

Srikandi: An Independent and Creative Woman in the Values of National Culture

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ABSTRACT

The background of this study stems from the importance of introducing strong and empowered female figures within the context of national culture, emphasizing Srikandi's relevance as an inspiring figure for the younger generation. This study aims to enrich understanding of cultural icons and strengthen nationalism through inspirational female figures like Srikandi. The research employed a qualitative approach with literary and narrative analysis methods to explore the meaning and symbolism of Srikandi within Indonesia's cultural and historical context. The findings revealed that Srikandi not only embodies strength and bravery but also represents creativity and cultural resilience. This character conveyed the message that women can actively participate in cultural development and break free from traditional stereotypes. The recommendations included the need for cultural education that instills leadership and creativity values in women through the figure of Srikandi, thereby enhancing women's empowerment and reaffirming national identity based on culture

INTRODUCTION

The depiction of Srikandi as a symbol of an independent and creative woman rooted in national culture is a compelling subject that integrates various cultural, historical, and philosophical perspectives within Indonesian society. Historically, Srikandi is a prominent figure in the Mahabharata epic, known for her bravery, loyalty, and martial prowess, embodying qualities such as honesty, humility, and dedication to truth, which are highly valued in cultural narratives (Khotimah & Zaini, 2023). Her character also possesses intrinsic masculine traits like resilience, determination, and self-reliance, which highlight the gender-fluid nature of her strength and leadership – traits that inspire both men and women in societal roles (Tursina et al., 2021). Such attributes echo the traditional values embodied by female figures in Javanese shadow puppetry, which portray women like Dewi Shinta, Srikandi, and Kunti as paragons of loyalty, devotion, and moral virtue, reflecting the essential virtues in Indonesian moral teachings (Ariani, 2016; Juniarti et al., 2020).

Moreover, the role of women in Indonesian culture extends beyond the spiritual and moral realms, encompassing social and creative dimensions, as emphasized by research on women's contributions in arts and innovation (Reis, 2002; Handoyo, 2018). For instance, Nawal El Sadaawi's life exemplifies the transformative power of educated, independent women who challenge traditional limitations and societal oppression, fostering social progress and redefining women's roles in society (El Sadaawi, 1980). Similarly, the evolution of performances like Bali's Cak Srikandi signifies contemporary efforts to reinterpret gender roles through art, emphasizing creativity, ideology, and societal implications (Ni Made, 2018). These representations underscore the importance of nurturing women's creative and leadership capacities, which are crucial for preserving cultural identity amidst rapid modernization.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of women's creative processes, as scholars examine how social, political, and cultural forces influence female roles, especially in artistic expressions and character education. Studies highlight that women's intelligence and moral virtues are essential benchmarks for national success and social harmony, with cultural products serving as mediums to portray virtues such as loyalty, morality, and religious piety (Juniarti et al., 2020; Sholikhah & Masruroh, 2019). The integration of character education through storytelling and puppetry, for example, aims to foster empathy, responsibility, and integrity among children, illustrating the moral and cultural significance of female characters like Srikandi (Sholikhah & Masruroh, 2019). Furthermore, the evolution of women's creative roles is intertwined with their social and political movements, demonstrating that their contributions extend beyond the domestic sphere into active societal participation and cultural innovation (Reis, 2002).

Despite these rich representations, there is still limited exploration of Srikandi's profound cultural values, especially within the context of contemporary Indonesian society and national culture. The existing literature often emphasizes her heroic qualities without extensively analyzing the deeper cultural implications and the symbolic meaning embedded in her character as a woman of independence and creativity. This gap highlights the novelty of this

research, which aims to bridge traditional narratives with modern interpretations, exploring how Srikandi embodies the virtues of resilience, moral integrity, and cultural creativity rooted in Indonesian identity. In particular, this study seeks to describe and analyze the cultural values inherent in Srikandi's character, as depicted in Javanese storytelling and broader national narratives, emphasizing her role as a paradigm of women's independence and creative potential in preserving and promoting cultural heritage.

The innovative aspect of this research lies in its unique focus on the underexplored dimension of Srikandi as a cultural icon symbolizing the convergence of gender, morality, and creativity in Indonesian traditions. While previous studies have examined her heroic traits and moral virtues, few have specifically addressed how her character reflects contemporary cultural values and aspirations, especially in fostering a sense of national identity and gender equality. By integrating perspectives from traditional arts, literature, and modern cultural studies, this research aims to describe a comprehensive understanding of Srikandi's role not only as a mythic figure but also as an embodiment of modern Indonesian womanhood— independent, creative, morally upright, and culturally rooted. The findings are expected to contribute meaningful insights into the preservation and development of Indonesian cultural heritage, inspiring women and society to uphold these noble values amid modern challenges. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to describe the cultural values contained within Srikandi's character, as a portrayal of an empowered and creative woman in the land of Java, illustrating her significance as a cultural and moral role model for today's Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Srikandi

Srikandi, a prominent figure in the wayang (puppet) tradition, is a representation of strength, independence, and resilience within Indonesian cultural narratives. As a figure rooted in the Mahabharata epic and integrated into Javanese shadow puppetry, her character offers rich insights into the cultural values and gender roles within Indonesian society. Analyzing Srikandi through various theoretical frameworks illuminates her symbolic importance and reinforces her role as a model of virtue and empowerment.

Srikandi's origins trace back to her as the daughter of King Drupada of Panchala, a kingdom in ancient India, and her story has been assimilated into Javanese wayang kulit performances (Tursina, U. et al. 2021). She is renowned for her martial prowess, especially her skill in archery, and her unwavering loyalty and bravery make her a central figure in the Mahabharata's Kurukshetra War. In the Indonesian adaptation of the Mahabharata, Srikandi's character embodies the ideal qualities of a female hero— independent, courageous, and morally upright— thus positioning her as an aspirational figure for women in Indonesia. Her reimagining as the reincarnation of Dewi Amba in Javanese wayang further emphasizes her spiritual and moral resilience, linking her character to local cultural values and spiritual beliefs.



Figure 1. Srikandi as Traditional Puppet Style

In the context of Javanese wayang kulit, Srikandi's character is decorated with symbolic attributes that emphasize her moral virtues and martial strength. Her narrative often emphasizes her as a role model for female virtue, embodying traits such as bravery (*keberanian*), independence (*mandiri*), and moral integrity (*kebajikan*). The character's story exemplifies how Indonesian culture elevates women's roles – highlighting that women, as well as men, can assume positions of power and moral authority. The association of her reincarnated form with Dewi Amba's story of revenge underscores themes of justice, perseverance, and the eternal struggle between good and evil, resonating deeply within indigenous cultural paradigms.

From a feminist perspective, Srikandi's character can be viewed as a symbol of gender equality, challenging traditional stereotypes that restrict women's roles to domestic realms. Her warrior attributes and leadership in the struggle serve as metaphors for women's empowerment, advocating the recognition of women's strength and independence. Feminist theory supports her as a role model that encourages women to transcend societal limitations and showcase their capabilities in various domains, including leadership and martial arts.

Mechanisms of gender representation in wayang also serve as a reflection of cultural ideals concerning morality and virtue. The concept of "*kebajikan*" (virtue) in Indonesian culture signifies that moral qualities and personal integrity are essential virtues that transcend gender boundaries. Srikandi, as a character embodying these virtues, can be interpreted through virtue ethics, emphasizing character development and moral excellence as central to her identity. Her bravery and moral conviction exemplify the ideals of virtue that serve as moral guiding principles for society.

Values of National Culture

The concept of "Values of National Culture" refers to the core principles, beliefs, and practices that define the identity and character of a nation. These values serve as foundational elements that shape societal norms, behaviors, and perceptions, influencing how individuals interact within their community and how they view their place in the broader cultural context. Theories related to national culture often emphasize the importance of shared symbols, traditions,

and moral standards that foster social cohesion, collective identity, and national pride.

Table 1. Cultural Values of Srikandi

Core Values	Description	Related Theories	Indicators in Behavior/Practices
Collectivism & Harmony	Prioritizing community welfare, social cohesion, and group harmony over individual pursuits.	Hofstede's collectivism dimension, Hall's high-context culture	Emphasis on teamwork, consensus, respectful communication, indirect speech, harmony in relationships.
Respect for Hierarchy & Authority	Respecting social roles, elders, and leadership structures.	Hofstede's power distance dimension	Deference to elders, hierarchical decision-making, respectful interactions.
Social Cohesion & Mutual Cooperation ("Gotong Royong")	Spirit of communal effort and solidarity.	Geertz's symbolism and rituals	Participating in communal activities, helping neighbors, cultural ceremonies emphasizing mutual support.
Tactfulness & Patience	Indirect communication, listening, and understanding others' perspectives.	Hall's high-context culture	Using non-verbal cues, avoiding conflict, maintaining social harmony.
Pride & Identity in Cultural Symbols	Collective pride in national symbols, traditional ceremonies, rituals.	Geertz's symbols and myths	Celebrating national holidays, reverence for cultural symbols, performing traditional rituals.
Moral Virtues & Responsibilities	Honesty, loyalty, respect, responsibility in social and personal conduct.	Cultural virtues embedded in folklore and history	Upholding honesty, showing loyalty to community and family, respectful behavior.

One prominent approach to understanding national culture is Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, which identifies key aspects such as individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity versus femininity (Hofstede, G. 2016). These dimensions reveal how cultural values influence social interactions, organizational behavior, and societal expectations. For example, in many Asian cultures, including Indonesia,

collectivism and harmony are highly valued, emphasizing community welfare and social stability over individual pursuits. These values manifest in social behaviors and leadership styles that prioritize group consensus and respect for hierarchy.

Another significant perspective is Hall's high-context and low-context culture theory, which explains how communication styles and social interactions are shaped by cultural values. In high-context cultures, like Indonesia, indirect communication, non-verbal cues, and relational harmony are critical, embodying values of tactfulness, patience, and respect for others. These communication practices reflect underlying cultural principles that prioritize social harmony and collective wellbeing, influencing interpersonal relationships and societal interactions.

Clifford Geertz's interpretive approach also highlights the importance of symbols, rituals, and myths in reinforcing national values (Zurvani, M., & Zarei, S. 2024). According to Geertz, culture is a system of symbols that provides meaning and order to social life. National symbols often evoke shared history and collective pride, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and unity. Rituals, traditional ceremonies, and national celebrations serve as performative expressions of these core values, strengthening cultural identity and social cohesion.

Furthermore, the concept of "cultural values" in the context of national identity emphasizes the importance of moral virtues such as honesty, loyalty, respect, and responsibility. These virtues are often embedded in historical narratives, folklore, and cultural practices, guiding societal expectations and individual behavior. For instance, the value of "gotong royong" (mutual cooperation) in Indonesia reflects the spirit of communal effort and social solidarity, which are vital components of the nation's cultural fabric.

In other hand, the "Values of National Culture" encompass a complex system of shared beliefs, symbols, and practices that underpin a nation's identity. They influence social norms, communication styles, moral standards, and collective behaviors, shaping both individual character and societal development. Understanding these values through various theoretical frameworks enhances our appreciation of cultural diversity and the importance of preserving core cultural principles in a rapidly changing global environment.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research adopts a qualitative approach, combining literary and narrative analysis methods to deeply explore the meaning and symbolism of Srikandi within Indonesia's cultural and historical context. The primary data sources include various texts that depict Srikandi's story, such as historical records, classical literature, and performances of Javanese wayang kulit puppetry. These sources provide a comprehensive understanding of how Srikandi is portrayed across different mediums and time periods, reflecting the evolving cultural values and societal perspectives.

Data collection involved gathering relevant texts, scripts, and visual recordings of wayang performances that feature Srikandi (Nugraheni, T. 2021). This process aimed to identify recurring themes, symbols, and portrayals associated with her character. The researcher meticulously examined these sources to capture the diverse representations of Srikandi's character, including her virtues, actions, and symbolic attributes.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, a systematic and objective technique that assesses the content of texts and media. This method involved breaking down the collected materials into manageable units, coding significant themes, and interpreting the presence of specific symbols, narratives, and cultural values. The content analysis enabled the researcher to identify underlying messages conveyed through Srikandi's character and to understand how her story aligns with broader cultural and moral principles in Indonesian society.

Through this methodological framework, the study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the cultural, moral, and symbolic significance of Srikandi. The approach ensures a thorough and unbiased interpretation of the sources, highlighting the role of Srikandi as a cultural icon embodying national values and gender roles. Ultimately, this research contributes to a nuanced appreciation of how traditional stories and performances reinforce cultural identity and moral virtues in Indonesia. Provide clear and concise versions of your methods of conducting research, population and samples, and data analysis tools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Srikandi as a Mythic figure

Srikandi, a prominent figure in the wayang (puppet) tradition, holds a significant role as a mythic figure representing not only heroism and virtue but also embodying mystical and spiritual qualities deeply rooted in Indonesian cultural and religious contexts. According to Khotimah and Zaini (2023), Srikandi's origins trace back to her reinkarnasi as the daughter of King Drupada and Dewi Gandawati, which signifies her divine and mystical heritage. Her story is intertwined with the legend of Dewi Amba, a figure driven by revenge after being rejected by Bhisma, which adds a layer of spiritual symbolism to her character. As a mythic figure, Srikandi is imbued with qualities that transcend ordinary human traits, embodying virtues such as loyalty, bravery, and moral uprightness. Her unwavering dedication to truth and justice portrays her as a divine agent of righteousness within the epic narrative, reinforcing her image as a mystical figure who operates under divine guidance (Khotimah & Zaini, 2023).

Furthermore, Srikandi's exceptional skills in archery and leadership in warfare are not merely physical attributes but also symbolize her spiritual strength and inner resilience. Her ability to defeat enemies and lead warriors in battle elevates her status from a mere human hero to a mythic icon of divine strength. This aspect connects with the theological dimension of her character, where her balance of masculine and feminine qualities reflects the harmony of spiritual virtues. As noted by Khotimah and Zaini (2023), her character's inner maskulin traits—such as determination, fearlessness, and independence—are depicted as divine attributes that distinguish her as a special figure in the epic.

In the context of Javanese wayang kulit, Srikandi's character is also used to serve spiritual and moral messages, often embedded within her story to inspire moral virtues among viewers. Her representation aligns with the Javanese philosophy of "kebajikan" (virtue), and her presence in performances is often linked to divine guidance, moral integrity, and protection of righteousness. Sunan Kalijaga's method of infiltrasi, which integrates Islamic teachings into wayang narratives, underscores how Srikandi also functions as a symbol of spiritual virtue that can be adapted to broader religious and moral teachings (Ilahiyah, 2024).

Beyond her role as a mythic hero, Srikandi's character also embodies the ideal qualities prescribed by traditional cultural and moral standards in Indonesia. As discussed by Juniarti et al. (2020), many cultural products portray the ideal female figure as noble, loyal, and morally upright, traits that in Srikandi are expressed through her devotion to truth and her commitment to justice. Her skills in defending her values and her unwavering attitude in adversity symbolize a divine exemplar of moral strength, which also aligns with the Indonesian cultural virtues of loyalty, patience, and sincerity (Juniarti et al., 2020).

Additionally, the character of Srikandi as a mythic figure emphasizes the importance of spiritual strength combined with moral virtues, illustrating that true heroism involves both physical prowess and inner moral integrity. Her mythic status reinforces the belief that divine forces support those who uphold righteousness, aligning with the traditional Indonesian worldview that spiritual

virtues underpin societal harmony and moral excellence (Ariani, 2016). As a mythic figure, she serves as an exemplar of heroism that integrates spiritual, moral, and mystical dimensions, inspiring society to embody these virtues in daily life and uphold cultural values.

In conclusion, Srikandi's role as a mythic figure transcends her story as a warrior and hero; she symbolizes divine strength, spiritual resilience, and moral virtue deeply rooted in Indonesian mythology and culture. Her character highlights the importance of divine guidance and inner strength as essential qualities of heroism, serving both as a spiritual archetype and a moral exemplar for society. Her story reinforces the Indonesian cultural narrative that true strength comes from a harmonious balance of physical capability and spiritual virtue, making her an enduring symbol in Indonesia's mythic and cultural landscape.

The Role and Embodiment of Modern Indonesian Womanhood

The role of Srikandi as an embodiment of modern Indonesian womanhood reflects her depiction as a figure who embodies independence, strength, morality, and cultural rootedness. As discussed by Tursina et al. (2021), Srikandi is portrayed as a brave puppet character in the Mahabharata epic, possessing strength equal to that of male warriors. Her courage and martial prowess exemplify the modern woman's capacity to challenge traditional gender roles and demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity. Srikandi not only symbolizes physical strength but also signifies inner strength, determination, and moral integrity, which align with the values of independence and self-empowerment that modern Indonesian women aspire to uphold.

Furthermore, Srikandi's character, as highlighted by Sitompul et al. (2021), reflects the broader societal perception that women possess characteristics and social roles that are vital and beneficial, not only for their own empowerment but also for the progress of the community at large. Her active participation in battles and leadership roles in the epic narrative serve as metaphors for modern women actively contributing to societal development, emphasizing that women can and should take part in public life, leadership, and decision-making processes. This aligns with the ongoing movement toward gender equality in Indonesia, promoting women's active roles both in traditional contexts and in contemporary society.

Srikandi's embodiment as a modern woman extends beyond her physical and martial abilities; she also represents a morally upright character rooted in cultural and spiritual values. Her loyalty, bravery, and unwavering commitment to truth exemplify qualities that modern Indonesian women are encouraged to adopt, upholding integrity while navigating societal expectations. Her story inspires women to remain true to their principles, fostering a moral strength that is crucial amidst the challenges of modern life.

Additionally, Srikandi's character illustrates the importance of cultural rootedness. Despite her modern attributes, she remains deeply tied to her cultural origins and spiritual beliefs, demonstrating that modernity does not require abandoning tradition but integrating it within contemporary frameworks. As Indonesian women increasingly assert their identities, the figure

of Srikandi serves as a symbol that modern womanhood is about balancing independence and creativity with cultural values and spiritual integrity.

In other hand, Srikandi stands as a powerful symbol of the aspirations of modern Indonesian womanhood – independent, creative, morally upright, and culturally rooted. Her portrayal in traditional narratives underscores that women can embody strength and morality, challenge gender stereotypes, and contribute meaningfully to societal progress. As the embodiment of these qualities, Srikandi continues to inspire Indonesian women to pursue their aspirations while maintaining their cultural identity and moral values, promoting gender equality and social development in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that Srikandi plays a vital role as both a mythic figure and a symbol of modern Indonesian womanhood. As a character embodying spiritual strength, morality, and bravery, Srikandi serves not only as a hero in epic stories but also as a reflection of deep cultural, religious, and moral values in Indonesia. Her balanced traits – both physical and spiritual strength – make her a relevant and inspiring figure in contemporary society, where Indonesian women are encouraged to demonstrate courage, independence, and high moral standards. Furthermore, Srikandi's role as an inspiring figure highlights that women are no longer confined to domestic roles but can be leaders, pioneers, and key contributors to social and cultural development. She emphasizes the importance of maintaining cultural and spiritual identity while pursuing progress and empowerment. The recommended actions are to promote and incorporate Srikandi's story through various media, including formal education and public communication, to inspire Indonesian women to become independent, creative, and morally upright individuals. Additionally, integrating cultural and spiritual values into the development of women's character is essential to shape future generations of women who are capable of competing and making positive contributions to Indonesia's increasingly dynamic and diverse society. Provide some conclusions and implementation of the research results.

FUTHER STUDY

One limitation of this research is its reliance primarily on traditional texts, puppet performances, and cultural narratives, which may not fully capture the contemporary or diverse interpretations of Srikandi's role in modern Indonesian society. Additionally, the qualitative approach, while insightful, may lack quantitative data to measure the impact of Srikandi's symbolism on women's empowerment and societal attitudes. Another weakness is the potential bias in selecting sources that emphasize her positive qualities, possibly overlooking critical or alternative perspectives. Furthermore, the study's focus on cultural and historical contexts may limit its applicability to younger generations or diverse regional communities within Indonesia. Future research could benefit from broader empirical studies, including surveys or interviews with women from various backgrounds, to better understand the current influence of Srikandi's story on societal change.

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