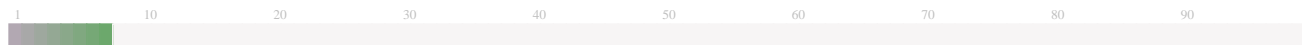


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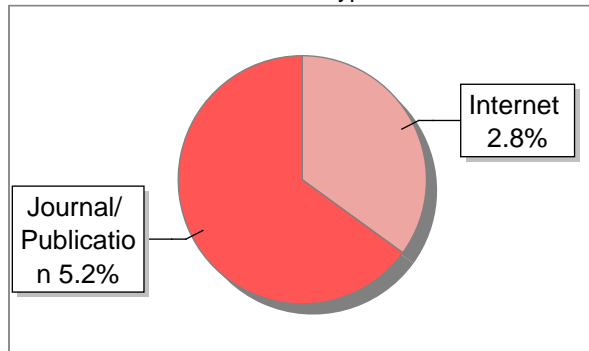
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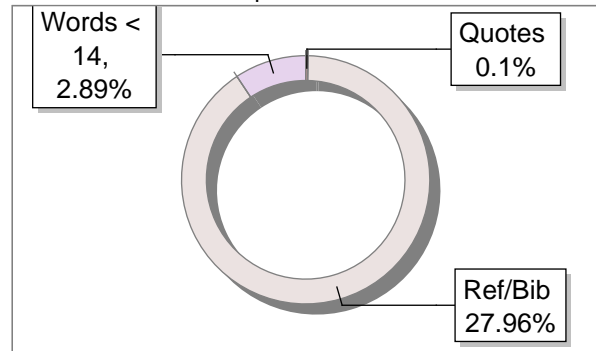
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# The Dignity of Women in Marriage: Comparative Study of Indonesian and Malaysian Folk Tales

Rina Ratih Sri Sudaryani\*

Ahmad Dahlan University (UAD), Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Tirto Suwondo

National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Jakarta, Indonesia

Rika Astari

Ahmad Dahlan University (UAD), Yogyakarta, Indonesia

**Abstract**—The dignity of Indonesian and Malaysian women is reflected in various sources, including oral and written literary works. The purpose of this study is to identify the position of women in marriage in folktales. The object of the research is the dignity of women reflected in Indonesian and Malaysian folktales. Data collection was conducted by studying four folktales from both countries. Data analysis was done by comparing and interpreting the folktales to obtain meanings. The findings of this study indicate the values of women's protection and the right to vote for women ideal by society, both in Indonesian and Malaysian folktales. This study confirms that women's dignity needs to be empowered through self-determination and representation to build confidence and the ability to make decisions in their marriage.

**Index Terms**—the dignity of women, marriage, folktale, comparative study

## I. INTRODUCTION

Women have noble positions in various folktales. The noble position cannot be separated from their role in both the family and society. Dewi Sekar Nitra, a son of the king, was appointed King of Daha in the Lombok folktale *Cupak Gerentang*. Likewise, *Putri Purbasari* (West Javanese folklore) became a queen in the Land of Pasundan (Rempong, 2021) and *Putri Kemang* (Bengkulu folklore) fought for herself and became a queen in her father's kingdom (Islahuddin et al., 2021). Even, in the *Tawaddud* saga, women are represented as intelligent, brave, and educated people (Maymunah, 2021). Reinforced in the Sundanese script, *Wawacan Ratu Dewi Maleka*, the king's daughter became a queen replacing her father (Raja Erum) named Maharaja Salalim (Rohmawati, 2013). Women, both in folktales, sagas, and old manuscripts, are described as having noble dignity (rights and positions) as leaders (Ojha et al., 2019). Therefore, this issue needs to be brought to the surface as a criticism of the notion that women have been considered weak and inferior (Begiato, 2022; Vijay & Vijayakumar, 2022).

Studies on the dignity (rights and position) of women in folktales have been carried out by several experts. However, the results show that these studies are generally more focused on four aspects. *First*, studies that discuss the position of women are limited to the scope of the family and their domestic roles (Amri, 2021; Husna, 2020; Rahmawati, 2020; Zhou, 2022). The *second* is research that focuses on the image of women who are patient, kind, respected, and loyal to their husbands (Harjito, 2021; Masuku, 2020; Qur'ani, 2021). The *third* is research that discusses the position of women in the public sphere and their role in the realm of politics and power (Balint, 2021; Ojaruega, 2022). The *fourth* is research that emphasizes the condition of women who are subordinated, objectified, oppressed, sex objects, and objects of arbitrariness (Hapsarani, 2018; Wijanarko, 2018). Meanwhile, studies that look at the dignity (rights and position) of women, especially in marriage, are rare.

Several studies have shown that women are allowed to choose a life partner and are not forced to choose a mate by their parents (Islahuddin et al., 2021; Nasiru, 2017). Some studies show that women dare to leave partners who are considered to have broken commitments (Aswar et al., 2019; Rohim, 2013; Yulianto, 2016) However, some of these studies did not explore the dignity of women, especially in their marriage. The corpus of folklore data shows that this is available, including *Putri Mandalika* and *Putri Gading Cempaka* from Indonesia (Ratih, 2021, 2022) and *Puteri Zuleha* and *Puteri Gunung Ledang* from Malaysia (GoDaddy, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to complement such studies. In addition to mapping the dignity of women in marriage, this study also aims to analyze (a) the values of protecting women's rights and dignity, (b) women's ideals of voting rights in society, and (c) the value of women's empowerment in folktales.

This study is based on the argument that the dignity of women in various countries cannot be separated from the

\*Corresponding Author.

social and cultural character of their society (West & Shearer, 2018). Harassment or violence against women undermines the understanding of public awareness of women's rights and dignity so the objective of public education about women's rights and dignity in marriage is not achieved. Meanwhile, sexual harassment in public spaces and forced marriages of women occur due to the narrow space for community participation. This happens because, in education, the government often does not involve the lower class of society. In addition, the dominance of patriarchal culture and gender bias relations still strengthen the position of men in the family and society (Kurvinen et al., 2022).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Folklore

UNESCO defines *folklore* as a creation based on the tradition of a cultural community, expressed by individuals in a group and recognized as a reflection of expectations that indicate cultural identity, social standards, and values transmitted orally by imitation or by other means (Kittilä, 2020). Folklore is also a literary genre transmitted either orally or in writing. It can be said that literature is an organic product of a community, which creates, receives, interprets, adorns, and transmits stories from generation to generation (Kim, 2013). Folklore becomes entertainment and a means to reduce moral values in society such as gratitude, love for the environment, and good main characters to serve as examples (Schmitt et al., 2016). Hidayati (2019) states that folklore has several functions, which are (1) as a projection system; (2) as a means to ratify cultural institutions; (3) as children's educational tools; (4) as a tool to coerce and supervise so that community norms are always obeyed by collective members. Therefore, in folklore, there are many depictions or images of various female or male characters. However, in the depiction/image of the characters, there are extreme inequalities between male and female characters.

Most female characters in folklore are always portrayed in domestic roles, as helpless, self-sacrificing, and beautiful princess who depends on the existence of a prince (Zahro et al., 2020). Given the patriarchal culture that dominates folklore, the stories of rebellious, strong and heroic women will be less than the stories of women who are portrayed as beautiful, gentle, self-sacrificing and obedient. This is in line with Kim (2013) research revealing that out of 500 entries in four volumes of folklore, only 30 stories of women who are opposed, hard, warrior, and strong can be found. The image of dominant women can still be seen through folklore in Korea and India. For example, the story of a woman who ends an unsatisfactory marriage to "manage herself". In this case, the author emphasizes the progress of a woman in positioning herself in society and opposing patriarchy (Kim, 2013). Then, there is Indian folklore that raises the stories of women who are brave and strong. They are given equal social rights to their male counterparts. In some cases, they are granted more privileges than men, for example, Kaikeyee, the second wife of King Dashrath from the Ramayana story who fought alone in several battles (Ojha et al., 2019).

### B. Gender Relation

Recent research tends to see literary works as a space where the construction and gender relations are formed and perpetuated. Sugiarti (2021) states that gender relations are inherent relationships between men and women that have been constructed by society, both socially and culturally, which differ from time to time and from place to place, so that character formation between men and women is considered natural. The division of roles that associate female and male characters is a manifestation of the gender ideology that exists in society (Takovski, 2019). The ideology is then illustrated in the form of fiction or literary works that will be accepted by readers. Furthermore, Magnúsdóttir (2018) asserts that gender relations depicted through characters in folklore show the tendency of women who be dominated by feminine, beautiful, and obedient traits, while men are always characterized by power, toughness and courage. In addition, gender relations in folklore are depicted through issues of social life regarding problems of marriage, domestic violence, gender construction and gender discrimination which tend to weaken the position of women (Rice, 2000).

Gender relations in folklore or literature can be seen through the use of words, characters or symbols which tend to lead to the division of roles between men and women (Saraç, 2016). In Indonesia, gender relations depicted through folklore or literature are still strongly characterized by patriarchal culture. In his article, Sugiarti (2021) mentioned that gender relations in folklore still do not show balanced roles. In 13 stories from East Java, there are 3 stories where female characters have an important role, while the other 10 stories are dominated by male characters. This is in line with what Magnúsdóttir (2018) mentioned, that gender relations represented through folklore are still dominated by female leadership which is feminine, while male leadership is always characterized by strength and therefore their behaviour sometimes cannot reflect the assigned role. Nurhayati (2019) argues that gender relations that have been constructed through folklore and literature are a reflection of the culture or values of the community in which the story develops.

### C. Women in Literature

Literature reflects people's perceptions and attitudes. The literature describes human life through characters, with their words and deeds to convey messages, information and entertainment. Literature is also said to be the witness to the evolution of women over centuries. The changing role of women in literature from the past to the present shows the evolution and empowerment of women (Awuzie, 2019). Some depict women as symbols of power and unity, but some use women as objects of pleasure (Singh, 2019). The characterization of women in literature is often influenced by the

author's personal experience or societal stereotypes in defining the position of women. Stereotypes about women in literature are perpetuated by a patriarchal culture that ignores women's rights and prioritizes male domination and privilege. The patriarchal culture in literature shapes men to be rational, strong, and assertive, while women are placed in an image of being weak, nurturing, and submissive (Alvira et al., 2021).

Women in literary works are represented in a relational framework which is equivalent to a set of marginalization systems and subordinated values such as sentimentalism, emotion and spirituality (Roberts, 2017). In this case, literature positions women as emotional subjects who have spiritual sensitivity. Furthermore, the gender relation between men and women is a symbolic and patriarchal problem (Roberts, 2017). Men are identified as masculine individuals while women are identified as feminine individuals. Women are considered beautiful, gentle, and delicate creatures while men are considered dignified, strong, and aggressive. Men are considered smarter, stronger, and braver than women in many literary works. Accordingly, in his long essay, Virginia Woolf argues that female characters featured in early literary works such as Sophocles, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, and Flaubert have portrayed women as lacking in character. This gives the impression that male writers have never accurately portrayed women and tried to make men superior to female characters (Saraswati, 2014). However, recently the image of women in literature has continued to develop to the stage of modern literature which has begun to elevate female figures with characters that go against patriarchal norms and culture.

### III. METHODS

The selection of folktales as the object of study is based on several reasons. *First*, the selected folktales contain stories about how women get protection. *Second*, in the folktales, women are represented as the strong ones, in contrast to the narratives shown in other sources where women are depicted as the weak ones. *Third*, folktales are a medium where the noble values of life are presented straightforwardly so that they can become a channel for the community to look back at the context of life in the past more broadly. The data sources of this research are 4 folktales (2 from Indonesia and 2 from Malaysia). The folktales from Malaysia are *Puteri Zuleha* from Kedah and *Puteri Gunung Ledang* (GoDaddy, 2020) and the folktales from Indonesia are *Putri Mandalika* from Lombok Regency (Ratih, 2021) and *Putri Gading Cempaka* from Bengkulu Regency (Ratih, 2022). These four folktales have similarities between the main characters (noble women), similarities in the problems faced by the characters, the protection obtained from the family, and the existence of antagonists who commit violence.

The data collection was carried out through the selection of several Indonesian and Malaysian folklore documents. The folktales selected contain a story that raises the problem of women's position in marriage or women's problems in facing proposals. This is following the aim of the research, to be able to map the dignity of women in folklore in both countries. The selection of folklore documents was done by classifying and identifying problems related to women's dignity. The data collected is in the form of structural relationships of male figures such as fathers and brothers with female figures so that data on the values of protection given by their fathers or brothers, data on women who have the right to vote and reject applications, and data on women's empowerment is identified.

Data analysis was done in three stages, namely data reduction by selecting and focusing on the attitudes and actions of female characters in dealing with marital problems in each story; presentation of data in tabular form and then description; and finally, conclusions are drawn and verification is carried out by looking for the overall meaning. Data analysis used comparison and interpretation methods. Four folktales were analyzed and then compared, especially in terms of the attitudes and actions of women in maintaining their dignity as women. The interpretation was carried out through a process of restatement of four folk tales that raise the issues of women's rights and dignity.

### IV. RESULT

#### A. Value of Protection of Women's Rights and Dignity

In Indonesian and Malaysian folklore, there are values of protection of women's rights and dignity which include: how to protect, the process of protecting, and the implications of protection, as shown in the following table.

TABLE 1  
VALUES OF PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHT AND DIGNITY

| Protection value        | Putri (Indonesia)  | Mandalika   | Putri Gading Cempaka (Indonesia)   | Puteri Zaleha (Malaysia)  | Puteri Gunung Ledang (Malaysia)   |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|
| How to protect          | King Tonjang Beru called his daughter and conveyed the proposal of the princes. If the proposal was rejected, the princes would commit war. The princess also did a meditation to get <i>wangsit</i> so that there would be no war (pp. 94, 96). | Raja Anak Dalam and his six brothers protecting Putri Gading Cempaka ran towards Mount Humpback when the Young King of Aceh attacked (p. 43).   | Raja Anak Dalam always kept Putri Gading Cempaka in his hiding place until the war with Raja Muda Aceh was over (pp. 44, 45).                          | Sultan Kedah protected Princess Zaleha and took her to the forest so that the Aceh prince who carried out the attack would not find her (p. 4). | Putri Peri protects herself from being forced to marry Sultan Mansor Shah by filing a lawsuit (p. 2). |
| Protecting process      | The princess meditated until she received instructions to invite all the princes to a meeting on the 20th of the 10th month of the Sasak calendar on Seger Kuta beach (pp. 96, 97).  | The efforts made by Princess Mandalika were successful so there were no wars between princes. Putri Mandalika has decided and has made up her mind to find the best way for her people (p. 97). | The efforts made by Raja Anak Dalam succeeded until the Young King of Aceh returned to Aceh and did not marry Putri Gading Cempaka (p. 44).            | The Sultan of Kedah protects Princess Zaleha from the Prince of Aceh and sends Princess Mariam as her successor (p. 4).                         | Putri Peri oversees the fulfilment of 7 requirements that are required before the wedding (p. 2).     |
| Protection implications | The efforts made by Princess Mandalika were successful so there were no wars between princes. Putri Mandalika has decided and has made up her mind to find the best way for her people (p. 97).  | The efforts made by Raja Anak Dalam succeeded until the Young King of Aceh returned to Aceh and did not marry Putri Gading Cempaka (p. 44).   | The efforts made by the Sultan of Kedah succeeded in keeping Princess Zaleha away from the Prince of Aceh so that there was no forced marriage (p. 5). | Princess Peri's efforts succeeded so that Sultan Mansor Shah failed to marry her (p. 4).  |   |

Table 1 shows the ways that have been done to protect women, especially in the case of forced marriages, such as going away or being hidden. Like what Putri Gading Cempaka did, she ran and hid in the mountains; Princess Zaleha hid in the forest; Princess Mandalika sought refuge by surrendering herself to the Almighty for guidance, and the Fairy Princess protected herself by making demands on conditions that are impossible to meet. The three women in the folklore have been given protection by their families, while one woman can protect herself.

The process of protecting women in these stories is carried out for a long time. Putri Mandalika meditated and waited patiently for instructions on what to do. Putri Gading Cempaka was guarded by her family on Mount Bungbuk until the Raja Muda Aceh's attack ended. The Sultan of Kedah hid Princess Zaleha in the forest and sent Princess Mariam to the Prince of Aceh. Princess Zaleha hid until the Prince of Aceh never found her. Putri Peri protects herself with conditions that are impossible for the Sultan to fulfil. So, during the protection process, the princess tries to make sure she is safe. Considering the efforts of the princesses, it appears that they have earned their right to be protected, one of which is by the close family.

As a result of their resistance, some acts of violence were avoided. Princess Mandalika managed to quell the wars of the princes who proposed to her. Princess Gading Cempaka managed not to be taken by the Young King of Aceh, and Princess Zaleha was not forcibly taken by the Prince of Aceh. Princess Peri managed not to become the second wife of the sultan. The success of the protection in these three stories was achieved with the assistance of the family, while one story carried out independent protection. The right of protection is obtained by women so that there is no forced marriage.

In Indonesian and Malaysian folklore, protection is given to women who are facing problems with marriage proposals. For example, when Princess Gading Cempaka and Princess Zuleha rejected the proposal of the Prince of Aceh, they needed to be protected. The rejection of the figure of the Prince of Aceh in these two Indonesian and Malaysian folktales occurred because the prince was arrogant. The refusal was not immediately carried out, but before that, Putri Mandalika meditated to get peace of mind and guidance. Putri Peri protects herself from the intention of a man to do polygamy. This shows that the values of protection have been given to women following their respective social conditions.

#### B. The Right to Choose Idealized in Society

Indonesian and Malaysian folklore shows that women have the right to choose as idealized by society, such as (1) women's rights to accept or reject proposals, (2) women's rights to choose a partner, and (3) parents who do not impose their will, as shown in the following table.

TABLE 2  
THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE IDEALIZED IN SOCIETY

| The right to choose idealized in society            | <i>Putri Mandalika</i> (Indonesia)   | <i>Putri Gading Cempaka</i> (Indonesia)  | <i>Puteri Zaleha</i> (Malaysia)  | <i>Puteri Gunung Ledang</i> (Malaysia)                                     |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| Women have the right to accept or reject a proposal | Princess Mandalika was given the opportunity by her father to answer the proposal from the princes (p. 96).                              | Putri Gading Cempaka was given the right by Raja Anak Dalam to answer the proposal of Raja Muda Aceh (pp. 37-39).          | Princess Zaleha rejects the wishes of the prince of Aceh (p. 4).   | Princess Peri rejects the proposal of Sultan Mansor Shah of Melaka (p. 2). |
| Women can choose a partner                          | At first, the princess intended to choose one of the dozens of princes, but her intention was cancelled after knowing the risks (p. 96). | Putri Gading accepts Maharaja Sakti's proposal according to her father's will (p. 44).                                     | Putri Zaleha remains alone until the end of the story (p. 6).  | Puteri Peri remains alone until the end of the story (p. 4).               |
| Parents do not force                                | King Tonjang Beru did not force Princess Mandalika to choose one of the princes (p. 94).   | The king of Anak Dalam does not want to make his own decisions. He invites his brothers to talk about the problem (p. 41). | The Sultan of Kedah did not hand over Princess Zaleha to the Acehnese prince despite the risk that the Kedah nation was attacked (p. 4). | There is no role of parents in this story.                                 |

In Table 2, female characters are faced with the problem of marriage proposals and forced marriages, but they refuse. The reason for the refusal has also been known to his family, both the parents and eldest brothers. This right is what women want. The refusal is shown in four Indonesian and Malaysian folktales, namely Putri Mandalika and Putri Gading, Putri Zaleha and Putri Peri. The right of rejection or acceptance of the application has been obtained by women. Even though this refusal might result in violence, women feel that they have their rights and dignity as human beings.

In the folklore above, women are shown to have the right to choose and determine their partners. Putri Mandalika exercised her right not to choose one of the princes. Putri Gading Cempaka chose her partner and became the consort of Maharaja Sakti. Meanwhile, Princess Zaleha and Princess Fairy chose to remain alone until the end of the story. So, refusal of marriage proposals for women does not always mean that there are proposals from other men. Parents do not force their daughters to accept the proposal so that no marriage occurs, like Putri Mandalika's father who was confused by the number of princes who proposed to his daughter. It was Princess Mandalika who insisted that she would solve the problem. Likewise, Raja Anak Dalam did not force his sister Putri Gading Cempaka to accept the proposal of Tuan Raja Muda Aceh. The Sultan of Kedah did not force Princess Zaleha to surrender herself to the Prince of Aceh, while in the story of Putri Gunung Ledang, parents were not mentioned. The roles of father and brother in the three stories appear as wise parents. Forced marriage to daughters does not occur because of the role of wise parents.

### C. The Value of Women's Empowerment

The four folktales show the value of women's empowerment which includes the level of women's autonomy, self-determination, and representation, as shown in the following table.

TABLE 3  
VALUE OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

| The Value of Women's Empowerment | <i>Putri Mandalika</i> (Indonesia)   | <i>Putri Gading Cempaka</i> (Indonesia)   | <i>Puteri Zaleha</i> (Malaysia)   | <i>Puteri Gunung Ledang</i> (Malaysia)   |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|--|
| Women's autonomy                 | Putri Mandalika did not accept and rejected the prince who proposed (pp. 94, 95).                        | Putri Gading Cempaka accepts Maharaja Sakti's proposal (p. 44).   | Putri Mariam agreed to replace Putri Zaleha, brought and married the Prince (p. 5).   | Putri Ledang dared to reject the Sultan's proposal indirectly (p. 2).  |
| Self-determination               | Putri Mandalika has her own decisions that have been considered (p. 98).                                 | Putri Gading Cempaka decided to become the consort of King Maharaja Sakti who led the Sungai Lemau Kingdom (p. 44). | Putri Zaleha decided to hide in the forest away from the Aceh prince (p. 6).  | Putri Peri can control herself and is not willing to be made a wife by the Sultan who is already married (p. 3). |
| Representation                   | Putri Mandalika is known for her beauty and demeanour, she is polite, friendly, and soft-spoken (p. 92). | Putri Gading cempaka is known for her beauty (p. 37).   | Putri Zaleha is known to be very beautiful and is said to have white blood, not the usual red, attracting the attention of the Prince of Aceh (p. 3). | Putri Peri in the magical palace at the top of Mount Ledang is known for her beauty and magical power (p. 2).    |

The level of women's autonomy is found in Indonesian and Malaysian folklore. The power or authority to regulate oneself is shown by Princess Mandalika by not rejecting the princes who propose to her. She made her own decision without interference from her parents. Putri Gading Cempaka refused the proposal in front of the Young King of Aceh. Princess Mariam is willing to replace Princess Zaleha to be brought by the Prince of Aceh. Meanwhile, the Fairy



Princess decided to put forward a very impossible requirement. The female figures in the four folklores have proven that they have a high level of authority.

Women have been able to control themselves and actively participate in making decisions. This is shown by Princess Mandalika who chose to give up her soul for the prosperity of her country. Putri Gading Cempaka decided to accept the proposal of King Maharaja Sakti. Putri Zaleha decided to stay away from the Prince of Aceh and hid in the forest. Meanwhile, the Putri Peri can control herself. The four women in the story show that they can make decisions for their future. **The representation of** women in the folktales is described as beautiful women. Putri Mandalika is famous for her beauty and is very kind. Putri Gading Cempaka is represented as a beautiful woman and a symbol of women who give birth to descendants of kings. Putri Zaleha is represented as a beautiful woman who has white blood, while Princess Fairy is represented as a beautiful woman who has magical powers.

## V. DISCUSSION

### A. *Value of Protection of Women's Rights and Dignity*

Protection values are given to women to maintain their dignity (Kashirkina & Morozov, 2020). Individuals who protect her are family members who love her and are responsible. These protection values are very much needed because the position of women is under the dominative power of the patriarchy (Sen, 2021). The right to protection from the family is one way to maintain the dignity of women so that **they do not** become victims of violence or become 'commodities' **that can be traded**.

There are two forms of protection found in folklore, namely being hidden in the forest or being taken away to flee to a safe place. At that time, both methods were considered effective in avoiding violence and forced marriage of women. Over time, forms of protection for women have been organized. Currently, in Indonesia, **there is a** National Commission for Women which was established in October 1998 after the May 1998 riots (STH-Indonesia-Jentera, 2022). Data on violence against women until 2019 shows that there were 406,178 cases, increasing 16.5% from the previous year. In Malaysia, there is the Malaysian Women's Aid Organization (WAO). Data from WAO shows **that the number of** women experiencing domestic violence in February-March 2020 has increased by 44.4% (Gunadha & Pramesti, 2020). **Based on the** data, women need protection from acts of violence and forced marriage, both in the past and present, both Indonesian and Malaysian women, according to their respective socio-political conditions.

Comparing the social conditions of Indonesian and Malaysian women, Ningsih and Andalas (2021) state that both are influenced by developing cultural problems and family upbringing patterns that affect life and life principles. So, the similarities between Ningsih's research and this research are related to women's decisions in dealing with proposals and marriages which are influenced by their respective socio-cultural contexts. The occurrence of forced marriages through Vidianingrum the lenses of social science is closely related to cultural factors, education, and a narrow understanding of religion (Adityo, 2020). **Not only in** folklore but in real life, Indonesian and Malaysian women also object. According to Pratiwi (2021), so far there has been a rejection by women of sexual harassment that occurs in public spaces. The refusal is carried out by women to maintain their dignity, both in folklore and in real life.

### B. *The Right to Choose Idealized in Society*

Indonesian and Malaysian folklore shows that there is an idealized right to vote in society, not something that usually happens by being forced or elected. Women are not chosen or forced to choose a partner, but they are given the freedom to choose. Women are also given the right to answer, whether to accept or reject the application. The reason for women's refusal is more about the dislike of **the character of the** potential partner and disapproval of polygamy (Gharala, 2022). Behind women's refusal, there are efforts to create peace and avoid violence (McKenzie et al., 2022), and polygamy does not occur.

Women have the right to choose a life partner. A princess accepted Maharaja Sakti's proposal because he was a wise king. Putri Mandalika, Putri Zaleha, and Putri Fairy exercised their right to refuse the proposal because it was not following their wishes. Women's rights to choose and refuse partners are influenced by the presence of parents, especially fathers as protectors for daughters. Wise fathers do not use coercion either physically or through religious reasons. Positive law and fiqh provide space for women to choose a life partner regardless of coercion from any party (Adityo, 2020; Mattalattang & Nasir, 2021). Women cannot be called disobedient if **they do not** obey their parents' wishes to marry a man **they do not** love because devotion to their parents **is based on** love and affection. Thus, folklore has shown the ideal of women's rights, namely the right to choose a life partner.

### C. *The Value of Women's Empowerment*

Indonesian and Malaysian folklore displays the value of women's empowerment **in the form of** authority, self-determination, and representation (Peroni & Rodak, 2020). Women have shown power or authority and decide to choose a partner. Putri Mandalika has authority over her. Likewise, Putri Gading Cempaka and Putri Zaleha chose to stay away because they felt they were not ready for age **and did not** like **the character of the** Raja Muda of Aceh. Princess Mariam did not refuse to replace the position of Princess Zuleha to be brought by the Prince of Aceh to her country. Princess Peri rejected Sultan Mansor Shah's proposal indirectly. So, women facing marital problems have shown their courage to make decisions and can control themselves (Rens, 2021).

Women in stories are often represented as beautiful, elegant, graceful, or noble-blooded women. Some are even represented as women who have magical powers. Magic is considered a symbol of power and mystery. The beauty of women cannot be separated from the face and body. The standard of female beauty is a slim body and white skin (Laendra & Vardiansyah, 2017). Women are not only associated with beauty and mystery, but they also need to improve their skills and confidence. As Nur (2019) states, it is important to empower women to increase their capacity and have confidence so that they can participate in the development of the nation.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Through a comparative study, this research on Indonesian and Malaysian folklore found that the dignity (rights and position) of women in marriage, apart from being determined by their strength, also depends on the protection of the family and society. Women as individuals who have high authority and self-determination display strong personalities so that every decision shows their dignity as women. Families who respect each other are obliged to protect their sisters, especially in dealing with problems of violence and forced marriage. Families provide protection rights to maintain the dignity of their daughters. The community is also responsible for maintaining security and not encouraging forced marriages for women.

This research is a criticism of the assumption that women are weak, powerless, unable to make decisions and do not dare to make choices. Such an assumption still exists even though efforts to dismantle hierarchical-patriarchal gender relations are constantly being encouraged. This research confirms that women are personal figures with character and courage to make decisions even though the actions they take contain many risks.

This study only looked at four folktales from two countries in Southeast Asia. Therefore, the samples used are limited so the results are relatively limited. For this fact about the dignity of women in marriage, especially in folklore, to become a broader discourse supporting gender justice, it is necessary to support other, more comprehensive studies on women in folklore from various countries. However, this research has illustrated the idealized rights for women in dealing with marriage so that they can motivate women, provide insight, and elevate women's dignity.

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**Rina Ratih Sri Sudaryani**, lecturer at the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Ahmad Dahlan University. Expertise in the field of literature and children's story writer. Research that has been carried out: *The Dynamics of the Presence of Women in Indonesian Poems after the New Order: A Feminist Study of Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialism* (2019), *The Struggle of Female Characters in the Satin Merah Novel by Brahmanto Anindito and Rie Yanti* (2020), *Indonesian Women in the Middle of Cultural Power Patriarchy* (2020). Email: [rina.sudaryani@pbsi.uad.ac.id](mailto:rina.sudaryani@pbsi.uad.ac.id); ORCID Id: 0000-0002-4722-2458



**Tirtio Suwondo**, researcher of Indonesian literature at the Yogyakarta Special Region Language Center (1982–2017); Central Java Language Center (2017–2020); and now (since 2022) at the Research Center for Language, Literature, and Community, National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Jakarta, Indonesia. He published several books at BRIN Publishing and several articles in international journals, including *Education Research International*, *Journal of Namibian Studies*, *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures*, and *International Journal of Data and Network Science*. Email: [tirt003@brin.go.id](mailto:tirt003@brin.go.id); ORCID Id: 0000-002-1064-7866



**Rika Astari**, an associate professor in the Arabic Language at the University of Ahmad Dahlan (UAD), Yogyakarta, Indonesia. She is also formerly Vice Dean at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, UAD Yogyakarta, and graduated from Pondok Pesantren Modern Gontor Putri in Ngawi, East Java. She has also participated in the visiting scholar programme at the University of California Riverside, USA (2018). Recently, she has been researching Arabic Linguistics, Traditions and Islamic Cultures, and Translations. Email: [rika.astari@bsa.uad.ac.id](mailto:rika.astari@bsa.uad.ac.id); ORCID Id: 0000-0003-3836-7230