyalty to Prabangkara. In Javanese tradition, loyalty (*tresna sejati*) is often regarded as the foundation of a harmonious relationship. This sincerity also shows that true love does not depend on status, wealth, or power, but rather on a deep inner connection and the desire to actualized happiness together. From a literary anthropology perspective, Rara Apyu's actions represent an attempt to transcend the social boundaries and norms that usually limit the women's role in patriarchal

traditions; by disguising herself as a king, she takes control of her own destiny and her love relationship. It shows how Javanese literature repeatedly uses love narratives to criticize rigid social norms, while simultaneously reconstructing ideal harmony.

The marriage fought by Rara Apyu is not merely understood as a human relationship, but also possesses a spiritual dimension. In Javanese culture, marriage is often regarded as the union of two souls that contributes to cosmic balance. Her disguise as Prabu Bramarkata is a form of adjustment to social norms that ultimately not just reconciles the individual, but also strengthens harmony in the wider society. Through the literary anthropology lens, Rara Apyu's love for Prabangkara becomes more than just a romance. Rara Apyu's actions reconstruct the harmony tradition by positioning love as a power that is capable of transcending social, spiritual and political boundaries. This story not only shows the sincerity of love that comes from the heart, but also represents how Javanese literature teaches the significance of harmony in personal and social relationships as part of the Javanese worldview.

"Ing sabên dalu salêbêting kadhaton suka-suka ãdrawina, sang pangantèn dados sêsêkaring pasamuan, laminipun ngantos pitung dalu, para ratu tamu sarta para agung ing amãnca praja sawêg bibaran kondur ing kithanipun piyambak-piyambak, namung ing alun-alun ngantos kawandasa dintên kawandasa dalu karamean sawêg bibaran." (Serat Prabangkara 97)

This excerpt illustrates the happy ending of Prabangkara and Rara Apyu's love story, where they are finally uniting as husband and wife. In terms of literary anthropology, the reunion of Prabangkara and Rara Apyu as husband and wife after a long separation illustrates love as a power that reconstructs harmony, both on an individual and social level. Their relationship not only narrates a romance, but also reflects Javanese cultural values that emphasize balance (*rukun*) and the union of souls as the essence of life's harmony. Rara Apyu's love for Prabangkara, having endured numerous trials, illustrates loyalty, sincerity, and the struggle to preserve their bond. This love becomes a reconciliation symbol between the inner and social conflicts they experienced before. Within Javanese culture, marriage is not only seen as the union of two people; it is also a resolution of conflict and the unification of cosmic harmony.

By becoming husband and wife, Rara Apyu and Prabangkara achieve both personal happiness and fulfill the social and spiritual duties idealized in Javanese tradition. Their relationship serves as a symbol of the triumph of true love, capable of overcoming all obstacles, including separation, social pressure, and the struggle for identity. It also reflects on how love acts as a tool to restore regularity and balance. Through the love journey of Rara Apyu and Prabangkara, *Serat Prabangkara* emphasizes the significance of sincere love, which derives from the heart, as a way to overcome disharmony, both in personal relationships and society as a whole. With their reunion in an official marriage, *Serat Prabangkara* reinforces love as the foundation of harmony that is the main value in the Javanese worldview.

3.3 Social Hierarchy and Gender Relations

Serat Prabangkara reveals a rigid social hierarchy in which the relationships between the king, his servants, and the wider society are clearly structured. However, it also illustrates gender dynamics, wherein women hold significant roles despite often being positioned in subordinate roles. The reconstruction of tradition opens a space to understand how social hierarchies can be balanced with values of equality.

"sampun têtela têtang yèn sang pangeran badhe winisesa dhatêng ingkang rama sang prabu pinalakramakakên angsal putrining ratu ingkang timbang kalihan kaluhuranipun, karsanipun sang prabu amêsthi kalampahan, Rara Apyu anglês manahipun, anggadhahi pamikir yèn prasêtyanipun kalihan sang pangeran badhe wudhar tanpa dados, dening kêncêngipun sang prabu, mila sêdya anganyut tuwuh, ananging pêcating nyawanipun kasêksèna dhatêng sang pangeran, Rara Apyu sadalu mêmêm mêlik botên sagêd tilêm, anggagas kédadosaning awakipun, kênthêling pamikir badhe oncat saking balegriyanipun, bokmênawi dados lantaran sagêdipun kalampahan panggih kalihan ingkang dados pangajapaning tawang kagarwa sang rajaputra, pagas têtalining trêsnanipun dhatêng yayah rena.." (**Serat Prabangkara 11**)

This excerpt demonstrates gender roles and social status in Javanese society. Despite her love for Prabangkara, Rara Apyu must confront the fact that her social status as a gardener's daughter makes her ineligible to be the wife of a prince. In terms of literary anthropology, social hierarchy and gender relations in *Serat Prabangkara* represent the construction of Javanese traditions that strongly emphasize social status as the main determinant of personal relationships, including love and marriage. Rara Apyu's story illustrates how the Javanese social stratification system affects gender relations and the rights of individuals to determine their life paths. Ideology forms the basis of thought that defines how society views the role and position of women (Alitha et al., 2025). Within Javanese culture, ideology plays a crucial role in shaping society's perception of women's roles and status. In Javanese society, social status not only determines an individual's position within the social structure, but also establishes boundaries that must be respected in order to maintain communal harmony (*rukun*). The conflict encountered by Rara Apyu exemplifies the gender inequality internalized in tradition, whereby women of lower social status are typically positioned as inappropriate for relationships with men from higher social strata. This indicates that gender relations in traditional Javanese culture are not only determined by the relationship between the genders, but also by a strict social hierarchy.

In Rara Apyu's case, her love for Prabangkara was not enough to transcend these norms, hence she had to use intelligence and strategies, such as disguise, to win her love. Through its narrative, *Serat Prabangkara* not only represents Javanese tradition, but also voices a critique of social and gender injustices that hinder true love. Rara Apyu's effort to transcend the boundaries of social hierarchy demonstrates the courage to defy traditional norms in order to achieve personal and social harmony. In Javanese tradition, harmony is mostly associated with adherence to the existing arrangement, but this story highlights that harmony can also be achieved through reconciliation between true love and rigid traditions. Thus, *Serat Prabangkara* through the story of Rara Apyu and Prabangkara, provides a complex depiction of the construction of Javanese tradition, where social hierarchy and gender relations are integral, but also negotiable through a sincere and strategic struggle for love. This demonstrates how literature becomes a medium to reflect, preserve, and criticize existing cultural traditions.

3.4 Nature Symbolism and Javanese Traditions

Nature symbolism in *Serat Prabangkara* takes an essential role in representing traditional values. Mountains, rivers and forests are used repeatedly as metaphors for purity, strength and balance. Nature functions not merely as the backdrop of the narrative, but also as a symbol of the

harmonious relationship between humans and the cosmos.

"Gêntos kacariyos lampahipun Rara Apyu murang marga malêbêt ing wana sêpi, punagining manah aluwung mantuk aran mênawi sande kawêngku sang pangeran, ingkang dados têtênging manah, sêsambatipun: dhuh pangeran, prak atimu kang."
(Serat Prabangkara 20)

Through the lens of literary anthropology, nature symbolism in *Serat Prabangkara*, such as the excerpt where Rara Apyu rests on the shore of a lake after a long journey, illustrates the close relationship between humans and nature in Javanese tradition. In Javanese culture, nature is not only regarded as a physical dwelling place, but also has a profound spiritual and symbolic dimension. In this context, the lake can be interpreted as a symbol of tranquility, reflection, and harmony, representing the traditional values of the Javanese people who view nature as a place to seek inner peace and self-understanding. Rara Apyu's decision to rest by the lake shows that nature is an escapeway from the burdens of life or conflict, as well as a space to contemplate on life's journey. Within Javanese tradition, nature is considered to contain energy that can rejuvenate people's inner balance. The lake, with its calm and reflective features, symbolizes the depth of contemplation and the connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. This underscores the Javanese cosmological view that sees humans as an integral part of the universe, in which harmony between humanity and nature is the key to a balanced life.

This symbolism also reveals how Javanese tradition teaches about the importance of respecting and understanding nature as part of the solution to human problems. In literary anthropology context, this excerpt affirms that nature is not merely a backdrop, but also an integral part of the narrative that reflects the Javanese worldview. Nature is represented as an active element that assists humans in discovering serenity, strength, and a new direction towards life's challenges. Through this depiction, *Serat Prabangkara* conveys a message about the symbiotic relationship between humans and nature, which is characteristic of Javanese culture. Nature is not merely a witness to Rara Apyu's journey, but also a spiritual space that supports her struggle. Thus, Javanese literature not only records traditions, but also reinforces cultural values about the importance of maintaining a balance between humans, nature and life.

4. Conclusion

Based on the analysis result utilizing a literary anthropology approach, it can be concluded that *Serat Prabangkara* is a literary work that not only interprets Javanese tradition, but also serves as a medium to portray the reconstruction of those values to maintain their relevance in modern life. In this manuscript; *Serat Prabangkara* bringing the reconstruction of Javanese traditional values such as court life, match-making or arranged marriage, the use of occult practices, love struggles, social hierarchy, gender relations, and natural symbolism that represent an attempt to preserve harmony as the essence of Javanese tradition. The love story of Rara Apyu and Prabangkara serves as a narrative thread that illustrates the tension between individual desires and social obligations, while also affirming the values of loyalty, sincerity, and cosmological balance. Based on this narrative, *Serat Prabangkara* serves as an illustration of how Javanese literature functions as both a reflection of culture and a tool for criticism and transformation, enabling traditional values to remain relevant in a contemporary context. Therefore, this work not only preserves Javanese cultural identity but also offers insight into how traditions adapt in response to changing times.

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