

# Kartini

*by* Maria Vincentia Eka Mulatsih

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## A STUDY OF KARTINI'S SCHOOL CONCEPTS IN *LETTERS OF A JAVANESE PRINCESS*

Maria Lintang Panjer Enjing  
Maria Vincentia Eka Mulatsih

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English Language Education Study Program: Department of Language and Arts Education

Sanata Dharma University

Yogyakarta, Indonesia

mv\_ika@usd.ac.id

### Abstract

Kartini is known as an Indonesian feminist writer who shows her opinion toward many aspects of Javanese life during Dutch colonialization era. Many studies have discussed her feminism, gender equality, marriage and emancipation. This paper will give new insight which is taken from Kartini's concept in relation with her dream school. Firstly, it provides the school concepts of Kartini by conducting a document analysis of her letters. Secondly, the school concept will be analyzed further using critical discourse analysis. It was found that Kartini's school concepts can be categorized into three parts namely school for women, character building, & various school subjects. Nevertheless, Kartini's school concepts have been influenced with Dutch ideal school condition. In short, this paper is beneficial for teachers, lecturers, and practitioners in dealing with a good school concept without ignoring the values of our local wisdom.

**Keywords:** School Concepts, Kartini, Dutch.

### INTRODUCTION

Literary work can acknowledge many readers to know social, educational, moral, and cultural phenomena that are being portrayed by the writers. Since literary works such as poems, plays, and novels take place in the various settings, they also contribute the understanding on how the communication happens in some countries, which contain different culture and education as Mulatsih (2018) also underlines.

One of the real examples of literary work that has the relation with education is *Letters of a Javanese Princess* which is written by Raden Adjeng Kartini. She expressed her experience and feeling about education for

Javanese women in that era through her letters. Those letters were compiled by J.H. Abendanon after Raden Adjeng Kartini passed away. The compilation of her letters was in form of a book called *Door Duisternis tot Licht (Out of Dark Comes Light)* in Dutch language and was published in 1911. An English translation of Kartini's letters was published in 1920. The title of this book is *Letters of a Javanese Princess*.

Kartini's idea for educating women changed the educational requirement in Indonesia during Dutch colonialism era. It allowed women to go to school. In fact, Indonesia experienced many changes in developing the education system. Suratno (2014) said that in

the Dutch colonial era (1600s-1942) education was purposed only for particular groups of people. The education was based by school classification according to social status. It was also influenced by the tradition that only men could go to school, while women should only stay at home (it is called as *pingit*). Now, people have chance to go school and obtain their education until at the highest level of institutions.

Knowing the importance of Kartini's letters for promoting Indonesian women's right of education in spite of her own education limitation in Dutch colonialism era, the analysis of her school concepts is needed to be done more deeply. There are two main problems that will be discussed in this article. The first relates to Kartini's school concepts as reflected in her letters and the second is the influence of western thought toward Kartini's school concepts.

Furthermore, this article hopefully benefits people who care for Indonesian education in relation with school concepts as viewed in Kartini's letters. By reading and understanding this literary work, readers may find the root of Indonesian education that is shown from Indonesian heroine from Java who fights for emancipation.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

For answering the first research question, close reading to all Kartini's letters was done. This method is a way where the researcher wants to dig more deeply the content of Kartini's letter in relation with her school concepts. Based on that reason, the approach that is used for analyzing the first problem refers to formalist. The formalist approach is a critical approach that analyzes

or evaluates the content of the text in literary works (Guerin, et al., 2010; Davis & Womack, 2002). The formalist approach is also called as a new critical approach. Since the object of this study is letters, this approach helps the writer comprehend the content of the letters.

For answering the second problem that is the influences of Dutch colonialization toward Kartini's school concepts, the writer applied critical discourse analysis. Previous finding about literal Kartini's school concepts is analyzed again to find out the relation between Kartini and Dutch. In this case, Dutch is the dominance. As Van Dijk (1993) mentioned that critical discourse analysis is applied when there is a question about power, dominance, social inequality.

In this study, the writer applied library study. The writer used library study to collect the data from numerous sources as the primary and secondary data. The main data of this study were taken from Raden Ajeng Kartini's letters entitled *Letters of A Javanese Princess*. Meanwhile, the writer took the secondary data of this study from several sources of related field. Many references such as journals, books, e-books, articles, and online references were used as a secondary data of the study. The writer also applied document analysis. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is an orderly procedure for evaluating and analyzing electronic and printed documents. Document analysis needs the data be examined in order to obtain meaning, gain understanding, and develop knowledge.

The writer conducted following several steps in analyzing the data. The first step was

reading the book entitled *Letters of A Javanese Princess*. The writer read the book thoroughly for several times, in order to gain a better understanding of the content of the letters. The second reading was founding the proofs and evidences that presents school concept of Raden Adjeng Kartini. The second step was the writer collects the theories and reviews of related studies. The purpose of this step was to support the analysis of the study. The third step was applying the reviews and related studies to determine the problem formulations. The fourth step was the writer applies theories to be used in this study. The study employed theories about school concept to support this study before the writer analyzed some variables in Raden Adjeng Kartini's school.

The fifth step was identifying the data. The writer also marked and wrote evidences from every letter, which represented the school concept of Raden Adjeng Kartini. The writer also classified the data into some variables based on the theory. The sixth step was analyzing the data. In this step, the writer arranged what the writer had read and tried to figure it out, in order to build explanations and develop theories. According to Sundari (2015), "In qualitative research, the data display can do in short narrative form, chart, the relationship between category, graphic, matric" (p. 34). The writer used short narrative form in showing the data in this study. The seventh was explaining the founding data into a conclusion. The presentation of data was explained in a qualitative way. The last step was verifying the result of the study. In order to get the final result of the study, the writer revised the study.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

For achieving her dream, Kartini had to face many obstacles. One of the obstacles was that she had to deal with the feudal customs among nobilities. The feudal customs placed a boundary between men and women that gave many disadvantages for women. In her letter, Raden Adjeng Kartini told Stella Zehandelaar that in that era there was a huge discrimination among women. She experienced that great discrimination. Her brothers could go to school even until the highest level. They also could learn any subjects at the institution whilst women just stayed at home and could not go outside of the house. The only school that was open to noble daughters was a free grammar school for Europeans. Kartini felt that it was not fair that boys could learn anything, but girls only learned grammar for Europeans. Then, she had a dream that she wanted to open a school that made women also could learn any subjects like boys and attended the school even until at the highest levels.

Kartini (1985) then became very critical to the Javanese tradition especially when the custom did not allow Javanese women to join the school. She had a perspective that woman was the most important educator for their children. She wrote told Mevrouw M. C. E. Ovink-Soer about it in 1900.

4  
*And who can do most for the elevation of the moral standard of mankind? The woman, the mother; it is at the breast of woman, that man receives his earliest nourishment. This child learns there first, to feel, to think, and to speak. And the earliest education of all foreshadows the whole after life (p. 65).*

In this letter, it was clear that Raden Adjeng Kartini stated her thought that women became the first place to educate and build the moral character of her children. Because of this strong reason, Kartini said that the education of women was very crucial in giving priority to educate women. She opened School for Javanese women that could educate women as future mothers in practical knowledge. She also wanted to teach them to understand love and justice.

Raden Adjeng Kartini stated that one of the most crucial important parts of educating people was moral education. She shared this idea to Mevrouw Ovink-Soer on January 21, 1901:

*But is an intellectual education everything? To be truly civilized intellectual and moral education, must go hand in hand (p. 65).*

In that letter, Raden Adjeng Kartini expressed her ideal dream to make women to be more morally and intellectually educated. In order to make a nation could be civilized, moral and intellectual education were important. Kartini thought that she wanted to open the school for women that could educate their intellectuality and morality.

Raden Adjeng Kartini sent the letter to Mevrouw M. C. E Ovink- Soer in 1900 that after she returned to Indonesia she wanted to open a school for girls.

*When we come back to Java, we shall open a school for girls of the nobility (p. 66).*

After Raden Adjeng Kartini finished her study in Holland, she would go back to Java immediately and opened the school for women of the nobility. She took this action because as a noble girl she knew the feeling when they just spent their time at home without doing anything.

After she married to her husband, she did not want to lose her dream. She asked her husband to open the school (Hapsari, 2017). Fortunately, her husband supported her decision and dream. On December 11, 1903 Raden Adjeng Kartini sent a letter to her friend Mevrouw and Mijnheer Abendanon

*Our idea is to open a school for daughters of the native officials her, if we can get a suitable teacher. If we could find a good governess, then she could care for the formation of their characters (p. 234).*

With her husband's never-ending supports, Raden Adjeng Kartini opened a school. This school was located in Rembang, Central Java. Raden Adjeng Kartini opened this school was for daughters of native official in that era. This idea came from the school in Jepara that Raden Adjeng Kartini and her sisters had already opened.

According to Lickona, et al. (2007), character education is an effort to develop in people's core ethical and action values that are widely asserted across all cultures.

Misnatun (2014), Agboola and Tsai (2012) said, the most important education is education based on educating moral. Throughout Kartini's letter to Mevrouw Abendanon- Mandiri on January 21, 1901, she shared her thoughts:

5 *Education means the forming of the mind and of the soul. I feel that with education of the mind the task of the teacher is not complete. The duty of forming the character is his; it is not included in the letter of the law, but it is a moral duty (p. 99).*

She thought that it was important to educate the character as well as to educate the intelligence. The most essential duty of a teacher was not only educating students' intelligence, but also developing the character of the students itself, because forming moral character would also take part of the successful or the failure of the students' life.

As a daughter of native official, Kartini felt that an institute for daughters of native officials was important because it could raise their spirit. The letter was sent to Mevrouw Van Kol in August, 1900:

1 *Our idea is to open as soon as we have the means, an institute for the daughters of native officials, where they will be fitted for practical life and will be taught as well the things which elevate the spirit and ennoble the mind (p. 115).*

School concept that was constructed by Kartini also to educate the daughters of native officials, so that they could be fitted for practical life. She also wanted to teach them so that they could raise their noble mind to be real women.

Raden Adjeng Kartini wrote a letter about the importance of education especially for Javanese people to Mevrouw Abendanon-Mandiri on June 10, 1902:

3 *We do not wish to make of our pupils half Europeans or European Javanese. We want a free education, to make of the Javanese, above everything, a strong Javanese. One who will be blessed with love and enthusiasm for his own land and people, with a heart open to their good qualities and to their needs (p. 172).*

According to Raden Adjeng Kartini, this school would not make Javanese pupils half European but she wanted to make all Javanese women to be strong Javanese women and realize their potentials that they might learn from Europeans.

Kartini showed her thoughts about school through her letter on January 27, 1903 to Heer E. C Abendanon:

*It is true that in "our school" (how pleasant that sound) we want to give more of a moral than an academic education. If it is not erected by the Government we would not have to follow the prescribed paths, and we want the whole idea of our school to be the education of children, not as though they were in a school, but in a home, as a mother would bring up her own children (p. 213).*

In that era, many women in Preanger had been to school and they were able to speak Dutch. She sent this letter to Mevrouw Abendanon Mandiri on September 30, 1901:

*In Preanger there are a great many women and girls who have been to school, and who speak Dutch. Most of those whose acquaintance we made talked Dutch with us because we do not know each other's language. Strange that we should make an agreeable acquaintance*

*with people of our own country, and of kindred race by means of a foreign tongue. (p. 118- 119)*

She wanted to teach the Javanese people especially Central Java girls and women. She wanted to teach them foreign especially Dutch, so that there would be no barrier between their own kindred race and Dutch people.

Raden Adjeng Kartini told Mevrouw Abendanon Mandiri about the learning activity in her school. This letter was written on July 4, 1903.

*The children come here four days in the week, from eight to half past twelve. They study writing, reading, handiwork and cooking.*

*We teachers do not give lessons in art unless the pupils show a special aptitude for it. Our school must not have the air of a school, nor we that of schoolmistresses. It must be like a great household of which we are the mothers. We will try and teach them love as we understand it, by word and deed (p. 223).*

<sup>1</sup> Kartini said that the school was open four days in a week. The pupils attended the school for four and a half hours. Raden Adjeng Kartini applied entertaining learning way at the school so that the students could enjoy at school. The school subjects such as reading, writing, cooking, and handiwork were taught in her school. The purpose of this school was to make all women be independent women but without forgetting their responsibility as women. Kartini applied writing, reading and handiwork so

that the students also learned the school subjects like boys did. Cooking also taught at the school so that students also still remember their nature as women. Besides those basic subjects that were taught, Raden Adjeng Kartini also taught the students moral values and character building at her school. She also treated her students as a mother who educated her students.

Raden Adjeng Kartini was grateful to have a husband who wanted to support one of her dreams which about education. She and her husband had a plan to open the school in Rembang. She wrote her feeling and this school plan to Mevrouw and Mijnheer Abendanon on December 11, 1903

*In January I hope to be able to open our little school. We are looking for a good teacher, and till we have found one, I shall have charge of the lessons myself. Several parents have already asked me to teach their children (p. 234).*

After she moved to Rembang with her husband, Kartini shared that she and her husband wanted to establish a school for daughters of native officials there. This school idea emphasized on mental development and character building. In short, she delivered her opinion that women also took the crucial part to educate next generation.

It seems that Kartini has her own school concepts. In fact, she was influenced with western concept of education. From some lines that she wrote, they indicate that Kartini thinks that western has better life. It can be seen from these following lines.

7  
I do not belong to the Indian world, but to that of my pale sisters who are struggling forward in the distant West (p. 31).

It was a great innovation for us to learn Dutch (p. 35). Do you understand now why I am so anxious to obtain the mastery of your beautiful language? (p. 42). Yes, but if I do not learn my French lessons well, I shall not be allowed to go to Holland year after next (p. 70). Father has also given us a German grammar. We hope to begin English (p. 90).

6  
I am happy only when I can throw the burden of Javanese etiquette from my shoulders. ... the burden of etiquette presses upon a Javanese aristocratic household. ... Javanese etiquette is both silly and terrible (p. 38).

They would gladly go on with their studies. But here in Java, there is no opportunity, and we cannot go to Europe (p. 42).

To go to Europe! Till my last breath that shall always be my ideal (p. 49).

Based on those lines, it is clear that Kartini admires Dutch and other foreign countries including their language. She does not agree with her own Javanese etiquette and prefers choosing western one. Moreover, she crystalizes the social groups in that era by having school for officials' and regents' daughter:

... open a school for daughters of the native officials (p. 234)

... read in the newspapers about the proposed school for regents' daughters (p. 105).

Europeans also influence Kartini's school concepts as reflected in some lines of her letters below.

to teach them to understand love and justice and right conduct, as we have learned them from the Europeans (p. 65).

The Government wishes to educate and civilize the Javanese people and must needs begin teaching the smallest and the highest class, which is the aristocracy, the Dutch language (p. 65).

In many cities small Dutch schools have sprung up like mushrooms (p. 99).

... education of girls. I shall plead for the importance of a knowledge of hygiene and physiology placed on the curriculum of the school, which is to be erected (p. 106).

Kartini has her dream school in which has been influenced with her admiration toward her Dutch friends.

## CONCLUSIONS

The school concepts that are found in *Letters of a Javanese Princess* are school for women, school with character education and various daily subjects. She literally mentions vocational school. She feels that women have the same rights with men to be educated. She feels that it is not fair that boys can learn anything, but girls only learn grammar for Europeans. Then, she has a dream that she wants to open a school that make women also can learn any subjects like boys and attends the school even until at the highest levels. It becomes the strong reason that women become the first place to educate and build the moral character of her children. The school concept that can be found in the *Letters of a Javanese Princess* is character education. Kartini states that it is important to educate the character as well as educate the intelligence. Another school concept that



can be found in various school subjects. Raden Adjeng Kartini applied an entertaining way of learning in the school so that the students could enjoy at school. The school subjects such as reading, writing, cooking, and handiwork should be taught. On the other side, Kartini creates her ideal school based on Dutch school.

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