Deconstructing Rahwana's Alternate Character in Neelakantan's *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* through Derrida's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the deconstruction of Rahwana's 'Ravana' character in Anand Neelakantan's novel *Rahwana*: *Kisah Rahasia* through the lens of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. The novel narrates Rahwana's journey as he strives to elevate the status of his family and nation. Derrida's deconstruction approach was selected to uncover the complex layers within literary texts, challenging traditional interpretations. As a descriptive-qualitative study, this research analyzed textual evidence from the novel to compare the initial portrayal of Rahwana with his deconstructed character. The findings indicated a complex duality in Rahwana's depiction: while his traditional characterization was marked by ruthlessness, arbitrariness, defiance of divine authority, and ambition, the deconstructed perspective revealed his compassionate, just, devout, and even pessimistic dimensions. These contrasting portrayals underscored the fluidity of Rahwana's character, which was uncovered through the deconstruction. The novelty of this research is to rethink of Rahwana's alternate character from his traditional character embedded in popular puppet stories through a deconstruction approach. Finally, the story of Rahwana has various versions, particularly related to Sinta's abduction. Some stories reveal Rahwana's love for Sinta in romantic ways, while in Neelakantan's novel *Rahwana*: *Kisah Rahasia*, Rahwana's love is depicted as a father's love for his daughter, not as a couple romance.

Keywords: *character study; Deconstruction; Jacques Derrida; Rahwana; Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*

INTRODUCTION

The name Rahwana (Ravana) is well-known, particularly within the context of traditional puppet theater, where his character is often portrayed. In these narratives, Rahwana is consistently depicted as a figure of cruelty which shapes public perception of him as inherently evil and violent. This negative characterization has deeply influenced cultural consciousness; it leads to widespread associations of Rahwana with malevolence. For instance, in North Indian popular culture, the burning of Rahwana's effigy during the Dussehra festival serves as a symbolic expression of collective disdain towards

his character (Shukla, 2011). The Rahwana's story appears in the famous Ramayana story in several countries, especially in Asia such as China, Tibet, East Turkestan, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Burma, and India (Desai, 1970).

Rahwana is often referred to as a Rakshasa or Asura, terms that signify his association with demonic or non-divine beings in Hindu mythology. These labels further emphasize his role as a formidable and often antagonistic figure, reinforcing the traditional portrayal of Rahwana as embodying characteristics that oppose the divine or virtuous (Ranjan, 2022).

Rahwana is symbolically depicted with ten heads, each representing a distinct aspect of his complex character. These ten heads collectively embody a range of emotions and traits, including joy, sorrow, love, anger, fear, jealousy, pride, compassion, devotion, and peace. This multifaceted portrayal suggests the depth and diversity of Rahwana's nature, highlighting the complexity of his character beyond a singular interpretation (Senroy, 2000).

Rahwana is also widely recognized as the abductor of Sinta in the *Ramayana*, a role that solidifies his position as the central antagonist in the epic. In this narrative, Rahwana's actions lead to a climactic conflict in which he is ultimately defeated by Sinta's husband, Rama, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. This portrayal further entrenches Rahwana's identity as a villainous figure within the cultural and literary traditions that draw upon the *Ramayana* (Saddhono et al., 2018). However, in *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* by Anand Neelakantan, the character of Rahwana is reimagined with a more complex portrayal. The novel suggests that for thousands of years, Rahwana, the Asura, has been unjustly maligned, his death celebrated with joy in the traditional *Ramayana* narrative. In this recontextualization, Rahwana is depicted as the notorious and cruel king of Ngalengka (or Alengka), who defied the gods in his pursuit of happiness for his beloved Sinta. Contrary to the conventional narrative that circulates widely, where Rama is celebrated as the heroic figure who vanquishes Rahwana, the novel presents a different perspective on this ancient tale, challenging the traditional depiction of Rahwana as merely a demon of darkness.

Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia invites readers to explore an alternative perspective on Rahwana, delving into his character from his own point of view. Through this narrative, the novel challenges the conventional portrayal of Rahwana as a purely antagonistic figure, suggesting that he may possess a protagonist's qualities within the broader context of the story. This reinterpretation encourages readers to consider the complexity of characters traditionally viewed as villains, highlighting the possibility that an antagonist in one narrative can be perceived as a hero or a sympathetic figure from another perspective (Saddhono et al., 2018). It is essential to analyze *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* with a focus on Rahwana as the central character to uncover the alternative dimensions of his portrayal. This analysis can be effectively conducted through literary criticism, a branch of literary studies that plays a crucial role in evaluating and interpreting literary works. Literary criticism not only offers an assessment of a work's quality but also provides a deeper understanding of its characters, themes, and narrative techniques. By applying literary criticism to Rahwana's character, one can gain insights into the complexities that challenge the traditional view of him as merely an antagonist (Pradopo, 2017; Teeuw, 2018).

Among the various literary criticisms available, deconstruction is particularly well-suited for analyzing *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*. Deconstruction, as a literary theory, emerged as a key aspect of poststructuralism, challenging traditional interpretations and revealing the inherent contradictions and complexities within a text. By applying deconstruction to the novel, one can uncover the multifaceted nature of Rahwana's character, destabilizing conventional binary oppositions such as good versus evil and protagonist versus antagonist. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the text, revealing new dimensions of meaning and offering a fresh perspective on the narrative (Saputra, 2022: 135). Poststructuralism does not aim to dismantle structuralism but rather to complement it by addressing elements that structuralism overlooks. While structuralism operates on the premise that coherence exists between external and internal structures, typically emerging across multiple texts, poststructuralism challenges this notion. It posits that contradictions, uncertainties, and multiple interpretations can be found even within a single literary work. This perspective allows for a more complexed and dynamic analysis, recognizing the inherent complexities and fluidity of meaning within a text (Darma, 2019).

In poststructuralism, deconstruction theory was popularized by Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction is the study of the traces of other texts, looking for influences from texts that once existed, examining the etymology of the words used, and then trying to make the disassembled text into a new text (Suarta & Dwipanya, 2014). The task of deconstruction in Derrida's concept seeks to eliminate the illusive ideas that have dominated Western metaphysics, namely the idea that the ratio is free from language and arrives at truth, or pure and authentic methods in itself without the help of others (Norris, 2020). Derrida also introduced the concept of "difference"

to deconstruction theory. "Difference" contains destructive power at the level of signifiers that are graphically immune to reduction. Derrida directly affirms the existence of difference, where the difference in question relates to differences in the meaning of a literary work. Deconstruction in Derrida's thought discusses the limits of texts and describes how these texts transcend the limits, as well as redefine the text and expand the text (Fang, 2017: 134). The application of deconstruction requires precise knowledge of what is being avoided and requires attention to hidden ideologies and thus provides alternative interpretations that are intertextually validated (Liebenberg, 1985: 39). Deconstruction also brings about a contradiction in people's opinions about pre-existing events (Miana & Suroso, 2020). According to Jacques Derrida, everything that is based on something present, absolute, stable, fixed, singular, or whether consciousness, existence, freedom, human, or identity contains a contradictory, inconsistent, and unstable logic that can destroy itself (Hanif, 2020: 93).

Deconstruction elaborates on matters relating to binary opposition (Kurniawati et al., 2020; Ningrum et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020; Widyantoro & Ernawati, 2021). Deconstruction can turn commonly held beliefs into taboos, and vice versa (Pratiwi et al., 2018). In deconstruction criticism, there is a finding that there is no consideration of protagonists and antagonists, behind the protagonist's side there is a negative side that is not visible to the reader (Indriana & Wiyatmi, 2022; Sutisno, 2017). Based on these insights, deconstruction emerges as a fitting literary criticism for analyzing the character of Rahwana in *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*. Deconstruction is particularly appropriate because its theoretical framework aligns closely with the complexities and contradictions inherent in Rahwana's portrayal. By applying deconstruction, the analysis can effectively unravel the multiple layers of meaning within the character, offering a deeper understanding of the issues explored in the novel.

Several studies have examined *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* from different perspectives. One notable example is a comparative study conducted by Suyono (2021), which analyzes the figure of Rahwana as depicted in the Prambanan temple reliefs, the *Kakawin Ramayana*, and Anand Neelakantan's novel. This research highlights the varying portrayals of Rahwana across different cultural and literary contexts, offering

insights into how his character has been reimagined and reshaped over time. The study found that the reliefs at Prambanan highlight a more memorable and complex aspect of Rahwana, aligning with his portrayal in the *Kakawin Ramayana*. However, in *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*, Rahwana is depicted differently from the version in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, with his characterization more closely resembling that in the Jain tradition. Another relevant research focuses on the conversion of Wibisana, Rahwana's brother, in *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*, analyzed through the lens of René Girard's ethical theory. This study explores the moral and ethical dimensions of Wibisana's actions, shedding light on the complex interpersonal dynamics in the novel (Sudanta et al., 2022). The results of the study indicate that Wibisana's conversion in *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* is twofold: an intellectual conversion and a religious conversion. His intellectual transformation reflects a shift in his perspective and understanding of the ethical dilemmas surrounding his loyalty to Rahwana, while the religious conversion signifies his spiritual realignment, moving away from Rahwana's influence towards a more divine and morally upright path. This dual conversion highlights the complex moral evolution of Wibisana within the narrative.

The two studies share similarities and differences with the research to be conducted. The primary similarity lies in the use of *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* as the object of analysis. However, there are notable distinctions. First, this study aims to explore the hidden dimensions of Rahwana's character, while Senroy's research focuses on a comparative analysis of Rahwana's portrayal across three sources. Second, this study concentrates on Rahwana himself, whereas Sudanta et al. (2022) focus on Wibisana's conversion. Consequently, this research introduces a unique contribution to the study of *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* by employing Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory to analyze Rahwana's character. This approach deconstructs the traditional negative traits associated with Rahwana, particularly those embedded in popular puppet stories, and reveals new layers of meaning. In this way, deconstruction expands the interpretive possibilities of the novel, contributing to the novelty and significance of this research.

Based on the discourse outlined, Rahwana's character has long been associated with antagonistic traits, yet there is an emerging assumption that he

may also possess protagonist-like qualities. This raises the central research question: How does the novel *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* deconstruct the other side of Rahwana's character? The significance of this research extends beyond merely applying deconstruction theory to a literary work. It also offers a broader understanding that no meaning is fixed or absolute, as demonstrated through the application of deconstruction. By exploring these layers, the research contributes to both the study of deconstruction and the reinterpretation of traditional literary characters.

This research on the deconstruction of Rahwana's character in *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* employs a qualitative approach. Qualitative research focuses on findings derived without the use of quantification, statistical calculations, or numerical methods (Rukajat, 2018; Sugiyono, 2015). The methodology adopted is descriptive, aligning with the characteristics of the novel, which necessitate detailed description in the presentation of its analysis. Descriptive qualitative analysis is utilized to explore the deconstruction of Rahwana's character, revealing the other side of this traditionally antagonistic figure. The primary data source is Anand Neelakantan's novel *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*, supported by secondary data such as relevant academic articles and theoretical works that reinforce the research framework. These additional sources provide theoretical context and support the interpretation of Rahwana's character through deconstruction.

The data collection process involves reading and note-taking techniques. Data gathered through these methods is then analyzed in conjunction with deconstruction theory to uncover the other dimensions of Rahwana's character. The reading technique serves as a follow-up to the documentation method, allowing the researcher to extract relevant information from inanimate sources such as books, magazines, and other textual materials. Through this process, key insights are identified and linked to the theoretical framework of deconstruction, leading to a comprehensive analysis of Rahwana's character in *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* (Arikunto, 2010).

The note-taking technique is employed to systematically record data collected through the reading process. This technique ensures that relevant information, themes, and insights identified during the reading are accurately captured for further analysis. By organizing and documenting the data in this way, the researcher is able to more effectively connect the findings to the theoretical framework of deconstruction, facilitating a deeper exploration of Rahwana's character in *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* (Sugiyono, 2015).

The exploration of Rahwana's character in this study begins with categorizing the initial and deconstructed meanings. The initial meaning reflects the traditional portrayal of Rahwana, while the deconstructed meaning reveals the other, more complex aspects of his character. Data analysis follows the process outlined by Milles et al. (2018), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. First, the data is systematically reduced to focus on key elements relevant to Rahwana's character. Next, the reduced data is clearly presented, highlighting the contrast between the initial and deconstructed meanings. Finally, conclusions are drawn, providing a comprehensive understanding of the duality and complexity of Rahwana's character as revealed through deconstruction.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The novel *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* presents a reimagined narrative of Rahwana, centering on his struggles for victory, wealth, and the establishment of his kingdom. Unlike the conventional portrayal of Rahwana as a purely antagonistic figure, this novel offers a more comprehensive depiction, beginning with Rahwana's early life marked by poverty and discrimination. Born into the Asura nation, a group regarded as despicable and vile, Rahwana endures immense suffering from childhood, exacerbated by the rise of his half-brother Kubera to power. Kubera's control over their father's wealth, along with his continual insults, fuels Rahwana's deep resentment and desire to restore honor to his family and nation. Despite his efforts, Rahwana is ultimately defeated by Rama.

Traditionally, Rahwana is viewed as a symbol of evil, yet in *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*, his character is reshaped and explored through his own perspective. This research focuses on the less recognized, protagonist aspects of Rahwana's character, revealing a deconstructed view that challenges the previous narrative of him as purely villainous. By applying Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, the analysis seeks to uncover alternative dimensions of

Rahwana's character that contrast with the widely known antagonistic traits. The findings of this research demonstrate that Rahwana's character, when viewed through a deconstructive lens, embodies qualities that complicate the binary opposition of good and evil.

Initials Meaning

This section highlights the characteristics of Rahwana as an antagonist in the traditional narrative, representing the traits that are most widely recognized by the public. In classical portrayals, Rahwana is depicted as a cruel and tyrannical figure, driven by ambition, greed, and a lust for power. His actions, particularly the abduction of Sinta in the *Ramayana*, reinforce his role as a villain who defies divine order and justice. Rahwana is often associated with brutality, arrogance, and a disregard for moral or ethical principles, solidifying his reputation as a symbol of evil and opposition to righteousness. These characteristics form the foundation of the antagonistic image of Rahwana that has persisted in cultural and literary traditions.

Ruthless

Rahwana is described as having a ruthless character. This is revealed in the story when Rahwana was enjoying his glory as a king who was adored by one of his soldiers. His thoughts began to create lines of ruthless when ruling. The following is an excerpt from the novel.

> *"Aku bisa merasakan dirinya benar-benar di bawah kekuasaanku. Aku bisa menendangnya, menyeretnya, dan bahkan memenggal kepalanya..."*

> (Neelakantan, 2017: 91)

(I could feel him completely under my power. I can kick him, drag him, and even cut off his head).

In another section, Rahwana's ruthless nature is revealed when he begins his campaign of plundering kingdoms. Enraged by the insult directed at him for being from the despised Asura nation, Rahwana's anger reaches its peak, leading him to behead the king of Ayodhya in a fit of violence. His methods of killing are portrayed as cruel and merciless, reinforcing his image as a fearsome and brutal leader. His violent actions instill fear among his enemies and followers alike, compelling them to submit and obey him in order to survive. This side of Rahwana's character is illustrated in the following excerpts from the novel, where his actions are described with vivid detail, highlighting his cold and heartless approach to warfare.

> *"Dengan satu gerakan enteng Rahwana memenggal kepala Anarnya, raja Ayodhya. Dia meletakkan kepala raja tua itu di atas patung Wisnu.... Dia menendang kepala itu seperti bola dan mendarat dengan bunyi gedebuk di bawah kaki patung Wisnu."*

> (Neelakantan, 2017: 269)

(In one fell swoop Rahwana beheaded Anarnya, the king of Ayodhya. He placed the old king's head on the statue of Wisnu... He kicked the head like a ball and it landed with a thud under the feet of the statue of Wisnu).

Based on the excerpts from the novel, Rahwana's ruthless character is clearly evident, as he consistently shows no mercy to his enemies. This trait is one of the most well-known aspects of Rahwana's persona, particularly among devotees of traditional puppet stories. His ruthlessness has solidified his reputation as a demon-king antagonist, often distinguishing him from ordinary demons (Johari, 2023; Sanmugeswaran et al., 2019). As the demon king of Lanka (referred to as Ngalengka in Indonesian culture), Rahwana is depicted as capable of extreme violence and cruelty, further reinforcing his antagonistic role (Medawattegedara, 2021). This portrayal has been a dominant feature in both classical literature and cultural narratives.

Acting arbitrarily

Rahwana's position as a leader instills in him a sense of absolute power, leading him to believe that he can act without restraint. He holds the conviction that, as king, no one would dare to oppose or challenge his authority. This perception of unchecked dominance drives many of his actions, reinforcing his tyrannical and authoritarian nature. This aspect of Rahwana's character is vividly portrayed in the novel, as illustrated by the following excerpts, where his arrogance and sense of invincibility as a ruler are

clearly evident.

> *"Aku telah melanggar setidaknya lima aturan kesopanan bangsa Asura, tapi aku tak peduli, tak ada lagi yang bisa berbunga-bunga dalam Bahasa Tamil yang suci.... Aku akan menggunakan caraku sendiri...."*

(Neelakantan, 2017: 85)

(I've broken at least five rules of Asura nation politeness, but I don't care, nothing else can be flowery in the sacred Tamil language.... I will use my way).

> *"....dan tak seorang pun berani menentangku."*

(Neelakantan, 2017: 85)

(...and no one will dare to oppose me).

In the novel, there is a crucial moment in Rahwana's development where he begins to perceive himself as a king, even before officially holding the title. This self-perception of having the highest position reflects his growing arrogance and ambition. Rahwana's internal belief in his superiority and rightful place as a ruler fuels his actions and shapes his behavior, even before he ascends to the throne. This evolving sense of entitlement and power is depicted in the following excerpts from the novel, highlighting the psychological transformation Rahwana undergoes as he moves towards his eventual kingship.

> *"Aku sungguh jengkel ketika dia berbicara dengan nada merendahkan. Juga, dia tidak menggunakan panggilan kehormatan dan menyebutku hanya dengan namaku saja di rapat Dewan, lupa bahwa aku seorang raja, dan dia hanya mahapatih."*

(Neelakantan, 2017: 111)

(I was annoyed when he spoke in such a condescending tone. Also, he doesn't use honorifics and refers to me by my name alone at Council meetings, forgetting that I'm a king, and he's just the supreme commander).

This evolving sense of entitlement and power is depicted in the following excerpts from the novel, highlighting the psychological transformation

Rahwana undergoes as he moves towards his eventual kingship (Hariwidjoyo, 2011). In *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*, Rahwana frequently exhibits this attitude of asserting his power, particularly in front of his followers, as a means of reinforcing his authority. This behavior, however, often leads to tension and frustration among those closest to him. His constant need to demonstrate his superiority and control creates an atmosphere of resentment, as his followers become increasingly annoyed by his domineering presence. This dynamic is crucial in understanding the complexities of Rahwana's relationships with those around him, as depicted in the novel.

Disobedience to God

In *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*, Rahwana is often portrayed as mocking the Brahmins, who were regarded as holy and devout figures. His disdain for the Brahmins is deeply personal, rooted in his strained relationship with his father, who was a Brahmin. Rahwana's resentment grew as he perceived his father's religious devotion as neglectful of family responsibilities. This led to Rahwana's increasing hostility toward the Brahmin caste. Moreover, Rahwana frequently ridiculed religious practices, ceremonies, and celebrations that he deemed unimportant or trivial. These attitudes are clearly reflected in the novel, as illustrated in the following excerpt, where Rahwana's irreverence towards religious traditions and figures is evident.

> *"Sering sekali kami mengejeknya dan terkadang aku berani mempertanyakan keyakinannya ketika dia dan teman-temannya sedang mengembangkan Weda."*

(Neelakantan, 2017: 26)

(There were many times when we mocked him and sometimes I dared to question his beliefs when he and his friends were developing the Weda).

> *"... Itu semua bualan nenek-nenek pencari kutu. Aku tak percaya pada surga tempat aku akan diberi segala hal yang dengan sengaja kutolak di dunia ini. Aku tidak percaya omong kosong para brahmana tentang kelahiran kembali..."*

(Neelakantan, 2017: 58)

(It's all nagging grandmothers' bullshit. I don't believe in a heaven where I'll be given everything I deliberately refused in this world. I don't believe in the brahminical nonsense about rebirth).

Based on the excerpts from the novel, Rahwana is portrayed as a character who rejects the authority of the Brahmins and Dharma, further shaping his negative personality. His disdain for Brahmin teachings and moral codes contributes to his image as someone who defies traditional religious and ethical norms. Rahwana's inability to control his darker desires and impulses reinforces this characterization (Shyam B R et al., 2024). Despite his aversion to Brahmins, it is significant to note that Rahwana himself is a descendant of Brahmins, adding complexity to his character and highlighting the internal conflicts that define his personality.

Ambitious

Rahwana is famously driven by his relentless ambition to seize power and fulfill his dream of becoming a king. This ambition that propels him towards the heights of glory he eventually attains. His unwavering desire for authority and dominance shapes many of his actions and decisions, marking his journey as one fueled by a thirst for power. This ambition is vividly depicted in the novel, as highlighted in the following excerpts, where Rahwana's determination and pursuit of kingship are central to his character development.

> *"…ambisiku yang membara! Kelaparan tak akan pernah memadamkan api ambisi yang dinyalakan istana itu dalam diriku."*

> (Neelakantan, 2017: 25)

(My burning ambition! Hunger will never extinguish the fire of ambition that the palace lit in me).

> *"Aku tak mau menyerah begitu mudah. Tidak seharusnya aku gampang dijinakkan."*

> (Neelakantan, 2017: 43)

(I don't want to give up so easily. I shouldn't be so easily tamed).

Rahwana's desire to always emerge victorious drives him to pursue his goals by any means necessary, as evidenced in various excerpts from the novel. His relentless ambition is a defining trait, positioning him as a figure willing to go to great lengths to achieve his objectives (Saddhono et al., 2018; Shyam B R et al., 2024). This ambition is symbolically represented by the ten heads of Rahwana, each reflecting different facets of his personality, including his unyielding drive for power and success. This characteristic not only shapes his actions but also solidifies his portrayal as a deeply ambitious figure in the narrative.

Deconstructed meaning

After examining the initial meaning of Rahwana's character, the deconstructed meaning can be uncovered, revealing an alternative perspective on his traits. Deconstructed meaning challenges the conventional portrayal and reconstructs the initial interpretations of Rahwana's character. This new perspective highlights dimensions of his personality that are often overlooked, offering a more complex and multifaceted view of Rahwana. In this section, the deconstructed meaning reveals another side of Rahwana, illustrating characteristics that contrast with the initial portrayal of him as solely ambitious and ruthless. Through this lens, Rahwana's character evolves, presenting a deeper understanding of his motivations and actions.

Compassionate

Initially portrayed as cruel and violent, Rahwana's character undergoes a transformation through deconstruction, unveiling a more compassionate and loving side. Despite his reputation for ruthlessness, Rahwana is now depicted as deeply affectionate and caring toward his family and supporters. This shift in his characterization reveals the complexity of his personality, highlighting his capacity for love and loyalty, which contrasts with his previously dominant violent traits. This reimagined aspect of Rahwana's character is clearly evidenced in the following excerpts from the novel, where his affection and devotion are brought to light.

> *"Isak tangis ibuku menyentuh titik lemah di suatu tempat dalam diriku dan aku menangis karena penderitaan kami…. Aku memeluk adik-adikku dengan erat…."*

> (Neelakantan, 2017: 46)

(My mother's sobs touched a soft spot somewhere inside me and I wept for our plight.... I hugged my younger siblings tightly).

Rahwana's deep affection for his daughter is also portrayed in the novel. The painful circumstances that led to their separation cause him great sorrow, motivating his efforts to reunite with her. This emotional bond between father and daughter adds another layer to Rahwana's character, showcasing his capacity for tenderness and familial devotion. His longing to reconnect with his daughter is evident in the following excerpt, highlighting a more compassionate and empathetic side of the traditionally antagonistic figure.

> *"Putriku terlihat seperti malaikat. Dia duduk di bawah pohon Asoka."*

> (Neelakantan, 2017: 474)

(My daughter looks like an angel. She's sitting under the Asoka tree).

The excerpt reveals Rahwana's capacity for compassion, particularly toward his family, including his mother, siblings, and daughter. This compassionate side suggests that behind his notorious cruelty, Rahwana possesses a deep sense of care and devotion. His concern extends not only to his family but also to his people. Although Rahwana is infamous for kidnapping Sinta, his actions are driven by paternal instincts, as he comes to believe that Sinta is his daughter (Shyam B R et al., 2024). This fatherly love, as explained by Saddhono et al., (2018), offers a more complex motivation for his actions, portraying Rahwana as a complex character whose cruelty is counterbalanced by moments of tenderness and care.

Acts Fairly

Rahwana is depicted as having an arbitrary and domineering attitude, driven by his greed and ambition to become king. This trait becomes a defining aspect of his character. However, beneath this ambition lies a sense of fairness toward his people. His original goal was to elevate the status of his nation, and this commitment to justice is reflected in his efforts to treat his subjects fairly. Despite his ruthless quest for power, Rahwana's desire to uplift and protect his people demonstrates a more balanced and equitable

side to his leadership. This fair attitude is evident in the following excerpts from the novel, where his actions toward his subjects reflect his dedication to ensuring their well-being.

> *"Aku akan memerintah dunia dengan keadilan, perdamaian, dan kemakmuran bagi semuanya saja, tanpa pandang bulu!"*

> (Neelakantan, 2017: 27)

(I will rule the world with justice, peace, and prosperity for all, indiscriminately).

In the novel, Rahwana is portrayed as a visionary leader determined to abolish meaningless rituals, animal sacrifices, and the caste system, driven by his personal experiences of discrimination from a young age. He believed in the fundamental principle that all people, regardless of their caste, should be treated equally. Rahwana sought to create a society free from caste-based discrimination, one where fairness and equity prevailed. Additionally, he is depicted as a benevolent figure who takes concrete actions to improve the lives of his people. He not only formulates medicine for children but also records his knowledge to ensure it can be passed down to future generations, without discrimination. This portrayal of Rahwana's positive contributions is illustrated in the following excerpt from the novel, reflecting his efforts to leave a lasting legacy of equality and progress for his people.

> *"Aku telah meracik beberapa obat untuk anak-anak dan menulis ilmu perbintangan, mencatat semuanya dengan cermat pada daun lontar."*

> (Neelakantan, 2017: 559)

(I have concocted some medicines for children and written astrology, meticulously recording everything on palm leaves).

Throughout various parts of the story, Rahwana is portrayed as a king who strives to rule justly and fairly over his people. Despite his reputation for cruelty, his efforts to improve the lives of his subjects reveal a more balanced and compassionate side to his leadership. In the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, Rahwana is similarly depicted as the great king of Lanka, known for his immense power and influence. While his actions

are often framed within the context of his conflict with Rama, his role as a formidable and capable ruler remains a central aspect of his character in both the epic and *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* (Harikrishnan, 2020).

Rahwana employed various methods to impart knowledge to his followers, including writing on subjects related to science. He was not only a formidable ruler but also a scholar, credited with authoring an astrology book titled *Rahwana Samhita*. His contributions extended to the study of medicine, where he demonstrated his intellect and expertise. Rahwana was also well-versed in politics, an expert in war strategy, and a wise and just king to his people (Harikrishnan, 2020; Shyam B R et al., 2024; Sugara, 2019). In addition to his scholarly pursuits, Rahwana was regarded as an exceptionally intelligent and valiant hero, a ruler with a deep appreciation for culture and civilization (Zvelebil, 1988).

Obedient to God

In the initial portrayal, Rahwana is depicted as someone who defied God and rejected religious practices. His father, a Brahmin who wrote the *Veda*, became a source of Rahwana's resentment, especially as he observed the frequent worship ceremonies, which he deemed unimportant. This rebellious attitude contributed to his earlier characterization as someone disconnected from divine faith. However, in other depictions within the narrative, Rahwana is shown to be deeply spiritual, often begging, praying, and expressing belief in the existence of God. This shift reveals a more complex relationship between Rahwana and religion, highlighting his inner conflict and evolving perspective on faith. The following excerpts from the novel illustrate this transformation, showing Rahwana's moments of prayer and his belief in divine forces.

> *"Siwa adalah Tuhan pribadiku yang aku sayangi."*
>
> (Neelakantan, 2017:33)

(Siwa or Shiva is my personal God whom I love).

> *"Siwa bisa menjadi teman, sepupu, anak, ayah, atau apa pun yang bisa dibayangkan."*
>
> (Neelakantan, 2017:34)

(Siwa can be a friend, cousin, son, father, or anything else imaginable).

> *"Akal budi hanyalah sebuah alat untuk melayani perasaan-perasaan kita, dan aku ingin hidup sebagaimana yang diinginkan Tuhan."*
>
> (Neelakantan, 2017:58)

(The intellect is just a tool to serve our feelings, and I want to live as God wants me to).

Based on the excerpts from the novel mentioned above, it can be concluded that although they often underestimate the existence of God. Rahwana did not forget Shiva who had been his role model God all this time. Rahwana is known as a religious figure (Sugara, 2019). It is known that Rahwana is figure who devotes himself to Lord Shiva or Siwa (Shyam B R et al., 2024). He even performed penance for the Lord Shiva (B. R. & Aithal, 2023).

Pessimist

In the initial portrayal, Rahwana is driven by ambition, with a relentless desire to dominate and achieve glory. His pursuit of victory defines him as a highly ambitious figure, consumed by the need to conquer and assert his power. However, this ambition is not unwavering. There are moments in the story when Rahwana experiences doubt, as his dreams seem increasingly out of reach. In these instances, he is overcome with despair, feeling pessimistic about his future and the feasibility of his goals. These moments of vulnerability reveal a more human side of Rahwana, where his inner struggles with failure and doubt contrast with his otherwise powerful and ambitious persona. This emotional complexity is evident in the following excerpts from the novel, where Rahwana's internal conflict is highlighted.

> *"Aku tiba-tiba merasa gentar… aku bisa merasakan tatapan yang mengejekku, menentangku, menakutkanku, sekaligus menenangkanku."*
>
> (Neelakantan, 2017: 43)

(I suddenly felt trepidation… I could feel the gaze that mocked me, defied me, frightened me, and calmed me at the same time).

"Aku raja tak berguna yang telah menyeret rakyatnya ke medan perang yang tak perlu, menyingkirkan mereka ke jurang kematian dan kehancuran."

(Neelakantan, 2017: 476)

(I am a useless king who has dragged his people into needless wars, driving them to the brink of death and ruin).

In *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*, Rahwana's character is also depicted as experiencing moments of deep pessimism regarding his leadership and the kingdom he built. This feeling reveals a more vulnerable and uncertain side of Rahwana, unlike the steadfast and powerful figure commonly portrayed in other narratives. Rahwana's ten heads, symbolizing various aspects of his nature, include the emotion of fear (Faturahman & Media Sucahya, 2022; Senroy, 2000). This fear contributes to his moments of self-doubt, undermining the confidence and ambition that once drove him to seek kingship. The novel portrays this fear as a weakening force, causing Rahwana to question his ability to lead and fulfill his grand aspirations. This complexity adds depth to his character, illustrating that even the most ambitious leaders have moments of vulnerability.

Based on the research findings, there are clear indications of binary opposition in the portrayal of Rahwana, consistent with deconstruction theory. The concept of binary opposition highlights and brings to the forefront contrasting aspects within a character, revealing hidden or opposing traits. In Rahwana's case, his initial characterization as ruthless and ambitious is juxtaposed with his moments of compassion, fear, and self-doubt. This opposition serves to deconstruct the traditional one-dimensional portrayal of Rahwana, emphasizing the complexity of his character by uncovering previously unrecognized qualities. Through this lens, Rahwana's character is not simply villainous but multifaceted, with contradictory emotions and motivations shaping his actions (Nugraha et al., 2023). The concept of binary opposition refers to the presence of two opposing viewpoints or interpretations within a text. One viewpoint represents the original, conventional meaning, while the other represents the deconstructed meaning, as revealed through a critical analysis. In the case of Rahwana, the original meaning portrays him as a ruthless, ambitious antagonist, while the deconstructed meaning uncovers alternative aspects of his character, such as compassion, fear, and self-doubt. By examining both sides of this binary opposition, deconstruction challenges the traditional understanding of the character, revealing the complexity and contradictions that lie beneath the surface.

In *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*, the initial portrayal of Rahwana aligns with traditional depictions, emphasizing his ruthlessness, arbitrary actions, defiance of divine authority, and unchecked ambition. This characterization reflects the widely accepted view of Rahwana as a symbol of villainy, representing moral corruption and evil (Johari, 2023). Rahwana's relentless ambition stems from his desire to dominate the world and elevate the status of the Asura nation, which had long been considered despicable and inferior. The insults and societal rejection he faced fueled his growing ambition, driving his determination to rise above the condemnation and establish power. This portrayal reinforces Rahwana's long-standing reputation as a figure who embodies malevolence and destructive ambition.

However, through deconstruction, the previous negative depiction of Rahwana undergoes a transformation, revealing a more complex character. In the deconstructed meaning, Rahwana is portrayed as compassionate, fair, obedient to God, and even pessimistic. This reinterpretation offers an alternative perspective, showcasing a side of Rahwana that contrasts sharply with his traditional image. Similar to the portrayal of Rahwana in Sunardi DM's *Ramayana*, where he embodies values such as religiosity, hard work, democracy, patriotism, environmental care, and responsibility (Sugara, 2019), the novel *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia* uncovers these layers of his character. His affection for his family and people, his obedience to God, his sense of fairness, and his moments of despair present Rahwana in a way that defies the common perception of him as merely a powerful and ruthless figure. This multifaceted portrayal invites readers to reconsider the complexity behind Rahwana's grandeur, revealing a vulnerable side that challenges the one-dimensional image of him as a villain.

This analysis also uncovers the unique relationship between Sinta and Rahwana, portraying them as father and daughter. This interpretation aligns with the Jain version of the *Ramayana*, which similarly presents Sinta as Rahwana's daughter (Senroy, 2000).

This complex relationship offers a departure from more familiar versions of the *Ramayana*, such as Valmiki's, where Rahwana is traditionally depicted as the villainous abductor of Sinta (Senroy, 2000). Additionally, in other retellings like Sapardi Djoko Damono's version, Rahwana is portrayed quite differently: he respectfully seeks Rama's permission to marry Sinta and is depicted not as a coward, but as a figure admired by women, including Sinta, for his desirable qualities (Miana & Suroso, 2020). These variations illustrate the diverse and evolving portrayals of Rahwana across different cultural and literary traditions, further complicating his character.

In the traditional *Ramayana* story, Sinta is kidnapped by Rahwana while she is in the forest, driven by Rahwana's desire for her (Siegel, 1990). However, in other interpretations, such as Suyono's retelling (Suyono, 2021), Sinta's abduction is reframed as an act of love and compassion from a father. In this version, Rahwana, feeling pity and humiliation over how his daughter was mistreated and secluded in the forest by Rama, abducts her to save her from suffering. While both versions agree that Rahwana kidnapped Sinta, the motivations differ significantly. The former suggests personal desire, while the latter portrays a protective paternal instinct. Despite these differences, both versions hint at Rahwana's deep compassion for Sinta, whether as a romantic figure or as a father. This compassionate motivation underscores the complexity of Rahwana's character and adds layers to the reasoning behind Sinta's abduction.

In applying the concept of deconstruction, it becomes evident that characters traditionally viewed as purely protagonist or antagonist are more complex, with each embodying trait of the other. This approach reveals that characters like Rahwana, often portrayed as an antagonist, possess qualities such as compassion, fairness, and paternal love, which are typically associated with protagonists. Conversely, even characters viewed as heroic may have moments of moral ambiguity or questionable actions. Deconstruction emphasizes that no character is entirely good or evil; rather, they exhibit a blend of opposing traits, challenging fixed interpretations and uncovering the fluidity of their moral and emotional dimensions (Indriana & Wiyatmi, 2022; Nugraha et al., 2023). This concept is rooted in deconstruction theory, which posits that there is no absolute or fixed meaning in texts or characters.

According to deconstruction, all interpretations are fluid, and meanings are continuously shifting based on context, perspective, and deeper analysis. In the case of Rahwana, for example, the traditional view of him as purely evil is deconstructed to reveal layers of compassion and humanity. This theory challenges the binary oppositions of good and evil, protagonist and antagonist, by demonstrating that every character can embody both positive and negative traits. Ultimately, deconstruction shows that meaning is not fixed but open to reinterpretation and recontextualization.

CONCLUSION

In the world of puppetry, Rahwana is traditionally portrayed as an evil character, an adversary to Rama, who embodies noble and benevolent qualities. However, in the novel *Rahwana: Kisah Rahasia*, a different portrayal of Rahwana emerges. The novel focuses on Rahwana's struggle to conquer other kingdoms, driven by a singular dream: to elevate the status of his people, the Asura nation, a group often belittled and scorned by other castes. Rahwana is initially described with traits such as ruthlessness, arbitrary behavior, disobedience to God, and ambition. Yet, through the lens of deconstruction theory, these characteristics are re-examined and transformed. The novel reveals an opposing, deconstructed side to Rahwana, highlighting his compassionate nature, sense of fairness, devotion to God, and moments of pessimism. Rahwana is depicted as a loving figure, caring for both his family and nation, devoutly worshipping Shiva, striving to be a just king, and occasionally succumbing to despair.

This analysis illustrates that the story of Rahwana can be viewed from multiple perspectives, showing that he is not simply a figure of evil. Instead, his character is multifaceted and subject to reinterpretation, depending on the author's narrative choices. The portrayal of Rahwana is not fixed, as his character can embody both villainous and virtuous qualities, revealing the complexity of his motivations and actions.

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