



## Functions of Character in Indonesian Folklore Princess of the Runaway Valley: A Study of Vladimir Propp Narrative Structure Theory

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### Abstract

*This study was conducted to document and preserve folklore entitled Princess of the Runaway Valley by unveiling 31 functions of Vladimir Propp narrative structure. This is a historical qualitative and content analysis study. The approach used was an objective one by using narratology structuralism study. In this study, the literary text became the focus of the study in which the researcher focused on the structure of a text. Based on the analysis result, there were only 24 of the 31 functions of character according to Vladimir Propp narrative structure. Therefore, the complexity of the story was not too high because it did not fulfill all functions required. The 7 functions that were absent in the story were absention, villainy, donor, return, exposure, punishment, and wedding/throne ascension.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Oral literature is a reflection of situation, condition, and culture of a society. According to Hutomo (1991), oral literature is a kind of literature that encompasses literary expression of a cultured society which is spread and inherited orally by word of mouth. The growth and development of oral literature in the life of the society is the growth of the dynamic movement of the inheritors in preserving cultural values. In fact, there are some oral literatures in Central Java, Indonesia, that have been extinct because of un-documentation. Oral literature can be regarded as a special characteristic of a region because it contains the cognitive and religious system, custom affirmation, history, law, and local wisdom of the society along with its environment (Sibarani, 2012). Oral literature has a tendency to quickly vanish and change along with the changing of the society as its owner. The changing and loss of an oral literature

within society mean the extinction or changing of the wealth contained in it. On the other hand, it is what happens within society dynamics.

Folklore was considered as an oral narrative story (Giolláin, 2014). Folklore as oral literature is a story built from fictitious thinking and real life stories becoming a groove journey of life with a moral value about the meaning of life and how to interact with other creatures. In folklore, there is a purpose to explain or understand the world and local heritage of a region. Efforts to discover and develop folklore are highly needed in Indonesia. Folklore is currently getting less attention from the public. The lack of public interest in regenerating folklore is very influential on the continuity of folklore in daily life. The community should explore all the potential that exists in the region, including the potential in the field of literature and local culture. In fact, each region has certain traditions as a form of local wisdom. Awareness on the importance of local wisdom is expected to grow new awareness to the public to explore more the wealth of the traditions. Folklore is one of traditional wealth that needs to be explored, preserved, and developed as a source of cultural strength. In line with Suliyanto's (2009) opinion, folklore should be able to be studied more deeply in order to preserve and develop various benefits contained in it.

Through Folklore, we can discover history, experience, life perspective, culture, religion, politics, dream, wishes and any other activity existing in the area. This shows that folklore implicitly defines reality that describes the condition of society in the past. The past lives of society are crucial to determine the life in the upcoming future. A society can study past lives of its ancestors to improve their lives in the future through folklore. Therefore, if the folklore that lived and developed in the past were dug up and developed, it would bring many benefits for present and future life. First benefit is as an entertainment (Amir, 2013). The second benefit is as an educative instrument (Sulistyorini, 2017). The third benefit is as a social control. Social control here means a way or media used to control community's behavior in order to obey values and rules agreed in the social environment (Habib as cited in Sulistyorini, 2017). It could be considered as a behaviour control. The fourth benefit is as environmental preservation. Folklore takes part in preserving environment so that rules agreed by the society to which the folklore belongs could be considered (Sulistyorini, 2017). Another benefit is that folklore could generate significant changes in social life, culture, politics, and science.

Based on those benefits, the study of oral literary structure, especially folklore, has been intensively conducted by several experts. The study conducted so far had been observed from various perspectives such as in terms of structure, author, until the reader's acceptance of the story. It is in line with researches conducted by Unsriana (2007), Khaeriati (2009), Suhartono et al. (2010), Effendi (2011), Alaini (2014), Sudewa (2014), Lestari (2015) and Susilawati et al. (2016). All of these researches work with the structure of the folklore itself. The structure of folklore strongly reflects the uniqueness and cultural characteristic of the area. By knowing the structure of the folklore as a whole, the meaning to be conveyed can be understood entirely and thoroughly.

In 1928, Vladimir Propp presented a theory about 31 functions of character that make up the course of folklore plot. All of these 31 functions were obtained after conducting a research on 100 Russian folklores. Propp assumed that all of these 31 functions can be applied to all folklore in general, not only for Russian folktale with a consideration of not involving detail record function. Propp then concluded that previous researchers wrongly conducted their research about folklore. It was based on 100 Russian tales that he called as fairytale. Propp finally came with conclusions as follows: (1) firm and unchanged elements in a tale was not a

motive or character, but a function, whoever character that was on the function; (2) number of functions in a tale was limited; (3) order of functions in a tale was always similar; (4) all tales represented just one type according to the structure. Related to the conclusion number (2), Propp indicated that each tale did not always contain all functions because many tales actually contained some functions. Those functions, however the number, were the ones that constructed the main structure of the story (Suwondo, 2011).

Teeuw (1988) mentioned that result of Propp's analysis of Russian tales was fairly surprising. It was because, if it was true and should be accepted, of the fact that Propp had succeeded to provide one foundation in classifying tales and other folklores. Prop said that the 3 functions could be distributed into a circle or sphere of actions. There were 7 spheres of actions that could be entered by the functions and included logically according to Suwondo (2011) as follows: (1) villain 'sphere of criminal action', (2) donor, provider 'sphere of donor, provider action', (3) helper 'sphere of helper action', (4) the princess and her father 'sphere of a princess and her father action', (5) dispatcher 'sphere of dispatcher action', (6) hero 'sphere of heroic action', and (7) false hero 'sphere of false hero action'. By these 7 spheres of action, the frequency of character emergence was detected and how to recognize the characterization was known (Suwondo, 2011). The 31 functions were as follows: (1) absentation, (2) interdiction, (3) violation, (4) reconnaissance, (5) delivery, (6) fraud, (7) complicity, (8) villainy, (8a) lack, (9) mediation, the connective incident, (10) beginning counteraction, (11) departure, (12) the first function of the donor, (13) the hero's reaction, (14) provition or receipt of a magical agent, (15) spatial translocation, (16) struggle, (17) marking, (18) victory, (19) the initial misfortune, (20) return, (21) pursuit, chase, (22) rescue, (23) unrecognized arrival, (24) unfounded claims, (25) the difficult task, (26) solution, (27) recognition, (28) exposure, (29) transfiguration, (30) punishment, (31) wedding (and throne ascension)'.

However, the authors did not agree with the assumption of Propp who said that all of these 31 functions could be applied to all folklores in general (Suwondo, 2011). The idea mentioned earlier about folklore as unique literary work comes from that fact that it reflects many cultural elements of society where the story is inherited from generation to generation. In this case, Propp took only 100 Russian folklores as its material research object. This meant that the research conducted by Propp and the 31 functions he concluded were considered sufficient to represent only Russian folklores. This is because the plot of the folklore and its constituent elements (including the character functions in it) must be somewhat influenced by the culture of the society in which the story originated. Folklore in Central Java especially in Semarang Regency has various kinds. One of them is folklore known as Princess of the Runaway Valley. This folklore is considered the origin of a region in Ambarawa, specifically in Banyubiru district. Based on this background, this study centers around the description of functions of character in folklore Princess of the Runaway Valley so as to be analyzed based on Vladimir Propp's narrative structure theory.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Research method is a way to find truth and principles of natural phenomenon, society or humanity based on certain discipline (Depdiknas, 2008). In line with the perspective of Usman and Akbar (2009), research method is a procedure or a way to find something through systematic ways.

The kind of the research is a historical qualitative and content analysis study. Qualitative research is a study that produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral

words of people and behavior that can be observed (Moleong, 2002). Historical research is used to solve the problems of research activity in which researchers collect data from the past, while the content analysis is a research method that aims to analyze the document in order to note the contents and meaning contained in the document (Jabrohim 2015). Furthermore, Muhadjir (2002) stated that the content analysis is a scientific analysis of the content of the message from the acts of communication. In literary study, content analysis, according to Endraswara (2003), will be mainly employed if the literary researchers want to uncover, understand, and evaluate literature. Therefore, this research includes content analysis because it will reveal the narrative structure of the text of folklore entitled *Princess of the Runaway Valley*.

The approach thus used in this research can be described as an objective approach by using narratology structuralism study. Narratology itself is derived from the word *narration*. Narratology is also called the theory of narrative discourse (text). Both narratology and narrative discourse theory are defined as a set of concepts of a story and storytelling (Ratna, 2013). According to Jabrohim (2015) the objective approach is an approach that gives full attention to literary works as an autonomous structure with intrinsic coherence. From these explanations, it can be concluded that an objective approach in this study is to describe the structure of the narrative approach in the folklore entitled *Princess of the Runaway Valley*.

The data in this study were in forms of words, phrases, clauses and sentences obtained through oral information from the speakers and supported by various written sources collected from institutions or agencies concerned. The data obtained were further described in writing with an analytical and in-depth explanation. The data in this study were folklore from Semarang Regency entitled *Princess of the Runaway Valley*. The sources of the data consisted of primary and secondary data sources. The primary data source used in this study was the folklore entitled *Princess of the Runaway Valley*. The secondary data sources were the supporting data from other relevant sources such as internet, newspapers, magazines, journals, relevant previous research, and various other references which are still relevant to this research.

The data collection techniques used in this study were literature review and writing technique. Literature review was done by the researchers by collecting various library sources related to the research material. Writing technique was conducted by researcher through reading the folklore text *Princess of the Runaway Valley* many times in order to gain understanding then it was recorded/written/noted in accordance with data required in the study. This research used data validity. The data was obtained then collected and recorded in research activities. To ensure the validity of the data in this study, the researcher used triangulation and informant reviews. Triangulation is a technique of checking the validity of data that utilizes something else. Triangulation of data applied in this study was triangulation theory. Triangulation theory was done by using the perspective of more than one theory in discussing the problem of the narrative structure in the folklore studied.

Data analysis used in this study was by heuristic and hermeneutic reading model. The heuristic readings are literary readings based on the linguistic structure. In heuristic reading, the reader needs to provide word inserts or word synonyms (by putting them in parentheses). In addition, the structure of the sentence is adjusted to the standard sentence, and if necessary, to clarify the meaning, of the arrangement needs to be reversed. In the heuristic reading of folklore, the activity is done through reading the "grammar" of the story from the beginning to the end accordingly. Hermeneutic reading is a reading with the aim to get meaning or wisdom of literary works. This reading allows for interpretation according to the reader's knowledge, understanding, insight, and intellectuality of the literary text (Jabrohim, 2015).

The procedures of this study were: (1) Data collection through heuristic and hermeneutic reading; (2) Data reduction by writing data in detail then simplifying it into description of the data (3) Data presentation from the identification and classification of data which had been arranged in order, so that it can easily be understood and analyzed; (4) drawing conclusion / verification; and (5) report preparation.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Referring to the theory, the 24 functions of character found in the folklore *Princess of the Runaway Valley* could be explained as below.

#### **Interdiction Function**

The interdiction function existed in this story when The King granted the palace's official recommendation after the discussion of The King's dream. The interdiction of this story was in the form of killing the fifth baby born in Mataram Kingdom's family. This interdiction can be seen in the following quote:

*"Well, if the condition is necessary for the salvation of my people, then I agree! From now, anyone having five sons or five daughters, one of whom should be killed!" as the King said to the palace official.*

#### **Violation Function**

In the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*, the function of violation was shown by the action of *Senopati* (Javanese commander) to one of his daughters. He did not want to lose one of his daughters. But, the king's command which had been announced could not be denied or rejected. The king's order in the name of goodness for all the people was obeyed by all parties, including *Senopati* himself. This regulation prompted *Senopati* to commit an offense. *Senopati* did not kill his daughters according to the King's order, but asked one of his five daughters to leave the palace for the goodness of all. Here is a snippet of the folklore:

*"Whatever it was, the king's order had to be carried out. However, he did not want to lose his children. So, he also intended to send one of his daughters to go from the palace in secret".*

#### **Reconnaissance Function**

The reconnaissance function can be seen when Princess Valley knew the arrival of the workforce. They passed through a river as the Princess was taking a bath in the river. Knowing their arrival, the Princess was just hiding behind a rock while looking from a distance at the figure of *Senopati*. She missed a man who had ever been mated with her. This can be seen in the following quotation:

*"She looked for a hidden place; fortunately, there were a lot of large stone chunks which were enough to protect her from the eyes of people who were about to pass".*

#### **Delivering Information Function**

In the folklore of the *Princess of the Runaway Valley*, the author became a messenger of information as an all-knowing third person. This is proved by the various conversations that describe the feelings of all characters and their thoughts about the events and circumstances that happened to the author.

*"I have dreamed, now my heart is restless, I want to know immediately what that dream means, Patih," the King asked to his Patih.*

#### **Fraud Function**

The fraud function in the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley* was done by *Senopati* as a part of the kingdom. *Senopati* did not want to lose any of his five daughters.

*Senopati* intended to ask one of them to leave the palace in order to save the family and the people so as not to kill one of them as the king commanded. Here is the excerpt from the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*:

*"In any case, the king's command must be carried out. However, he did not want to lose his children. So, he intended to send one of his daughters to go from the palace in secret "*

### **Complicity Function**

There was a figure that entered the complicity function i.e. a pigeon. This pigeon knew the sadness and solitude of Princess Valley. The pigeon immediately invited the Princess to speak and advised her despite not really knowing what she suffered from. This can be proved by the following quotation:

*"Princess Valley... you do not have to reject your suffering, but you can step away from it. From now on, stop focusing on yourself. The people who live here can be your family,"* the pigeon continued.

### **Lack/Need Function**

The lack function was highlighted by the author in the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley* through the Princess Valley as the main character. The princess' needs for family affection and luxury of the palace were harder to get out of the palace.

*"I've lost everything. My family and all the luxuries I used to enjoy."* The Princess Valley answered.

### **Mediation Function**

In the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*, the intermediary or liaison function was owned by a pigeon. Although the pigeon was told only for a moment to meet the Princess Valley, this pigeon was able to change the mind and the action of the Princess. She was no longer in sadness due to loss of family and palace and finally she was able to struggle for the people around her.

### **Counteraction Function**

The counteraction function in the folklore was shown through the thoughts of the Princess Valley of the fate she received. The Princess thought of the words of the pigeon which came to her and asked her to keep alive even though there was no family and treasure as before. She then pondered the words of the pigeon that had just asked her to speak.

### **Departure Function**

The departure function was experienced by the main character in the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*, namely Princess Valley. The Princess decided to leave the palace and the family who had raised her to save her four sisters. She also went away from the rich life and had to survive without relatives to be a commoner.

*"That's the end. The Senopati family took off the Princess Valley with a sad heart. The princess valley began to step out of the palace that had raised her. Since she was a baby, she was spoiled with a lot of fun. Now, she had to learn to live alone, without friends or relatives, becoming a commoner "*

### **Hero's Reaction Function**

In the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*, the hero's reaction was directly shown by the main character. The Princess soon proposed herself to go from the palace for her sisters. This can be seen in the following quotation:

*"I ... father! Valley would leave the palace environment."* Princess Valley, one of *Senopati's* children who had grown up, interrupted.

*"Yes daddy, tonight I would also pack, I am sincere, as long as my all younger sisters can be saved."*

The Princess Valley helped the community without asking for any reward by treating the sick. Here is the quotation of the folklore.

*"Indiscriminately, she helped treating the sick people around with the ingredients derived from the herbs taken in the forest where she lived along the broad swamp."*

### **Magical Element Receipt / Magic Tools Function**

The reception function of the magical element in the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley* arose when the Princess Valley ran out of food and met two young men. These two young men were talking about a haunted forest because no one could get back from the forest safely. There was no clear reason for the awesomeness of the forest. The surrounding community received the haunted news of the forest without rejection because they felt that haunted places were still around them.

*"Eh Kang, do you know? In the forest there, it is said haunted, isn't it, anyone who goes there cannot come out anymore,"* Sabar twitted.

### **Spatial Translocation Function**

In the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*, there appeared some functions of displacement. Princess Valley, who was originally at the palace, moved out of the palace. The Valley Princess passed through several settlements and eventually settled in the middle of the forest where her place was along the edge of the swamp. This can be proved by the following quotation:

*"That's the end. The Senopati family took off the Princess Valley with a sad heart. The valley began to step out of the palace that had raised it. Since she was a baby, she was spoiled with a lot of fun. At the time, she had to learn to live alone without friends or relatives becoming a commoner. She then cleansed herself at the river near her hut and began meditating on a boulder beside the swamp. From the results of her meditation, she then obtained the intelligence of concocting drugs. Indiscriminately, she helped to treat the sick people around with the ingredients derived from the herbs taken in the forest where she lived on the edge of the swamp."*

### **Struggle Function**

Struggle function appeared in this folktale. Princess Valley as the main character was able to fight to live against her suffering of the loss of her family and the pleasure she got from the palace after hearing the advice of a dove. The dove had opened the way Princess Valley thought to survive for the people around who need her. Her ability of concocting drugs was used by her to heal the surrounding people as a proof that she was able to survive. Here's the quote of the folklore:

*"She then cleaned herself at a swamp near her hut and began meditating on a boulder beside the swamp. From the results of her mediating, she then obtained an ability of concocting drugs".*

### **Marking Function**

The marking function in the folklore did not exist.

### **Victory Function**

In this function, Princess Valley dominated. She could be an important person in the community around as a person who helped the sick. The life of the princess became useful and respected by many people. Here's a quote of the folklore:

*"The more people visit this Princess Valley place, the more her residence grew crowded and she no longer lived in loneliness".*

#### **Lack/Need Function**

In this folklore, the lack of need was felt by Princess Valley as the main character. The princess who turned into a commoner had to satisfy her own needs in the stalls around the village. She could fulfill her needs with her own effort. Here's a quote of the folklore:

*"The food was gone. She had to buy in the stalls around".*

#### **Pursuit/Investigation Function**

The pursuit or investigation function was not found in the folklore. This is because Princess Valley as the main character was estimated to die and did not come back again. There was no suspicion at all from the court because *Senopati* was the one who always obeyed the king's command.

#### **Rescue Function**

In the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*, the rescue function was performed by the princess as a daughter of *Senopati* who wanted to save his family. The king's order to kill a daughter or a boy of five brothers raised his concern. He decided to ask one of his children to leave the palace and become a commoner. The rescue done by Princess Valley was not only useful to her family, but also to all the people of that kingdom. Here is the excerpt from the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*:

*"I ... father! It is me who will leave the palace environment. "*The princess, one of grown up daughters of *Senopati*, interrupted.

*"Yes daddy, tonight I will also pack with my sincere, as long as my all younger sisters can be saved."*

#### **Uncontrolled Arrival Function**

The unrecognized arrival function was not so much highlighted by the author. In the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*, there was one part of the story that was described not very clearly i.e. *Senopati*'s children. The children other than Princess Valley were not clearly described their ages, physicals and behaviors every day. The children of *Senopati* were only told to gather when *Senopati* asked one of them to leave the palace. This is proved by the following quotation:

*"Then, he called his four children, while his infant daughter was already a sleep in the arms of his wife."*

#### **Unfounded Claims Function**

The unfounded claims function in the folklore was not experienced by any characters. All the characters were depicted according to their circumstances, the submissive Valley Princess, the non-rebellious *Senopati*, and the wise King.

#### **Difficult Task Function**

In this function, Princess Valley became a character who accepted a difficult task. Princess Valley had to get out of the palace, having no family and royal luxuries, she always got and lived in simplicity with the people, a life which had never been imagined by Princess Valley before. The Princess was saddened by her situation and she was mourning her sadness. However, her sadness and solitude made her a strong person and able to survive in the forest to help the surrounding community. She was able to change her life by doing positive things for society. Here's a quote from the folktale:



"I've lost everything. My family and all the luxuries I used to enjoy", The Princess answered. Indiscriminately, she helped treating the ailing community around by using the herbs derived from the materials taken in the forest where she lived along the broad swamp.

### **Solution Function**

In this settlement, at the end of the story, Princess Valley became a very important figure for the community. The Princess was known as 'Nyi Lembah' who was kind and helpful. Although her life was no longer lonely, until at the end of the story she still missed her family. *"It is said that the big rock where 'Nyi Lembah' used to sit was still there. The inhabitants around believe on this rock, where formerly 'Nyi Lembah' was spilling her feeling of longing for her family "*.

### **Recognition (of Hero) Function**

The hero function was highly highlighted in the folklore. Princess Valley as the main character in the story became a heroine who really benefited the people around the kingdom. The Princess spent her life helping the sick with no reward as part of relieving her sadness from leaving her family and the palace that raised her. This is seen in the following quotation: *"Gradually, many people heard about the existence of a woman who lived alone in the forest"*. Her presence had benefited the people around. As she grew older, people called her as 'Nyi Lembah'.

### **Transfiguration Function**

Transfiguration function in this folklore was experienced by the main character. Although the main character was a woman from a palace who run away from, after some years of her age increasing, Putri transfigured into a Nyi. The name of the main character became Nyi Lembah.

*The 7 functions that did not exist in the folklore Princess of the Runaway Valley are as follows:*

### **Absentation Function**

In the folklore *Princess of the Runaway Valley*, the absentation function did not appear. This function could appear when one of character in the folklore died or killed by the enemy. Nevertheless, the main character in this folklore just left the palace and was not killed as the palace regulation.

### **Villainy Function**

The villainy function did not appear as the other functions. The author did not present villainy from one character to another that could lead to the suffering of the main character. The author just featured the life story of the main character as an ordinary character.

### **First Donor/Giver Function**

The first donor function in the folklore *Princess of the Runaway Valley* did not exist. It was because of the main conflict experienced by Princess Valley when she went out of the palace.

### **Return Function**

In this folklore, there were no characters that returned because the author just narrated the leaving of the main character. She left from the palace and never returned.

### **Exposure Function**

The function of exposing main actor was not shown in the folklore. Despite many questions that arose from the reasons for her departure and the state of the palace after the

departure, the author did not clearly state the reasons and continuation of the palace condition. The story ends with the reception of Princess Valley in the community as a helpful woman.

### **Punishment Function**

In this folktale, there was no punishment for any antagonist or evil character in the story. The punishment function did not appear in the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley*.

### **Marriage and Throne Ascession Function**

The function of marriage actors was not shown in the folklore. Princess Valley as the main character was not told to marry or ascend the throne. She just became a commoner who was far from the luxury and splendor of the palace enjoyed by her family.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the analysis which has been conducted, the folklore of *Princess of the Runaway Valley* has 24 of 31 functions of character according to Vladimir Propp. Thus, it can be said that the complexity in the short story is not too high because not all of the functions of the perpetrator are fulfilled. The 7 functions of characters which are not in the short story are functions of absention, villainy, donor/giver, return, exposure, punishment, marriage/and throne ascession.

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