

## REPRESENTATION OF NYI RORO KIDUL IN MYTH, LEGEND, AND POPULAR CULTURE

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**Abstract.** Nyi Roro Kidul, Nyai Loro Kidul, or Nyai Ratu Kidul is a character of folk legend which has existed all along south coast of Java land: from East Java, to Middle Java and Jogjakarta, then to West Java and Banten. People along the south coast of Java island believe to myth of this legendary character as a beautiful and supernatural woman who has authority of devil realm in Indonesian Ocean (Indian Ocean) or Segoro Kidul (South Sea). The popularity of Nyi Roro Kidul has also become motivation for national film-making and TV media to produce many films and drama about this character. Although there are many similarities about the revelation, among regions, legend and mass culture (film, TV); the representations of Nyi Roro Kidul show differences in theme emphasis. In East Javanese people, Nyi Roro Kidul is emphasized on the intention of people seeking wealth *pesugihan* (with the helping from devils) by sacrificing human soul for antidote. In Middle Javanese people, Kanjeng Ratu Kidul is represented as the take turn-wife of Sultans from Mataram, Sultan Panembahan Senopati to Sultans of Jogjakarta in the present time. The west Javanese people represents this figure as the princess of Pakuan Pajajaran Kingdom who is betrayed and abused, and throw away herself to jump into South Sea, then she incarnates as a beautiful and undefeated supernatural queen. On film and television, Nyi Roro Kidul is presented as a beautiful, sexy, cruel and sexual adventurer woman.

**Keywords:** *representation, myth, legend, popular culture, Nyi Roro Kidul*

### INTRODUCTION

Nyi Roro Kidul is a legendary figure who is believed as the sacred myth by people all along south coast of Java island. There are many folktales (myth and legend) which remain alive until now in those territories (Endraswara, 2005; cf. Danandjaja, 2007). In many myths and legends the figure of Roro Kidul is convinced as a semi-god creature, or princess, who is beautiful and supernatural. Nyi Roro Kidul is also worshipped by people for expecting wealth eventhough with promise of sacrificing soul of family member as the antidote.

The story of Nyi Roro Kidul which is convinced by mostly traditional Javanese people is still controversial until now. There are ones who believe, and even admit that they ever

meet, and thereare also many of them who consider it as merely a folktale. As a matter of fact he believe of Nyi Roro Kidul is not only monopolized by traditional people, but also by intellectual modern people, especially Javanese mystical devotees. Is Nyai Ratu Kidul story a real story, or author's fiction with pure purpose to entertain people with a folktale, or is Nyai Ratu Kidul story a literary work of folktale from author as an order of a king for the shake of political purpose, or is that folktale a kind of literary work of the king himself which he uses for keeping his political position power? (The Asia Paranormal Investigators, 2006). Considering that the story of Nyai Ratu Kidul involves human character; Sutowijoyo is the king of Mataram moslem who is nobled as

Panembahan Senopati, in that case before it, there is never a story of moslem king which boldly gets married with the devil queen.

Because of the popularity of Nyi Roro Kidul character, this issue is taken as business opportunity by mass media (as popular culture) and film-makers (Burton, 2012; cf. McKee, 2012). Therefore many film titles and serial plays appear which show that mysterious legendary figure. (cf. Santoso, 2013).

How is Nyi Roro Kidul character represented in folktale (myth, legend) and in mass media of film? This topic will be discussed in this article.

It is necessary to confirm early that Nyi Roro Kidul appears with many names and titles. There are many titles of her as the controller of South Sea of Java island which are believed by Javanese people, namely Nyi Roro Kidul, Nyai Roro Kidul, Nyi Loro Kidul, Nyai Loro Kidul, Nyi Ratu Kidul, or Nyai Ratu Kidul. Nyai is a title for a Javanese woman from high level status, which has the same meaning with Nyi. The name of Roro is also the same meaning with Loro which are the title of name of a princess. Therefore practically there are princesses of Javanese royal family with the names like Roro Jonggrang, Roro Mendut, Roro Kembang Sore, and etc. To simplify, this article prefers to use one of those titles, namely: Nyi Roro Kidul.

## METHODS

This study is included in the topic of cultural study of oral literature (Suwondo, 2011; Santoso, 2013) and popular literature (popular culture) (Burton, 2012; Ida, 2017). With qualitative approach, the data of this research are folktales in transcript text in the form of myth and legend as well as drama and film of Nyi Roro Kidul (the queen of South Sea).

The analysis of the data is done by following the directions from McKee (2012), as the following steps: (1) reading the transcript text of myth and legend of Nyi Roro Kidul; (2) watching the download records of drama and

film of the queen of South Sea; (3) doing intertextual analysis by comparing the representation of Nyi Roro Kidul in folktale and in film or drama; (4) summarizing conclusion of the depiction of Nyi Roro Kidul in oral literature and in popular culture.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The people all along south coast of Java island believe to Nyi Roro Kidul with their different ways. These differences happen since the intentions and purposes of people who want to shrine her are also different.

Banyuwangi people have myth about Nyi Roro Kidul as a source figure or teacher who is capable to spread her supernatural power to anyone who honors her. According to an informan (AD, 2017), anyone who desires to have supernatural power, in this case he has to worship Nyi Roro Kidul by doing meditation at south coast toward the queen of South Sea at Indian Ocean (Indonesia). The myth like this also develops on fishermen of south coast in Malang. When meditating, there is a faith for not wearing green cloth as dominant colour of Nyi Roro Kidul. (cf. [dongengceritarakyat.com](http://dongengceritarakyat.com), 2015).

Among Blitar, Tulungagung, Trenggalek, and southern Pacitan people, they develop a myth of pesugihan (seeking wealth) by worshipping Nyi Roro Kidul. The act of pesugihan does not mean without any charge since there is one human soul of family member which has to be sacrificed as antidote (victim) and served to Nyi Roro Kidul in which Indian ocean becomes the altar for the ceremony of sacrifice. Although it is not as frequently as the facts which happen in the past time, as a matter of fact in the modern time what happen to people in southern regions, it is still found rumors of rich people who get wealth from pesugihan by worshipping to Nyi Roro Kidul—considered to be acts which can harm the life of the persons themselves.

Kediri city, eventhough having no beach, it also contributes a legend of Nyi Roro Kidul. In Kediri

kingdom, there is a prince of Jenggala king named Raden Panji. One day Raden Panji wanders into the forest of Sigaluh. At that time Raden Panji clears away the forest of Sigaluh. Meanwhile there is a white banyan tree in that forest which becomes the center of devil kingdom with the king's name Prabu Banjaran Seta. At the time executing the clearance of the forest, deliberately that banyan tree is also cut down. By ruining that white banyan tree, Prabu Banjaran Seta becomes happy since he can make perfect his life, therefore eventually the spirit of Prabu Banjaran Seta enters to the body of Raden Panji, so Raden Panji gets more supernatural power. Hence the authority of Sigaluh forest and Prabu Banjaran Seta kingdom is taken over by Raden Panji. (Subagyo, 2011).

Prabu Banjaran Seta has a younger sister named Retnaning Dyah Angin-angin, who nextly becomes the wife of Raden Panji. From that marriage they have a daughter named Ratu Hayu. On their daughter's birth, Ratu Hayu's grandfather, Eyang Sindhula comes and then he gives name to Ratu Hayu with a name of Ratu Pagedongan, expecting she will become the most beautiful woman in the universe. After Ratu Pagedongan has grown, she asks to Eyang Sindhula in order she gets eternal beauty. Then the request is fulfilled and Ratu Hayu or Ratu Pagedongan becomes continuously beautiful forever, with one condition that she must become devil. After Ratu Pagedongan becomes devil, hence Raden Panji gives authority to his daughter to reign in South Sea, until one day it will come the time to meet with Wong Agung who will reign Java. (Subagyo, 2011). That's what exists in East Java, Nyi Roro Kidul is convinced and reflected by people who believe her as a mysterious figure which can give supernatural power and wealth.

How about the happening in Middle Java and Jogjakarta? Some interesting facts can be discussed to show how this sacred figure has been faithed for along time and represented by low class people and royal family. As a legend

story, these stories seem strange and irrational when they are viewed through historiographic scientific study.

In Majapahit era, in Mentaok forest there is Mataram kingdom which is reigned by a queen named Lara Kidul Dewi Nawangwulan. The queen is the descendent of the 22nd king of Tanah Melayu who is taken as the daughter in law by the king of Raja Majapahir, Bre Wengker (1456-1466), she gets married with Raden Bondan Kejawan or Kidang Telangkas (or in folktale it is very popular with the name of Jaka Tarub). In that folktale it is told that Lara Kidul Dewi Nawangwulan is not the princess of Tanah Melayu kingdom, instead she is a fairy whose shawl is stolen by Jaka Tarub when she takes a bath in a lake together with other fairies. The marriage of Raden Bonda Kejawan (Jaka Tarub) with Lara Kidul Nawangwulan gives birth to their daughter named Dewi Nawangsih who becomes the queen as the successor of Mataram controller. Nextly the reign of Dewi Nawangsih is continued by her daughter, namely Ni Mas Ratu Angin.

When Sutowijoyo, Ki Juru Mertani and Pemanahan are given grant of Mentaok forest by Sultan Hadiwijoyo, henceforth the forest clearance is begun and there the meeting between Sutowijoyo and Ni Mas Ratu Angin happens. By the agreement of Sultan Hadiwijoyo, then Sutowijoyo gets married with Ni Mas Ratu Angin. It is intended to the legitimation of Sutowijoyo authority for becoming king of Mataram since Sutowijoyo is not descendant of the king, meanwhile from the self of Ni Mas Ratu Angin, she is descendant of Majapahit king. Ni Mas Ratu Angin is the figure who someday becomes the myth as Nyi Roro Kidul.

This version may be overlapped with the story of Sutowijoyo's family tree. Perhaps Ni Mas Ratu Angin is not the daughter of Dewi Nawangsih, but she is more further descendant of king, because if it is investigated, as a matter of fact the daughter of Dewi Nawangsih is

included Ki Getas Pandawa who is the great-grandfather of Sutowijoyo. If Ni Mas Ratu Angin is the child of Dewi Nawangsih, therefore it is the same as Sutowijoyo marries his great-grandmother, who should have been a wrinkled old woman.

There is another legend about Nyi Roro Kidul which develops and is believed by Middle Javanese and Jogjakarta people. (Subagyo, 2011).

Mataram kingdom in the beginning is actually Mentaok forest which is granted by Sultan Hadiwijoyo to Ki Pemanahan, Ki Juru Mertani and Sutowijoyo, for their merits in killing Arya Penangsang, the Regent of Jipang Panolan, who rebels to Pajang. After Mentaok forest is handed over, Ki Pemanahan, Sutowijoyo and Ki Juru Mertani start to build and give a name of Mataram. After Ki Pemanahan has passed away, Sutowijoyo is crowned to be the Regent of Mataram by Sultan Hadiwijoyo and titled Panembahan Senopati ing Ngalogo Sayyiddin Panotogomo (one who is esteemed as war commander, a leader in government and religion).

Slowly and sure, in the reign period of Sutowijoyo, Mataram begins to be separated with Pajang, as it is a political strategy to rebel to Sultan Hadiwijoyo. In the time of clearing away Mentaok forest and the time of planning rebellion against Pajang, it appears a story that Sutowijoyo is supported by Nyai Roro Kidul with the supporters from devil armies from South Sea.

The myth of Nyai Roro Kidul have really existed since the era of Panembahan Senopati, this belief is used to motivate Mataram army and also to reduce the bold of opponent army. From the existing various stories, there are two versions of initial meeting between Nyai Ratu Kidul and Sutowijoyo. The first is when Sutowijoyo executes the clearance away of Mentaok forest. The second is when Sutowijoyo meditates ngeli (allowing his body to stay below a water flow), it is also the time when Sutowijoyo

has begun to plan to rebel Pajang government. (Döhne, 2006).

That second version is told as in the following: Before Sutowijoyo does the rebellion to Pajang, he has ever meditated for asking to God in order to get direction to be able to protect his people and to govern Mataram kingdom fairly and to make the people prosperous. Sutowijoyo meditates by doing ngeli or allowing himself to be swept away in river flow. When he is swept away finally he comes to the unity between Gajah Wong river with Opak river, near Plered village, therefore there is storm at southern sea which makes worried to the residents there. Nyi Roro Kidul immediately tries to control the situation, she investigates the cause of the storm, then she finds Sutowijoyo as the main cause who does meditation.

When Nyi Roro Kidul knows Sutowijoyo, she falls in love with his handsomeness. Then Nyi Roro Kidul asks, what Sutowijoyo is really desired until he suffers himself by meditating so it impacts chaos in southern sea. Then Sutowijoyo expresses his purpose that he wants to become Mataram king that will bring the people to the prosperity. Nyi Roro Kidul agrees to help Sutowijoyo with requirement which has to be obeyed that Sutowijoyo and the descendant kings must marry Nyi Roro Kidul. Sutowijoyo agrees with that agreement, and he finishes his meditation. (nyairorokidul.com., 2013).

In the territory of Middle Java and Yogyakarta, in these regions the figure of Nyi Roro Kidul is dominantly represented as a beautiful queen of spiritual nature who falls in love to a human being so she willings to live under the authority of human (king). Since that incident, public opinion develops in Mataram which shows that Sutowijoyo is supported by the South Sea controller. Not only that; Nyi Roro Kidul is also said to instruct to the controller of mount Merapi to support and help Sutowijoyo. That information does not only spread in Mataram, but also out of Mataram. To support the opinion and the belief of Javanese people,

Mataram army is armed with Bendhe Kyai Becak (instrument of gamelan like small gong). In this case, when it is necessary, Bendhe Kyai Becak is usually hit by Mataram army when they are in a war for bringing in army of devils. Therefore this power that makes down the opponents of Mataram, in every war, Mataram army always wins the combat.

From Middle Java and Yogyakarta, we move to the west territory, that is to West Java and Banten. Like Middle Java, the legend in West Java also confirms that Nyi Roro Kidul originally comes from human or half-human.

A long time ago there is a princess of Munding Wangi kingdom named Kadita. Since the beauty of her face so she gets a title Dewi Srengenge (the goddess of Sun). However Munding Wangi king is not satisfied and still sad because he expects a son. Then the king marries a princess named Dewi Mutiara.

Dewi Mutiara feels that Dewi Srengenge is the obstacle of her desire, because Dewi Mutiara desires that her son will become the king of Munding Wangi. So Dewi Mutiara asks to the king to instruct Dewi Srengenge to go out of the palace. But the requirement is refused by king.

One day Dewi Mutiara delegates her maid to rent service from a superstitioner with an intention to curse Dewi Srengenge in order to make her body itchy and get scabies. Then Dewi Srengenge changes to become an ugly and smelly woman. (cf. Rustan, 2012).

To know his daughter condition, so the king of Munding Wangi invites all medicine men in the palace to heal his daughter, however their effort can not succeed in to heal the disease in Dewi Srengenge's body. With disappointed feeling, influences and persuasions come from Dewi Mutiara in order the king wants to chase away his daughter from the castle. Finally the king of Munding Wangi sends Dewi Srengenge to move out of the kingdom.

Dewi Srengenge executes her suffering toughly and has no revenge to her step-mother, Dewi

Mutiara. She prays in order God always accompanies and protects her in her suffering. She keeps on walking, until she comes to the South Sea. Then there is a miracle, when her skin touches the water of South Sea suddenly the skin of her body is clean, then she takes a bath and she recovers from the disease. Finally Dewi Srengenge becomes the controller of South Sea (Nyai Roro Kidul). As the beautiful and supernatural woman, she is adored by surrounding people because she often helps many villagers which are in difficulty. Therefore in West Java and Banten, Nyi Roro Kidul is convinced as human incarnation which has beauty, supernatural, and generosity to help suffering people. (Bintang, 2013).

There are several facts about existence of the belief to Nyai Roro Kidul with some versions of stories about the origin of Nyai Roro Kidul. The story of Nyai Roro Kidul is indeed not a history which contains a chronology of time, instead it is a folktale spreading by mouth to mouth.

From several stories they show a significant influence in the belief of Nyai Roro Kidul. It means that the story of Nyai Roro Kidul has experienced different perspectives which are viewed from the point of view of each region. These facts can become initial assumption that the belief toward Nyai Roro Kidul has spread widely since the past time, it becomes instrument to strengthen political and social structure of people in the past time. It seems that each region wants to claim that Nyai Roro Kidul originally deserves from their own region and their own religion.

The claim from every region in Java island about the originality of Nyai Roro Kidul is a statement which seemingly may intend to strengthen a belief in that period, and it is used by one in authority of each territory to convince people that they are helped by the queen of devils. (Subagyo, 2011).

Nyi Roro Kidul as Popular Culture in Mass Media

Besides cultural aesthetical motive, a film is absolutely made also for the shake of fulfilling profit motive economically for the producers (cf. Burton, 2012). Some national films on cinema which show Nyi Roro Kidul are Kutukan Nyi Roro Kidul (1979), Ratu Pantai Selatan (1980), Nyi Blorong (1982), Perkawinan Nyi Blorong (1983), Banggunnya Nyi Roro Kidul (1985), Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan (1988), Joko Sembung dan Dewi Samudra (1990), Ajian Ratu Laut Kidul (1991), Susuk Nyi Roro Kidul (1993), Dewi Angin Angin (1994), and the latest one is Nyi Roro Kidul Project (2014). A film is obviously a mass cultural product, so it automatically will follow the traditions in mass culture, one of the traditions is that mass culture is influenced by existing actual issues from society in that region and in that period. The followings are extracts of films which present Nyi Roro Kidul character.

Kutukan Nyi Roro Kidul (1979) tells a woman who takes holiday at the south beach together with her beloved one, then she is possessed by Nyi Roro Kidul. When in their date they do it far too much, Nyi Roro Kidul is very angry and says a curse to them. In this moment, Nyi Roro Kidul is represented as a beautiful, supernatural, horrible figure, who will threat the safety of a person who commits unproper ones. Ratu Pantai Selatan (1980) tells about Nyi Roro Kidul which comes to land because her beloved daughter will marry with human being. They are disturbed by a rich and greedy land owner who wants to bother the love between the daughter and the human in which it causes Nyi Roro Kidul considers to have responsibility to handle the situation. In this story Nyi Roro Kidul is performed as a beautiful, motherly, supernatural, and charismatic character.

Nyi Blorong (1982) raises a story about two handsome men in which the actors in that time are Barry Prima and George Rudy, fighting for love from Nyi Blorong who is Nyi Roro Kidul's lovely daughter. This film also promotes a character of a lazy person who wants to be rich

in short time with the shortcut way of pesugihan. The film is included a hot film, but it is not from the performance of Nyi Roro Kidul's behaviour, but by the sensuality of her daughter, Nyi Blorong.

Perkawinan Nyi Blorong (1983) illustrates Nyi Blorong, the daughter of Nyi Roro Kidul, who is pretty and loves Tejo Arum. There is another man (Dewata Cengkar) that bothers them. As it is portrayed in the previous ones, in this film the character of Nyi Roro Kidul is similarly reflected very polite, beautiful, elegant, and charismatic, on the other hand her daughter, Nyi Blorong, is represented as a sensual character.

Still with the same illustration, in the film of Banggunnya Nyi Roro Kidul (1985) it shows a lady named Neneng, whose face is similar with Nyi Roro Kidul, then she is possessed by Nyi Roro Kidul. Since the actresses is very sexy and bold, so Nyi Roro Kidul is performed as a supernatural and sensual character.

Pembalasan Ratu Laut Selatan (1988) is full with controversions since many acts are vulgar and showing violence. It is described that the queen of South Sea makes an oath to revenge to the descendants of villains who has taken her magic stone which comes out of the queen's body. In this story Nyi Roro Kidul is portrayed as a beautiful, supernatural, cruel, sexy, and sexual wanderer character.

Jaka Sembung dan Dewi Samudra (1990) expresses about Jaka Sembung who struggles to fight against Nederland colonist. Loosing from the struggle, Joko Sembung is thrown away to South Sea and he is helped by Dewi Samudra (Nyi Roro Kidul). In this case, with simiral performance, Nyi Roro Kidul is reflected as a supernatural, beautiful, and sensual character. Ajian Ratu Laut Kidul (1991) shows an issue of fighting for power from a woman village chief by her villainous competitor. With his tricky black magic, the woman village chief is made to be ashamed and betrayed, so eventually she is chased away by her own villagers. However by

the helping of a handsome man, who is actually the delegation of Nyi Roro Kidul, that woman village leader succeeds in recovering her name and defeating her competitor. In this film, the figure of Nyi Roro Kidul is not presented, the film only performs that delegation as the protagonist character.

Susuk Nyi Roro Kidul (1993) is about a woman who is obsessed to have eternal beauty and sexy body forever in her life, by using susuk (magical pin) of Nyi Roro Kidul with one requirement that the woman who needs it must kill and get the blood of a virgin man for her immortal beauty. In this film, Nyi Roro Kidul as well as the man are performed sexy and like to play sex and she kills the man at once after they have sexual intercourse.

Dewi Angin Angin (1994) tells about a supernatural woman warrior who is possessed by Nyi Roro Kidul. In this film, her supernatural is dominantly shown meanwhile the beauty and the sexiness are not emphasized.

The last film of Nyi Roro Kidul is Nyi Roro Kidul Project (2014). This film begins with a character of Sandra who is an orphan that wants to seek her origin by asking to orphan houses in several villages. Oneday she comes to an empty village. Meanwhile there is an information that in the past time that village is occupied by the followers of Nyi Roro Kidul. The followers of Nyi Roro Kidul are slaughtered by another villagers since they have devilish principles. Their bodies are burned lifely. Since that time, the spirits of the villagers those are also the followers of Nyi Roro Kidul still roam to find preys of life human to be killed and brought to the kingdom of Nyi Roro Kidul in South Sea.

The terror eventually threatens Sandra, Anggun, Niko and Gento. The roaming spirits chase them where ever they want to go. Then finally with the help of Ernest, Sandra with her friends can release themselves from that cursed village. Arriving to the city, however, a new problem comes. They find the city of Jakarta is empty, and very quiet! There is no hints at all.

Then they realize that it is not Jakarta which is lost, however they themselves who are disappeared from real life!

Shortly eventhough in the form of film as the product of popular culture (Burton, 2012) it always has different and various themes. But the most popular one from Nyi Roro Kidul film, the character of Nyi Roro Kidul is always represented as a beautiful, sexy and sexual wanderer figure. As a mass cultural product those films are perhaps made to fulfill public taste. Beside that the actrees and actor themselves also construct how Nyi Roro Kidul want to be represented and perceived by public. As a matter of fact the sexual motive dominates more on public perception than mystical one, wealth from pesugihan and supernatural power.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded as follows. Firstly, in the territory of East Java south coast, Nyi Roro Kidul figure is performed in a folktale of myth and represented as a character who is beautiful, supernatural and become wealth giver by sacrificing human soul for the antidote. The second, in the territory of Middle Java and Yogyakarta, the characer of Nyi Roro Kidul is dominantly represented as a queen of devils who is beautiful and falls in love to human being until she willings to exist under human (king) authority. The third, in the territory of West Java and Banten, Nyi Roro Kidul is believed as human incarnation who has beauty and supernatural power and who is very generous to help suffering people. The fourth, in the mass cultural product (film and drama) and public perception from the spectacles, Nyi Roro Kidul character is always represented as a beautiful, sexy, sometimes cruel, and sexual wanderer character.

It has been considered that there are still too many lacks from the discussion of this article. The most lacking one is on the explanation of the theoretical field. Beside that, the incompleteness of titles of drama which have

not been discussed, makes more shortages to this article. On the next discussion, it is even better if the study is expanded to moral and religious perspectives. It is appropriate to be questioned what motive dominates film production of Nyi Roro Kidul, merely entertaining motive, moral educational motive, or even fully commercial motive. (cf. Yuliarti, 2016).

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