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**The Influence of External Elements on The  
Human Decision-Making Process:  
A Comparative Analysis of The Story of The  
Fall of Man in The Book of Genesis and The  
Game of Dice in Raden Tanojo's *Sadjarah  
Pandawa Korawa***

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**Abstract**

This paper is a critical analysis of two important texts in two cultural traditions, namely the story of "The Fall" in Genesis chapter 3 in the Judeo-Christian tradition and "Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu" in the Mahabharata epic in the Javanese tradition, *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa*, by Raden Tanojo. The analysis process of juxtaposing the two texts will use the characterization method that focuses on the speech and actions performed by the serpent and Sengkuni as a representation of external elements that are capable of influencing human actions. Both are portrayed as intelligent and cunning, and they use their cunning to tempt other characters, Eve and Yudhistira, to sin or mistake. In addition, a text-reading of the Book of Genesis can provide a perspective that not everything has to end with war and violence in the Mahabharata, and also a text-reading of the Mahabharata can provide a perspective that humans must dare to bear their faults, instead of running and hiding as told in the Book of Genesis.

**Keywords:** textual juxtaposing, characterization method, temptation, the serpent, *Sengkuni*, Javanese tradition

## Introduction

Many inevitable circumstances compel a person to make difficult choices. This kind of human decision-making process is influenced by various factors, both internal and external. Simply, internal elements can be understood as the elements within oneself (knowledge, emotion, personal value, etc.) in which that person gains information and responses based on that information, while the elements outside oneself (persuasion, manipulation, and social pressure) that lead to one's responses.<sup>1</sup> Even though the internal elements can determine one's decision, sometimes the external elements often play an important role in determining individual choices. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze and explore how these external elements influence the decision-making process, especially in one's spiritual life. The purpose of this article is to analyze how these external elements influence the decision-making process through a comparative study of two classic narratives: "*The Fall*"<sup>2</sup> in Genesis 3 and "*Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu*" (Duryudana defeats Pandawa in the dice war game) in the epic of Mahabharata in Raden Tanojo's *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa*.<sup>3</sup>

The novelty of this analysis is the juxtaposition of those two narratives from different traditions, especially from the Judeo-Christian and Javanese traditions, resulting in a comprehensive synthesis of how external factors influence decisions made by humans. It is important to analyze both narratives since they are important in their respective traditions. Just as the Book of Genesis has become an important book for Christians, so too does the Mahabharata which was written by Raden Tanojo. Therefore, a Javanese Christian may feel uneasy about having two traditions to live by. Should a Javanese Christian choose one tradition as his or her identity, or can both traditions be honored without giving rise to a conflict?

The narrative of "*The Fall*" in the Book of Genesis (Gen.3) is one of the most fundamental narratives in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It tells us how Adam and Eve, ancestors of humankind, were tempted by the serpent's temptation to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge (Cf. Gen.3:4-5), even though God had forbidden them to do so. This action led to severe consequences, including their banishment from the Garden of Eden and the entrance of sin, suffering, and death into the world. This narrative also highlights the importance of obedience to divine commands and the severe consequences of disobedience while showing how external elements, such as persuasion, can influence human decisions.

There are different interpretations of the passage in the Church tradition, especially in the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and the Protestant Church, especially regarding the verse "*The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die''*" (Gen.3:2-3). Indeed, the prohibition of eating the fruit in the center of the Garden of Eden was already mentioned in the previous chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Jacqueline N. Zadelaar et al., "Development of decision making based on internal and external information: A hierarchical bayesian approach," *Judgment and Decision Making* 16, no. 6 (2021): 1421.

<sup>2</sup> *Bible Gateway Passage*, s.v. "Genesis 3 (New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition)," accessed June 25, 2024, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=genesis%203&version=NRSVCE>.

<sup>3</sup> R. Tanojo, *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa [History of Pandawa Korawa]* (Surabaya: Trimurti, 1953).

of Genesis:

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... And the Lord God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die”<sup>4</sup>

Although the offenses committed by the first humans were of their free will and thus their responsibility, there were influences from the serpent that affected their decisions externally. This difference in interpretation of the various teachings of the Christian Church will be explained in more detail in the discussion of this article in the next section. However, the analysis used in this paper will take the perspective of the Catholic Church tradition as a form of contribution that can enrich the understanding of the faith of Christians in general in the spirit of ecumenism.

On the other hand, the Mahabharata, one of the greatest epics in the Javanese tradition, especially the version written by Raden Tanojo, shows the story of a dice game that involves Yudhistira and Sengkuni. In that narrative, Sengkuni, known for his cunning, managed to persuade Yudhistira to bet everything he had on an arranged dice game. Even though Yudhistira was well aware of the risks, he still got into the game due to internal compulsion and external pressures. At the end of the game, he loses his kingdom, family, and honor, which then triggers the tragic chain of events in the great war of Kurukshetra. The narrative itself highlights the complexity of decision-making influenced by external factors, such as manipulation by others.

Those two stories, even though they belong to different cultural or religious backgrounds, can be compared in terms of how they show the impact of external factors on human decision-making. Both tales demonstrate that people’s decisions could go wrong when they are enticed and manipulated by external factors. Therefore, this study aims to juxtapose these two texts tracing their similarities and differences, examining how factors external to the agents influence their choices. Moreover, the juxtaposition of these two different texts can enrich the interpretation to understand the reflection of morality and human free will and how it affects human decisions. By using this method, the readers might become more aware of the universality of the human experience in the decision-making process.

## Research Methods

The primary texts that are going to be analyzed in this article are *The Fall* in Genesis 3 and *Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu* in the Mahabharata epic in the Javanese tradition, *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa*, written by Raden Tanojo.<sup>5</sup> Besides that, the method used in this essay is characterization analysis which lies within the scope of narrative theory. According to Breche, the main components of narrative study are plot

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<sup>4</sup> Gen. 2: 9, 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> The author uses *Bible Gateway Passage*, “Genesis 3” and Tanojo, *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa* [History of Pandawa Korawa].

and character, and both of them are interrelated.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the dominant features of the narrator's point of view and theology become more apparent. Those classifications would be beneficial in analyzing *The Fall* and *Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu* to understand the structure of the narrative and unravel the meaning within it.

As a method, the characterization analysis had been used before by William Wrede to analyze Mark's secrecy motif, though his primary goal was to point out the historical origin of such motif.<sup>7</sup> In the later development, Joseph Tyson mentions how the secrecy motif impacts the appearance of other characters.<sup>8</sup> According to Cornelis Bennema, the characterization approach in the New Testament (NT) can be done through three stages, namely (1) understanding the text and context, (2) analyzing and classifying characters based on complexity, development, and inner struggle, and (3) evaluating the characters in relation to the author's ideological point of view and storyline.<sup>9</sup> These steps are essential in the analysis of characterization.

The results of the characterization analysis are important in the next stage of analysis, which is the cross-textual reading method. Daniel Listijabudi argues that cross-textual interpretation does not stop at just one crossing of texts and then stop, but continues to dialogue.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, this cross-textual method does not stop at just comparing texts, but transforming and enriching each other. Listijabudi also provides some important guidelines in examining two texts that come from two different traditions. Firstly, one must choose different texts from two different traditions. These two texts should not be randomly chosen. Both texts must have the same motive. Secondly, he also notes that the interpreter needs to have sufficient knowledge of both texts in a well-balanced manner. Thirdly, it is possible to use other interpretative techniques to support cross-textual readings. Fourthly, the interpreter analyses the similarities and differences between the two texts by developing deep theoretical reflections. For the similarities, it is necessary to explore the ideas that are raised in certain patterns, motifs, and elements. For the differences that arise, the interpreter can categorize them into several groups: (a) appreciative differences, (b) enriching differences, and (c) irreconcilable differences. Fifthly, the interpreter of the text must also

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<sup>6</sup> Pamela La Breche, "A methodology for the analysis of characterization in old testament narrative," (Master Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992), 2, <http://search.ndltd.org/show.php?id=oai%3Aunion.ndltd.org%3AOCLC%2Foai%3Axtcat.oclc.org%3AOC LCNo%2F31279345&back=http%3A%2F%2Fsearch.ndltd.org%2Fsearch.php%3Fq%3Dsubject%253A%2522AS%2522%26start%3D790>.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher W. Skinner, "The Study of Character(s) in the Gospel of Mark: A Survey of Research from Wrede to the Performance Critics (1901 to 2014)," in *Character Studies and the Gospel of Mark*, ed. Christopher W. Skinner and Matthew Ryan Hauge (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Skinner, "The Study of Character(s) in the Gospel of Mark," 11.

<sup>9</sup> Cornelis Bennema, *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 102.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Listijabudi, *Bergulat Di Tepian: Pembacaan Lintas Tekstual Dua Kisah Mistik (Dewa Ruci Dan Yakub Di Yabok) Untuk Membangun Perdamaian [Wrestling on the Edge: A Cross-Textual Reading of Two Mystical Stories (Dewa Ruci and Jacob at Yabok) for Peacebuilding]* (Yogyakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia & Duta Wacana University Press, 2019), 98.

be careful in analyzing the text so as not to make a careless mix when juxtaposing the two texts by having sufficient hermeneutical skills.<sup>11</sup> Those are all useful steps on how to apply cross-textual methods and become guidelines that are very helpful in the process of analyzing the texts.

### **Narrative Technique in the Book of Genesis Chapter 3**

One of the most important elements in analyzing a text is a plot. A story's plot is the series of events that form a larger narrative, each of which influences or causes the others.<sup>12</sup> According to Stordalen, the plot in Genesis (chapters 2-3) can be divided into three main plot themes. Firstly, the plot in Genesis 2:16-24 focuses on the creation of animals and humans (male and female). Secondly, the plot in Genesis 3:1-7 revolves around the debate and the act of eating in the Garden of Eden. Thirdly, the plot in Genesis 3:8-19 recounts divine intervention.<sup>13</sup> The analysis of this article will focus on the second and third plots because many elements of characterization can be analyzed, such as the dialogues spoken by God, the serpent, Adam and Eve, and the actions they performed. In addition, while the prohibition to eat the forbidden fruit is in the story of Genesis chapter 2, this article makes a point of focusing on Genesis chapter 3 to better help identify the characteristics of the serpent that externally influence human decisions.

Indeed, the narrative of *The Fall* in Genesis chapter 3 cannot be separated from the context of the narrative told in chapter 2. This narrative can be approached from several Church traditions. From the viewpoint of the Protestant Church's interpretation, the first humans had basically misidentified the fruit that should not be eaten from the beginning, even before the serpent came. The proof is that the tree that should not be eaten according to God's words in chapter 2 is the tree of knowledge. This is in accordance with verse 9, "*In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" (Gen.2:9). The prepositional phrase "*in the middle*" is attached to the noun "*the tree of life*" before the conjunction "*and.*" Consequently, the serpent was right, that the Tree of Knowledge could certainly be eaten. So, even without the serpent, Adam and Eve already have a different understanding of God's word. Quoting Calvin's thoughts, Sherly Mudak states that sin is a violation of God's Word committed by man.<sup>14</sup>

The placement of the two unique trees in the Garden of Eden is one matter that has long baffled readers of Genesis. Even though the word "*in the middle*" is first used in reference to the Tree of Life (Gen. 2:9), in which Eve later claims that the Tree of Knowledge is situated there as well (cf. Gen. 3:3).<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that Adam and Eve did not misidentify God's command because God later blamed their decision to eat from the tree He forbade without mentioning the fruit of which tree, either from the

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<sup>11</sup> Listijabudi, Bergulat Di Tepian, 103–104.

<sup>12</sup> Sean Glatch, "What Is the Plot of a Story?" *Writers.com*, November 17, 2023, <https://writers.com/what-is-the-plot-of-a-story>.

<sup>13</sup> Terje Stordalen, "Man, Soil, Garden: Basic Plot in Genesis 2-3 Reconsidered," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 17, no. 53 (1992): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/030908929201705301>.

<sup>14</sup> Sherly Mudak, "Makna Doa Bagi Orang Percaya" [The Meaning Of Prayer For Believers], *Missio Ecclesiae* 6, no. 1 (2017): 104, <https://doi.org/10.52157/me.v6i1.70>.

<sup>15</sup> Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 2-3* (Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 7.

tree of life or the tree of knowledge, whereas they ate from the tree of knowledge (cf. Genesis 3:11). It seems plausible, then, that the serpent tempted Eve to eat the fruit of knowledge that God forbade her to eat because then God took offense at it. If God had not forbidden man from eating the fruit of knowledge, He would not have taken offense at Adam and Eve eating the fruit. This is in line with the teachings of the Catholic Church, which understands the serpent or devil as one who tempts people by twisting the word of God so that it influences human free decisions.

Scripture witnesses to the disastrous influence of the one Jesus calls “a murderer from the beginning,” who would even try to divert Jesus from the mission received from his Father (Jn 8:44; cf. Mt 4:1-11). “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8). In its consequences the gravest of these works was the mendacious seduction that led man to disobey God.<sup>16</sup>

Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of (Cf. Gen 3:1-11; Rom 5:19). All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the different interpretations within the Christian Church regarding the forbidden fruit, this article seeks to focus its analysis on the serpent and how it appears as a character capable of externally influencing human decisions. The first step in analyzing characterization is to understand the text and context. The focus of the analysis will be on how the characters are presented in the text through direct or indirect methods. This kind of analysis can be done by observing the speeches and actions of the character. Speech is important in the analysis of characterization. It is simply because a character’s dialogue is often the key point to figuring out which narrative units the narrator considers most important, and therefore has greater value for characterization.

Four characters have speech or dialogue in the Book of Genesis chapter 3. The list of the dialogue will be presented in the table below:

**Table 1. List of Characters’ Dialogue in Genesis 3**

No.	Character	Dialogue	Verse(s)
1.	The Serpent	“Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”	1
		“You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”	4-5
2.	The woman (Eve)	“We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”	2-3
3.	The man (Adam)	“The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”	13
		“I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was	10

<sup>16</sup> *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, s.v. “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” para. 394, accessed November 22, 2024, <https://usccb.cld.bz/Catechism-of-the-Catholic-Church/>.

<sup>17</sup> *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*, “Catechism of the Catholic Church,” 397.

	afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”	
	“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.”	12
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	“Where are you?”	9
	“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”	11
	“What is this that you have done?”	13
	The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.	14-15
	I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”	
	To the woman He said, “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”	16
4. The LORD	And to the man He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”	17-19
	“See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”	22

Source: The Book of Genesis chapter 3.

The data above shows that the characters, other than the LORD, have the same number of dialogues, which is two times. The serpent, Adam, and Eve speak two times. However, the LORD speaks seven times in that chapter. More interestingly, the LORD speaks directly to each character by name to whom He would speak, such as, “The Lord God said to the serpent” (v.14), “To the woman He said” (v.16), “And to the man He said” (v.17). By addressing the character, it seems that the LORD wants His message to

be received personally by each character because a name is a big part of one's identity.<sup>18</sup> The name Adam (אָדָם) itself is close to the Hebrew word "אָדָמָה" (*adamah*) that simply means "ground" or "earth" by which the LORD has made him, while Eve (חַוָּה) is related to the Hebrew word "חַיָּה" (*hay*), which means "life" or "living" because she was "the mother of all living" (Gen.3:20). Therefore, by addressing His speech to them, the LORD would likely to personalize His interaction and to remind their identity. By observing the dialogue alone, there appears to be an irony in the conversation between the LORD and humans. There is still compassion in the LORD's hurt heart. However, He is a loving and just God at the same time.

The dialogue from Adam and Eve, when they were asked by the LORD, perfectly describes the natural human response to guilt, which is to blame others. After Adam and Eve disobeyed the LORD, He asked Adam. Adam answered the LORD's question by blaming Eve, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate" (v.12). The same thing also happened to Eve by her blaming the snake, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate" (v.13). These short verses illustrate the LORD's judgment where He acts as the judge. It seems that the same behavior can also be found in every person's spiritual life. Most people don't want to wrestle with feelings of their guilt. In fact, feeling guilty is a good thing. The feelings of guilt can act as an alarm that reminds and makes a person aware of the mistakes and sins he has made. As is well known, and become one of the great themes of the Bible, the LORD always comes and seeks when human sins and tries to run away from Him. Therefore, in a sinful situation, the natural human reaction is to hide from the LORD, while the LORD's natural reaction is to seek humans.

Although God punished, He also gave hope to humankind. It is the LORD who first had the initiative to seek humans by asking, "Where are you?" This verse does not contradict God's omniscient nature, but rather it shows the LORD's compassionate nature that wants to seek and save His people. Later on, in verse 15, the LORD said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." This verse has a tremendous impact which would later be referred to as *Protoevangelium*. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) describes it this way:

After his fall, man was not abandoned by God. On the contrary, God calls him and in a mysterious way heralds the coming victory over evil and his restoration from his fall. This passage in Genesis is called the Protoevangelium ("first gospel"): the first announcement of the Messiah and Redeemer, of a battle between the serpent and the Woman, and of the final victory of a descendant of hers.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, even though humankind has sinned, the LORD has given the first promise that can be traced in the Bible which refers to the coming of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of humankind. Christian tradition sees that passage (Genesis 3:15) as the

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<sup>18</sup> Marshall Connects Inc., "Greeting People By Name: How to Reap the Unbelievable Benefits," September 2023, <https://www.marshall-connects.com/site/corporate-growth-news/2018/09/22/the-unbelievable-benefits-of-greeting-people-by-name>.

<sup>19</sup> "Catechism of the Catholic Church," para. 410, accessed June 25, 2024, <https://www.usccb.org/sites/-default/files/flipbooks/catechism/106/>.



announcement of “the New Adam” which, by His obedience, would undo the consequence of Adam’s disobedience (cf. Romans 5:17-19).

There is another interesting point can be found in the serpent’s dialogue. It only speaks twice. And when it spoke, it did not seem to go against God’s commandments, but rather to be affirming them. It did not directly and openly oppose the LORD. The serpent used manipulation and deceit to trick humans because it is portrayed as the craftiest among any other wild animals (cf. Genesis 3:1). Its words did not contradict the words of the LORD. Instead, it uses the LORD’s words directly to deceive Eve by simply asking, “*Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’*” (v.1). It is important to remember that the serpent was well aware and fully knew the LORD’s commandments. Therefore, the narrative of “The Fall” shows that either the serpent did not really understand the LORD’s words, or it deliberately twisted the words of the LORD.

The serpent’s characterization, other than its speech, would be clearer when it is analyzed through its description and action. There is one distinct characteristic possessed by the serpent that is described at the beginning of the narrative (cf. v.1). So, the reader would presume that the serpent is crafty (cunning or tricky). Paul Heger states that the Bible’s emphasis on the fact that the serpent is more crafty than all animals, though it may seem an insignificant detail, proves to be a deciding factor in determining which character is most to blame for sin and the disaster it causes.<sup>20</sup> Driven by its nature, the serpent came and approached Eve and Adam. The serpent assured the woman that she and Adam would not die. The eating of the fruit would not cause them to die, rather it would open their eyes and give them the ability to discern or differentiate good and evil (cf. vv. 4-5). It would seem that the author wanted to emphasize that the women’s choice was logical, since the high compliment she had for the Tree of Knowledge and its fruit and also the amazing experience she would have after eating the fruit without any side effects.

In the context of the LORDS’s judgment, the reader would realize that Adam and Eve were questioned for the crime they committed, but the LORD did not question the serpent! It most assured that the LORD knew that the serpent had no reason or someone to blame for the offense. No one but itself. This deception was finally confirmed by God’s verdict that the serpent was guilty (cf. v.14). In this case, God did not need any evidence to make this judgment. Even if the serpent had defended himself, it would not have changed the fact that he was indeed guilty and had seduced Eve and then Adam. His judgment transcends all knowledge and reaffirms the omnipotence of the LORD.

So, through the characterization technique, one can understand the character of the serpent in Genesis 3. The serpent was described as the most cunning animal. However, it turned out that he used his ability to do something evil. He manipulated and twisted the word of the LORD. He also encouraged and manipulated them to go against the LORD’s direct command.

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Heger (ed.), “Interpretations of the Fall Narrative,” in *Women in the Bible, Qumran and Early Rabbinic Literature: Their Status and Roles* (Brill, 2014), 47.

## Narrative Technique in *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa*

The same technique used to analyze the characteristics of the serpent in the Book of Genesis will also be used to analyze the characteristics of Sengkuni in the epic Mahabharata in *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa* by Raden Tanojo, that is by observing the speech and actions done by the character(s) in that narrative.

In order to analyze the narrative by using characterization techniques, direct quotations from the book in the Javanese language will be presented along with free English translations which would hopefully help with the analysis in English. In the book *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa*, the character of Sengkuni first appears in the Mahabharata and is narrated as the king of the Gandara:

*Kotjapa Sang Durjodana, lan kang para ari Korawa, apa déné kang paman kang aran Sangkuni, ija iku Ratu ing Gandara, kaprenah ariné Sang Pramèswari Déwi Gandari, Sang Sangkuni minangka dadi patakonané para Korawa, sarta mitulungi rembug nandukaké sarana murih sirnaning para Pandawa, sabab saka panasing ati, awit Pandawa tansah disih lan dibebungah déning wong akèh, déné kang dadi telenging sengité dumunung ana Sang Bima, ija iku kang tansah diarah patiné, sarana diwisani tjinakotaké ing ula, sarta diambahaké ing kali Gangga, ananging meksa ora bisa gawé ing patiné Sang Bima, malah saja ndadi pangunggut-ungguting atiné marang Sang Durjodana.<sup>21</sup>*

(Once, Duryudana and the other Kurawa, his younger brothers, met their uncle Sengkuni. Sengkuni was a king in Gandara and was the younger brother of Empress Dewi Gandari. Sengkuni became an advisor to the Korawa and gave them many suggestions in their quest to eliminate the Pandawa. The Korawa themselves hated the Pandawa because they were favored by many people. The person they hated the most from the Pandawa was Bima, whom they once wanted to kill with snake venom and floated in the Ganges River. However, this did not kill Bima so they hated him even more).

There is no direct speech from the character from that passage. Nevertheless, there are many of information about Sengkuni. He is the king (*ratu*) in Gandara the brother of Gandari, the queen of Hastinapura, wife of the King (*Prabu*) Dretarastra. So, Sengkuni is the uncle of Korawa. The narrative itself explained the reason why the Korawa and Sengkuni disliked the Pandawa so much, namely because of envy since the Pandawa were favored by the people. Thus, the portrayal of Sengkuni has been negative since its inception, being associated with heartache (*panasing ati*). In addition, another striking depiction is how Sengkuni's actions to harm the Pandawa were anticipated from the beginning by portraying Sengkuni as an advisor who aims to eliminate the Pandawa (*sarta mitulungi rembug nandukaké sarana murih sirnaning para Pandawa*). So, one of Sengkuni's prominent characteristics is his ability to advise and influence others, not only his nephews, the Korawa but also those around him.

This kind of influencing power is remarkable. In fact, in Javanese society, the character of Sengkuni is associated with malice and deceit. According to Endraswara, the

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<sup>21</sup> Tanojo, *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa [History of Pandawa Korawa]*, 19.

name Sengkuni itself is derived from the Sanskrit language: *śakuni*, which means bird.<sup>22</sup> Sengkuni did have a delicate and pleasant voice like a bird. He counselled so that others would be pleased. Though the sound of the bird is beautiful, beauty is also often associated with cunning, as Sengkuni performed in Mahabharata.

Sengkuni's characteristics can also be identified from the words he speaks. He directly plans and seduces the Korawa, who then asks his father, to invite the Pandawa to Hastinapura to play dice:

*Katjarita, sarawuhé ing Hastinapura, Sang Durjodana banget panggubelé marang ingkang rama Sang Adji, anggoné ora suda rasaning ati, jèn ta durung ngasoraké Pandawa,... Sang Sengkuni bandjur tinudju ing rembug, pinurih angupaja marganing amrih pakolihing lelakon amrih rusaking Pandawa, aturé Sengkuni andjupuk pepéling: "Pandawa punika sampun santosa saèstu, langkung awrat sesanggènipun ing prang, awit déning sampun pikantuk bantu sabijantu kalihan Sang Prabu Kresna tuwin Narpati Drupada, jèn kaangkaha ing prang masa kuwawija, ing saèstunipun sinten ingkang njanggi wawratipun, andjawi saking punika namung prajogi linawan amendet sarana saking dadu kémawon, kula sampun baut sanget main prang dadu, manawi pinasrahan ing damel makaten punika, saèstunipun kados saged angrampungsi mengsah, dados langkung sakétja ing panggalihé paduka." Sang Durjodana banget panudju ing galih, awit déning rerimbaganing rembug uwis kapénak, nuli bali ngadep ing rama Sang Prabu, matur kang supaja utusana animbali marang Pandawa, tinantang main prang dadu baé, Sang Prabu Dretarastra ora panudju, awit wis ora kasamaran marang sedyaning putra kang satemené arep masang paékan gawé loropan, dimèné korup kairup ing guna amrih sirnaning Pandawa, ananging Sang Prabu Dretarastra ora mangga gawé rusaking kaponakan, ing nalika iku tangising putra banget anenangi ati, bisa gawé ngeres rasaning panggalihé Sang Prabu, atemahan anuruti aturing putra, ari Nata Sang Widura kang diutus marang Indraprasta, dawuh kinon animbali para Pandawa pada kériida lakuné.<sup>23</sup>*

(Once, upon arriving in Hasinapura, Duryudana, expressed his frustration to his father because his heart would not be satisfied if he had not humiliated the Pandawa... So Sengkuni came to Duryudana to help destroy the Pandawa. Sengkuni said, "The Pandawa are very well settled, it will be very difficult to defeat them in war because they must be assisted by Prabu Kresna and Narpati Drupada, so it is useless if we go to war because who can actually bear the weight of the war. Unless it would be good if we fight only through the means of dice. I am very good at playing dice. if you entrust me to do so, I can actually solve the problem, so that your heart can be at ease." Duryudana was very interested. Because he felt that he had a bright spot, he went to his father and asked him to send someone to call the Pandawa and challenge them to a game of dice. Prabu Dretarastra was reluctant as his son's intention was clearly to set a trap to destroy the Pandawa. However, his son's whining made him uneasy. So, in order to reconcile the situation, Prabu Dretarastra complied with his son's wishes and told Widura to come to Indraprastha and order the Pandawa to join the dice game).

From his direct speech, one instantly knows that Sengkuni is a clever man. He realized that he and the Korawa would not be able to win against the Pandawa in an open

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<sup>22</sup> Suwardi Endraswara et al., "The Transformation of the Character Sengkuni from *Wicarita to Kakawin Bharatayuddha* in the Perspective of Literary Anthropogeneology," *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review* 7, no. 6 (2024): 33, <https://ijssrr.com/journal/article/view/2084/1605>.

<sup>23</sup> Tanojo, *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa [History of Pandawa Korawa]*, 33.

war. He said, “*langkung awrat sesanggènipun ing prang*” (it will be very difficult to defeat them in war). He took into account every variable, including the presence of Krishna and Drupada on the Pandawa’s side. Therefore, he devised tactics to defeat the Pandawa in a way that seemed good (not violating the regulations), but was actually evil. He sang this song to the ear of his nephews in which they would agree. Besides, he himself says that he is good at playing dice, “*kula sampun baut sanget main prang dadu*” (I am very good at playing dice). It means that he has often played dice before. So, in a sense, he is actually living off his dishonest actions. This attitude is known in Javanese society as “*goroh mateni*.” It is known as a lie that can support or prosper oneself, one’s family, and one’s group, but someone is harmed.<sup>24</sup> In this context, Sengkuni intended to and would harm the Pandawa. Moreover, the game of dice itself is nothing but gambling. Thus, Sengkuni’s gambling nature further emphasizes his characterization as a bad person. In a sense, he is tempting others to imitate or adopt habits that he himself has.

The climax of the story occurs in the dice game planned by Sengkuni. It is narrated that he was able to influence everyone, not only the Pandawa, but also the Korawa and Prabu Dretarastra to organise the dice game:

... *Sang Prabu Judistira nuli mangkat lan para ariné ora ana kang kari, ing antara dina teka ing Hastinapura, wis katemu karo Prabu Dretarastra, Sang Sri Judistira dinawuhan anglawani prang dadu lan raka Sang Durjodana, nuli tumanduk tandang pada ambuwang dadu, ganti-ganti pambuwangé, ananging Sang Durjodana ing wektu iku ora gelem njarirani déwé, kang dikon ambuwang dadu Sang Arja Sengkuni, déné anggoné ambuwang dadu luwih ambekiwit, tansah nganggo laku tjidra, paékané Sang Sengkuni, mula tansah unggul angukupi tohé Sri Adji Judistira, sakèhing radjabrana kabèh wis kena ing mungsuh, nuli ngetohaké wadya dalasan kang raji-raji, kasor manèh wis kinukup ing mungsuh, ing wusana tohé sèrèdan badan pribadi lan garwa Déwi Dropadi, meksa katitih baé, sarira lan garwa wis kena ing mungsuh, Dropadi wis kapundut déning Sang Durjodana, bareng arep pinangku Sang Déwi angontjati, nuli Sang Dusasana tumandang anjandak, Dropadi djinambak wani, sinèrèd sinija banget nganti wudar panganggoné, kalawan ngutjap ngaku jèn tjèti, ing pratingkah saja banget memirang lan sawenang-wenang anggoné muni-muni, malah bandjur njendal tapihé Déwi Dropadi mèh wuda, jèn adjaa ana parmaning Déwa kang anulungi, Sang Hjang Darma welas banget, bareng kasendal tapihé, pada sanalika tuwuh tapihé anjar manèh, saben kasendal mangkono, malah nganti bola-bali rambah kaping pira-pira, kaganti tapih anjar manèh.*

...

*Kotjapa Sang Durjodana, ing nalika andulu menangé bali kabèh, rumasa ora pakolèh ing panjidrané marang para Pandawa, ing samengko saja ora prajoga ing karsané, mungkat manèh laraning ati, Sengkuni lan Karna kang tansah angilèni dipurih anenantanga prang dadu manèh, Sang Durjodana énggal anggegubel ing rama Adji, Sang Prabu Dretarastra anuruti aturing putra, wis utusan animbalana ing Sri Judistira manèh, nanging Prabu Judistira bareng katimbangan manèh, panggalihé wis ora kasamaran jèn bakal nemu ala kadadijané, nanging wedi jèn sungkana ing karep, Sang Prabu bandjur mangkat karo ingkang raji-raji, satekaning Hastinapura, tinantang prang dadu manèh, kang kanggo pradjandjijan, sapa kang kalah mesti lunga saka ing pradjané, lawasé rolas taun saba ing alas baé, nuli anjamur sadjroning sataun, manawa nganti konangan anggoné njamur, mesti kena ing patrapan saba ing alas manèh ija rolas taun lawasé, déné panjamuré iku manawa ora*

<sup>24</sup> Muh Mukti, “The Philosophy of Goroh Nguripi Sengkuni in a Javanese View,” *Asian Journal of Philosophy and Religion* 3, no. 1 (2024): 7, <https://journal.formosapublisher.org/index.php/ajpr/article/view/9275/9188>.

*konangan tumeka ing telulas tauné, kena andjabel nagarané déwé, bareng wis kadadijan ing djandjiné, wong agung loro tumuli bandjur pada ambuwang dadu, ananging samana Prabu Judistira kang kalah manèh, amarga saka ing panjidrané Sangkuni kaja sabené kang wis kalakon bijen.*<sup>25</sup>

(... Yudhistira and his borthers met Prabu Dretarastra in Hasinapura who ordered them to play dice. Duryudana ordered them to throw the dice one after another, while he himself did not want to throw the dice. The person who was asked by the Korawa to throw the dice was Sengkuni because he was more skilled in throwing dice. So, the Korawa always outperformed Yudhistira so that all the possessions had fallen into their hands. Finally, the game even dragged themselves and their wife, Dewi Drupadi, as a bet, but they still lost. All the Pandawa had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and Dewi Drupadi was already in Duryudana's hands. So, Dursasana rose up to bring Drupadi to the Korawa. He pulled Drupadi's hair and dragged her until her clothes fell off. The Korawa acted to humiliate Drupadi, and wanted to strip her naked. Drupadi pleaded for divine help and Sang Hyang Dharma was moved to help her. For every piece of clothing that fell off, there was another piece of clothing that covered Drupadi.

...

After knowing that his prize was returned, Duryudana felt that he had not succeeded in destroying the Pandawa, so he felt uneasy because his wishes were not accomplished. Knowing this, Sengkuni and Karna were asked to challenge the Pandawa again to play dice. Duryudana talked to his father so Dretarastra followed his son's wishes and called Yudhistira back. When Yudhistira was called back, he was aware that he would definitely get bad results, but out of respect for Dretarastra, he went along with his younger siblings. Arriving in Hastinapura, he was challenged to a game of dice with the agreement that the loser must leave his kingdom for twelve years living in the forest and for a year in disguise. If their disguise was discovered, they had to return to the forest for another twelve years. If they were not discovered until the thirteenth year, they could return to their kingdom. After saying the agreement, they both threw the dice, but Prabu Yudhistira lost again, because it was cheated by Sengkuni as it had happened before).

In the end, Sengkuni was able to persuade the Pandawa, represented by the eldest son, Yudhistira, to play dice and beat them at the game. As a result of being provoked by Sengkuni, the Pandawa suffered a huge defeat on their side. They lost everything, from their wealth, troops, and kingdom, to their pride. The most disheartening thing was that their wife, Drupadi, was also publicly abused in front of her husbands. All these things happened because the Pandawa fell for Sengkuni's foul plan. What makes it even sadder is that they were beaten twice. In the first game, even though they lost, everything was then returned back to the Pandawa (*ing nalika andulu menangé bali kabèh*). They did not learn from their mistakes. Yudhistira was called back to play another game of dice. He was aware that he would definitely get bad results, but out of respect for Dretarastra, he went along (*nanging Prabu Judistira bareng katimbangan manèh, panggalihé wis ora kasamaran jèn bakal nemu ala kadadijané, nanging wedi jèn sungkana ing karep, Sang Prabu bandjur mangkat karo ingkang raji-raji, satekaning Hastinapura, tinantang prang dadu manèh*).

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<sup>25</sup> Tanojo, *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa [History of Pandawa Korawa]*, 34-35.

As silly as it may seem, Pandawa's act of coming a second time can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, they upheld and respected their elders. The Pandawa honored their uncle, Dretarastra, in this case. Secondly, it also shows that humans tend to commit the same sins or mistakes. That sin can take any form, including taking a form that seems good, such as honoring elders, but leads to alienation. The Pandawa had to leave their kingdom and go into exile for twelve years and disguise themselves for another year at the risk of having to repeat the exile again if their identities were revealed during the exile. Hence, from this story, it can be learned that there is some kind of permanent consequence for the larger community to bear due to the mistakes of one or a group of people. In the case of this dice game, Yudhistira's defeat resulted in the loss of the Indraprastha Kingdom and the exile of his entire family to the forest. Furthermore, this would result in the great war of the Mahabharata.

### **The Dialogue between “*The Fall*” and “*Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu*”**

Both stories of “*The Fall*” and “*Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu*” are very interesting, especially for people who have a dual identity, namely Javanese Christians. They were brought up in the traditions of Javanese society as well as the Christian faith. Both have a significant impact on shaping the horizon of one's perspective. Of course, blaming or assuming that one tradition is superior to the other is avoided in this analysis.

The Catholic Church recognizes that God can work in any way He wants. Therefore, the Church values local traditions as a way in which God reaches out to every human being, as expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*:

For God, revealing Himself to His people to the extent of a full manifestation of Himself in His Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the culture proper to each epoch.

Likewise the Church, living in various circumstances in the course of time, has used the discoveries of different cultures so that in her preaching she might spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations, that she might examine it and more deeply understand it, that she might give it better expression in liturgical celebration and in the varied life of the community of the faithful.<sup>26</sup>

The document wants to state that the Church recognizes that she is facing a cultural situation in which she needs to be open to encountering and engaging with local culture because the local culture is also a way for humans to contemplate the mystery of the world and faith in the existence of the transcendent. In the context of “*The Fall*” and “*Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu*”, both stories narrate reflections on the external influences that could affect human decision-making. Interestingly, there are characters in both stories who influence these protagonists in their decisions.

The antagonists in both stories, the serpent in the Book of Genesis and Sengkuni in

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<sup>26</sup> *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, s.v. “*Gaudium et Spes* (no. 58),” accessed June 29, 2024, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vatii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vatii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

Mahabharata, manipulate and exploit the weaknesses of the protagonists. The serpent seduced by twisting the words of God, while Sengkuni seduced by exploiting the weakness of Yudhistira. Both are portrayed as cunning characters and use their cunning to bring down the protagonists. In addition, both stories also tell how the actions of an individual can affect the wider community. Adam and Eve's disobedience led to the entrance of sin and death in human life, while Yudhistira's fall resulted in the Pandawa losing Indraprastha. If Adam and Eve were expelled from the forest or the Garden of Eden, the Pandawa were expelled from their kingdom to the forest.

Some of the literary elements of both stories can be juxtaposed and here are the results of the analysis that show some of the elements in common:

**Table 2. List of Literary Elements in Both Stories**

Elements	The Serpent in <i>The Fall</i> (Gen.3)	Sengkuni in <i>Mahabharata</i>
Characteristic of crafty or cunning	<i>"The serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made"</i> (Gen 3:1).	Sengkuni made a tactic of playing dice and strategized for the Pandawa to come to Hastinapura and risk everything they had.
How they influence other characters	Twisting the words of God and exploiting human desires.	Exploiting Duryudana's bitterness and Yudhistira's sense of honour.
Trickery	The serpent deceived Eve by promising that eating the forbidden fruit would make her like God, knowing good and evil.	Sengkuni deceived Yudhishtira by luring him into a game of dice with the promise of a chance to gain honor and success.
Consequences	Expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and sin and death entered human history.	The loss of the Indraprastha Kingdom, Pandawa's exile to the forest, and the public humiliation of Drupadi.
The final resolution of the story	This theme of sin will echo throughout Scripture, culminating in the need for redemption by Christ.	This dice game triggered a series of events that led to the Kurukshetra War and ended with the Pandawa victory over the Korawa.

Source: Genesis 3 and *Sadjarah Pandawa Korawa*.

In the reading of *"The Fall"* and *"Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu"* in Mahabharata, there are still some things that are different because these two stories come from two different traditions. In the Book of Genesis, the serpent is often interpreted as a representation of Satan or evil incarnate. Throughout the Mahabharata, Sengkuni is often interpreted as a human character who represents cunning and deceit in the context of human politics and family rivalry. Unlike the serpent who is intrinsically evil, certain things cause Sengkuni to be evil. He can still show some good traits in certain measures, such as his loyalty to his family and his care for his nephew. Nevertheless, Sengkuni can be a prototype of what happens when people's lives are dominated by evil and how that evil can affect others and drag them to do evil as well. Therefore, this distinction can be categorized as enriching differences because it can enrich our understanding of how demons or evil spirits can enter people's lives, even using reasons that seem good on the surface.

### **A Mutually Enriching Encounter**

There is much to be gained from the joint reading of *"The Fall"* and *"Sang Durjodana Arsa*

*Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu*” in Mahabharata. In the process of reading and understanding the Mahabharata, the story in the Book of Genesis might provide a new perspective that not all conflicts have to end in war. Warfare or violence does not solve problems but can lead to bigger problems. Moreover, war will only leave death and sorrow in its wake. Instead, the Holy Scripture offers that the solution to evil, deception, resentment, and all human weaknesses is love, forgiveness, and sacrifice. This is because one of the reasons why the Great War of Mahabharata happened was the hurt and pride on both sides. If a person can control his/her emotions well, he/she will certainly not be tempted by “evil” persuasion which, in this case, is the temptation and trickery of Sengkuni.

Similarly, on the other hand, reading the Mahabharata can provide a new perspective in understanding the Scriptures. In the Mahabharata story, one will also come to appreciate responsibility more and more. The Book of Genesis tells the story where Adam blamed Eve easily and then Eve blamed the serpent easily too (Gen.3:12-13). It makes one think that one can abdicate responsibility and pass it on to others, even if it does not eliminate the effects of the mistake and its consequences. Unlike Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis, the Pandawa showed a brave and courageous spirit. They did not run and hide. The Pandawa bravely continued to bear the consequences of Yudhistira’s mistake. Even though they knew that they had been deceived, they still held and upheld the previously established agreement. This illustrates how humans should behave when they make a mistake, namely admitting their fault and bravely bearing the consequences.

Therefore, a shared reading that juxtaposes these two stories “*The Fall*” and “*Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu*” can bring much inspiration to one’s spiritual life. Both stories can offer inspiration that can illuminate one another and deepen one’s spiritual life. For the Javanese, their Christian faith will be deepened by understanding that not everything has to end in war; and for the Christians, their Javanese traditions will be strengthened by developing the attitude of responsibility.

## Conclusion

These stories of “*The Fall*” and “*Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu*” open up a vast horizon of both faith and wisdom. The focus on characterization techniques in reading and analyzing texts, especially attention to dialogues and actions, can be a great device for understanding the meaning contained in the text. By using this technique to read “*The Fall*” and “*Sang Durjodana Arsa Ngasoraké Pandawa sarana Prang Dadu*”, one will understand that there is always an opposing protagonist who symbolizes the force outside the humans that can influence their actions. Both the serpent and Sengkuni are portrayed as figures who use their ingenuity to influence, manipulate, and deceive other characters. The serpent tempts Eve to disobey God’s direct commands, while Sengkuni tempts Yudhistira to bet everything he has in a game of dice. Both resulted in them losing what they had and expulsion. While Adam and Eve lost their exclusive relationship with the LORD and were exiled from the Garden of Eden, the Pandawa lost their honor and the Kingdom of Indraprastha, and they had to exile themselves to the forest.

Comparing texts through this cross-textual method helps people to see that the consequences of moral decisions can be experienced on both a personal and spiritual level



(Genesis) and a social and political level (Mahabharata). By juxtaposing, people can better understand that any form of moral choice, whether in a spiritual or social context, has far-reaching and profound effects. Both teach that humans must be careful in their choices, as every decision leads to repercussions that go beyond the individual. Another richness emerges when these two texts enter into dialogue. The story in the Book of Genesis can inspire the Mahabharata that not everything has to end in battle, while the story of the Mahabharata can inspire the Book of Genesis that humans must have courage; do not run away from responsibility and blame others easily. Hopefully, by doing so, one can be more open to God's revelation which can also be found in local texts that also need and deserve respect.

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